

Departament de Traducció i d'Interpretació i d'Estudis de l'Àsia Oriental
Programa de doctorat en Traducció i Estudis Interculturals
Facultat de Traducció i d'Interpretació
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**Mobilities and embodied transnational practices:
An ethnography of return(s) and other intersections
between China and Spain**

Tesis doctoral presentada per:
Irene Masdeu Torruella

Dirigida per:
Dra. Amelia Sáiz López
Dr. Joaquín Beltrán Antolín

Bellaterra, setembre de 2014

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Agraïments

Aquesta recerca s'ha dut a terme gràcies al finançament de les beques "Becas para estudios de postgrado, doctorado e investigación en el exterior MAEC-AECID" i "China Study Plan" (新汉学计划) de l'Institut Confuci.

En primer lloc vull agrair molt honestament el recolzament durant tots aquests anys als directors d'aquesta tesis, Dr. Joaquín Beltrán Antolín i a la Dra. Amélia Sáiz López, no només per la orientació acadèmica sinó per la seva amistat.

També vull agrair als companys del grup de Recerca Interasia el seu suport i especialment al professor Sean Golden per la seva disposició i recolzament quan ha estat necessària. Especialment, a la meva companya de doctorat, Mireia Vargas.

També vull agrair a la professora Li Minghuan que em rebés a la Universtat de Xiamen. Etnògrafa per naturalesa, les seves apreciacions crítiques han estat una gran contribució al resultat d'aquesta tesis. Un agraïment a tots els alumnes de doctorat de migracions de la universitat de Xiamen per rebre'm amb els braços oberts i especialment a la professora Yuanfen Chenxiaoying.

Els amics han estat presents i relacionats amb aquesta tesis des dels inicis fins al final. En primer lloc, i per ordre cronològic, vull agrair a tots els meus amics de Chengdu que van formar part del naixement d'aquesta tesis sense que ni ells ni jo en fóssim conscients. A la Fede, la meva companya de pis i d'aventures vitals. Al Pep, l'Agustí i en Manolo, a qui sempre recordarem, pels moments compartits al Salut, lloc on vaig fer les primeres entrevistes amb retornats. A tots els meus alumnes de castellà que em van ensenyar a mirar i interpretar la societat xinesa quan vaig arribar. Als amics dels meus primers anys a Xina i als que d'allà han sorgit. A la Huong, l'Ainara, l'Oware i l'Adi, a l'Edu, en Víctor, a l'Anne i en David.

Xiamen ha estat la meva segona llar i això ha estat, en bona part, per trobar-hi una família amb qui he après i que m'han cuidat i ajudat quan ho he necessitat. El meu company de casa, al Carlos, als meus "absurds" preferits vinguts d'arreu, la Kyra, en Zeid, en Chris, la Ana Lisa, en Luís. A l'entorn Amoy per les nits de cerveza, música i xerrades inacabables. Especialment a en David i la Tintin, i al duo Andreas i Björn. I a en Fèlix.

I als amics de "casa" per ser com son, i rebre'm sempre amb els braços oberts quan he tornat.

Al Marc per acompanyar-me a les cafeteries i bars regentats per xinesos de Barcelona i "perdre hores" xerrant amb els *laoban* i les *laobania*. A l'Àlex per les nostres xerrades a Kunming i a Barcelona i per animar-me constantment a tirar endavant amb la tesis i fer-me veure el món a través del seu art. A la Maria La Picola per les seves visites energètiques cada vegada que he tornat a casa.

Als amics de Girona per aprendre cada dia d'ells, a en Jordi, l'Alba, la Deborah, l'Edu, la Marta de Mèxic, perquè és tant fàcil ara com quan en teníem 15. A en Ramón per tirar-se a l'aventura i venir amb mi a Qingtian amb una càmera sota el

braç, i per les hores dedicades a l'elaboració del documental que presento com a annex d'aquesta tesis.

Però en especial a l'Anna, per fer-nos de mirall i per les llargues xerrades per skype que m'han reconfortat durant tots aquests anys i em feien re-trobar-me quan ho necessitava. I a la meva germana de cor i d'ànima, a la Marta, per ser la meva font d'inspiració tantes vegades.

També agrair a la meva família, a la biològica i a la que ens anem fent. Especialment a la Mima i la Margarita per la seva hospitalitat i per haver compartit amb mi una estona de viatge.

I finalment agrair-li a un espai que sempre serà el meu aixopluc, La Canova, i amb ell, als meus pares. Vull agrair per sobre de tot al Francesc i la Maria el seu incondicional suport sempre. A ells dos està dedicat aquest treball.

Finalment un recordatori a les meves àvies, que no van poder "mouré's" tant com ho he fet jo.

EPIGRAPH

Creeré más en el habla que en los idiomas como creo más en la gente que en los países (...). Antes que a ningún país voy a pertenecer a una paisajística. Antes que de ningún idioma, voy a ser de cómo la gente habla.

Javier Pérez Andújar (2011:108).

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The notion of “return” immediately brings to mind a movement of dénouement, conclusion and retreat; a practice of resolution and closure, denoting an immobile and bounded reality. However, the practices that we will analyze in this thesis under the rubric of “return mobility patterns” will take us along other paths embracing a continuum of flexible and ongoing sequences of movements and moorings, entrenched in a wider scope of transnational practices.

This research aims to analyze the different embodied and mediated mobilities between China and Spain from an intergenerational perspective.

The aim of this research is not only to follow itineraries and understand the experience of migrants who return to China. Going beyond this one-sided perspective focused on the perspective of “returnees”, this ethnography takes a relational perspective and explores the broader context of the migration process, which includes different social actors, different places and different forms of mobility. Therefore, an important objective of the research consists of analyzing the various forms of mobility and the relationships between people who physically move between China and Spain with those who have not migrated, although they are also active agents in transnational practices.

Therefore, this research aims to study everyday mobility of people involved in migration flows between China and Spain by examining the trajectories and oral accounts of Chinese migrants, as well as by analyzing how mobility and transnational practices are undertaken throughout virtual spaces and incarnated in the material world. By focusing our attention on the material world and analyzing the circulation of things, their emplacement in public and private places in different localities, and the relationship between things in motion and the people that use and consume them, different types of embodied and mediated mobility come to light.

1.1 Firsts points of intersections and the origin of the research

My interest in mobility, return migration and the initial questions of this dissertation came by chance while I was living in Chengdu (Sichuan) during the 2008 – 2009 academic year. After I finished my Master degree in Anthropology, which was related to art production and ethnic minorities in China (Masdeu Torruella 2006), I committed myself to one year of Chinese language studies in Chengdu. For an anthropologist without either a Chinese family background or an education in Asian studies, acquiring the language skills was a prerogative to develop further any kind of research related to Chinese society.

Without expecting it, and almost by chance, my daily life in Chengdu brought about a change in my research interests and I became interested in Chinese migration in Spain and, concretely, in return movements. As Kjellgren points out, the choice of research topic is often the result of a series of random coincidences, itineraries and meetings, as well as “personal desires and perhaps even *yuanfen*¹”. (Kjellgren 2006:227).

It was during this academic year when I met by chance some Chinese migrants who had just returned to China after living in Spain for several years. The shared experience of being regarded as a foreigner and/or native in two different settings – in this case China and Spain - as well as the mutual need to exchange thoughts and considerations about both societies, led to feelings of empathy and good communication between us from the beginning. From these first conversations my interest, curiosity, and preliminary research questions about return migration practices arose.

On the one hand, I was interested in knowing how they perceived the rapid changes taking place in their country of origin and how they incorporated their life experiences abroad - in some cases in more than one country - when they visited or returned to live in China. And on the other hand, I was especially interested in understanding what relationships they maintained with Spain, and the role of these links in their daily life in China upon return. From these first conversations, I could already see how return practices were not a simple and defined movement back to the origins, but involved a much more complex process than a simple “homecoming”. These physical displacements were inserted in a way of life made up of a “concatenation (sequence) of movements”².

These first encounters took place in 2009, when the financial crisis in Spain emerged strongly in the media and public opinion, coinciding with the post-Chinese Olympic Games, which symbolized the rapid economic growth of the country. This global conjuncture definitely played a relevant role in triggering the questions for this research.

The place where these random meetings took place gave additional meaning to the preliminary insights of this study. It was a Catalan bar-restaurant located in Chengdu run by two Catalans, who had moved to China after completing a degree in East Asian Studies. This bar-restaurant was a *point of intersection* of different itineraries, back and forth movements, transits and multiple identities, which shaped the ethnographic basis of this research and my interest in exploring the meaning of migration movements towards a country from which one once migrated.

Although the research arose in China, it was in a place where social practices and structures beyond national borders were shaped on a daily basis. The context of the

¹ The term *yuanfen* 缘分 is usually translated as “destiny” and denotes some affinities beyond the logic of

² The idea of migration, re-migration and return to different places where one has lived, which I have described as a “sequence of movements” resembles, in some ways, the notion of “serial migrants” forged by Ossman (2013).

triggering of the research involved the interaction and exchange of social practices and cultural expressions that have guided the development of this project. The correlation between places and social practices involving several geographically distant locations has been, from the beginning, the leitmotif of this research project about transnational mobilities and contemporary return migration practices to China from Spain.

In September 2009, I decided to go back to Barcelona in order to start the research in the framework of doctoral studies. Obtaining funding has been from the beginning a decisive factor for carrying out the research and has, somehow, shaped its development and outcomes.

In 2010, I combined my doctoral studies with my professional dedication as a Catalan teacher and cultural mediator in the Fondo neighborhood of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, a township located on the outskirts of Barcelona and a relevant node for the Chinese community in Spain. Besides teaching Catalan language to Chinese people, my role as a propagator of Catalan language led me to spend hours in shops, bars and restaurants managed by Chinese, as well as to take part in parents' meetings in schools³.

This period of exploratory research in the metropolitan area of Barcelona was decisive for the design of the research and gave me the chance to have a good introduction to the main site where I developed fieldwork in China.

While the conversations I maintained with returnees in China used to transport us, figuratively speaking, to Spain, the everyday practices I observed in Fondo and the conversations with my students were largely related to Chinese society. Concretely, these links and conversations brought me to Qingtian 青田, a rural county located in the southeast of Zhejiang province, where most of the Chinese people living in Spain come from, and the place where the main body of this ethnography is circumscribed.

The first image I saw of Qingtian was the big picture that dominates a small noodle shop in Santa Coloma de Gramenet, and the first contacts with Qingtianese that enabled me to begin the fieldwork in China emerged from my walks around the streets of Fondo, as well as in the classrooms where I taught Catalan language.

Thus, like the Spanish restaurant in Chengdu, the places I visited in Barcelona and Fondo also became *points of intersection* of different types of mobility where different localities meet.

In January 2011, I received a scholarship from the Spanish government and "moved back" to China to start my fieldwork. It was at this moment that my connection with Xiamen University began, which has lasted until today thanks to funding from

³ The "Consorti Per la Normalització Lingüística" (Institution for Linguistic Normalization) is a public entity created by different Catalan institutions, which aims to disseminate the knowledge and use of the Catalan language. CPNL offers free Catalan courses exclusively for Chinese people in areas with a high concentration of Chinese migrants.

Confucius Institute⁴. However, from September 2012 to February 2013 - between the two fellowships - I also worked as a Spanish language teacher in Lishui University to further develop and conclude the fieldwork.

Thus, this research has been done in changeable settings and financial contexts, combining both grants and jobs in areas and institutions related to the research. Despite being a somewhat challenging experience, it has also been enriching and rewarding. Moreover, the fellowships granted from Spanish and Chinese institutions materialize also the “transnational funding” of this project.

1.2 Chinese people in Spain. An overview.

The Chinese presence in Spain is increasingly heterogeneous, not only according to the place of origin in China, but also in relation to its socio-demographic profile. The different profiles of Chinese people living in Spain consist of students, highly-skilled professionals coming from urban areas, and a great majority of people from rural regions⁵.

In addition, although the history of Chinese people in Spain is not long in comparison to other European countries, the number of locally born and/or socialized children is growing and the emergence of migrant’s descendants’ cohorts in their young and adult ages is already a reality⁶. The intergenerational factor and changes in peoples’ identities, and transnational mobility between first-generation migrants and their descendants are the common threads underpinning this dissertation. As we shall see, this dissertation examines the different transnational mobility patterns of migrants and their descendants as a continuum instead of separating these realities according to different generations⁷.

Despite the increasing heterogeneity of Chinese people in Spain as regards place of origin⁸, people coming from Qingtian (青田县) and Wenzhou (温州市) still predominate in the Chinese community in Spain⁹. Whether they are first-generation migrants or their descendants, most Chinese people in Spain have links with rural localities in Qingtian or Wenzhou, located in the southeast of Zhejiang province, where a strong migration culture has developed over the last four decades.

⁴ The fellowships I obtained to develop this research are the MAEC-Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (January 2011-August 2012) and the Joint PhD Fellowship del Confucius China Study Program (September 2013- July 2014)

⁵ The diversity and heterogeneity of Chinese migration in different European countries has been emphasized by different researchers, leading us to question the notion of “Chinese diaspora” (Christiansen 2003; Pieke 2007), which has been used to categorize and misinterpret different realities with an ethnic bias.

⁶ In a recent article, Sáiz López (2013) gives an insight into this heterogeneity and the role of migrants’ descendants in the diversification of Chinese communities in Spain.

⁷ As expressed by Chiang (Chiang 2011:94) “one should be aware that a study of the two different generations should not mean separating the two, as has been done in the past”.

⁸ There has been a growing influx of migrants coming from Fujian and Northeast of China since the last decade.

⁹ It is difficult to know exactly the place of origin of international migrants within a country, but it is assumed that approximately 70% of Chinese migrants in Spain come from Qingtian and Wenzhou.

According to the latest official statistics from the Spanish Government Migration Office, at the end of 2013 there were 184.196 Chinese people holding Spanish residence permits.¹⁰ However, it is important to take into account that statistical data cannot really be translated into the number of Chinese migrants living in Spain. The same happens with the data related to returnees, provided by the Chinese Office. The logic of mobility – and especially the movements back and forth between countries - implies a flexible use of official documents and citizenships and, thus, cannot be grasped from statistical data and the framed idea of migration and return as static and separate movements.

In spite of caution needed when reading statistics, it is true to say that the presence of Chinese people in Spain has been growing since it started to be significant in the 1980s. Although the presence of Chinese migrants in Spain can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not until the post-Mao economic and political reforms in China that Chinese people began to be demographically significant in Spain¹¹, as well as in other southern European countries such as Italy or Greece. The history of Chinese people in Spain has to be understood within the wider scope of Qingtian- Europe migration flows (Beltrán Antolín 1998, 2003). The book edited by Gregor Benton and Frank Pieke in 1998, "The Chinese in Europe", was the first systematic contribution to academic knowledge of Chinese migration to Europe and tried to underline the transnational connections between Chinese people who settled in different European countries. In fact, many Qingtianese people in Spain have relatives and friends who settled in different European countries, prompted by economic and migration policies.

Chain migration and the development of different types of family business - which have been adapted to needs over time - are the main characteristics of the settlement of people from Qingtian in Spain. Like in other countries, the economic activity of first-generation Chinese migrants in Spain mainly consists of opening their own business and, thus, in 2011 the Chinese were the first foreign community living in Spain with the highest number of self-employed¹² (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b:89).

In the beginning, Chinese people settled in the main cities in Spain such as Barcelona, Madrid or Valencia, but they soon expanded to other cities, small towns and villages in different Spanish provinces, following the same entrepreneurial logic that led to the spread of Qingtianese migrants across different European countries. In fact, as we shall see in this dissertation, geographical expansion to the point of market saturation is making many Chinese people in Europe turn their sights towards China as a place in which to live and invest.

¹⁰ *Extranjeros Residentes en España a 31 de Diciembre de 2013, Observatorio Permanent de la Inmigración, Gobierno de España.* (Foreign Residents in Spain, 31 December 2013. Government of Spain's Permanent Migration Observatory).

¹¹ For a detailed account of the history of Chinese in Spain, see Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2001; Beltrán Antolín 1998, 2003).

¹² *Trabajadores Autónomos* (Self-employed workers)

Geographic expansion and/or a change in sectors, which are two common entrepreneurial strategies among international Chinese migrants (Haugen and Carling 2005), stand out in the economic activity and lifestyle of Chinese people in Spain.

In the interplay between these two strategies, Chinese people have established themselves throughout Spain and widened their business sectors. Chinese food restaurants were the main entrepreneurial activity of Chinese people in Spain from the end of the 1970s until the mid 1990s, and it was this sector that employed migrants arriving in large numbers directly from China (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b:91). The saturation of the market after their geographical expansion throughout Spain led to other businesses, such as trading, import-export businesses, as well as the opening of wholesale and retail shops. Haugen and Carling documented the change in sectors of Chinese migrants in Spain from restaurants to shops and low-cost Chinese goods trading (Haugen and Carling 2005:645). However, there has also been a transformation of the economic activity within the same catering sector, involving Chinese-run *bares de barrio* or local bars (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b:97–102). The introduction of Chinese people to the running of local bars has brought about an increase in the interaction between Chinese people and mainstream local society, which is playing a relevant role in Qingtian and the changing economic activities of migrants returning to live in their hometown. As we shall see, the different economic activities of Chinese people in Spain have a relevant impact on the economic activities in their society of origin and, consequently, on the local urban landscape.

Finally, to finish this brief overview of the circumstances of Chinese people in Spain, we should also add that they have maintained important transnational practices with their society of origin in the economic and entrepreneurial domain (Beltrán Antolín 2004, 2006) as well as in the family and reproductive sphere (Sáiz López 2012, 2012, 2013). Besides these two basic aspects in the daily lives of ordinary Chinese people, the transnational links between China and Spain through migrants' associations have also been documented (Nieto 2007).

1.3 Transnational Qingtian

This research aims to examine reverse migration flows and practices and its impact in the societies of origin. Thus, my research was mainly based in Qingtian, which is a point of intersection forged by the daily movements and transnational practices involving those who move physically (migrants and returnees) and those who are part of this mobility without the need for actual physical displacement.

Qingtian is a rural county with a strong migration culture. People who have not migrated and have no intention of doing so are involved in the social lives of their relatives and friends, living mostly in European countries. Although new migration flows towards Africa (Haugen and Carling, 2005) and Latin America have

emerged strongly in the last decade, the main international connections are still framed within the Qingtian-Europe scope, and are especially concentrated in Italy and Spain¹³.

A longstanding tradition of migration characterizes Qingtianese society. Although international migration had already been introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Thunø 1999), it has been during the last three decades when migration-related values have taken a deep hold, and the pre-1980 Qingtianese social structure totally transformed (Beltrán Antolín 2003). Since then, migration values and behaviors have been deeply embedded in Qingtian society and connections with the international migrant community pervade the social life of the region. Therefore, this rural area, traditionally isolated and geographically surrounded by mountains along the Ou River (瓯江), has become a meeting place between different socio-cultural realities, localities and networks.

Chinese and European scholars have documented the history of, and reasons for, international migration from Qingtian to Europe in great length (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Li 1999a; Thunø 1999), and references to the "historical returnee" have also been mentioned in these works. However a qualitative long-term, in-depth study of the impact of migration on Qingtian, and its transformation since international migration emerged has not been undertaken. In a way, my own ethnography is a continuation of Beltrán's ethno-historical work undertaken 20 years ago (Beltrán Antolín, 2003).

Over the last two decades the situation in China, in Qingtian, and in Europe and Spain has led to enormous changes, from migration policies to the social and economic environment. During my fieldwork I recognized a plurality of itineraries, directions and experiences of mobility (direction, intensity and role), as well as a transformation in business activities, institutional aims and local practices, due to the change in migration flows and transnational links.

What happens when there is a structural change in both the societies/countries that make up this circular migration milieu? What happens when new mobility patterns emerge and old ones are transformed? What happens when a migrant's descendants takes part in these transnational ties? And what happens when new practices of return and reverse migration flows appear? These are the questions that form the backdrop to my research, and are going to be addressed in the corresponding chapters of the dissertation.

¹³ According to the Qingtian Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, at the end of 2011 there were over 250,000 Qingtianese living in more than 120 countries, and 68 per cent of them were residing in Spain and Italy.

1.4 An ethnographic grounded model of analysis

When I first arrived in Qingtian and started to focus on the subject of return I realized that this reverse physical mobility is entrenched in several other mobility patterns and, thus, cannot be explained without taking into consideration other transnational practices, reflected in different degrees of corporeity. Therefore, during the first exploratory stages I widened the scope of my research in order to understand the relationship between the different mobility patterns and transnational practices linking China and Spain (which span throughout Qingtian) and their underlying logic.

To do so, I developed an empirically-grounded analytical scheme, which includes the different bidirectional transnational practices according to their different nature and degrees of embodiment: from the physical movement of people (visits, migration and return) to object-mediated mobilities (circulation of objects, products and economic capital and their emplacement), and the more ethereal, virtual contacts and exchange of information through the new information and communication technologies. The conceptual and analytical model, explained in detail in the introduction of Chapter four, allowed me to underscore how different movements related to things, ideas and people are an integral part of present-day transnational practices between Qingtian and Spain. In a way, each one of those practices could stand as a single study but the aim of this research project is to underscore how are these transnational practices interrelated in the scope of the nowadays mobility between Qingtian / China and Spain.

For analytical reasons these embodied and mediated mobility patterns are distinguished according to their different degrees of embodiment. However, as we shall see, these transnational practices are intertwined and related in everyday life.



Figure 1. Diagram Bidirectional transnational practices between Qingtian/China and Spain.

However, I should say that transnational ties, visits, and return practices, as well as institutions and business activities related with migration have existed for at least three decades and, therefore, do not imply a radical change or the emergence of completely new realities. Therefore, in order to grasp the continuities and changes with the existing transnational practices and analyze the emergence of new ones, the diachronic perspective conforms a basic feature in each one of the chapters addressed to the analysis of embodied and mediated transnational practices.

In this model of analysis the different modes of return mobilities that we shall examine in chapters six and seven are conceptualized as the most embodied of the different transnational practices developed between China and Spain. Regarding return mobility, this dissertation is concerned with the following questions:

How do the Qingtianese return to their origins? What does it mean for the Qingtianese to go back to China to live for a period of time that may be of varying length, and may or may not involve further physical movements? What is the relationship like with the places where they have lived before? And how are these issues related to intergenerational variables?

1.5 The ethnographic fieldwork: Time, places and techniques

This study is based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in China divided in different stages from January 2011 to September 2013. During the three years of fieldwork research I also visited and interviewed Chinese people in Spain, mainly in Barcelona, Girona, Valencia and other small towns of Catalonia.

1.5.1 Where did I do the fieldwork? Following itineraries.

In China, the fieldwork was mainly based in Qingtian County, which is one of the nine counties that belong to the administration of Lishui (丽水), a prefecture-level city. Qingtian covers an area of 2.492 square kilometers and is made up of 21 villages or rural districts (*xiang* 乡), and 10 towns or urban districts (*zhen* 镇). At the end of 2010, Qingtian County had a registered population of 510.000 inhabitants.

Hecheng town (鹤城) is the symbolical capital of the county and is commonly known as Qingtian, using the name that refers to the whole area. Hecheng is the main urban center of Qingtian and the most populated area of the county.¹⁴ It is also the locality where migrants gather when they visit their hometown and where returnees have opened the first cafés and restaurants.

The fieldwork was based in Hecheng and in the villages from where the migration flows towards Europe began. Specifically, I stayed and did fieldwork in Youzhu (油竹) and Fushan (阜山), and on a minor scale, in Fangshan (方山) and Shankou (山口).

¹⁴ According to Hecheng's local government sources, 60% of people living in the town come from the villages in Qingtian's rural areas.

During the first stages of fieldwork in 2011, I lived with the family of a woman I met in Fondo (Santa Coloma de Gramenet) during the exploratory study in Spain. Living with a migrant's family allowed me to observe the daily transnational practices of those who stayed in China and the way they perceived their migrant relatives. In addition, my hosts often took me to meet other migrants' relatives, as well as people living in Spain when they knew somebody was visiting Qingtian. This was the best context in which to start the fieldwork, as well as to observe closely the movement of objects, the sending and receiving of products and the different symbolic and use values adopted in different houses.

In 2012, I decided to stay in a small hotel in Hecheng run by a woman who was taking care of her nine year-old grandson while her daughter was living in Spain. Most of the hotel clients were migrants travelling to Qingtian for business or to visit relatives and spend their holidays. This was another important space to capture the physical comings and goings that make Qingtian an intersection of mobilities.

As I widened my circle of contacts and I started to be more familiar with the main places of social interaction in Hecheng and neighboring villages, I began to interact with a wider group of social actors belonging to different generations and with different socio-cultural backgrounds. In fact, people would often approach me while I was sitting in a park or in a café and start a conversation. Almost all the people who approached me spontaneously had a migration background either in Italy, Spain, Portugal or other countries, and some of them became important informants and friends.

Finally, from September 2012 to January 2013 I lived in Lishui, where I worked as a Spanish teacher. The proximity of Lishui to Hecheng allowed me to continue carrying out my research and gave me a good opportunity to interact with Qingtianese people who have returned to China and settled in the bigger city of Lishui instead of remaining in Qingtian.

The different places on which I based my research condense paradigmatically the meaning of migration as a way of life. The long-term fieldwork based in Qingtian allowed me to examine the impact of migration on the society of origin in its various forms, the interaction between migrants and non-migrants during the return mobility process, and the perception towards migration by locals who stayed behind in China.

However, Qingtian is not the only destination of reverse migration flows and return mobility patterns. The empirical reality also led me to keep track of migrants on their return paths through different Chinese cities. Thus, the analysis of return mobility patterns resulted in my moving with the informants to other localities in China and seeing how the logic of bidirectional transnational practices continues to develop upon return.

I followed migrants to the small and medium-sized cities located in the vicinity of Qingtian, as well as to Hangzhou and Shanghai, where in recent years, an increasing number of Qingtianese migrants and their descendants have been developing economic and business activities.

1.5.2 Who did I speak to? The ethnographic relationship in a place of mobility intersections.

An important objective of this research consisted of analyzing the various forms of mobility and relationships between people who physically move between China and Spain with those who have not migrated. Thus, during the fieldwork, I spent time with and interviewed people with different experiences of migration and mobility. Migrants who still live in Spain, as well as those who have moved back to live again in China, made up the first group of informants. The second group included those Qingtianese who had not migrated but were actively involved with mobility in different ways. I spent a large part of the fieldwork with migrants' friends and relatives, and I also interviewed people with relevant roles in social institutions related to migration, such as schoolteachers, temple managers and monks, owners of restaurants and cafés, as well as local politicians and associations leaders. Given that this research has an intergenerational approach, I also interviewed migrants' descendants while they were visiting Qingtian or those living in Hangzhou or Shanghai.

I was faced with a "multi-mobile" society in which people were involved in different ways with transnational mobility. How did I position myself in this field of intersections? Or even more importantly, how did the informants perceive the back-and-forth movements between Barcelona, Xiamen and Qingtian - one of the leading migration counties in the area - of a Ph.D. student from Spain?

The way to establish empathy and points in common was approached differently according to peoples' migration trajectories. Thus, the three groups of people, characterized by a different relationship with migration, produced different ethnographic relationships. My relationship with people who had migrated and lived in Spain and with those who remained in China had its specific features.

In his ethnography about the return of Japanese nikkeijin, Tsuda argues that ethnic, national, gender and class identities are relevant elements in ethnographic fieldwork (Tsuda 2003:9).

In fact, as a foreign woman staying in Qingtian for long periods, the locals identified me at first as either a journalist or a business woman and, in some cases, as the wife of a Qingtianese migrant. Despite the initial moments of confusion, when people became aware of my research and connection with Xiamen University as a visiting PhD student, the reaction generally changed completely in response to the great respect shown towards higher education in rural China.

Regarding my relationship with migrants, I soon realized that people who had returned to China after living in Spain for several years were eager to spend time

with me, chatting in Spanish or Catalan, or simply sharing social customs associated with Spanish society – food, music, knowledge, memories, etc. Returnees and people travelling constantly between the two countries showed an open predisposition to explain their migratory trajectories and express their feelings upon return. It is important to take into account that, as in other places characterized by a strong migration culture, returnees are often conditioned by social expectations.

A 33 year-old woman who had migrated to Spain when she was 18 and had returned to Qingtian three years before I met her, openly expressed this fact, which was present in most of my conversations with returnees. When we finished a long interview in which she explained her life story, and her experiences and trajectories between China and Spain, the women took a deep breath and expressed her gratitude for our conversation, explaining that "I hadn't spoken honestly about my life in Spain for such a long time; here you can't be open with everybody".

The fieldwork in Qingtian has shown me that informants are often as curious as ethnographers and they want to know the real circumstances of the person who is observing them. This "reverse ethnography" has been crucial for my research and has created an atmosphere of trust and friendship with the people I have interacted with. By sharing experiences, views, concerns and future plans, informants were fulfilling my objectives and reasons for my prolonged stay in China.

My experience living in China has been crucial in this research. I lived for several years between China and Spain and so I have also become a mobile subject, particularly since I started the doctoral research project. This research was carried out while I was living in China, going back and forth between Qingtian, Xiamen and Barcelona. During the four years that my research lasted, I was a visiting doctoral student in Xiamen University and the city became my home; the place where I wrote and analyzed the data that I was collecting during the fieldwork in Qingtian and other localities in China. Besides these repeated local movements within China, I also travelled often to Spain.

Living in China beyond the specific time frame of the fieldwork a deeper understanding of Chinese society as well as the identification of transnational practices in my own life experience. Nevertheless, beyond that, living between China and Spain has helped me to deepen and increase the understanding and empathy towards the informants of this study; the "mobile subjects" that cope with the difficulties and virtues of mobile and flexible lives on a daily basis.

1.5.3 Methods and research techniques.

This study is based on ethnographic fieldwork involving participant observation and interaction with the different social actors described above.

- ***Oral accounts: Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations***

The first research methods used in this study include oral accounts. Semi-structured interviews and informal everyday conversations, systematically written down in the fieldwork diary, have been the main source of data collection in relation to migrants' trajectories and the perceptions of non-migrants towards migration.

For each one of the social actors related to migration (migrants, returned migrants, migrants' descendants and non-migrants) I prepared a specific interview structure following the objectives of the research. I have interviewed over 50 people related in different ways to migration. The interviews with key informants were conducted in different sessions and sometimes involved different settings. Interviewing the same person in Spain and in China, or at different moments of his or her life has shown the importance of processual and relation factors in the assessments, feelings and perceptions of mobile subjects.

Most of the interviews with migrants and the Qingtianese who had not migrated were conducted in Chinese. Even migrants who had lived in Spain for many years felt more comfortable using Chinese when narrating their life stories and complex thoughts. However it is important to take into consideration that most of my informants spoke Qingtian dialect (*qingtianhua* 青田话) in their daily lives and this is their mother tongue.

Interviews to migrants' descendants were conducted in Spanish or Catalan, depending on the localities where the interviewees had been socialized.

Although interviews were important to organize the information and deepen the understanding of certain aspects, the analysis of the informal, everyday conversations, written down in my field notes, is the main source of information regarding people's perceptions and appraisal towards migration and mobility. It was very common to gain an insight into or learn about aspects of my informants' lives while we were having an everyday conversation or doing some activity such as shopping, going to a temple, or in a break from their work.

Timing, circumstances and mood cannot be controlled as if they were a laboratory science and everyday activity is the space through which one can understand and grasp realities that might remain undisclosed in a formal interview.

- ***Observation and analysis of social activities and the materialization of transnational practices.***

The observation and analysis of the material world became central to this study, as can be seen in the ethnographic grounded method of analysis presented below (see figure 1). During the fieldwork, I focused my attention not only on what people said

and explained but also on what people did and the way they related with places and things in motion.

I consider products, things and architectural forms as primary documents and units of analysis in the study of transnational mobility and migration culture, regarding their material forms and the way people interact with them. I have focused on the relationship between things and people following the perspectives of Gell (1998) and Appadurai (1986). Temples, restaurants and cafés, or even post offices, are relevant places of transnational practices in their material forms as well as in their function as containers of social activity.

A perspective focused on things in motion and the places where they are located, distributed and acquire meaning, reverts to basic questions about the changes and continuities in Qingtianese society and transnational practices, also showing the active role of material culture in the framework of social relations between different actors involved in this mobility.

I systematically made field notes with the description of places, social activities and the informants' actions. Besides the use of photographic images to retain specific aspects of the material world, also of utmost importance for this study were the analysis of the written descriptions, and handmade diagrams and drawings related to social landscapes, object circulation and peoples' actions.

- **Forums and on-line diaries: Virtual documents and ethnographic sites**

Virtual and on-line transnational practices are represented in the analytical level as the most invisible transnational practices connecting China with Spain (see figure 1). I have focused on two types of virtual spaces used by Qingtianese people.

Weixin 威信 and virtual diaries:

Throughout the fieldwork, the ethnographic virtual spaces also became relevant for following migrants' trajectories. As the fieldwork progressed, I realized that, beyond the physical ethnographic field in its traditional sense, relationships with the informants were extended through virtual space, especially by using mobile phone applications such as *weixin*.

Weixin is a mobile phone application that has rapidly become the main communication tool in China allowing simultaneous transnational communication by texting conversations and sending voice messages. Moreover, the application also emerges - in the case at hand - as a space for mobility representation through the "social wall" where users can post images, reflections and links that appear as diaries of their daily lives.

The conversations with informants across physical distance and the analysis of the information that people added and posted to their "social walls" allowed me to follow the journey of the informants and continue collecting information about their circumstances, perceptions and ways of representing their mobility.

Analysis of Xihua Forum website:

Between September 2011 and January 2012 I proceeded with an analysis of the on-line Xihua Forum 西华,¹⁵ created by and intended for Chinese people living in Spain or for those planning to migrate for several reasons. The analysis of the posted information and the social interaction undertaken through the virtual space of the forum revealed the encounter and the juxtaposition between local and transnational practices.

- **Quantitative survey on Chinese language students in Qingtian**

The emergence of new transnational realities, characterized by migrants' descendants who live in Europe and usually visit Qingtian for their summer holidays, is an unknown reality that has not been studied before. Most of the children and teenagers travelling to Qingtian are enrolled in language schools to study and improve their Chinese language skills.

The heterogeneity of circumstances, trajectories and countries of residence of these migrants' descendants led me to conduct a basic survey among 205 Chinese language students during the summer of 2011.

The statistical descriptive analysis was undertaken by using SPSS software and revealed the relation to different transnational family strategies, leading to the physical mobility of migrants' descendants.

1.6 Transits: A documentary film dissertation

This study comprises a written dissertation as well as a documentary film, presented as an audiovisual annex. The reasons for making a documentary film date from the first fieldwork stage in January 2011. When I started the fieldwork, I realized that audiovisual platforms provided the perfect support for grasping and documenting the different forms of mobility and the forms they take in Qingtian.

The documentary project was undertaken in cooperation with Ramon Oliveras, who was the cameraman. We have worked together throughout the whole process, from filming, selecting material and shaping the script, to the process of editing. At present, the project is in the post-production phase, and will be ready to be presented as an audiovisual support for this study.

The film focuses on different itineraries and mobilities to and from Qingtian and is based on the experiences of five main characters belonging to different generations and travelling between Qingtian and Spain for different reasons. The documentary aims to underscore the vibrancy of Qingtian as a place of transit, a place where different movements and social realities meet.

¹⁵ <http://www.xihua.es/forum.php>

For an ethnographer with no experience in the field of audiovisual production, the project has been a challenge in many ways. Thanks to the cooperation of Ramon Oliveras throughout the project, technical problems could be solved and my skills were honed. Selecting, analyzing and interpreting the audiovisual material resemble in some way the work involved in putting together the traditional written dissertation. Thus, I accomplished the task of producing the dissertation in two formats, which are inter-related with each other and help to grasp the total meaning of this study.

Despite the academic vocation of the film, it also aims to have an educational function and I hope it can serve as a tool to transfer the knowledge and realities of Qingtianese mobility patterns beyond academic circles.

1.7 Outline of the chapters and organization of the research

The dissertation is divided into four parts. In the first part, the theoretical and methodological perspectives used in this research are discussed, as well as the settings of the ethnography.

The second part brings us to Qingtian and analyzes the changes and continuities of the impact of international migration over the last three decades by studying language schools that have gone from teaching Spanish, Italian and other foreign languages to future migrants, to implementing Chinese language courses addressed at migrants' descendants. For our purposes, therefore, language learning is a good example of the transformation of the migration culture and introduces the role of new actors, who are the migrants' descendants, in transnational practices and changes in the migration culture in Qingtian (Chapter three).

The third and fourth parts of the thesis are organized around the different bidirectional transnational practices according to their different degrees of embodiment following the ethnography-grounded model of analysis.

The third part analyzes transnational mobility patterns that do not entail the physical displacement of bodies. While transnational mobility by virtual and on-line means are documented and discussed in Chapter four, transnational practices mediated by object circulation and their emplacement in different semi-public and public places are discussed in Chapter five.

The fourth part of the dissertation addresses transnational practices involving physical displacement: visits (Chapter 6) and returns (Chapter 7).

Chapter six analyzes the regular and occasional trips to Qingtian of first-generation migrants and their descendants. While migrants' visits to their hometown are triggered by productive and reproductive aims, locally-born Spanish and/or raised Chinese maintain different types of links with Qingtian. Moreover, the physical movements of the Qingtianese towards Spain to travel and visit friends and relatives underscores new physical mobilities from Qingtian to Spain that go beyond

“economic migration” and open up the meeting point between migration and tourism mobility.

Chapter seven brings us to examine and analyze the different modes and patterns of return mobilities characterized by different generations of Chinese people in Spain. First I will disentangle the strong ideological connotations surrounding return from the way it is actually undertaken and experienced in order to situate the analysis beyond the recurrent mythologized notion of return within migration studies.

I will then present the different modes of current return mobility patterns to China, which may go from highly physical transnational movements to rather stable modes of migrant residency in China.

As we shall see, while some migrants continue with or transform the “returnee’s” business activity, which is already socially institutionalized in Qingtian, others decide to settle in larger cities in Zhejiang province, such as Hangzhou, or in Shanghai, thereby further increasing the number of places susceptible to becoming home. Finally, we will see how different modes of transnational practices and the links of migrants who have returned to China are still the driving force behind migrants’ lives, even in those cases that feature a rather stable return mobility and transnational practices of a different nature.

The last chapter will include the concluding remarks on circular mobilities and transnational practices and the role of return mobility within this logic.

Chapter 2. Theoretical and methodological approaches

2.1 Transnationalism and mobility: Empirical realities or methodological tools?

From the beginning of the fieldwork I realized how transnationalism and mobility were important everyday factors for the people I spoke to. These two concepts took on increasing relevance as a way of describing and analyzing the empirical reality I was exploring.

In fact, transnationalism and mobility – two terms that sometimes overlap and can refer to similar realities – make up, respectively, two of the main theoretical and methodological schemata of our times. The strong relationship between the two terms has been highlighted by Ley (2010:380), who indicates that “transnationalism has become an umbrella term to describe the contemporary hyper-mobility of migrants across national borders”.

Although transnationalism is mainly related to migration studies, mobility studies, or the so-called “mobility paradigm” (Urry 2007), has been more widely applied. In fact, the term mobility has become “a central metaphor for the contemporary world, both in its physical form and its imaginative implications” (Salazar and Smart 2011:v). The way to apply these two concepts and their related frameworks in the research at hand has brought some problems due to the fact that they are sometimes used in the literature to refer to a mode of analysis, while other times they are employed to describe concrete empirical realities. While it is true to say that methodology and theory are indeed related in the different phases of research, I am aware that we cannot let theoretical and conceptual frameworks eclipse the diverse empirical reality we want to disclose.

In my opinion, one of the main problems surrounding the notion related to transnationalism is precisely the use of the term as a methodological tool and adjective to describe concrete empirical reality conversely. Something similar might also occur within the more recent field that focuses on people’s movement across distant geographical places:

If mobility (or transnationalism) is the topic of research, there is a great risk that different interpretations of what is going on will be neglected, or that only patterns that fit the paradigm will be considered, or that only extremes of (hyper)mobility or (im)mobility will be given attention (Salazar and Smart 2011:vi).

This research sees mobility and transnationalism as concepts for describing particular empirical practices that might be differently experienced and practiced by distinctive communities, and by different individuals according to different factors such as generation, class or personal insights.

2.1.1 Transnationalism

The concept of transnationalism has already traveled a relatively long journey since it first appeared on the migration studies scene at the beginning of the 1990s, introduced by Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994, 1995) who defined transnationalism as the process, practices and networks through which *transmigrants* forge and develop social relationships that link the respective societies of origin and destination.

When reflecting on migration studies, two of the main scholars of the transnationalism approach stated that “we need a methodology that allows us to move beyond the binaries that have typified migration research in the past” (Levitt and Schiller 2004:1012). Levitt and Schiller were referring to binaries, such as acculturation versus cultural persistence, migrants versus non-migrants, homeland versus new land, etc. and they brought to the table the relationship between methodology and concrete empirical realities mentioned above.

In fact, the need to break away from the traditional unidirectional, one-dimensional way of grasping migration – strongly linked with assimilation perspectives - as well as the intellectual reflection on the world’s changing realities and structures with the advent of globalization and the increase in international connections, have led to the rapid dissemination of the transnational perspective among migration scholars, reaching a prevalent position in the 2000s.

Research on transnationalism has provided important insight into the everyday practices of migrants and the way they maintain connections with their countries of origin and destination through internet communication and travel, as well as by sending and receiving money, objects, information, etc.

However, the impact of these transnational practices has been mostly focused on the agency of migrants, attributing a passive role to the people remaining localized in the countries of origin. The work of Levitt (2001a) is perhaps the best example of research into the active role of those who stay in their countries of origin. As we will see in this research, both migrants and non-migrants are actively involved in transnational practices.

The term “transnationalism” has been used as a “catch-all concept” (Lee 2011:295) since it first appeared in the academic field of migration, referring to a wide variety of connections between migrants and their places of origin, and it could be said that an agreement has not been reached about its conceptual implications or empirical characteristics. As Vertovec pointed out, the misuse of the term led transnationalism scholarship to be criticized because of this conceptual confusion, which makes it a synonym of something international, multinational, global or diasporic (Vertovec

2004). The debate between followers and critics of the transnational perspective is already quite long-standing and well known.

In a recent article, Tsuda warns us not to forget that what makes a specific cross-border activity truly transnational is its simultaneous nature:

“To be truly transnational the transborder practices must have a simultaneous and bidirectional impact in both sending and receiving nation-states” (Tsuda, 2012: 633).

2.1.2 Mobilities or transnational geographies.

As with the transnationalism approach, the “new” mobility paradigm (Urry 2007) also inspired and brought about a profuse production of work on different regimes of mobility. However, the reflection and work on the mobility - modernity binomial have a much longer history and were especially relevant among sociologists of the Chicago School (Cresswell 2010:17).

One of the first works placing this debate in the scope of Chinese migration was concerned with “transnationality – or the condition of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space – which has been intensified under capitalism” (Ong 1999:4).

In fact the political and economic reforms in post-Mao China “set the population on the run” (Liu 1997:110 cited in J. Y. Chu 2010:10). From 1978 onwards, physical movements of Chinese towards foreign countries created what has been called “the migration fever” (*chugore* 出国热) and a population on the move. Leaving the country and going overseas was a desirable goal, especially in areas that had experienced a prior influx of international migration (J. Y. Chu 2010).

Mobility in China has been endorsed with a highly positive value since the 1980s and has led to a high number of displacements within the country and towards foreign countries. The internal and international mobility of Chinese people, and its representation, are important elements to understand present-day Chinese society. The role of the modernity-mobility binomial in post-Mao China has become a relevant topic of research (Chu 2006; J. Y. Chu 2010; Nyíri 2010; Ong 1999). Moreover, Chinese internal (Fan 2011b; Shen and Chiang 2011) and international mobility (Chu 2010; Coates 2013; Nyíri 2010; Ong 1999) have been profusely documented.

Regarding the value, representation and practices of current Chinese mobility, Nyíri (2010) has recently updated the role of Chinese international mobility by combining theoretical and empirical research on Chinese international migration and tourism. The internal transformations of Chinese society are bringing about the emergence of tourism as an attribute of modern urban lifestyles in China.

The encounters and crossroads between migration and tourism mobility are currently a main theme of research within the new scholarly research on mobility patterns (Chio 2011; Holert and Terkessidis 2009; Salazar 2011).

Two elements underlined by the new scholarship on mobility are central for the research at hand.

Firstly, it is important to take into consideration that "mobility is a socio-cultural construct (Salazar and Smart 2011:iv) that involves a "fragile entanglement of physical movements, representations and practices" (Cresswell 2010:18). Being aware of these three factors surrounding the narratives and images of mobility is relevant in this research, especially when dealing with "return"; a movement with strong ideological connotations.

Secondly, we need to be aware of the political constraints towards movements that have created hierarchies of mobility (Cresswell 2010). This factor was one of the main criticisms of the transnational paradigm that sometimes assumes the free movement and weakened control from nation-states and political apparatus (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004a; Waldinger 2008a). The right to move, according to Salazar, is not equally applied but the movement of people may create or reinforce differences and inequalities (Salazar and Smart 2011:iii).

In a world that is perceived to be in constant flux, control over people's mobility potential and movement has become a central concern for projects of management and governance (Salazar and Smart 2011:iii).

And finally, we need to analyze mobility bearing in mind those realities that are related to notions of fixity, stasis and immobility. As Salazar states "mobility is not the unique feature of our times" (Salazar and Smart 2011:ii). The need to analyze the relationship between movements and moorings allows us to reconsider the relevance of localities and its meaning for different people. The relationship between mobility and immobility leads us to think about the relationship between the global and the local. In her ethnography of a migrant-sending village in Fujian, Chu examines "the relationship between global flows and parochial closures" (Chu 2010:4)

Within the critical review of transnationalism, mobility patterns and scholarly research related to migration, two aspects are especially relevant in the research at hand: the relevance of a diachronic and longitudinal perspective in the study of transnationalism or mobility, taking into consideration the practices of the past, as well as the heterogeneous practices of the present and the future according to the intergenerational factor of migrants.

2.1.3 New? How new? Transnationalism and mobilities of the past.

The modernization of communication and transport technologies has often been regarded as the main feature of contemporary mobilities and transnational practices. The aura of novelty that has surrounded transnational links as the key feature in contemporary migrancy, has led transnational perspectives to be criticized (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004b) and has also been a point of reflection for relevant transnationalism theorists: "Are transnational practices really new? To what extent are they new?" (Vertovec 2004:3).

The same point has also been underlined in the more recent field of the "new mobilities paradigm", in which scholars have also called for awareness on the continuity of mobilities from the past to the present (Cresswell 2010; Salazar and Smart 2011). At a time when, from the social sciences perspective, hyper-mobility and global flows are often presented as the distinguishing features of contemporary societies, several scholars have repeatedly argued that mobility is not something unique to contemporaneity, but is instead a fundamental aspect of society from a diachronic point of view, and that mobility and migration in some populations have been the rule, rather than the exception (Salazar & Smart, 2011). In fact, one of the caveats underlined by Cresswell (2010:28) in relation to current research is the "historical amnesia when thinking about and with mobility".

It seems clear and unquestionable that connections between the "society of origin" and "destination" are an inherent aspect of the migration phenomenon from a diachronic perspective, and they have been documented in different empirical studies (Hsu 2000; McKeown 2001). The determination and the need to establish channels of communication and distribution of information between places of origin and "settlement" have always existed. These forces of will have been materialized, more or less successfully, depending on the technological possibilities and the socio-political context of the countries of origin and destination.

The articles in the volume edited by Tan Chee-Beng (2007) reinforce the historical perspective of Chinese transnationalism. Referring to early contacts of migrants from the Pearl River Delta region (Guangzhou) with their homeland, Tan Chee-Beng states that "the Chinese case shows how there were transnational networks long before scholars used transnationalism as a mode of analysis" (Tan 2007b:2). Actually, we should keep in mind that social practice has always preceded intellectual reflection – a logic that comes with language.

Thus, travel, migration, and linkages or exchange of products and information between social groups placed in geographically distant areas do not imply an intrinsic novelty. However, it is also a fact that the development and widespread use of new communication and transportation technologies intensifies, amplifies and speeds up these practices. Apart from the possibility for migrants to travel back to visit their hometown more often due to the range and lower cost of air travel (Leung 2007), it is also easier than before for migrants and people who did not migrate to keep in touch via "virtual visits" (Hiller and Franz 2004:735).

The analysis of the impact of the internet on the ways that migrants implement transnational practices, networks and belongings has emerged with force in the last ten years (Chen 2006; Cheong and Poon 2009; Komito 2011; Tamang 2006; Yang 2003). In this research, virtual transnational practices will be analyzed following the perspective that analyzes virtual (online) and actual (offline) spheres as intertwined realities and practices rather than as distinctive or separate domains (Boellstorff 2012:39). Transnationalism and mobility has also had an impact on the media. Yang, for example, emphasizes the centrality and agency of the mass media as a basic component of transnationalism, as it offers its consumers the opportunity to travel long distances without physically moving (Yang 1997:288).

On this point, while recognizing technological changes, it is important to avoid a so-called technological determinism, but we should inquire how modern technology makes transnational connections easier (Basch et al. 1995:52) and, as I see it, somehow different, but not how it produces them.

Not only do those invisible links now performed over the Internet predate the conceptual terms of "transnationalism", but so do other embodied transnational practices that I will analyze in this research, such as houses, object circulation and embodied movements.

2.1.4 Migrant's descendants: Transnationalism and mobilities of the future

If we stress the longitudinal relevance of transnational practices and mobility with our sights on the past, we also have to attend to "transnationalism of the future" and analyze what happens with the connections between place of origin and place of migration for those children and adults that have been socialized in migrants' families and backgrounds.

In fact, in the last few years, scholars have increasingly referred to the changing characteristics of transnationalism over time and generations. "Will second generations maintain or forge attachments with their parents' hometown?" "To what extent will transnational ties endure over time and across generations?" These are questions that are currently emerging within migration studies (Gowricharn 2009; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Levitt and Waters 2006; Levitt 2009; Louie 2006a; Nyíri 2014; Somerville 2008; Tamaki 2011).

The book published in 2003, entitled "*The Changing Face of Home. The Transnational Lives of the Second Generation*" (Levitt and Waters 2006:3) was one of the firsts attempts to put different empirical cases together to delineate a theoretical discussion on comparative empirical situations of transnationalism affecting "later generations". However, the study cases discussed in the book are exclusively centered in the US.

Lee (2011) states that the case of second-generation migration implies the need to rethink the concept of transnationalism and proposes the subdivision of direct and

indirect transnationalism to differentiate the second-generations' links with the parents' place of origin. However, the study-cases relate transnationalism to "ethnic celebrations" and "ethnic identities", but not to real transnational practices, i.e. cross-border activities that have a simultaneous impact on both sides of the movement.

In fact, one of the main areas of inquiry regarding the relationship between transnationalism and second-generation migrants is focused on the consequences of the socialization of descendants in a transnational social field, localized in the place where migrants' have settled, for the construction of their identities (Louie 2006a; Marsden 2014; Nyíri 2014).

In addition, more concrete transnational practices involving physical displacement have taken into consideration the trips of migrants' descendants to their parents' homeland (Gowricharn 2009; King, Christou, and Teerling 2009; Tamaki 2011).

In order to consider the longitudinal factor on migration and transnationalism, and to analyze the mobility patterns of ethnic Chinese towards China, we need to "de-homogenize new generations" (Benton and Gomez 2014:1166) and thus distinguish which type of transnational practices are maintained by adult descendants. To do so, we should first bear in mind the nomenclature used.

2.1.4.1 Definition of "migrants' descendants" in the scope of the present research

Regarding the nomenclature used, we should ask: when is a person no longer regarded as a migrant by mainstream society, institutions and academics? Is migration a transferred inheritance? We have to be aware that it is inappropriate to refer to the descendants of Chinese migrants as "migrants" simply because their parents had emigrated.

As we will see in the case at hand, some children are involved in their parents' physical mobility; others migrate of their own accord when they are adults, whereas others remain in Spain. But, if we are not talking about mobility as adults, we have to take into account that the term "migrants" is unsuitable and, thus, the concept ""second-generation migrants" is an oxymoron" (King and Christou 2008:2; Rumbaut 2004:1165).

However, the differences among migrants' descendants regarding their previous experiences in China are relevant for the discussion of subsequent transnational physical links. Hence, and given that a better expression has not yet been coined, I will use the term "migrants' descendants" when I want to generalize and speak for both cases, but I will also use the concepts second- and 1.5-generation migrants when their former experience concerning their relationship with both China and Spain is relevant for the discussion.

Chinese second-generation migrants in Spain include both children born and socialized in their parents' migration country (Spain, or other countries they have

been to before settling in Spain), as well as those born in China but who moved to Spain at pre-school age. And here we come to the second troublesome point which is the dividing line between the two groups, widely discussed by King and Christou (2008:5–6). Although any point is somewhat arbitrary, it is agreed that school age is seen as the cut-off point between second and 1.5 generation (King and Christou 2008, 2009). Given that the Chinese begin primary school at six years old, I will consider children that have finished at least one year in school, and therefore arriving in the migration country at 7 years of age, as 1.5 generation.

Along the same lines, the second relevant group of Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain includes the people who have attended school in both settings. This group does not only include children born in China arriving in Spain after six years of age, but also Spanish-born children who are sent to China to be raised by their grandparents and, in some cases, to study during the first school years. Hence, what matters is not the place of birth, but the place or places where one has been brought up and socialized. This group has been labeled as 1.5 generation, expressing the proximity to the migrants' generation in their experiences residing in China (there, the 1st generation), but closer to the second generation because they have arrived in Spain before adulthood and have therefore formally attended school in two settings¹⁶.

2.2 Return(s)

“By the nineteenth century, it was recognized that migration flows often tend to produce “counterflows” of migrants—mostly returning migrants. While this is intrinsic to the concept of circular migration, much still remains to be understood about the complex and multilayered issue of return migration processes. Return migration remains the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration” (IOM 2004:4).

At the beginning of the 2000s several researchers acknowledged the lack of scholarship on return migration (Durand 2004:103; Stefanson 2004:2; Tannenbaum 2007:147). However, in the last few years, the growing interest in return migration has not only stood out for the increasing number of publications (Carling Mortensen and Wu 2011), but is also noticeable for the rising number of conference panels and research projects oriented towards return migration, reverse flows or transnational links¹⁷.

One of the main issues within return migration is the “multilayered” nature of the process noted in the IOM report quoted above. First, return migration studies are

¹⁶ Following the same logic, migrants' descendants arriving at later ages have been labeled 1.25 generation migrants because they are closer to their parents' socialization settings (Rumbaut 2004).

¹⁷ The research project “Provincial Globalization. The Impact of Reverse Transnational Flows in India's Regional Towns” (directed by Mario Rutten and Carol Upadhya) and the research project “Possibilities and Realities of Return Migration” (PRM), Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), are relevant examples. The abovementioned working paper by Carling and Wu (2011) was undertaken under the PRM Project and presents an extensive and systematic analysis of the academic production related to return migration.

dealing with a concept that has a special meaning for the migrants themselves – a concept with strong EMIC connotations – and with different implications in its ideological and actual extent. Secondly, return migration encompasses increasingly heterogeneous situations and highly different typologies. Besides that, return migration is conceptualized in very different ways by scholars; ways that are, in the last instance, related to how the process of migration itself is viewed.

In a highly globalized and interconnected world where migration has increasingly been conceptualized as a process rather than a unique and discrete event (Schiller and Levitt, 2004) or a “single act of leaving” (Chiang 2011:101), new perspectives are also emerging, forcing us to rethink the dynamic, open-ended and diverse reverse movements back to the country of origin. During the last decade, scholars have begun to rethink the dominant lineal way of approaching the return migration phenomenon by introducing analytical transnational perspectives. As Ley and Kobayashi (2005:112) pointed out “transnational developments have complicated the tale of return migration”.

2.2.1 Return and transnationalism

According to Bretell (2007) the growing interest in the return migration phenomenon is related to the current prevailing position of the transnational paradigm in the study of migration. In fact, the relationship and connection between transnational practices and actual return migration is at the core of the scholarship regarding the present-day dynamic circulation of migrants back and forth between two countries. The more inclusive and dynamic understanding of return that allows us to analyze different return movements that are not exclusively featured by a permanent resettlement is strongly related to transnational flows, practices and networks.

Duval (2004) depicts return visits as a concrete and solidified transnational practice, and Sinatti (2011) argues that return itself could be conceptualized as a form of transnationalism. Thus, reverse migration is not always considered as a single and final step of the migration journey, but is increasingly integrated within the logic of continuous transnational links and movements. Taking this argument a step further, in a recent article about Mainland Chinese reverse migration from Canada, Teo rightly exposes how the study of return migration “has the potential to sharpen our understanding of transnationalism as a process”(Teo 2011:807).

These “unsettled” return movements that are no longer exclusively aimed at a permanent mooring in the place of origin have been referred to as “transnational return”(Ley and Kobayashi 2005) or integrated in broader concepts such as “circular mobility” (Chiang 2011; Shen and Chiang 2011) or remigration (Tannenbaum 2007). Despite the different ways of labeling the movements back to the country of origin, these works bring into question the lineal way of grasping return migration, which is especially illustrated by Gmelch (1980).

In this milieu of mobility and interconnectedness across different social and geographical places, questions about home and sense of belonging arise: "Is it still possible for migrants to go "home"? (Wang and Wong, 2007), "Where is home for migrants?" (Teo 2011:807).

In the last decade, the need to rethink reverse migration practices as a dynamic process has also influenced the way of grasping and understanding the concept of home within the area of migration studies. In his article about Hong Kong *transmigrants*, Jacobs (2004:165) points out how "mobility changes the idea of home, putting it beyond pre-given idea of origins". The traditional dichotomy between "home" - linked with the country of origin- and "being away from home" - related to the country of migration - has been progressively questioned and replaced by a more circular and dynamic concept of home that emphasizes different elements of the home-making process, and stresses how home can be physically nestled in different geographical places (Wong 2002). Levitt underlines how transnationalism appears "when home means more than one country" (Levitt 2004).

Given that migrants locate and construct a sense of home in different places (Leung 2007), "home" is increasingly seen by researchers as a transnational social field widespread across different physical and geographical places (Constable 1999). However, even though "migrants' home" can be multiple and dynamic (Wang and Wong 2007), and cannot always be understood as a lone reality tied to one single place (Teo 2011), it is important not to let the overemphasis on mobility blind the membership and belonging of people with concrete localities (Brah 1996). Living here or there, but in local and specific places, is still a critical point for migrants.

In the analysis of different interpretations and conceptualizations of return – from neoclassical economics, to the structural approach and emerging transnational perspectives and social networks - Cassarino (2004:253) argues that "our understanding of return remains hazy". This statement was made ten years ago but I consider that the situation he remarked on has remained the same. Thus, in the next section I will define how I understand return in the research at hand, based on the concrete situation I have been exploring and the theoretical frameworks that deal with the mobility of migrants.

2.2.2 How do I understand return? Theoretical definition of return mobility patterns

It must be said that the use of the term "return" as an analytical tool to describe the diverse movements towards China to live after living in Spain or in other countries for several years may cause confusion and create misperception due to the traditionally academic significance of the term - related to a completed and definitive movement towards the home of origin after a provisional migration. Besides, we are dealing with a prevalent EMIC concept, commonly and historically used in different settings over and above migration studies. Hence, return is not a neutral notion employed to denote a specific type of movement towards the place

of origin, but implies a set of representations and ideas deeply rooted in different cultural settings and related to ideological identities.

For that reason, the analysis of return practices has to disentangle its representational and experienced connotations in order to break away from the recurrent discourses on the myth of return.

In order to place the ethnographic reality within the notion of “return” and “mobility patterns”, first we have to tackle and critically analyze the well-established perception of migration as a temporary or permanent movement. This traditional dichotomy is especially relevant in the analysis of return in two ways.

Firstly, return has been classically perceived as the ideological reference point to differentiate this dualistic way of conceiving migration (Cohen, Duncan, and Thulemark 2013:4) and, secondly, return is also a movement per se that can be grasped as settled or unsettled, as enduring or provisional, if we follow the abovementioned logic.

However, the framework of lifestyle mobility blurs the opposition between this dual migration movement in relation to its complete or ongoing nature (Cohen et al. 2013:2–5) and allows us to dispense with the ideological and conceptual load attached to the term “return” as the benchmark of the classical dichotomy between temporary and permanent migration. Hence, return practices are not regarded here as the main identification of temporary migration, nor as the missing element of permanent relocation, but a “return to point of origin, or to any other point in the ongoing movement process, may be part of lifestyle mobility” (Cohen et al. 2013:5).

We have described how perspectives of transnationalism have broken away from the traditional and lineal way of grasping reverse migration flows by interpreting them as continuous and unbound movements rather than as a singular motion marking the end of a temporary migration trajectory (Conway, Potter, and St Bernard 2008; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Ley 2010; Plaza 2008; Teo 2011)¹⁸. These works have shown us how return is entrenched within transnational and circular mobility. However, the tendency to stress hyper-mobility and the lack of attention to discontinuities within the ongoing movements by some transnationalism scholars make it difficult to situate certain empirical cases due to two main issues.

First, although it is true that mobility is more feasible nowadays, it is important to keep in mind that it is not free at all. Therefore, when addressing return practices of Qingtianese migrants and their descendants, it is important to bear in mind the relevance of economic and political constraints in present-day physical mobility patterns across different countries, which has been stressed by several scholars (Cresswell 2010; Cunningham and Heyman 2004; Salazar and Smart 2011; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004a).

Grasping the meaning of current movements by combining the research on mobility with the analysis of enclosure and recognizing the power of borders, sets the limits

¹⁸ See theoretical background for a state-of-the-art of return studies and transnationalism perspectives.

on the overemphasis of unbound, free mobility, and allows the following questions to be raised: “why and how do some people and goods move and others do not?” (Cunningham and Heyman 2004:293). Along the same lines, “mobility and borders are not antithetical” and the political regularization of mobility within the context of globalization is relevant in the creation of immobility (Salazar and Smart 2011:iv). In this dissertation, we will see how regularization and political borders are significant in shaping return migration practices and migrants’ strategies to maintain truly mobile lifestyles.

Secondly, we have to keep in mind that dwelling and movement make up a whole, blurring the difference between “departing” and “returning”. In this sense, the concomitant analysis of mobility with enclosure (Cunningham and Heyman 2004), moorings (Cresswell 2010), dwellings (Tsuda 2003) and immobility or “things that stand still” (Salazar and Smart 2011:iv) is especially suitable for the conceptualization of return migration practices.

Awareness of the need to enhance the logic of movements alongside the notion of fixities and stasis (Cresswell 2010:29) allows us to conceptually place return movements within the logic of a “mobile lifestyle” (Cohen et al. 2013). In this research, I argue that return mobilities are thus inserted within the ongoing mobile trajectories formed by the alternation of movements with moorings. The stress on the plural forms of the substantives is aimed at translating the multi-local (return to different places where one may have lived) and multi-modal (involving different means of returning) empirical reality into language; the tool we use to move forward with description, comparison and theory building.

According to the ethnographic data that I will present in this dissertation, the return appears as a friction momentum between a concatenation of several movements and moorings or dwellings across different localities. Thus, return is “one of the multiple steps of a continued movement” (Sinatti, 154, referring to King, 2000) or one of the “constellations of movements” (Cresswell 2010:29) that make up mobility.

Conceiving the return within a continued set of movements and dwellings entrenched within diverse transnational practices allows us, on the one hand, to grasp the mobility logic lying behind the more steady return practices (not only the continuous back and forth movements) and, on the other hand, to reinstate the relevance of local places and concrete localities involved in these trajectories, rather than regarding migrants as floating in the air as is sometimes the tendency within transnational or mobility studies.

2.2.3 Transnationalism and return migration in the context of Chinese international migration.

In fact, return has always existed in different migration contexts, but what is new in today's reverse flows, which have led new theoretical perspectives to emerge, as well as a growing attention to empirical reality encompassing the movements towards one's country of origin?

Several scholars have shown how return is intimately related with changing socio-economic conditions and that it is increasingly experienced as a back-and forth movement rather than a complete and final step. We find references to this new reverse flow towards India (Upadhyaya and Rutten 2012; Upadhyaya 2013), Senegal (Sinatti 2011), Hong Kong (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Ley 2010), or China (Teo 2011), to name but a few.

The global economic structure is influencing new population movements and "contemporary phenomena of returns are not immune to the underlying process and pressures of globalization" (Oxfeld and Long 2004:3). Reflecting on migration flows to Greece and Cyprus, King and Christou have underlined the "migration turnaround" in the scope of those countries that have experienced a rapid development in few decades and have gone from having mass emigration to having mass immigration (Christou and King 2006:819; King et al. 2009:20). Although it is too early to talk about a migration turnaround in China, it is true to say the country's economic growth is attracting an increasing amount of international migration and has caused the consequent social transformations of the role and status of international migrants. Nowadays, "return migration practices" from Spain towards China are somehow prompt by these circumstances that are positioning China as an emerging migrant-receiving country.

Nevertheless, taking into account the two abovementioned elements that seem to be found in diverse empirical cases - increasing back and forth movements and economic structural changes - we should take into consideration that return is a highly situated phenomenon (Oxfeld and Long 2004:4) and these structural changes are experienced and "practiced" differently among different ethnic groups, socialization backgrounds, countries of dwelling, generations and according to every individual's situation and class.

In the last few years, some researchers have pointed out how Chinese migrants have recently shown a strong tendency towards new forms of circular return migration due to the economic prosperity and technological development in PR China (Chiang 2011:96; Ley and Kobayashi 2005:112). However, these references to actual return migration to China are still limited and scattered among the research that addresses mainly the case of highly-skilled migrants returning to Taiwan and Hong Kong for better professional opportunities.

Although the literature on Chinese migration and transnationalism is profuse, there is still very little research specifically approaching the phenomenon of return. This reality, stated by Xiang (2009) some years ago, is still relevant nowadays.

Return migration within the Chinese scope has been mainly focused on two aspects. On the one hand, scholars have exhaustively analyzed the changes and continuities of Chinese migration policies towards international migrants and returnees (Barabantseva 2005; Beltrán Antolín 2003; Godley 1989; Liu 2009; Skrentny et al. 2007; Thunø 2002; Wang, Wong, and Sun 2006; Wang 2009, 2013), and, more recently, the circumstances of the return of students and highly qualified professionals have become a new relevant object of study in Chinese return migration (Sternberg and Müller 2005; Teo 2011; Zhou and Hsu 2011; Zweig, Chen, and Rosen 2004).

Thus, there is still very little empirical research that specifically approaches present-day return migration practices among the so-called “economic migrants” and their descendants to PR China.

2.2.3.1 An overview on Chinese migration policies and terminology

Huaqiao 华侨 or *huaren* 华人 are common terms used in China to refer to Chinese people living abroad. These terms have relevant political connotations and have changed their meaning over the last four decades depending on the attitude of governments towards migrants. Governmental attitudes and policies towards Chinese international migrants have been widely studied. An overview of these changing political circumstances and the nomenclature attached to the people involved in international migration, and especially with reference to the returnee, is pertinent for this research.

Originally, the term *huaqiao* identified those Chinese who “sojourned abroad” with their sights set on their country of origin and taking return as the final step of their migration journey abroad and, therefore, did not take into consideration those migrants who settled in migration countries (Li 1999b:12). With time the concepts have been transformed and *huaqiao* now refers to those Chinese people living abroad that have not changed their nationality, while *huaren* refers to the Chinese who have settled outside China and have changed their citizenship¹⁹.

¹⁹ The term *huaqiao* was coined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and had strong political connotations. The term *huayi* 华裔 is less used than *huaqiao* and *huaren* and it refers to ethnic Chinese who were born and socialized in the country to which their parents, grandparents or older ancestors had migrated. During the fieldwork, however, I noticed that this cluster was also referred to as *huaren*.

Although the concept of *huaqiao* has a long history and the role of return flows has been relevant throughout history²⁰, a term to refer to the returnee did not exist before 1957. Until that moment there was no specific term to designate people returning to China after living abroad, and they were considered *huaqiao*, like international migrants that had not come back.

In the 1950s, the emergence of an official term to designate "returned migrants" coincided with the large migration flows of ethnic Chinese towards China due to riots and anti-Chinese attitudes in some Southeast Asian countries, which were especially virulent in Indonesia and lasted well into the 1960s (Godley 1989; Wang 2013).

In 1957, the first official policy category to denominate those *huaqiao* who had already returned was coined under the concept *guiguo huaqiao* (归国华侨), which is normally referred to by its abbreviation *guiqiao* (归侨). The term referred to a settled and permanent return, and included ethnic Chinese regardless of their nationality, generational belonging, or if it was a voluntary or forced "return". The construction of this policy-based category was aimed at making a class-based rather than race-based Chinese nation (C. Wang 2013:65).

The policies towards the *guiqiao* created a class-based Other integrated by Chinese people born and socialized in capitalist countries (C. Wang 2013:70), first receiving preferential treatment in comparison to their local neighbors and afterwards - during the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976) – suffering discrimination and persecution.

The special status of those "returnees" who had moved to the places from where their ancestors emigrated long ago - especially in Guangzhou and Fujian -, and their different status in comparison with their local neighbors is vividly exposed in Li's analysis of the Songping Overseas Chinese Farm (Li 2013a)²¹. In addition to privileges in access to universities and other aspects of daily life during the 1950s, the most important change was the decision to protect and encourage remittances and donations sent by migrants (Godley 1989; Thunø 2001).

After the Cultural Revolution, the international opening up and the political and economic reforms in China, led to the emergence of new flows of international migration. The attitude of the government towards the "overseas Chinese" went along similar paths as those taken during the 1950s with the issue of new policies addressed at stimulating remittances and donations. The Chinese government again urged international migrants and returnees to contribute to the "modernization" or "reconstruction" of the country (Barabantseva 2005:14). The economic and political reforms of the country related to the overseas Chinese were complemented with the construction of the *qiaoxiang* areas to designate the native places of international Chinese migrants or *huaqiao* (Thunø 2002:922).

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Chinese governments and Chinese international migrants before the establishment of the Popular Republic of China in 1949, see Thuno (2001) and Godley (1989).

²¹ Those ethnic Chinese that arrived in the 1960s and 1970s were placed in the especially established *huaqiao* state farms (Godley 1989:338; C. Wang 2013:72). The Songping farm, analyzed by Li (2013a), was one of the 84 farms especially set up to allocate those arriving from Southeast Asian countries.

However, people who left China after 1978 were not officially referred to as *huaqiao* anymore, but as “new migrants” (*xin yimin* 新移民)²². Consequently, some years later, a new term emerged to designate those new migrants that were returning. They were not labeled *huaqiao* or *guiqiao*, but *haigui* 海归, a term that refers to a circular and flexible mobility towards China after living abroad. In fact, Barabansteva (2005:14) has argued that the Chinese government encouraged the flexible movement of international migrants with the aim of incorporating their economical or educational capital in the development of China.

The term *haigui*, framed in the 1990s to refer to the new category of migrants following a flexible, open-ended return, is mainly used to designate the return practices of students, academics and highly-skilled professionals, ruling out international migrants from rural areas from those perceived modern circular mobility patterns.

Wang, Wong and Sun (2006) argue that the advent of the term *haigui* has presented a challenge to existing governmental frameworks dealing with migration, and I would also add that it challenges academic research on Chinese return migration. The authors maintain that, whether the return was before or after the economic and political reforms in China, the distinction between *guiqiao* and *haigui* is based on the dichotomy between the traditional and linear return with rather flexible and circular movements. While *guiqiao* expresses the concept of a linear and permanent return, the concept of *haigui* relates to a circular and open mobility. The scholars ultimately wonder if we can continue to use *guiqiao*, i.e. if we can still talk about linear and uni-directional mobility patterns. It seems that circularity is mostly the case, not only among students and highly-skilled professionals but, as we will see in this research, among the so-called “economic migrants”.

2.2.3.2 Transnational return and Chinese migration

In fact, the circular physical mobility of back-and-forth movements between origin and destination countries has attracted the attention of researchers for years, especially with regard to the circular mobility of highly-skilled migrants between the already classical nodes of Hong Kong or Taiwan, on the one hand, and Canada, New Zealand or United States on the other (Chiang 2011; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Ley 2010; Plaza 2008; Salaff 2006; Shen and Chiang 2011; Wong 1999; Zweig et al. 2004; Zweig, Chung, and Vanhonacker 2006).

²² Although international migrants that left China after the opening up of the country in the 1980s are officially referred to as “new migrants”, the term *yimin* 移民 (migrant) is commonly used to refer to people moving and settling inside China, rather than to refer to international migrants.

In actual fact, the empirical cases referred to by the first researchers writing about the need to develop a new conceptual understanding of return as a transnational movement and circular motion rather than a unidirectional form, were based on the empirical cases of younger generations of highly-skilled “astronaut” migrants from Hong Kong or Taiwan involved in continuous transnational embodied mobility (Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Plaza 2008). The expressions “astronaut migrants” or “astronaut families”; a terminology initially used in the 1990s to describe return migration practices of Hong Kong males who kept on travelling back and forth between Hong Kong and the countries where their relatives were residing (Chiang 2011:120; Manying 2006:77).

Circular return migration of mainland PR China citizens, *haigui*, has also received increasing attention in the last decade. Nevertheless, most of the research on new return migration practices, or circular mobility among mainland Chinese migrants, addresses student mobility (Fong 2011; Zweig et al. 2004, 2006) and the return of highly-skilled urban professionals (Ho 2010; Manying 2006; Teo 2011; Zhou and Hsu 2011).

There is a mobile hierarchy based on rural / urban pairing in which ordinary Qingtianese international migrants are regarded as being on the bottom rungs of the ladder. In a way, “new migrants” (*xin yimin* 新移民) from rural areas who left for Europe upon the opening of China are supposed to follow the traditional paths of migration encompassing temporary or definitive relocation, rather than developing perceived modern paths of mobility involving circular migration, which in PR China is mainly related to urban academic students and highly-skilled professionals comprising the *haigui* category.

2.3 Transnational spaces and objects as social agents

Regarding the materialized and embodied forms of mobility patterns and transnational practices, two methodological and theoretical perspectives are significantly involved in the present research. First the perspectives that approach the social meaning and agency of objects and commodities by focusing on their materiality and circulation (Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998), and secondly the methodological approach to transnational links through a space lens (Bivand 2011; Gielis 2009; Massey 1994). Both perspectives are based on the relational character of the social interaction between objects, people and places.

The attribution of a capacity of agency to objects, things and material culture beyond its representational value, was at the core of the work by social anthropologist, Alfred Gell. Even though his research career was devoted to the pursuit of a social methodology for approaching the study of “art objects”, his theoretical and methodological considerations are based on the reflection about “things” as social agents, and are, therefore, totally pertinent for this research. As Gell states, human agency is exercised within the material world, and things emerge

as social agents in particular situations (Gell 1998:20). The most outstanding outcome of Gell's theory in terms of this research lies in the relevance of the social meaning and agency of objects through the analysis of *their materiality*. According to the author, the social agency of objects lies in their forms, structures, contents and the ways that people relate to them. Hence, Gell argues that the agency and social function of objects can be underscored by examining their materiality and the relations established between them and the people in the concrete places where the social action occurs.

This is also a major point in Appadurai's theoretical perspective on the study of material culture and circulation of commodities. For the anthropologist, following "the things themselves" - *in their materiality*, Gell would have said – is the way to grasp the meaning that humans give them: "We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories" (Appadurai 1986:5).

In his theory on the "social life of things", Appadurai suggested a new perspective for studying the circulation of commodities and objects as entities with a "social life" across geographical and cultural spheres. Given that consumption is a social activity during which messages are sent and received, the social circulation of products and commodities implies a distribution of knowledge, values and practices. This perspective is crucial to the analysis of the bidirectional movement of objects between Qingtian and Spain. As we will see in this dissertation, by following the journeys and itineraries of "things in motion" we can underscore the object's meaning and the subject's mobility.

Therefore, I consider objects, things and architectural forms as primary documents and units of analysis in the study of transnational mobility and migration culture. There are few scholars who have applied these perspectives to research about transnationalism, and inquiries into the function and agency of the "material world" in migration studies are yet to be developed. Any investigation has been focused mostly on oral information and the individual's mobility patterns, but the observation of the paths and derivations of the material world and an in-depth analysis of its social function in the migration milieu has not yet been developed as an object of research. However, we could find some outstanding examples centered on the "material world" and on things in motion, such as the analysis of the documents, maps and the circulation of groceries in the Guangzhou *qiaoxiang* (Chu 2006; J. Y. Chu 2010) and the examination of documents and photos in the context of Chinese migration to Portugal (Nunes 2011, 2012).

In addition to the methodological focus on objects and their relational function, this chapter also adopts the "place perspective" in its study of transnationalism. Based on Massey(1994) and Appadurai's (1995) reflections on transnational spaces, studies on particular migrant places have been developed in recent years. The main area of study of this research has made migrants' houses a unit of analysis.

On the one hand, we find research based on the analysis of houses as relational places and units of analysis where transnational links and practices (virtual, objects

and physical presence) take shape (Bivand 2011; Gielis 2009). Furthermore, over the past few years new contributions to the meaning of home through the analysis of houses in their material form have also emerged from the discipline of architecture (Jacobs 2004; Lopez 2010; Lozanovska 2004, 2011). As we will see, houses, temples, bars and restaurants as a unit of analysis – both from a relational perspective and by examining their material forms – will provide a wealth of information about transnational practices between Qingtian and Spain.

The study of migrants' houses has also led to a reflection on the transnational concept of home in the migration context. Given that migrants locate and construct a sense of home in different places (Leung 2007), "home" is increasingly seen as a transnational social field spread across different physical and geographical places (Constable 1999).

In this research, although houses are central places and objects of research, other semi-public architectural spaces – mainly temples and bars - will be analyzed as places of socio-cultural negotiation

However, in this chapter, the analysis of transnational practices through a place lens will focus on examining two particular places – local temples and houses – in their material form, their different social uses and their relational function. Some of the reflections on multiple homes and belongings will be introduced here but the main discussion about this phenomenon will be developed in the third part of the dissertation. Similarly, the analysis of the third set of particular places in this research - restaurants and cafés - will also be included in the third part, related to return migration.

The specificity of a social anthropological perspective focused on things in motion and the places where they are located, distributed and acquire meaning, reverts to basic questions about the changes and continuities in Qingtianese society and transnational practices, also showing the active role of material culture in the framework of social relations between different actors involved in this mobility.

PART I.TRANSNATIONAL QINGTIAN

Chapter 3. Transformation of a qiaoxiang

Introduction: Migration culture on the move.

“Yesterday I took an evening train from Wenzhou to Lishui where I am based this semester²³. The train goes all along the side of the Ou River 瓯江 and passes through small villages, neighborhoods, towns, and isolated factories that all lie on the mountainside. The train is in the penumbra. Some travellers are sleeping, while others converse quietly. Half an hour before my destination, when passing through Hecheng town, the neon lights of the bridges and buildings light up the interior of the carriage. The two women sitting in front of me interrupt their ongoing conversation to comment on the sudden change in landscape caused by the eruption of colorful neon lights into the gathering darkness of the countryside. The answer of one of the women to the astonished face of her traveling companion, reveals the perception and character of the place: “Ah yes, this is Qingtian, a place of huaqiao (migrants)²⁴”. The other woman immediately nods and replies: “Ah, I know, a place full of rich people”. And after this brief comment they go back to their previous conversation”.

(Fieldwork notes, November 2012).

The dialogue between the two women on the train synthesizes in just a handful of words non-natives’ perception of Qingtian and the widespread notion in China that directly links international migration regions - denominated *qiaoxiang* 侨乡 - with being wealthy places and communities. Thus, without noticing the economic disparities and social inequalities resulting from migration processes, non-locals presume and recognize Qingtian and their inhabitants as a wealthy place and community due to their international migration connections.

The image of Hecheng town at night, with its illuminated bridges and tall buildings rising up on both sides of the Ou River, is the pride of many Qingtianese. They refer to their hometown as “the little Hong Kong” due to the narrow strip of space that sits between two bodies of water (on one side sea, on the other, river) and the

²³ During the last stage of fieldwork (September 2012 – March 2013) I was based in Lishui where I taught Spanish language and collaborated with the research group “Qingtianese in the world” (世界上的青田人 Shijie shang de Qingtian ren) at Lishui University (丽水学院).

²⁴ *Huaqiao* 华侨 is a traditional concept in China that refers to the international migrants “who sojourned abroad”, maintaining a strong emphasis on the temporary nature of their migration experience and assuming a return. Even if the newly framed concept of “new migrants” is the one that Chinese authorities use to refer to those Chinese who left the country from late 1980s onwards, this is not an EMIC category used by Qingtianese people to refer to international migrants from Qingtian.

mountains, as well as to the high buildings and frenetic construction industry that have transformed the landscape of the place and have brought strong urbanization and development into this rural area.

This image is the outcome of an historical process deeply linked to international migration and transnational links, which have kept and continue to keep migrants linked to Qingtian through visits, returns, objects and money circulation, as well as daily contact using on-line devices. The bridges, buildings - houses, restaurants, cafés, temples, schools, etc.- and the main development infrastructures of Qingtian county have been made mainly with the remittances, investments and donations of international migrants over the last three and a half decades (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Zhang 2007).



Figure 2. Hecheng at night.

It's been more than 30 years since migration from Qingtian to Europe started to boom and the Qingtianese recount how, during this time, the physiognomy and social structure of the region have changed dramatically. Like other societies strongly influenced by international migration, overseas remittances and investment, as well as business activities related to migration, have contributed to the progressive replacement of "agriculture as a way of life" by "migration as a way of life" (Cohen 2004). Even if it's true that international migration has transformed and shaped social life in Qingtian, especially since the beginning of the 1980s, it's important to emphasize that apart from the influence of pioneer emigrants who left the country at the beginning of the 20th century, physical mobility had been entrenched in the social practices of the area long before by means of internal migration (Beltrán Antolín 2003:30)²⁵.

In the 1990s the phrase "*nine parts mountain, half a part water and half a part fields*"²⁶ - which expresses the harshness (*ku* 苦) of life in a region surrounded by mountains and with little water and arable land - was still the local tune that

²⁵ In fact, Beltrán points out how international migration in Qingtian and Wenzhou is a prolongation of the traditional practice of temporary internal migration (Beltrán Antolín 2003:30)²⁵.

²⁶ 久山半水半分田 *jiushan banshui banfentian*

described Qingtian society and explained the initial reasons for international migration. In this context, the mountains were a symbol of how difficult life was and the resulting poverty of the area (Beltrán Antolín 2003:19).

Nowadays, however, young Qingtianese people no longer refer to their hometown as a difficult place to survive in by farming. Instead they describe the small town of Hecheng – the county's main urban area - as a place of rest and leisure, a "place of migrants" (华侨 *huaqiao*), a place of "European taste" (欧洲特色 *ouzhou tese*). This transformation in Qingtian's self-image as presented by local people expresses the changes in Qingtianese society over the last three decades. The restaurants, cafés and imported product shops, as well as the high-rise buildings, are the most visible elements that have turned the core of this town into a highly consumer-oriented society.

Originally, international migration was a way of escaping poverty and a harsh life in Qingtian. However, due to transnational practices, migration was rapidly introduced into the values and practices of Qingtian society as a "self-sustained impulse independent of the initial socioeconomic conditions" (Beltrán Antolín 2003:18). Remittances, donations and investments, as well as the exuberant consumption attitudes of the migrants when returning to their hometown, created the background for the incorporation of migration values into the Qingtian lifestyle. For that reason, even if the economic situation in the Zhejiang emigration villages had already improved considerably by the end of the 1990s, the number of people in the Wenzhou–Qingtian region willing to go abroad in order to have the opportunity "to get rich quick" in Europe²⁷, kept on rising. Due to the transnational ties of international migrants with their hometown and the relatives remaining in China, migration has been regarded by common people as the main way to find prosperity and a better life.

The incorporation of migration practices into the community's values, and the perceived binomial between international migration and wealthy places introduced in the opening narration of this chapter, lies in the core of the *qiaoxiang* (侨乡) concept. In China this term designates those areas with a high proportion of migrants, returnees and people living on remittances, and stresses the connections between international migrants and their "hometown". Poisson (2000) emphasizes the transnational characteristics of the *qiaoxiang* concept such that "it is not necessarily defined in terms of numbers or boundaries, but as a link between the migrant and one or several people (friends, acquaintances, family, relatives....) who have remained in China" (Poisson 2000:40).

Actually there are two interrelated elements that shape the meaning of Qingtian *qiaoxiang*. On the one hand, the mobility and transnational nature of the area and on the other, the resulting incorporation of migration as a key element in the social structure and development of a migration culture. Massey has argued that migration

²⁷ I am referring here to the expression that is used as the title of an article by Li (1999a) summarizing the general attitudes in Wenzhou *qiaoxiang* villages towards international migration.

culture appears when “migration becomes deeply ingrained into the repertoire of people’s behaviours, and values associated with migration become part of the community’s values” (Massey 1999:46). International migration is, in fact, a major element that shapes the social structure in Qingtian and has converted the county into one of the most important *qiaoxiang* areas in Zhejiang province, after Wenzhou²⁸.

A strong migration culture is indeed embedded in Qingtian and the connections with international migrants channel the social and daily lives of Qingtian people. Several researchers have shown how these connections with international migration configure a *habitus* in Bourdieu’s sense (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Li 1999a; Thunø 2002). Like the concept of migration culture, the notion of *habitus* explains migration flows beyond economic reductionism and elucidates why chain migration from Qingtian has kept on increasing over the last three decades.

A set of ideologies, values and beliefs based on transnational links (remittances, donations, investments and returns) framed an idea of a “golden Europe” and an image of rich and successful migrants. Thus, every person with the chance to migrate used to do their utmost to get his or her “ticket” to Europe. Over and above economic reasons, it was a set of values that made migration as a rite of passage for a better life among young Qingtianese.

It is important to take into account, however, that, as Thunø points out, the *habitus* is not immutable but is also subject to changes according to structural conditions (Thunø 1999:176). Like all kinds of social structures, values and cultural expressions, migration culture in Qingtian is not a static and immutable reality. Analyzing the “migration culture” or “migration *habitus*” as a process, keeping a close eye on the changing characteristics of the transnational ties and practices, might underscore relevant transformations in Qingtian *habitus* and therefore in migration flows and different mobilities.

In the last few years the rapid socio-economic changes in China and Spain, as well as the consolidation and insertion of Chinese people in Spanish society, have brought about new practices related to Chinese people living in Spain with regard to the *qiaoxiang*. The relationship is reciprocal and, therefore, this phenomenon is also bringing about changes in the way in which migration, Europe and, concretely, Spain are perceived from Qingtian by the people who did not migrate.

Different scholars have shown how traditional return and transnational practices have had a key role in shaping Zhejiang *qiaoxiang* areas of Wenzhou and Qingtian (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Li 1999a; Zhang 2007). However all the relevant pieces of fieldwork undertaken in those emigrant villages were carried out more than ten

²⁸ Even though the first international migrants from Qingtian can be traced back to the end of the XIX century, the international migration flows from Zhejiang to Europe started to be relevant from the 1980s onwards, when Chinese politics opened up after the Cultural Revolution. These situations contrast with the much longer history of international migration from different areas in Fujian and Guangzhou provinces, where *qiaoxiang* villages are traditionally linked to Southeast Asia, the United States and Canada.

years ago, when they stressed the emergence and primary development phases of migration culture, phases that bore in mind the traditional links between migrants in Europe with their "hometown". The comparison of my own ethnographic observations and findings with the data of the studies elaborated during the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s reveals important changes in people's behaviors towards migration and the emergence of new mobilities and transnational flows between Qingtian and Europe.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that right now there is a transformation in the "institutionalized" and "traditional" migration culture in Qingtian that has been developing over the last three decades. This transformation encompasses a change in the perception of migration, the returnee and the relationship between both ends of the circulation movement. This phenomenon brings about new movements, new representations, new transnational flows and thus a transformation in the Qingtian migration *habitus* or migration culture.

In this chapter I will present the contextual setting of these changes and will come back to them in the corresponding chapters of the dissertation.

Firstly, we will see how migration and international connections have been integrated as identity markers in Qingtian. Through the analysis of the visual and "literal" manifestations of the notion of *qiaoxiang* and the new emerging concepts that stress the "cosmopolitanism" character of the place, I will show how Qingtianese use international migration narratives and images to present and differentiate themselves as a social group. As we will see, a migration identity has been developed not only among the ones who physically move but also involves those who stayed behind in China.

In the second section I will describe the main structural and processual phenomena that are involved in the transformation of the transnational links and the Qingtian migration *habitus*. And finally, the third section of this chapter exemplifies the aforementioned changing situations through the modifications of one the most relevant institutions developed in Qingtian in the last three decades: the language training programs. Through a processual analysis of the ethnographic data related with these language institutions since their appearance in the mid-1980s until today, we can follow the transformation of the relationship between Qingtian and Spain through migration flows and transnational links. This section will also introduce the context of the migrant descendant's involvement in the changes of migration *habitus* in Qingtian.

3.1 Qingtian: Images, myths and changing realities

Qingtianese are proud of the transnational links with Europe that differentiate their region from other surrounding rural areas and have embraced migration as the main element in the way they introduce their hometown to non-locals; "*Qingtian is a qiaoxiang, a place of huaqiao, a place of European taste*" is a common sentence used to explain any given situation happening in Qingtian.

Migration and the connections with different European countries have become markers of local identity and comprise the main element in Qingtian's self-image, both from an institutional point of view as well as at the grassroots level, thus developing a specific identity and sense of belonging. This phenomenon that Li (1999a) has denominated the "Qiaoxiang consciousness" in the case of Wenzhou rural areas is not unique to emigration villages in China. As Haugen and Carling (2005:659) have demonstrated, the same discourses of belonging presenting the "specificity of the local area by virtue of its linkages with the wider world" are present also in emigrant villages in Cape Verde, helping shape a "migration ideology".

During my first weeks of fieldwork I soon realized that the use of several languages in Qingtian conveys ideas about the increase in social and cultural capital both in the personal and individual domain – showing the international connection of a given individual and family – as well as in public and institutional spheres - manifesting the penetration of the international phenomenon in this rural area by means of its representation.

Regarding the individual domain, I was initially surprised that, having got used to speaking with some of the informants in Chinese while we were in Spain, they often spoke Spanish with me when we met in Qingtian. Sometimes they did that when they didn't want anybody else to understand what they were saying but I realized that the fact of using Spanish materializes their links with Spain, their migrants' condition and the expansion of their social and cultural capital in concrete situations and social meetings.

Following on from that, Spanish and Italian also have an important place among those people who have not migrated. There are restaurants and cafés with Spanish, Italian and French names all over the county; the words "salami" and "chorizo" are not rare in daily conversations in Qingtian and, as we will see in the last section of this chapter, Italian and Spanish language courses have been strongly developed in Qingtian over the past decades.

Information panels in museums and at tourist and historical sites, for example, are often introduced in three languages, including Chinese, Spanish and English. Whereas English language is increasingly present in the museums and tourist places of Chinese small towns, the presence of Spanish versions endows, in a visual way, the specificity of Qingtian.



Figure 3. Information panels in the Shimendong forest park, Qingtian.

Thus, the penetration of foreign languages goes beyond the personal relationships sphere and has also a dominant place in public and semi/public spaces. In fact, the presentation of Qingtian as an “emigration village” usually goes hand in hand with a public presence of the languages of the countries to where the Qingtianese have most frequently migrated. This public presence not only emphasizes the value of migration but also the international, cosmopolitan and “modern” character of the place because of it. In fact, the presence of foreign languages is an important visual element, a hallmark that keeps the place on a par with the international migration countries.

The banners hanging from the first bridge that one meets on arriving Qingtian from Wenzhou are the preeminent example of the public self presentation of Qingtian. The first thing one sees on arriving in Qingtian is a bridge with three large banners welcoming visitors to this “emigration village”, directly highlighting the representation, idiosyncrasy and identity of Qingtian as a *qiaoxiang*. Each one of the three banners proclaims the phrase “Welcome to the *qiaoxiang* of Qingtian” in Spanish, Italian and French. The selection of these languages announces the main countries where Qingtianese migrants have traditionally settled down, and thus the principal places involved in Qingtian mobility.



Figure 4. Bridge in Hecheng “Bienvenidos al distrito de ultramar de Qingtian”

Using the translations of the term *qiaoxiang* in Spanish, Italian and French adds meaning to the official and traditional representation of migration in Qingtian and China. Thus, these banners illustrate two main aspects related to the *qiaoxiang* identity or ideology. On the one hand, they show the use of languages as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and the place's transnational connections, and on the other they also express the relevance and traditional connotations of *qiaoxiang* as the "hometown" of international migrants assuming their loyalty and return.

The Spanish version of the banner reads "*Bienvenido al distrito de ultramar de Qingtian*" and, as well as the versions of the other two Latin languages, brings into play the debate around the translation of key concepts across different languages, cultural contexts and conceptual frameworks²⁹.

During fieldwork several Qingtianese people living in Spain and with a good command of Spanish asked me about the meaning of the word "ultramar" in the banners of the bridge, as they could not grasp its meaning in this context³⁰. In fact the Spanish expression "distrito de ultramar" is a byproduct of an indirect translation of the word *qiaoxiang* through the English idiom "overseas village".

The term "overseas" has a long tradition in English academic literature related to Chinese international migration as being a translation of the character *qiao* 桥, a character that appears as a component in the two main words involved with Chinese international migration, both of which have strong political connotations: *qiaoxiang* 侨乡 and *huaqiao* 华侨. Therefore *qiaoxiang* is often translated in English as "overseas village" and *huaqiao* as "overseas Chinese". However I will use the expressions "emigrants village" and "Chinese migrants" throughout the dissertation to avoid both the political meaning of the terms and the intimate relationship of the notion "overseas Chinese" and "overseas villages" within the context of Chinese migration in United States and Canada, which are very different from the context we are dealing with here.

A lot has been written about the historical development of the term *huaqiao* and the transformation in its meaning depending on the changes in Chinese policy towards international migrants since the end of the 19th century up until today (Barabantseva 2005; Beltrán Antolín 2003, 2004; Louie 2004; Thunø 2002; Wang 1998). What I want to stress here is how both words, *huaqiao* and *qiaoxiang*, represent traditional concepts that convey a linear and temporary structure of migration in which return implies the final and permanent movement by virtue of the Chinese character *qiao*. In this context, the character *qiao* has the meaning of "living abroad, away from one's native land" and has been used to refer to the Chinese nationals living temporarily outside the country. Chinese international migrants, thus, have often

²⁹ Reflection on the transcultural translation of academic key words related to mobility has been the topic of a recent seminar organized by the EASA and JASCA for the IUAES Inter-Congress of 2014. The aim of the panel is to reflect on the authority of popular English keywords from a comparative cultural perspective in order to go "beyond the currently dominant Western concepts" (Salazar and Yamashita 2014).

³⁰ Ultramar refers to "something on the other side of the sea". Beyond (ultra) the sea (mar) has then the same meaning as "overseas". However this word is not really used to refer to experience with migration in modern Spanish.

been referred to in English as “sojourners”, a category of migrants considered to be provisionally away from their homeland but who always assume that they will eventually come back “home” one day. The notion of *huaqiao* as sojourners does not encompass the possibility of settling down in “foreign” countries, of developing homes and belonging feelings in the receiving countries, or the possibility of moving again once they have returned.

The term *qiaoxiang* is highly visible in Qingtian, in a very plastic and literal way as we have seen in the example of the bridge. However, and stressing the transnational nature of the concept, this expression can also be found at the other end of the migration circulation. The introduction of the expression *qiaoxiang* in the name of a restaurant managed by a Qingtianese family in Santa Coloma de Gramenet (Barcelona) expresses the widespread use of this concept among private enterprises outside the geographical border of Qingtian. Without saying it directly, the restaurant refers straightforwardly to Qingtian identity, stressing the presence of Qingtian people abroad.



Figure 5. Business card. Qiaoxiang flavor 桥乡味道.

As well as the notion of *qiaoxiang*, the concept of *huaqiao* is widely used in Qingtian and other Chinese places with a longstanding migration culture both in everyday conversations and as visual references.

Most of the towns and cities in China where migration has been historically or currently an important factor have a “huaqiao hotel”. The *Huaqiao binguan* (Huaqiao Hotel) in Qingtian is nowadays an outmoded establishment but was one of the first hotels to be built in Hecheng at the beginning of the 1990s, using funding from Qingtianese migrants’ investments, and it still stands in the avenue overlooking the Ou River where the first cafes, bars and foreign restaurants appeared.

More than thirty years later the word *huaqiao* is still in use in Qingtian to emphasize the specificities of new apartment buildings by virtue of the connections with migrants abroad.



Figure 6. "Overseas town" compound (Huaqiao cheng 华侨城), Youzhu, Qingtian.

The examination of the banners and posters representing Qingtianese mobility - which are widespread across the county - epitomize two main entangled elements that form the notion of "migration identity" or "qiaoxiang consciousness". First, they strengthen the notion that Qingtian is the "hometown" of migrants spread across different countries. Secondly, they also reinforce and emphasize the "international" or "cosmopolitan" character of Qingtian society through the inclusion of the languages spoken in the main countries to which Qingtianese have migrated, especially Spain. It is here where we can see how proud they are about the connections with European countries where a majority of Qingtianese have migrated.

Nevertheless, following on from the continuing use of the terms *huaqiao* and *qiaoxiang*, new concepts are currently emerging that indicate a reality beyond the notion of Qingtian as the only and singular home for Qingtianese living abroad. From an institutional perspective the more newly framed expression *Shijie Qingtian* 世界青田 emphasizes the internationalization and cosmopolitanism of the place by virtue of the links with a wider group of countries, not just with the traditional countries where Qingtianese have migrated, as appeared on the banners of the bridge. The expression comprises the term "world" (*shijie* 世界) and the word "Qingtian" and can be translated as "Qingtian in the world" or "the world in Qingtian", depending on the angle we adopt. Instead of relating to specific countries, this expression reinforces links with the wider world and illustrates the diversification of migration destinations over the past years.

From one angle, this expression still emphasizes the link with the hometown and reminds us about the origin of these migration flows but without rejecting the possibility of settling down or feeling at home in other places outside of China as the character *qiao* is not there anymore. These days, construction walls in Hecheng are full of this expression, and the greeting banners for the 2012 Chinese New Year also incorporated this phrase, wishing a happy new year to Qingtianese spread across the world.



Figure 7. 2012 Chinese New Year banners in Hecheng.

From another angle, this expression reinforces the internationalization and cosmopolitanism of Qingtian and stresses the linkages with different countries in the world as a special feature and marker of Qingtian's identity and culture. This term has been introduced in the institutional, official and political organizations in Qingtian.

The recently inaugurated local research institute "Research center on Qingtianese throughout the World" (*Sijie Qingtian jianjiu zhongxin*)" adopts this new nomenclature breaking with the traditional names that incorporated the word *qiaoxiang*.³¹

The printed news magazine issued in 2012 by Qingtian's local government is related to the above-mentioned research center and also adopted the same expression as part of its title. The "*Qingtian Shijie*" magazine aims to present and publish articles and news related with Qingtian as well as with the situation of Qingtianese in different countries (See annex 1). The title, aesthetics and content of this news magazine contrast with the main local newspaper that adopted the term *qiaoxiang* in its title back in 1992 when the former "Qingtian newspaper" 青田报 - founded by the Qingtian Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1956 - was reopened with the new name of "Qingtian qiaoxiang newspaper" 青田侨乡报³².

³¹ The term *qiaoxiang* is associated with local research institutes in other emigration villages in southern China. One example is the "Guangdong Qiaoxiang Culture Research Center" annex at Wuyi University (Guangdong).

³² To see examples of the newspaper see their on-line version:

<http://www.mjceo.com/newspaper/9442/epaper.html>

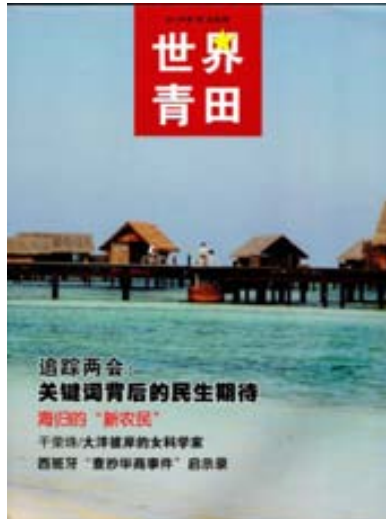


Figure 8. Cover of the Qingtian Shijie magazine

Ultimately the forging and dissemination of these new expressions translates as a self-conscious way of updating the traditional implications of *qiaoxiang* and *huaqiao* terminology. They incorporate the broader number of countries that currently constitute transnational ties, expressing the transformation of the links between the migrants and their sending countries, and emphasizing the connections of this local area bound by mountains with a wider world.

3.2 Structural change influencing Qingtian migration habitus transformation.

Structural factors related to the shift of global economies, as well as the development of Chinese migration in Spain, have brought about a change in the migration *habitus*. I list below the main structural aspects that have brought about a modification in the migration culture and transformation in the Qingtian – Spain migration context.

Spanish economic crisis and Chinese economic rise.

During fieldwork several Qingtianese who have never migrated told me that Qingtian is one of the places in China where the European economic crisis is impacting heavily. Given that Spain is, along with Italy, one of the main destinations for Qingtianese migrants, the consequences of the Spanish economic situation were a hot topic throughout my stay in Qingtian. As local Qingtianese explained to me quite graphically “even if growing numbers of people have come back on holiday or business in recent years, they arrive in Qingtian with fewer Euros in their pockets”. This is a relevant and striking point in the modification of the image, perception and expectation of migrants and returnees. However, it is important to mention here that these changes are related not only to the Spanish economic crisis or international shift in countries’ strategic power but also to the intensification, generalization and transformation of transnational links and practices.

As I will argue in chapter four there is a change in image in the way migrants are viewed in the Qingtian *qiaoxiang* due to diverse, strong and normalized transnational bidirectional movements and ties from/to and to/from Qingtian that are bringing about more realistic images of what it means to be a Chinese migrant in Europe. The traditional idea of migrants and returnees, which has been one of the main elements of the traditional *qiaoxiang* habitus or culture (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Li 2013c), is changing among young Qingtianese who have not migrated and who are less and less gullible about the “golden dream” of getting rich in Europe. Therefore if the image of Europe and how migrants are perceived is changing, we might also consider that the Qingtian *habitus* is also transforming and, consequently, the migration flows, too.

Nevertheless even though Qingtianese complain about migrants coming back with less money in their pockets and they identify this phenomenon with the European crises - which is knocking Spain especially hard - Qingtianese migrants’ consumption in Qingtian has not really decreased. Migrants keep on purchasing houses, paying for sumptuous meals for their friends and relatives, and spending huge amounts of money on rituals such as weddings or funerals. The most important point here is that nowadays more and more people can come back to Qingtian, not solely the elite who, before, were the only ones who could make it back to their hometown.

Along with migrants’ patterns of consumption in Qingtian, there is also an increase in internal consumption by people who have not migrated because of the rise in the Chinese economy and development of opportunities within the country. Thus if cafés, restaurants and import shops were originally aimed at migrants and the select few, nowadays there is a growing use of these places and products by those Qingtianese who have not migrated. The introduction of “foreign” ways of life and habits into Qingtian’s day-to-day life also corresponds with the notion of *habitus*, which not only explains migration flows beyond economic reductionism, but also throws light on the extent of consumer patterns, business activities and other social activities embedded in the transnational space. Thus the businesses created around migration are still growing and changing constantly but now there is a diversification of customers, who include migrants as well as the Qingtianese middle-classes who have introduced cafés, Western food and other practices into their daily life. This generalization of economic activity has led to an increase in internal consumption.

Even if the aforementioned aspects are related to a Qingtianese perception and therefore ought to be analyzed in a broader context that takes several phenomena into account – to be discussed in chapter 4 – it is true to say that Chinese people in Spain are turning their gaze on China and Qingtian and viewing them in a different way to before. Li Minghuan has already reported on the transformation of transnational ties due to Chinese economic development: “The economic boom in China really adds new meanings to the relationships between Chinese migrants abroad and the *qiaoxiang*. An obvious change in direction is that the pursuits of

some emigrants have switched from patriotic, supportive and charity activities to that of catching new opportunities in qiaoxiang areas". (Li 2013b:200).

Development and consolidation of the traditional qiaoxiang culture: new mobilities and migration flows.

We should consider that, over the last three decades, the consolidation of international migration and the *qiaoxiang* social structure has brought crucial changes to migration flows in the region.

While Qingtian remains a relevant emigration county and one of the main areas of origin of Chinese people in Europe, in recent years this *qiaoxiang* has also become a relevant destination for internal migration. An increasing number of rural people from the poorer provinces in China - especially Henan, Sichuan and Guizhou- are arriving in Qingtian to work in the construction industry³³, drive taxis and *sanlunche*³⁴ or work as employees in restaurants, cafés and hotels. In Qingtian then, as in many medium-sized towns in China enjoying some prosperity and growth, the presence of internal Chinese migrants (外地人 *waidiren*) is an increasingly prominent reality³⁵.

This situation entails social and economic inequalities that create disparities between those families who have successful relatives abroad and those who couldn't emigrate or didn't find financial success. Not all migrants got rich and these social interstices were, and are, completely omitted from the traditional *qiaoxiang* portrayal. The landscape of Hecheng town reproduces this social imbalance visually, the luxurious apartments and villas making a stark contrast with the improvised old houses inhabited by internal migrants and those Qingtianese who were not so lucky in their trip to Europe.

During my first stay in Qingtian, a woman who had returned from Spain explained her perception of migration to me by comparing her own experience in Spain with the life of internal migrants in Qingtian. As the woman said, the reasons for internal migration (achieving a better life for the whole family), the way it is done (chain migration) and the social status of the migrants in relation to the locals in the "receiving society", follow the same logic as the migration processes from China to Spain. This informant expressed the relationship between the two phenomena as follows:

Sometimes I think that they [internal migrants] might feel like we did when we arrived in Spain. Everything is work, work, work, to send

³³ Internal migrants are not just working in private companies building apartment blocks and new houses. Internal migrants are also the ones helping construct public works and infrastructure (managed by the government) such as the hospital (inaugurated in 2012) or the ongoing high-speed train complex project.

³⁴ *Sanlunche* 三轮车 are still a common sight in small Chinese towns. They are a type of tricycle and work using electric or pedal power. Considered an image of the "undeveloped" and "uncivilized" China, *sanlunche* have been removed from the largest and middle-sized cities in China. During my stay in Qingtian I heard about schemes to ban this form of transport in Hecheng town.

³⁵ According to estimates from the Local Office of the Lishui Prefecture in Qingtian, in 2011 between 40 to 50% of people living in Hecheng were born there, with 40,000 Qingtianese coming from villages in the county and 20,000 people from other provinces.

money home and help the family, to prosper³⁶. There is not too much time left to go out and enjoy life... It is very hard. Here people treat them like some Spanish treat us Chinese, not always erm... but sometimes is as if we were less, inferior, just because we are different, we are foreign. The difference, of course, is that they [internal migrants in Qingtian] are Chinese, they are in their own country, with the same culture and language... this is where it is different but both situations have many aspects in common.

(Interview with Sofia, February 2011, Qingtian).

Behind these words lies the main feature common to migration through time and space. Beyond national or ethnic factors, social class and the fear of the unknown become the key factors in the discrimination and inequalities pervading the building of social relations between individuals in the context of migration.

Along with the presence of internal migrants from other regions in China, we must also mention the discreet but significant arrival of foreigners (外国 *waiguo ren*) coming from the countries to where Qingtianese have migrated. During three years of extensive fieldwork, I have come across Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese and Germans arriving in the area, being taken under the wing of Qingtianese migrants who act as their hosts and translators. In most cases, through the connection with Qingtian, these people were heading to different Chinese cities attracted by the possibility of doing business. Some of them even start their business in Qingtian. In 2011, for example, I took part in the opening of a coffee-shop managed cooperatively by a young Spanish man in his early 30s and a Qingtianese migrant. This man has, for the past 15 years, rented the shop space where he has a "Todo a 100" (*baiyuan dian* 百员店)³⁷ in Elche from the Spanish guy's family. This transformation of the flows through influx and not just departures is significant in the *habitus* change.

Concurrent with these transformations that are making a migrants' receiving society out of Qingtian is also a relaxation in international emigration. During fieldwork few people came to me to enquire about emigration and when I asked young and middle-aged Qingtianese whether they would like to go to Europe, the answer was positive but the emphasis was on another kind of mobility. They do not want to emigrate and start working or doing business in Spain, but they do want to travel and visit friends and relatives in the various countries where they have connections.

The main reason for this decrease in migration corresponds to the transformations in Chinese society (more opportunities, increase in number of young people with university-level studies, and a slow improvement in semi-skilled workers' conditions). On the other hand, as we have mentioned, there is now a more "realistic" idea of

³⁶ Fazhan 发展

³⁷ "Todo a 100" is a type of shop that got more and more well-known in Spain in the 1990s. These shops sell everything you might need for day-to-day use at rock-bottom prices, from which it takes the name "todo a 100", which means "everything at 100 pesetas (pre-Euro currency in Spain)".

life as a migrant in Spain and an informed perception of the situation in Europe. Qingtianese are still willing to keep the ties and connections with Spain and other European countries but the aim of their movements is starting to differ.

Consolidation of the Chinese migration to Spain

The last but not least relevant element I want to remark on in relation to the transformation of the Qingtian migration *habitus* is related to the history of Chinese people's presence in Spain.

First of all it is important to point out that after more than three decades of strong migration flows of Qingtianese to Spain the opportunity to travel back and forth between both places has grown and spread among families with different transnational characteristics and financial situations. Of these elements it is the economic insertion of Chinese people into Spanish society that I should like to underline, as it brings about the chance for more frequent visits to China and an increased presence of Qingtianese who live in Spain back in their hometown.

Secondly, after three decades of a significant Chinese presence in Spain, there is already an important percentage of migrants' descendants who have been socialized in Spain. There are different and diverse transnational strategies regarding descendant care in the Qingtianese migration context that will be analyzed in more depth in the next section in relation to the language schools in Qingtian and in chapter five.

This diversification of the Chinese presence in Spain, depending on the generation and economic status, has also brought changes to Qingtian migration culture. Migrants' descendants are new actors in this field, bringing new needs, inputs and values. As we shall see these changes are embodied in the reorientation of Qingtian language schools, both in terms of their customers – formerly they were future migrants, now they are migrants' children – and in terms of the languages taught – from foreign languages to Chinese.

3.3. Learning and teaching languages in Qingtian: Paths and diversions of migration flows.

The circulation and bidirectional movements from and to Qingtian -emigration on one hand, and returns and visits on the other - have converted this region into a place where different social realities meet – a cultural interchange. One of the outcomes of this bidirectional movement is precisely the abundant and wide-ranging activity related with language learning, which is quite unique for a small country town like Hecheng.

These numerous options for learning languages correspond with the creation of official and informal schools that are strongly embedded in the Qingtian migration culture.

In fact, tracking the development of Qingtian’s language schools since they first appeared in the 1980s up until the present day, reveals a shift in the migration flows and the capacity of Qingtian’s social institutions to adapt to the structural changes as presented in the section above.

The transition from the supremacy of Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and other foreign languages taught to future emigrants, to the gradual replacement of these courses with Chinese for migrants’ descendants, reflects new transnational flows and the transformation of migration culture in Qingtian *qiaoxiang*.

In this section I will present the history of the formal and informal institutions related to language teaching activities. The data for analysis encompasses interviews with directors, teachers and students at several centers, and the observations I carried out when I went along to lessons and teachers’ meetings. Following on from that I will then present, analyze and discuss the data extracted from the survey taken among Chinese language students in Qingtian during the summer of 2011³⁸.

3.3.1. Teaching Spanish to future migrants: Process in decline

On arriving in Qingtian one of the first things to catch your eye is the “battle of the flyers” advertising language courses. Posters announcing classes, especially for Spanish and Italian, are plastered on the walls in the villages and main urban areas of the county.



Figure 9. Language schools posters in Shankou

The two posters advertise the courses on offer from the two main foreign language schools in Hecheng town.

The first advert belongs to the Gonghui School (工会学校), which is an official teaching center for adults that offers different professional training programs, such as cooking, design, IT, mechanics, languages, etc. The poster sitting next to it, advertises the “Foreign Languages Training School” (*waiyu peixun xuexiao* 外语培

³⁸ This process and the reflection on the actors and new practices involved are the main topic of the first part of the documentary “Transits”, which forms part of this dissertation and is presented as an annex.

学校), the second most important institution among Qingtian's foreign language schools. Unlike Gonghui School, this one is private and informal, managed by a retired primary school English teacher whose son and grandsons live in Spain³⁹.

If we take a close look at both posters we can see that they reveal two central elements in the context of teaching foreign languages in Qingtian: on one hand, the central role played by Italian and Spanish within the group of languages that form the main destinations of Qingtianese international migration; and, on the other, the role of the "returnee" in these teaching activities and the development of the *qiaoxiang* culture.

Examining the languages offered, we can see how the first poster only advertises Italian even though the Gonghui School also provides Spanish courses, which are under the aegis of another teacher⁴⁰. In turn, according to the "Foreign languages training school" poster, they cover more than seven languages. Along with Italian and Spanish we can also find French, German, Portuguese, Polish, Hungarian and Czech. However as far as I could see during three years of fieldwork, the school just gave Italian and Spanish classes. The way that works, the teacher and manager of the center told me, is that she advertises all the languages Qingtianese might be interested in and then, if some students get in touch with her, she looks for the appropriate person to teach them. And here we arrive at the second point that these posters display.

In both, the brief teacher curriculums emphasize their condition as "returnee". The two Italian teachers, the Spanish one, and the presumed German and Portuguese teachers, are all presented as returning students or as returnees with translation experience. Moreover, the use of Latin names for the two Italian teachers, Marco and Franco, reinforces their experience and adaptation to the foreign country – stressing the "Westernized" "been there, done that" flavor of their credentials⁴¹.

The final detail to note is the reference in the second poster to the possibility of continuing to study via the internet after "leaving the country" (出国): "If you leave the country you can continue studying via the internet" (你就是出了国还可通过网上学) claims the Gonghui School poster.

This sentence about distance learning brings to light the motivation of all the students who take part in these courses, that is to migrate to the relevant countries

³⁹ Both schools appear in the "Transits" documentary annex to the thesis.

⁴⁰ The school provides the space (classrooms) and materials, but each teacher has to recruit their own students. The teachers are not paid a regular salary, their income depending on the number of students they have. Therefore each teacher is advertising on their own account.

⁴¹ The tradition of using "Western" names whenever a Chinese person stays in contact with foreigners has a practical reason in preventing the pronunciation difficulties that some Chinese names might entail. However in this case the reasons seems to be more symbolic than practical given that the classes and the context are 100% Chinese. In a similar way, the use of Chinese names by Europeans in Europe, serve to give a flavor of "exoticism and orientalism".

armed with basic language skills⁴². So the languages on offer must correspond to the main destinations of Qingtianese migration. Although Spanish and Italian are the two languages significantly advertised, we have seen how in the “Foreign Languages Training School”’s promotion there is a new array of languages related to Eastern European countries mentioned that demonstrates the dissemination of Qingtianese across these countries (Nyíri 2003).

The close relationship between studying foreign languages and the emigration flows can also be seen in the banner of a small electronics shop located in the village of Shankou. It reads: “If you go to Spain or Italy buy an “electronic language study device” (出国西班牙，意大利就买博客语言学习机).

出国西班牙，意大利就买博客语言学习机
 if you go to Spain or Italy, buy an electronic language study device.



Figure 10. Shop in Shankou

The visual references pointing to the relationship between migration flows to Europe and language teaching activities are spread throughout Qingtian and reveal a set of consolidated practices, institutions and business activities rooted in the Qingtian *qiaoxiang* culture. Even away from the public eye this binomial between migration and foreign language studies is present in the private sphere. During my stay in Qingtian I had the chance to be in the homes and apartments of migrants, their relatives and returnees. It was not rare to find Spanish dictionaries, as well as learning cassettes and CDs, on the shelves and desks of those houses.

⁴² The text in this footnote is extremely blurry and largely illegible. It appears to be a reference to language learning materials or migration statistics, but the specific content cannot be discerned from the image. It seems to discuss the availability of language learning resources like dictionaries, cassettes, and CDs in migrant households.

This phenomenon began with Qingtian's development as a *qiaoxiang* in the 1980s. The two schools featured in the adverts have been running for more than three decades and their experience and their history mirror the twists and turns in the migration flows between Qingtian and Europe.

The schools started their courses in the 1980s when the significant flows from Qingtian to Europe began, and both of have noticed the same drop in demand over the last few years.

The Gonghui School was the first center in Qingtian to offer European language courses in around 1985 as an official response to encourage the possibility of emigrating to Europe. Most of the infrastructures and business created in Qingtian during the 1980s and 1990s came from international migrants' donations and investments, thus the local government encouraged migration as a way of developing the region and organized the first foreign languages courses.⁴³

The school is located on the avenue overlooking the Ou river in a large five-storey building with spacious classrooms. It's a neighborhood known by locals as "The European town" (*Ouzhou cheng* 欧洲城) for being the area where the first cafés and Western restaurants in town were clustered.

In the beginning the courses were designed to prepare future migrants for their adventure to Europe with the objective of earning money and prospering. From an official point of view, migration was regarded as a way of developing the county and providing a better future for families and the community, and was therefore strongly encouraged. So the courses didn't include solely language training but also an introduction to the law, habits and customs of European countries. These activities didn't last long because they later realized that this information was shared among relatives and friends on both sides of the circulation so they decided to concentrate specifically on languages⁴⁴.

According to the school's director, the 1990s and the 2000s were a golden age for the school and its language courses and most students were willing to study Spanish. At the height of these two decades they reached more than 600 Spanish language students a year. These numbers contrast starkly with the current situation where there are only 10 students per class⁴⁵.

⁴³ Pieke has also pointed out the role of local government in promoting migration as a way to foment development in the case of Fujian international migration. In his report for the IOM Pieke analyzes the different attitudes from national, provincial and local governments towards international migration (Pieke 2002). Xiang Biao also analyzes from a broader context local governments' promotion of migration as a strategy of local development in China (Xiang 2003)

⁴⁴ Besides, as a professional school they trained people in skills they would develop in Europe.

⁴⁵ The information about the school comes from an interview with the director and conversations with several teachers and administrative workers during the summer of 2011. Although I tried to get documents and more data to analyze the variations in foreign language students over these three decades it was not possible. The school administration argued that they did not have a record of this data. I therefore had to rely on the perception and memories of the school's director and other teachers who had been working there for a long time. All of them shared the same impressions.

The school director sees the financial crisis in Europe and the economic development in China as the main causes of the decline in foreign language courses and consequently of international migration.

We began the Spanish courses in 1985 or 1986, I'm not quite sure which year it was exactly... At that time we all wanted to go out (go abroad) to earn money, to prosper, it was a big trend) here. Qingtian was quite poor back then, as you know. But now everything has changed here. Fewer and fewer people are coming here to study Spanish or Italian, we all know that the economic situation in Europe is not good, especially in those countries, so people don't want to go any more. This is what I see. (Interview with the Director of the Gonghui School, Qingtian, July 2011)

This situation finds a parallel with another type of school intimately related with migration flows to Europe. The "Qingtian Technical Training Center" (青田技校培训中心) located in the market area offers training courses and official exams to acquire the Professional Qualification Certificate (职业资格证书) that is required to apply for migration, specially through a job offer. The school opened in 1980 and in 1985 started the cookery training courses in response to hostelry being the main economic activity of Qingtianese migrants in Europe.

Since 2000 the school has hosted a monthly official exam to get the Professional Qualification Certificate and people from the entire Zhejiang province go to Qingtian to sit it since other cities only hold this exam once or twice a year. While looking at the lists on his desk, the director confirmed that out of the last 53 exams just one person had applied to go to Italy and no-one to go to Spain.

The director told me that whereas between 2000 and 2004 most of the students were training to go to Spain, since 2009 just 10 people had applied for this destination. Instead, at present, most students are applying to go to Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, etc.). To address this situation, the director told me they are considering offering other kinds of courses, specifically in design and aimed at people willing to go to Italy where they specialize in the garment trade.

The director emphasized how fewer and fewer people come to his school to get a certificate to migrate to Spain. He argued that the reasons are both economic and politic, refering to the changes in the family reunification laws, which, for Qingtianese, have been the main way of getting over to Europe in the last two decades.

On one hand, people know that wages in Spain are lower than before, that the crisis is very strongly entrenched and is not over yet, and could even get worse. And another thing is that it is more and more difficult to get those permits to go to Spain, as they have closed the door.

(Interview with the Qingtian Technical Training Center, Qingtian, July 2011).

Li Minghuan argues that European countries' migration policies and practices have been, along with the high incomes of Western European countries, a hugely relevant pull factor during the course of Chinese migration to Europe (Li 1999a). Thus, and even though migration has been introduced in the Qingtian *habitus*, we can argue that the decline in wages and income in Europe - especially in Spain - and the difficulties of reunification are seen as push factors that keep people out of the migration project as a way to prosperity.

Likewise, the director of the Technical Training School, the owner and manager of the second foreign language school in Hecheng - the "Foreign Languages Training School" - sees the reasons for her Spanish course decline in relation to the changes in the Spanish economy and its immigration policies, especially in the area of family reunification, which had been the prime migration strategy for Zhejiang migrants.

While the Gonghui School is an official institution supported by the government, the "Foreign Languages Training School" represents the emergence of individual initiatives and privately-owned businesses related to migration in Qingtian. In contrast to the Gonghui School's facilities, this one consists of only two classrooms in an old apartment block located in the center of Hecheng that the manager of the school bought when business started to flourish.

In 1989 when she was 50 years old and took retirement from the primary school where she worked in Hecheng, Miss Huang started teaching Italian, Spanish and Portuguese in a very informal way in the living room of her former small apartment. She explained how, after retiring, she felt young enough to keep on working and needed some extra money to top up her pension. Given that at that time "everybody wanted to go to Europe to work (打工 *dagong*)" she saw an opportunity and decided to use the rudimentary Spanish she had learned years ago when she was a student at Hangzhou Normal School.

When she realized that more and more people were interested in studying European languages she decided to ask for a loan and buy a bigger house where she could have two rooms as classrooms and also move there to live with her husband. This was when she started to contact Qingtianese who had lived in Europe to be the teachers at her school.

If I could find enough students I could pay teachers. So, a man who returned from Germany, and who had also lived in Italy, started teaching both languages, Italian and German. Later on, I found a young woman who had migrated to Spain when she was 18 years old and come back when she was 30. Another one who had also lived in Italy. In this way, the school went on growing and working well (Interview with Miss Huang, July 2011).

Nevertheless, in summer 2011 Miss Huang lamented how, from 2008 onwards, things had begun to change and the number of students started to decrease dramatically until that year, when her Spanish and Italian classes - the only languages taught - contained an average of eight students per course.

During my three-year fieldwork I personally saw the drop in numbers at her school. Even though when I met her in February 2011 the decline had already started, over the course of that year there was still some activity in the classrooms and Miss Huang pulled out all the stops to develop new ideas. The ever shrinking number of students in recent years has forced Miss Huang to go full circle, taking her back to when she started the business and was the only teacher at her school. Given that she has few students, there are no teachers willing to work there for such a low return, and so she is once again performing the teacher's role. Nevertheless, during the time I stayed at the school⁴⁶ whenever she knew any friends or acquaintances from Spain were visiting Qingtian, she would invite them to the classes and ask them to give a couple of lessons or present an interesting topic for the benefit of the future migrants. I took part in some of these activities, sometimes as an observer and at others acting on the request of my host.

At the time I was living at the school, out of the 8-10 students attending Spanish classes, most of them were people in their 20s waiting for their spouses' paperwork to come through for "family reunification". There were also two teenagers of 16 and 17 waiting on their uncles' and aunts' final decision to bring them to Spain. And, finally, the class included a 24-year-old woman living in Castelldefels (Catalonia, Spain) who was spending two months in her hometown in Rui'an, a rural area that belongs to Wenzhou municipality. The young woman could communicate in Spanish on a pretty basic level, but her skills in Spanish were better than Miss Huang's. I was really astonished to find out that she was making a one-hour bus journey every day, to come to the class. She explained that in her hometown there was no Spanish language school and that even though she was attending a Spanish course for foreigners in Barcelona, it was good for her to have somebody explain Spanish grammar through the medium of Chinese (see footnote 23).

By November 2012 Miss Huang didn't have any Spanish language students and only three people were coming to the Italian classes.

This whole situation is leading Miss Huang to reconsider the orientation of her school and jump on the bandwagon of the already existing and prevalent activities in Qingtian which are now focused on teaching Chinese to migrants' descendants. The Gonghui School went down this route in 2005. The continuation of the interview with Miss Huang expresses the transformation of the migration flows and the language schools' adaptation to the new context:

⁴⁶ During the winter of 2011 I spent two months living in Miss Huang's apartment, in the room next to the main classroom.

Now everything has changed, fewer and fewer people are coming here to study Spanish or Italian (...) On the other hand, however, there are more and more huaqiao (migrants) who bring their children to our Qingtian to learn the hanzi (Chinese characters) and Chinese culture (Interview with Miss Huang, July 2011).

The Gonghui School was not the first center to adapt to the new context and offer Chinese lessons. Even though it was the first specialized school for foreign languages to change its focus, in an informal and small way these activities had already started more than ten years ago on the initiative of schoolteachers – and has been a growing trend ever since.

3.3.2 Teaching Chinese to migrants' descendants: A process on the rise.

Activities aimed at teaching Chinese to migrants' children emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, arising out of the demand from migrants' families for local schoolteachers to take their children on as pupils during the summer holidays⁴⁷. The informal schools, therefore, were the pioneers of these programs. Later on, with the growing numbers of children and youngsters coming back to Qingtian in summer, the official schools echoed the trend and came up with their own courses.

Thus, at present there are two typologies of schools aimed at teaching Chinese to migrants' descendants. The first group includes the official public schools that, during summer, offer Chinese for "foreigners" alongside regular courses. There are two schools in Hecheng that fit in this first type: the Gonghui School, which we introduced in the section above, and the "Children's Palace" (*Shaonian gong* 少年宫). The second group embraces the informal centers that originally started up as private tuition classes in the schoolteachers' homes.

Type of schools		Name of the school	Num. Students
1. Official language schools	Official and registered schools	<i>Children's Palace</i> 少年宫	7
		Gonghui School 工会学校	15
2. Informal language schools	Small-size academies managed by schoolteachers	<i>Hecheng kindergarten</i>	62
		<i>Teacher's house</i>	121
Total Students (Questionnaire)			205

Figure 11. Typology of Chinese language schools in Qingtian

⁴⁷ Drawing on the information I got from all the schoolteachers and families I spoke to, it seems it was around 2000 when a few families started asking for these services in a very limited way. I cannot guarantee the timing and it is possible that some families did so before that date. However if we take into account the history of the Qingtianese migration in Europe and the length of time needed for economic insertion, it is realistic to think that these practices started at the beginning of the new millennium and have continued to increase bit by bit.

3.3.2.1 Characteristics and development of Chinese language schools for migrants' descendants in Qingtian

In summer 2011 I focused my fieldwork on four education centers that offered Chinese lessons and visited several schoolteachers' home set-ups.

The analysis of schools' characteristics and development as well as their curriculums, uncover relevant ideas on the conception of migration in Qingtian over the years. Out of the four schools I include in the sample, two are official schools that represent the first typology mentioned above, and the other two are an evolution of schoolteachers' informal private tuition classes that have turned into small schools in apartments away from the teachers' homes (see figure 11).

3.3.2.1.1 Informal Chinese language academies

The informal centers encompass a wide variety of types. From private lessons held in schoolteachers' living rooms, to small language academies in apartments and houses used exclusively for this purpose. These small academies are an evolution of the former, the private lessons in the teachers' homes. Not all of them have banners at the entrance or advertise using posters. Instead, the fact of their existence is spread among migrants by word of mouth and relies on the teachers' reputations.

The small private kindergarten located on the avenue looking over the river is one of those informal academies. The 35-year-old Chinese language teacher, and sister of the kindergarten's owner, started having children studying Chinese in the summer of 2001. The woman had never considered it before but a neighbor, who knew she was a primary school teacher, asked her to coach her nephews who traveled to Qingtian from Spain one summer. The news traveled fast around the neighborhood and, from then on, every summer she has had several pupils who come from Europe. During the interview she emphasized that they only have a small space - the kindergarten consists of two small rooms and a kitchen - so she does not want to grow any more and make a "big business out of it".

When I went to the kindergarten there were seven Chinese language students, all of them from Spain, the oldest being 22 and the youngest eight. The teacher told me that during that summer she had a total of 13 students and just one came from Italy; all the others lived in Spain. In order to meet the needs of the different levels and ages, she hires two more teachers to do personalized tutoring with each student who attends class every morning on week days.



Figure 12. Hecheng kindergarten. Chinese classes for migrants' descendants.

By way of contrast, the school I will refer to as the “Teachers’ House”, has developed into another type of academy covering demand from children whose relatives live in the villages around Hecheng and who cannot bring them into school every day. Some of the students who go to this school board there from Monday to Friday and go back to the village with their relatives at weekends. This school is located in a spacious apartment that includes two classrooms, an office, a living room with kitchen and one bedroom with bunk beds where an average of 10 students sleep. There is no sign or banner outside to identify the school so the only way to get a place there is through informal contacts and information.

The school relies on a team of workers made up of two teachers, a cook and two women in charge of the organization and pastoral care. When I visited the school there were 15 students basically from Spain and Italy.

Over and above the two academies I give as my examples, there are countless teachers’ houses that host migrants’ descendants during the summer vacation.

3.3.2.1.2 The boom and institutionalization of Chinese language classes in Qingtian

As well as the informal academies, Qingtian’s official and institutional schools have also recently developed Chinese language courses for migrants’ children. In fact the courses offered by the official language schools in Qingtian imply an institutionalization of an informal practice that had already started in a casual and small-scale way.

The Gonghui School began offering Chinese classes for migrants’ descendants in summer 2005 when they brought together around 10 students. The school’s director and teachers agreed about the progressive increase in students over recent years, but they considered the summer of 2011 to be the real boom and peak of the process with 121 students enrolled⁴⁸.

These students studying Chinese at the Gonghui School in July 2011 were distributed over three levels of ability. The busiest courses were at the beginner level (初级班), which was divided into two classes totalling 54 students. The intermediate level (中级班) consisted of 42 students in one class, and finally 22 students with more advanced skills in Chinese formed the high-level group (高级班). In the first and second classes the level of Chinese language skills among some students was quite low and so it was not always easy for them to communicate with each other. This situation entailed challenges in the teaching methodology and teachers’ role.

At the other extreme in terms of language skills are the 22 students with a good command of Chinese. Most of them spent their first years going to school in China

⁴⁸ It is important to see that the “second wave” of families and students from Europe arrive in August. I could only collect data related to June – July 2011.

before moving to Europe with their parents and have therefore been socialized in two education systems. The students of the high-level group were either born in China and taken to European countries with their parents or born in Europe and brought back to China to stay with grandparents for a number of years.

In the summer of 2009 a second official school followed the trend and started summer Chinese language courses for migrants' descendants. While the Gonghui is an adults' school aimed at professional training, the Children's Palace (*Shaonian Gong*) is, as its name indicates, a center for after-school activities for children such as music, arts and crafts or sports. In this school classes were divided by language level as well as the students' age. A class of 35 children aged five to nine made up the first group, the elementary level. The intermediate class had 27 students between the ages of 10 and 16.

The four Chinese teachers in the Children's Palace were also primary school teachers who did this as an extra summer job. During conversation with the teacher she emphasizes how she learns something new every day with these classes because she is in touch with new and diverse realities:

“Even though the children have Chinese relatives and are raised with Chinese influences, they are very different from our kids in China. They come from different places, with very different school systems; they don't behave like our Chinese students. But they are Chinese so I think it is very good for them to come here and study in summer to get to know their culture, their Chinese culture”. (Interview with the Director of the Gonghui School, Qingtian, July 2011)

And here we come to one of the activities developed at the Qingtian official schools alongside the language learning, which is related to the notion of “searching for roots” (寻根 *xungen*). Unlike the informal academies with small classes, in the official schools and especially the governmental Gonghui School, their curriculum includes knowledge of Chinese culture and society as well as the local history and culture of Qingtian – all of which is presented under the rubric of migration.

As we have seen, during the 1980s the Gonghui School aimed to teach not only Spanish, Italian or French, but also an introduction to European laws, society rules and culture to “help” the future migrants prosper in Europe. More than 30 years afterwards, the same discourse appears alongside language teaching but now it's the other way around, enabling migrants' children to “understand” Chinese culture in order to be able to prosper there in the future.

The most important objective of our school is that the children of huaqiao understand (了解 *liaojie*) our Chinese culture, our Chinese history so that they can eventually return, invest and prosper (...) I know that in Spain there are a lot of Chinese schools, our government supports them. But the most important thing is to understand our

culture and for that reason they need to come here to China, to Qingtian. (Interview with the Director of the Gonghui School, Qingtian, July 2011).

This change reveals a modification in the discursive governmental arguments and interests towards migration. Government and institutions try to adapt and make the most of grassroots actions, decisions and changing mobilities. Thus, while before they encouraged the emigration of young Qingtianese to Europe in order to develop the region, now they are trying to foster the reverse flows of the later generations of Chinese migrants in order to contribute to the internationalization and professionalization of Qingtian and China.

In this context the official discourse related to the *qiaoxiang* identity, which is intimately related with migration, gathers strength and is transferred to the later generations.

Every day in class we teach them about our culture but we also organize activities to help understand our Qingtian culture, to let them discover and know their roots (寻根). For example we visited the museum, to get to know about the Stone culture in Qingtian, and our Qingtian migration history (Interview with the Director of the Gonghui School, Qingtian, July 2011).

However, as we shall see in chapter five, the migrants' descendants' process of discovering their roots during the summer goes deeper in an informal way through meeting up with their relatives in different villages.

3.3.2.2 An overview of the Chinese students in Qingtian in summer 2011

In summer 2011 I conducted a basic survey on the 205 students of the previously mentioned schools (see figure 11). The questionnaire covered basic demographic information, followed the trail of the students' mobility (country of birth, country of residence, previous countries of residence), and explored their attitudes and experiences towards Chinese language learning.

On the following pages I will present and discuss the results of the statistical descriptive analysis of the survey in light of the relation to the different transnational family strategies that lead to the physical mobility of migrants' descendants.

The distribution of the sample's students across sex and age reveals an almost equal presence of male and female, and a majority of students in their primary school years. In the table below we can see how the percentage of males (55.6% n=114) was a little higher than females (44.4% m=91) and how almost half of the students were between five and ten years old, and that 85.4% were not 15 or over.

Sex	N	Percentage
Female	114	55.6
Male	91	44.4

Age	N.	Cumulative Percentage
Between 5 and 10	90	43.9
Between 11 and 15	83	84.4
Between 16 and 20	32	100
Total Students	205	

Figure 13. Students profile by sex and age

The three main topics resulting from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis are the following: the mobility of migrants' descendants and diversity of transnational nuclear families, the symbolic and practical value of learning Chinese and, finally, the contacts with different realities, languages and social backgrounds.

3.3.2.2.1 Mobility of migrants' descendants and the diversity of transnational nuclear families

Regarding country of birth the survey confirms, on the one hand, the diversification of Qingtianese families across different European countries and, on the other, also displays the densification of Qingtianese migrants within Spain and Italy.

Country of birth	N.	Percentage
China	44	21.5
Spain	65	31.77
Italy	48	23.44
France	19	9.3
Austria	8	3.9
Portugal	8	3.9
Germany	2	1
Others	11	5.4
Total Students	205	100

Figure 14. Students' profile by country of birth

The sample's 205 students were born in 14 different countries, with Spain, Italy and China occupying the top three positions for countries of origin, comprising 76.6% of the sample (Spain 31,7%, Italy 23,4% and China 21.5%). This means that, according to this sample, most of the migrants' descendants had already been born outside China and a majority of them were born in either Spain or Italy. This information coincides with the statistical data issued in 2012 by the Spanish Government that shows how the number of Chinese nationals born in Spain to Chinese mothers is increasing (Sáiz López 2013:171).

These are not static realities, however. Migrants' descendants born either in Europe or China are susceptible to further movements according to their family's transnational strategies, which are directly related to their economic and productive situation and expectations.

Obviously not all the children born in China have remained there -if it were so they would not have needed to study Chinese during the summer-, and not all the children born in Europe stay in their country of birth permanently. The combined analysis of the categories “country of birth”, “experience in other countries” and “current country of residence” reveals different strategies of transnational households based on the direction of the mobility: from China to Europe or vice versa.

These two strategies and movements of migrants’ descendants meet the analytical distinction proposed by Amelia Sáiz, of transnational Chinese households based on the place of birth of the parents and the children, and the different strategies and forms of residentially divided nuclear families (Sáiz López 2013:170–171).

a) **From China to Europe: Migrants’ descendants born in China**

The first type of mobility is portrayed by the students who were born in China and later on “migrated” with their parents to Europe.

If we look at the students’ distribution according to their current country of birth and residence we can appreciate the mobility of those children who were born in China and later on migrated with their parents to Europe. Of the 44 students born in China, 22 now live in Spain, 15 in Italy and the other seven are spread among other countries.

Country of residency	N.	Percentage
Spain	88	42.9
Italy	64	31.2
France	19	9.3
Austria	9	4.4
Portugal	8	3.9
Germany	3	1.5
Greece	1	0.5
Other	13	6.3
Total Students	205	100

Figure 14. Students’ profile by country of birth

Within this typology two options are to be found: either the children moved with their parents when they decided to migrate or, more likely, first the parents emigrated and some years later their children joined them in the country where they had settled.

If both the father and the mother emigrate, leaving their children behind in China, it is usually grandparents who take care of them during the first years of their life. If the children are reunified after they are six, which is after school going age, reproductive strategies other than staying with the grandparents may include studying in private boarding schools or living with their schoolteachers. In all three

cases parents will send regular remittances to cover the living expenses of their children.

According to the statistical analysis, among the students born in China, 34.3% remained in China for more than five years up to a maximum of seven; 34.1% lived there for between three and five years, and 11% left China when they were under three. Out of the 44 students, 31 went to school in China and 13 didn't. Therefore we can see that they are reunified with their parents mostly between the ages of three and seven.

It is important to bear in mind that the reunification of the children born in China depends on the stage of the nuclear family's business development and economic situation⁴⁹. These cases normally happen at the beginning of the migration experience when the heads of the household are busy working and saving money to develop their business activities and support their family. Taking care of a child will require someone to get rid of their business obligations in order to undertake reproduction responsibilities. This phenomenon is at the core of the second transnational nuclear family typology.

b) From Europe to China and back again: Migrant's descendants born in Europe

Even if most of the students who were born in Europe (78.5% n=161) have lived in their country of birth continuously, 26.3% (n=54) of migrants' descendants born in Europe and attending Chinese language summer courses in Qingtian have lived in China at some stage during their childhood (18 had lived in China from one to two years, and 22 lived there between five and seven years). The numbers expressed a relevant percentage but it would have been much higher some decades ago and probably the children that have gone to school in China during their childhood are the ones less in need of these language courses since they already possess good skills.

At any rate, this 26.3% of students represents the second case of children's mobility, which implies a double and bidirectional movement between their country of birth in Europe and China, their parents' country of birth. First the children move from Spain, Italy, France, etc. to China, then after some years they "move back" to Europe where they reunify once again with their parents in their country of residence.

Most parents allude to the benefit of their children growing up in a Chinese social environment and obtaining a good command of the language. However the main

⁴⁹ it is not my intention to assert that all the children born in China or the ones who are sent back to China after their birth in Europe will eventually be reunified with their parents in Europe. There are cases where they stay in China while their parents, or one of them, remain working in Europe. There is also diversity within one single family, leaving one child in China and bringing the other one to Europe. Transnational nuclear families are highly diverse and may be permanent or temporal depending on the family's economic context and business strategies. In the next section we will tackle this issue in more depth. For a detailed description of these transnational reproduction strategies see Sáiz López (2013).

reason for the decision to send the children to China is highly pragmatic and has a lot to do with reconciling work and business responsibilities on one side, and taking care of the children on the other.

In fact, the delegation of early years childcare to the grandparents is common practice in contemporary Chinese society, especially when younger parents move to larger cities and start their professional or business career. In these cases children often stay with their grandparents in the villages until the couple have a suitable, stable situation to bring them to in the city. For Qingtianese in Spain the situation follows a similar logic; no matter how far away they are and how different the contextual backgrounds are, they reproduce the same mobility pattern and reproduction strategy that can be found within China.

However, it is important to take into account that the economic insertion of Qingtianese families who have been in Spain for a long time and have already lived through the first stages oriented towards saving money to open and develop their own business, has brought a change of attitude towards this practice.

Once the heads of the family have achieved a stable situation and are able to rent an apartment and have their own business they would try to proceed with the family reunification of those children in China, or will try to keep them in Spain if they have already been born there.

In those situations either one of the couple, normally the mother, relinquishes her responsibilities in the business to take care of the child, or the couple hires a childminder (*baomu* 保姆), who is generally a woman of Chinese origin also. These are the most common strategies, however we can also find families that bring their parents to Spain through family reunification and reproduce the original model of the extended family living under the same roof. And finally a further solution, which is not generalized but one I have encountered on several occasions, implies the transfer of the educational responsibilities of the children to another family, normally a local Spanish family, by giving the sons or daughters up for temporary and informal adoption. In these cases, the parents emphasize the benefits of giving their children the opportunity of growing up in a Spanish environment that will enable them to learn the language and social skills needed for better "integration". Generally when the children are of school age the parents will take them home again.

The possibilities of experiencing mobility are always open for migrants' descendants. During fieldwork I have encountered situations where, when their children are grown up enough to have a good command of Spanish and been introduced to the Spanish school system, some parents decide to take them to China for several years in order to complement their education from the Chinese side.

The case of three siblings studying Chinese in summer 2011 is a good example of this late mobility⁵⁰. The children were born in Lorca (Spain), just one year apart from one another, and were sent to live with "their Spanish family" - this is what they called them - who "adopted" them until the older brother was nine and the younger six years old. The two sons and the daughter remembered that when their Chinese parents visited them they could not really communicate as their parents' Spanish language skills were quite rudimentary and they could not speak a word of Chinese.

When the parents decided that the moment to take the children home had arrived they realized they could not really understand each other and that "they were too Spanish". They therefore decided to send them to study in a Hangzhou boarding school for two years. During their stay in China they traveled frequently to Qingtian to stay with their maternal grandparents. After two years, their Chinese language had improved enough and the parents decided it was time for them to "return" to Spain and continue their education in a Spanish school.

In the summer of 2011 they came back to China for the first time since their stay in Hangzhou four years before, and joined the advanced Chinese class with another 19 students with a really good command of the language. Right now the older brother is studying the first year of a Medicine degree in Madrid and the others are studying at high school in Lorca.

We can see how strategic and pragmatic reasons, as well as education and the perceived best environment in which to develop children's skills, are thrown into the melting pot of diversity in forms of transnational families in which migrants' descendants are involved and "mobilized".

The analysis of the country of birth and country of residence coincides with the basic migration destinations among Qingtianese migrants, and experience in a third country reveals the widespread mobile strategies of reproduction and education in the Chinese migration context.

3.3.2.2.1 Learning Chinese: Symbolic and pragmatic value

Aside from the experiences of studying in China for some years, the survey also indicates that almost half of the students (45.5%) learn Chinese in their country of residence. However the questionnaires show that they hadn't been studying Chinese in their countries of residence over long periods, in fact 74.2% of the students had studied Chinese for just a couple of years. That's why the majority of the students were in elementary and intermediate classes.

The number and diversity of Chinese schools in Spain are the initiative of the Chinese Associations, Confucius institutes and private schools. Chinese classes in Spain are normally run at the weekend and, in recent years, have been in demand

⁵⁰ The three siblings are main characters in *Transits*, the documentary annex to the dissertation.

not only by migrants' children but also by Spanish people interested in studying Chinese, which corresponds to the push element of the growth in the Chinese economy and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Chinese migrants work hard and are worried about the Chinese language skills of their sons and daughters. On the one hand they refer to the language as a central part of their identity as Chinese and don't want their children to lose what they consider to be a central part of their heritage and roots. On the other, however, and beyond this generalized essentialization in which the language is a central vector of Chinese identity, there are pragmatic reasons behind these decisions. That is, giving their children the best chance of having knowledge and abilities in both Chinese and Spanish in order to give them choice in where to develop and achieve their goals in life. Enable them to be ready to adapt to life in the "two worlds" involved in their socialization background.

The surveys analysis also shows how, for most of the students, that summer was the first time they had taken part in a Chinese language course in Qingtian, with only 24.9% having studied Chinese in Qingtian before. However, even though it was their first year as a Chinese language student for most of them, 82% of the students had been in Qingtian before – just 24.9% were in Qingtian for first time. This indicates, as we will see in chapter six, how physical transnational practices through visits and movement between Spain and Qingtian are strongly continued in migrants's descendants.

As we have seen, the majority of the students (74.1%) were living in Spain and Italy. France came next, with almost 10% of the students, and the other countries accounted for just a few students that did not reach more than 5% of the total (see figure 13 page71).

The heterogeneity of languages and socio-cultural backgrounds made these classes small "Towers of Babel" where more than six languages were spoken. That was especially the case in the two official schools, which take most of the students.

This situation supposes an important methodological challenge for the teachers, especially in the basic Chinese courses where some students cannot communicate or understand either spoken or written Chinese. In these classes I observed how the teachers put a lot of imagination into their lesson planning, sometimes using the Qingtian dialect (*Qingtianhua*) or English to try to create a language code that the majority of the students could follow.

This blend of languages also made it difficult to explain and manage the survey. Knowing the situation I prepared six different versions using the main languages in the classrooms: Chinese, Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese and English. However with the younger children I had to sit with them, explaining the questions and helping them understand the items correctly in order to ensure accurate answers. Sometimes I spoke Spanish with them; sometimes Chinese and sometimes we had to use English since, while I can understand basic expressions and sentences in Qingtian dialect, I cannot speak it.

Nevertheless, beyond what was strictly a language barrier, on some occasions another contextual bias appeared, especially among the younger students. For example, on more than one occasion when I asked them where they were born, the immediate and unconscious answer was not the name of a concrete country but the word *guowai* 国外, which literally means “outside the country” and is translated and understood as “foreign country”. Obviously after I asked again where exactly in *guowai* they were born, they were able to give me the precise answer. This attitude corresponds to linguistic conventions. The common dichotomy between 内 *nei* (in, inside) and 外 *wai* (out, outside) the country 国 *guo* (in this case China) defines the discourse of the Qingtianese migration and, as I could observe with the young children, has been transmitted to the next generation. Thus, being in China and being asked for their country of origin some children automatically apply the abovementioned dichotomy and answered they were born abroad “outside the country” (*guowai*). It is important to note that this is what they heard most when staying in Qingtian. Whenever they met relatives and relatives’ friend they were presented as the “one born abroad”⁵¹.

The outcomes of these activities will be covered in chapter six where I concentrate on the experience of those visits to Qingtian/China as solidifying the transnational link encompassing migrants and their offspring.

The situation I found in 2011 is the outcome of a process and history that involve the transformation of the population with the emergence of new actors, migrants’ descendants, and the resulting emergence and transformation of business activities related with language teaching in Qingtian.

3.3.3 Teaching Spanish in Qingtian primary schools: Migrants’ descendants living in Qingtian.

We have seen how the growing activities of Chinese language training are directly proportional to the decline in teaching Spanish and other foreign languages. This is the reality within the scope of Qingtian’s training institutions such as language schools and academies. However, the inputs from and links with Spanish in Qingtian are not really disappearing but, instead, are transforming and adapting to the new situation in international migration flows and transnational families strategies.

In this section we will see that nowadays Spanish teaching is emerging at the regular primary schools. Thus, these courses are addressed to new actors, not to adults wanting to emigrate but to the children of those Qingtianese who have already migrated.

These new projects underscore another facet of the phenomenon concerning migrants’ descendants training in various language skills, reflecting their family migration itineraries and their potential mobility, as well as the emergence of multiple identities.

⁵¹ 国外出生 *guowai chusheng*

It's not only the migrants' children who live in Europe with their parents who are involved in the transnational practice of learning a language that may help them to broaden their future chances and prepare them for further movements. While in this case the children are involved in the transnational practice of learning Chinese, migrants' children who live and go to school in China for shorter or longer periods are also involved in this transnational process. Here, however, the skills that will give them the preparation they need for broader options and potential movements in the future lie in learning Spanish. In this way, and in both cases, migrants' descendants are involved in learning the language of a country where they do not live at the moment but which still configures their transnational life.

I will firstly introduce the reality of the primary and secondary schools in Qingtian related to migration and then describe and analyze the pioneering experience of Spanish teaching projects in the primary and secondary private boarding school in Lishui called "Lishui Foreign Languages School".

This section will expand understanding of the potential mobility of migrants' children and the transnational family strategies and characteristics and will complete the picture from the previous section. Here I will present the situation of the still-transnational nuclear families by focusing on the children who are living and studying in China -either those born in China who have not yet been reunified or the ones who were born in Spain but have "migrated" at some stage of their childhood due to their parents' decision. We have already explained how the strategies regarding the country where migrants' descendants spend their childhood is intimately related with a broader entrepreneurial strategy and the family's economic insertion in Spain.

3.3.3.1 At the crossroads: Continuities and changes in the migration impact on primary schools in rural Qingtian

The presence of migrants' children in Qingtian County's primary schools is a relevant reality in the urban area of Hecheng as well as in those villages strongly influenced by migration. Qingtian still follows the typical structure of a migration society with numerous households temporarily integrated by two generations, with a gap in between: the sons and daughters live with their grandparents while their parents are in Europe, working and developing their own business.

While this reality was especially noticeable in the Qingtian villages where the migration flows started, nowadays this situation is transferring to the main urban areas of the Lishui Prefecture such as the cities of Hecheng and Lishui.

The description and analysis of the primary schools in Fushan 阜山 and Fangshan 方山, two villages with a well-established tradition of international migration, epitomize the process related to transnational families, migrants' descendants and the

transformation of internal flows within Qingtian⁵². In fact, the history of Fushan's Middle School opens up a vista that enables us to see how the first emigration bridges were created between Qingtian and Spain.

Fushan and Fangshan Middle Schools bring together children living in the neighborhoods of the two villages that have been part to some of the earliest and strongest impacts of international migration.

The history and modern-day characteristics of both schools are strongly linked with the migration phenomenon in two main regards. On one hand, the impact of migration on these schools can be followed in their foundation, history and development, and on the other, migration has also shaped their structure and the singular profile of the students that has changed over the years. The first outcome, which embraces the involvement of Qingtianese migrants through donations and funding, has been widely recognized and documented in local gazettes, booklets and small exhibition spaces. However the impact of transnational flows and practices on the changing structure, situation and student profile of these schools has been under-explored and under-presented.

The historical documentation of the involvement of well-known migrants with Qingtian's education institutions has been especially recorded in the Fushan Middle School, the first of its type to be opened in Qingtian County during the first half of the 20th century. The small exhibition space in the school's main building follows the different stages of its history. Moreover, the booklet and catalogues printed for its 80th anniversary celebrated in 2008 also reflect the school's historical course, which is intimately linked with the international migration from Qingtian, and is devoted to the life stories of local "heroes" who have migrated, got rich and participated in financing the school and who are very popular among local people. The booklet details the name, origin and amount of money given by international migrants who, over the years, have continuously donated to the school.

Fushan Middle School's origins date back to 1928 when a well-known Fushanese official named Chen Ying (陈瑛) returned to his hometown to retire after studying in Austria and carrying out diplomatic services⁵³. Chen Ying was born into a lineage of wealthy Fushan officials and, like other young men of a similar family background and generation, was sent abroad on an official tour of duty for several years. Chen Ying is a celebrity in Fushan due to his skills in various languages, his official rank

⁵² Fushan 阜山 and Fangshan 方山 are the earliest and most relevant areas with a migration tradition in Qingtian County, along with Youzhu 油竹 and Shankou 山口 See: (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Thunø 1996)

⁵³ The information for the reconstruction of the history of the Chen lineage in Fushan proceeds from a mix of different oral accounts and written documents. The conversations with old people in Fushan, with the school's director, as well as with the Chen Ying descendants who migrated to Spain from the second half of the 1970s are the main sources of information. However the history of Chen Ying is well documented in local gazettes and booklets, which I have consulted.

and pioneering experience as an overseas student but he is best known for his role as tutor to the famous Kuomintang official, Zhang Xueliang⁵⁴.

Chen Ying returned to Fushan in 1924, when he was 39, due to health problems and, after his recuperation, in 1928 he founded the first middle school in Qingtian County where he was the principal until 1934. In the figure picture we can see several students visiting the school's museum space with the picture of its founder wearing official clothes in the background.



Figure 16. Students visiting the museum hall in Fushan School with the picture of its founder Chen Ying wearing official clothes. Source:

More than four decades later his descendants also travelled to Europe but under totally different circumstances. Chen Diguan and Chen Yiguan became the first Fushanese who managed to migrate to Spain after the Cultural Revolution. This was thanks to resumed contact with Chen Tse-Ping, a relative from their parents' generation who was also sent to Europe on an official mission in 1922 but who, unlike Chen Ying, never came back⁵⁵.

The Chen family's links with international migration and Fushan Middle School recommenced in the 1980s from Spain through transnational donations. In 1984, the descendants of the lineage of Fushan School's founder organized the first collective donation from Qingtianese people living in different European countries to help with the school's reconstruction following its destruction by fire during the Cultural Revolution.

⁵⁴ Chen Ying was a prominent figure in the early 20th century, known for his role as a tutor to Zhang Xueliang. He returned to Fushan in 1924 and founded the first middle school in Qingtian County in 1928. He served as the principal until 1934. The photograph shows students in a museum hall, with a large portrait of Chen Ying in official attire in the background.

⁵⁵ Chen Diguan and Chen Yiguan were the first Fushanese to migrate to Spain after the Cultural Revolution. This was made possible through contact with Chen Tse-Ping, a relative from their parents' generation who had been sent to Europe on an official mission in 1922 but never returned.

Actually the donations for Fushan Middle School's renovation during the 1980s were the first contribution made by these new migrants to their hometown, along with funding for the restoration of the Qingzhen Chan temple (清真禪寺), which is one of the most important religious sites in Qingtian County. The migrants' contributions to both institutions - the temple and the school - are still relevant and make up the principal channel of migrants' economic involvement in their hometown.

The directors of both schools explained that even though their regular income nowadays comes mainly from the provincial government's department of education, crucial donations are still coming from Fushan people living in Europe and being used to build new sports fields and other infrastructure⁵⁶.

While the relationship between rural schools and migration via donations has been widely documented and emphasized in different formats, the impact of the bidirectional migration flows over time on the structure, characteristics, transformations and everyday life of these rural schools has not yet received much attention. The frequent visits I conducted to the schools and conversations with their directors and teachers not only shed light on the situation of the migrants' descendants who stay in Qingtian, but also elucidate today's social structure and mobility patterns within the region. The analysis of the structure, problems, and the changing profile of primary school students is a good way of approaching and underscoring the social structure and context of a given society. So analyzing these schools in Qingtian County will also disclose the impact of migration on the Qingtian *qiaoxiang* – both its changes and continuities

Fushan and Fangshan Middle Schools have a high proportion of students whose parents are in Europe, especially at primary school levels. The directors of both schools underlined how the majority of families are spread between Spain and Italy. Out of the 200 children in Fushan School's kindergarten, for example, half have their parents in Europe, and at least 10% of the pupils in each primary school class share the same family situation.

In Fangshan School the numbers are similar or even a little higher. As the Fushan School's director states, these days most students who have a migration connection were born in Europe, were sent to their parents' homeland after birth and would probably "return" to Spain at some stage during their childhood.

⁵⁶ The last collective donation to Fushan Middle School from international migrants was organized in 2008 in order to celebrate the school's 80th anniversary. The money from the latest donations has been used to build new sports field and an extra classroom. The Fangshan School director also told me that they get individual economic contributions from overseas each year.

In fact the students of Fushan and Fangshan Schools have a very close relationship with migration from a diachronical perspective. Throughout the past four decades students from these schools have migrated to Europe either after graduation or before. Actually, we could argue that the parents of the children who nowadays study at these schools probably graduated from the same institutions at the end of 1980s or during the 1990s and thereafter migrated to Europe.

The old classmates circles and regular meet-ups are a very important social practice in contemporary China intended to strengthen and maintain the links between the same generation of people who are disseminated across different regions within China. The celebration of the Fushan and Fangshan old classmates meetings (*tongxuehui* 同学会) no longer happen in China but, instead, are organized across different European countries since most of the students from the '80s and '90s emigrated to Spain, Italy, France, Germany, etc. with few of them remaining in China.

Qingtianese have brought the practice of old classmates meetings abroad, meaning the celebrations are performed in a transnational way. The meetings held in China just as much as those the Qingtianese organize in Europe, have the same social function which consists of keeping people living in other cities or countries in touch with their origins, not only territorially but socially speaking. Old school networks are used to build and maintain connections as classmates are considered important social figures in a significant sphere of trust based on reciprocity⁵⁷.

The reports from the old classmate get-togethers held in Barcelona and published on Eulam, one of the largest internet sites dedicated to gathering all types of information on and for Chinese people living in Europe, are good examples of these transnational activities and networks related to "classmates". The first report corresponds with the event celebrating the class of 1987 graduates held in 2007 and the second one took place in 2013 and brought together students who graduated in 1993. As the text states, old classmates from more than 10 countries met in Barcelona to enjoy the celebration.

⁵⁷ During the summer of 2011 when I stayed in Qingtian for a month and a half with my friend and cameraman with whom I cooperated in the making of the "Transits" documentary, I realized from my own experience the strength of the concept of "classmate" (同学) in Chinese society. It indicates a special relationship based on trust that really does make it a mix between brotherhood and friendship. At first when I introduced him saying that we were friends and were collaborating on a documentary project, people use to smile in a shy and provocative way, assuming a romantic relationship between us. As soon as I changed my way of introducing my friend to him being my "classmate" (同学) – which is also true – the doubts disappeared, our relationship was suddenly clear to everyone and no-one asked me about the nature of our "relationship" again.



Figure 17. Reports from old classmate get-together held in Barcelona and published on Eulam website

The students' meetings held in Spain reveal the long tradition of migration among young people from these villages; people who have studied in the schools that are now facing another type of migration-related student profile. It's a longitudinal process that has been changing over the years with the alterations in international flows. While the students of the '80s and '90s migrated after graduation, now most of the students connected with migration at those schools are the young children of those very same migrants and they will probably move to reunite with their parents before finishing their primary school years.

According to the directors most of the children directly related to migration mobility were born in Spain or Italy and have been sent "back" to their parents' hometown following the strategy of conciliation between productive and reproductive.

Along with this majority profile there are also some cases of students where the children were born and raised in Spain, and moved to their parents' hometown after going to primary school for a few years in the places where they parents had settled. This typology might be caused either because the nuclear family has decided to return to China or because the parents want their sons and daughters to improve their Chinese language skills after studying for several years at Spanish primary schools, hence why they send them to China to further their studies.

Most of these cases, however, are circumscribed in the schools in Hecheng city, Lishui or other larger cities in the province such as Hangzhou. Returnees generally do not choose to re-settle in their villages of origin. Instead they prefer to live in urban areas within the county or Zhejiang province, and this is also the case for those parents who send their children to study in China once they are a little older who also choose schools in urban areas.

Even though the practice of sending children back to Qingtian during their school years is continuing, the directors of both schools expressed how, over the past ten years, the structure, characteristics and number of students is decreasing due to different internal mobilities and migration flows. The directors of Qingtian's rural schools generally stress how there are fewer students registered each year and how this progressive decrease in enrolments has led to crucial structural changes at these schools.

In 2011 Fushan School had 700 students across kindergarten, primary and junior middle school. This number contrasts with the school's population in 2001 which reached more than 1,200 students. In 2004, Fushan's senior middle school level had to be closed down due to lack of students⁵⁸. Fangshan School has gone through a similar process and had 800 students enrolled in 2011, contrasting with the 1,300 they had in 2005.

One of the reasons for this decrease in students could be that more families are deciding to keep their children with them in Europe instead of sending them back to China. However when one starts to dig a bit deeper and speak to the directors, teachers and locals, more reasons appear. At both schools, the reason for the decrease is related to two kinds of migration flows that are connected with the international migration *habitus* in Qingtian.

Firstly, every year there are several groups of students who "return" to Europe with their parents, as part of the reunification process. Both directors stated that at least 50 students a year are leaving the school to go to or "return" to Europe, where most of them were born.

The teachers at these schools expressed the difficulties of teaching when the students come for a short period of time then leave again. There is a high level of mobility in the classes each year. Interestingly, the same problems are also faced by teachers in Spanish primary schools because of the late incorporation of Chinese migrants' descendants who have attended Chinese schools for a number of years. I therefore think that joint migration policies from both countries should join forces in developing collaborative programs between primary schools in Qingtian and the schools that attract a higher number of Chinese migrants' children in Spain. These collaborative programs could be designed and applied in different ways and could be a realistic and useful way of avoiding school failure and deal with some of education's methodological issues that might lead to integration problems for children raised in the mobility milieu. The collaborative educational efforts might improve the knowledge and methodological resources of the teachers on both sides so that these children's mobility could be converted into a benefit rather than be a limitation.

⁵⁸ The school curriculum in China is as follows: Primary school (*xiaoxue* 小学) for students from 5 to 10 (*chuzhong* 初中), junior middle school from 10 to 15 and senior middle school (*gaozhong* 高中) from 16 to 17. The corresponding school year groups in the Spanish education system would be "Primaria", "Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO)" and "Bachillerato".

The second reason behind the reduction in number of students enrolled in Qingtian's rural schools is related to a growing internal movement towards urban areas. A relevant proportion of families in Fushan and Fangshan, as well as in other county villages, are changing their daily residence to the urban areas of Qingtian County, especially Hecheng and the nearby residential areas of Youzhu⁵⁹. The director of Fushan School connected this process with the consumer patterns of those families who have relatives abroad and the desire to move towards a modern and more comfortable urban way of life.

Everybody wants to leave the village and go to the city. The families that can afford it, normally the ones that get money from their sons or daughters living in Europe, move to new apartments in Qingtian⁶⁰, where life is more comfortable. That's why the rural schools have fewer and fewer students every year.

(Interview with Fushan School director, Qingtian, April 2011).

However it's not all about departures. Alongside these emigration flows from Fushan to the urban town (Hecheng) or to foreign countries there are also important immigration flows towards these villages. While the locals are leaving, internal migrants from the very poorest regions in China are arriving to work there. This is especially relevant in Fangshan where construction activities have been intense⁶¹. This is how the Fangshan School director could assert that between 20 and 30% of the students in his school are the children of internal migrants (移民 *yimin*) who arrive from other provinces, such as Anhui, Guizhou and Henan⁶².

3.3.3.2 Urban schools: Spanish in new transnational educational practices

The presence of migrants' descendants at the primary schools, as well as the historical links between Qingtian and Spain, have caused some of the schools' management teams to put extra effort into introducing Spanish learning activities at their centers.

Given that many families have moved from villages widely involved in migration movements - such as Fangshan and Fushan - to the larger cities within the Lishui Prefecture, the profile of the students whose parents are in Europe is thus progressively increasing in urban area schools. The initial arrangements and implementation of the Spanish language training projects in primary education are

⁵⁹ According to Hecheng's local government statistics, 60% of people living in the town come from the villages in Qingtian's rural areas.

⁶⁰ Generally Hecheng Township is called Qingtian, like the whole county.

⁶¹ Fangshan is one of the first places where migrants constructed villas and houses. The cost of land here is one of the highest in the county.

⁶² This process that, on a small scale, reproduces the tendency for fluxes to be from rural areas to cities all over China

basically developing within the scope of these urban schools, especially in Hecheng and Lishui.

The directors and teachers involved in these projects say that the motivation to start these activities came from teachers seeing the need for them, as well as at the request of some parents living in Spain. As we have already seen, most of the children studying in Qingtian while their parents work in Spain would probably move "back" to Spain at some time during their schooling to get enrolled in a Spanish school. To avoid the communication problems these students go through when they arrive in Spain, their parents encourage Qingtianese schools to teach their children some Spanish skills so they have a good base in the language when the family reunites in Spain. Apart from some "cultural" or pedagogical imbalances, the main difficulty of Chinese children's integration into the Spanish education system has been of a linguistic nature, especially when pupils arrive in later primary school years.

However, over and above the motivation of these new projects, the schools also regard learning Spanish as a benefit for the whole student community no matter whether their nuclear families are in China or in Spain. Qingtian's socio-cultural background is heavily influenced by several foreign languages - especially Spanish and Italian - because of the transnational links maintained between migrants and their hometown.

Over recent years while the influence of Spanish has grown in China most of the programs are set at university level. The migration *habitus* in Qingtian and the penetration of a migration culture also influences the language-teaching sphere and is leading to the introduction of Spanish in primary schools. We have seen how, beyond a pragmatic function that might allow movement to foreign countries, being able to speak Spanish or Italian in Qingtian also determines social status.

Fewer and fewer Qingtianese families who have not migrated would consider sending their children to Spain under the same conditions as former generations did. However, they do see the benefits their children could reap by making the most of contacts with relatives and acquaintances in Spain with a view to pursuing higher level studies at universities there. This emerging phenomenon shows the transformation in Qingtian society, and the growing diversity of people from Qingtian in Spain envisaging potential new types of migration flows from Qingtian to Spain.

As I have already mentioned, very few Qingtianese asked me to help them to migrate, or inquired about contacts and the job situation in Spain. Of course, that's because most of them already had contacts and reliable information, but the fact is fewer and fewer people intended to migrate and work for a living (*dagong* 打工) in Spain. During my fieldwork, however, and while writing notes up at various Hecheng cafés, on two occasions young students came up to me to ask for my help in translating documents for their applications to courses and degrees at Spanish

universities. These very preliminary cases can be further developed over the coming years.

So the Spanish language courses at Qingtian primary schools are not only aimed at migrants' children living there but also at other children whose parents are interested in broadening their children's horizons.

Even if there is a growing interest among Qingtian primary schools in offering Spanish language courses, in 2013 the only school that had implemented these activities is the Lishui Foreign Languages Experimental School (*Lishui waiguoyu shiyan xuexiao* 丽水外国语实验学校), which is one of the most exclusive boarding schools in Lishui.

The Spanish courses at this school started in February 2011 as extracurricular classes mainly aimed at children with relatives in Spain. The school's head of studies and one of the leads in this project explained that they had wanted to run these classes for a long time due to the requests of a number of migrants whose children study there. Finally they sent out a letter announcing their decision to the tutors and started up the classes. The fact that one of the center's foreign teachers who has been teaching English at the school for four years is from Cuba helped to speed the process as they could already rely on one native-speaking Spanish teacher.

Lishui Foreign Languages Experimental School is a private school inaugurated in 2003 and managed by a cooperative of teachers. It is a well-equipped boarding school with a large campus where the students live from Monday to Friday with the possibility of visiting their "homes" at the weekends.

Miss Yue is the school's head of studies and the lead in setting up the Spanish courses. She explained the heterogeneous situation of transnational families and the presence of migrants' children in Chinese primary schools in a very visual way through the experience of her two sisters, one of whom lives in Spain and the other in Austria.

There are a lot of huaqiao in Qingtian, people who are in Europe to earn money. And a lot of them don't have time to take care of their children. Not all of them, of course, depend on the business they have abroad. For example I have two sisters, one in Spain and another in Austria, and they differ in this regard. My elder sister in Austria has two sons who were born "outside the country" (国外) but are now in China at primary school. One studies at this school and the other one is in Wenzhou with her husbands' parents. But then, my younger sister in Spain has three daughters, two twins who are studying at primary school in Spain, and a little baby who was born last winter and now is in Qingtian with my parents. When she reaches school age my sister will come to take her back to Spain, for sure.

(Interview with Yue, Lishui, October 2012).

Miss Yue's description of her family structure is a good portrait of the different transnational strategies chosen by the migrants.

The head of studies continued by explaining the link between the school in Lishui and the migrants' descendants, emphasizing that the fact that it is a boarding school is one of the aspects that has attracted lots of families in Europe to send their children there.

But not all the parents really can take care of their children "abroad"(国外) so they decide to bring them to Qingtian where their parents, the children's grandparents, will take care of them. But the cultural level of the grandparents is not very high, some of them can barely read, and they are also elderly. So at this school they are here from morning to night and surrounded by people who care for them and their education. We also have a "life teacher" (生活老师) and this is one of the aspects that the "huaqiao" (migrants) consider especially useful for their children. That's why when the children get to school age and the parents don't take them "abroad" they prefer to bring them to our school rather than have the kids in the grandparents homes. (Interview with Yue, Lishui, October 2012).

The school's annual registration fee is quite expensive and thus only families who are comfortably off can afford to send their children there and delegate their care to the school's professionals.

The students who start primary school in the first grade in China and are raised by their parents follow the same profile as rural school. They can either continue studying in China or move to Europe at some point in their education, whenever their families' situation abroad makes it possible. In addition, some families consider it a great positive to keep their children studying in China for several years before bringing them to Spain in order to give them a grounding in Chinese language skills.

However at this school there is an important percentage of students who are living the same experience but the other way round. They were born in Spain where they studied for a number of years at primary school then moved to China to continue their schooling for a while. These students therefore arrive with totally different socialization processes and customs and with important difficulties in following classes in Chinese. This mirrors the situation of those children who spend their preliminary years studying in China then arrive in Spain in the middle of primary school or later.



Figure 18. Spanish course for children previously schooled in Spain, Lishui Foreign Languages Experimental School

In fact, it is mainly for this set of students with a school background in Spain that the Lishui School has started the Spanish lessons. As Miss Yue explained, most of these children's parents send them to study there but they don't want them to forget Spanish so that they stay on track for when/if they return to Spain. Some of these children are in China because their parents returned to work or do business there but most have been sent for a while to improve their Chinese language level and "incorporate" a more Chinese social background.

Interestingly enough, the division of the Spanish courses into three classes is based on the different relationships of the children with the migration experience rather than with their Spanish language level.

1. The first group integrates those students who have been schooled in Spain and therefore have a good grasp of Spanish.
2. The second group is aimed at those students whose parents live in Spain. Even if most of them were born in Spain they were sent to Qingtian when they were small children or even babies and therefore do not speak Spanish.
3. The third group is made up of those students who do not have nuclear family in Spain but whose parents are still interested in their children taking up Spanish. Most of them have extended family members (uncles, cousins, etc.) and their parents consider it could be a good place for them to study abroad.

As we can see, the division between the second and third group is based on the children's migration profile more than on the level of their Spanish language knowledge, which is zero in both cases.

Besides this program, some other schools in Hecheng are also trying to develop Spanish language activities. One of these initiatives involves cooperation between the Qingtian Experimental School (*Qingtian Shiyan Xuexiao* 青田实验学校) located in Hecheng and the Spanish “Miguel Hernández” primary school in Badalona, with assistance from the “Associació Popular Xinesa” (*Chinese People’s Association*)⁶³ and the support of the Catalan Autonomous Government.

Of the 1000 students at the Qingtian Experimental School, more than 350 have parents in Europe. For its part, the Miguel Hernandez school is located in Fondo, a neighborhood in the metropolitan area of Barcelona where there is an important concentration of Chinese migrants.

In summer 2011 a delegation of the aforementioned Catalan institutions visited the Experimental School in Qingtian to discuss future cooperation, which envisaged the exchange of teachers and students. While on the Chinese side their priority was to develop a program of Spanish courses and to ask their counterparts to send language teachers for short periods, on the Spanish side the request implied the possibility of including a mathematics teacher to help develop a new course that would incorporate the Chinese Mathematics teaching methodology. It is the Chinese students’ success in mathematics combined with studies showing the benefits of the Chinese way of teaching them that have led Miguel Hernandez school to shape their request.

Beyond that both sides agreed to start regularly communicating and collaborating on activities between the students at both schools via the internet.

As far as I know, the project has not yet been implemented even though the negotiations and contacts are still in place. Nevertheless, what I wanted to emphasize here is the initiative and interest of the Qingtian school’s management team in starting to offer Spanish classes. The school director repeatedly revealed his interest to me, explaining that if this cooperation did not work out he would look for alternatives to get the Spanish courses off the ground.

⁶³ The “Associació Popular Xinesa” is promoting Chinese language learning in the metropolitan area of Barcelona in cooperation with several primary schools. They started the projects in Santa Coloma de Gramenet five year ago and they are implementing the program in the places where most Chinese families are concentrated. They have collaborated with different schools in Santa Coloma and Badalona on the outskirts of Barcelona and since 2013 they have also been organizing and running the weekend Chinese classes at a primary school in Olot, a large town in the north west of Catalonia where most of the Chinese people come from the Dongbei area. The Association’s president explained that they decided to move there due to demand.

3.4 Concluding remarks

In this chapter we have seen how the changes in the Qingtian migration *habitus* can be identified through the transformation of Qingtian's language schools, which have gone from teaching foreign languages such as Spanish to future migrants, to teaching Chinese to migrants' descendants. In doing so, we introduced two types of migration flows: the one that goes from Qingtian to Europe (migration to foreign countries), and the reverse transnational flows from Europe to Qingtian by means of visits by migrants' descendants.

For our purposes, then, language learning is a good example of the transformation of the migration culture and introduces the role of new actors, who are the migrants' descendants, into the transnational practices and changes in the *qiaoxiang* culture. The results of the analysis of the survey reflect the distribution of Qingtianese migration in Europe and emphasize the centrality of mobility and transnational households within the Chinese migration.

Through the analysis of different migrants' mobilities we have described the different transnational strategies undertaken by Qingtianese migrants in caring for and raising their children, an element that we will take up again in chapter six.

While in this chapter we have introduced the role of migrants' descendants in new institutions related to migration, in chapter six I concentrate on the experience of those visits to Qingtian/China as solidifying the transnational link encompassing migrants and their offspring.

Finally, we have shown how, while Spanish language training is going through a process of decline among the language schools for adults, i.e. future migrants, the same language seems to be emerging in the Chinese primary schools where migrants' children study.

Hence, it appears that the "tradition" of teaching Spanish in Qingtian *qiaoxiang* is not in a desperate state but, instead, is transforming itself according to the new realities and structural changes. Teaching Spanish is no longer for future migrants, but for the descendants who stay behind.

It turns out that these new actors, the migrants' descendants, are the protagonists of both programs: Chinese for those who live in Europe, and Spanish for the ones who live in China. Therefore throughout this chapter we have seen how both programs materialize the two main family structures and strategies undertaken by the Qingtianese who live in Spain.

**PART II. BIDIRECTIONAL TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES AND
MOBILITIES: QINGTIAN - SPAIN**

Introduction. The logic of Bidirectional transnational: From the virtual to the physical.

“People can move without being mobile
and can be mobile without moving”.
(Salazar and Smart 2011:iv)

As different scholars have demonstrated, transnational ties and return migration play a key role in shaping migration culture and *habitus* in Qingtian and, consequently, they are influential in shaping international migration flows. We have already advanced that, besides structural changes, the transformation of the traditional transnational ties and the emergence of new transnational links and mobility practices are bringing about changes in the Qingtian society and migration *habitus*.

In this chapter we will go into detail about the characteristics, aims, extent and actors involved in the modern-day transnational connections between Qingtian and Spain in order to elucidate and widen the logic and casuistic leading to the transformation of the Qingtian migration *habitus*. Throughout the examination of different transnational ties and practices we will see how the image of migrants and returnees is changing in contemporary Qingtian.

In the classical way of conceptualizing and understanding migration and transnational ties, it is generally assumed that migrants are the active agents in their movements and transnational practices, while the people who remained in the emigration villages, often called the “left-behind”, are just passive receptors of the influences of their relatives and acquaintances abroad. As we will see throughout the different parts of this chapter, the transformation in old transnational ties and the changing image of migrant and returnee are due to a flow of information in which both the migrants and the people who stayed in Qingtian play a key active role.

We will see how Qingtian *qiaoxiang* emerges as a crucial anthropological site integrating, as a point of intersection, a social life forged by the daily movements and transnational practices involving those who move physically (migrants and returnees) as well as those who are part of this mobility without the need to actually physically displace.

At this intersection represented by Qingtian, we find migrants who travel for a short while, people who have returned, and others moving back and forth between both places. However, along with these transnational activities that require physical movement, Qingtianese who have not migrated and have no intention of doing so, also live a mobile life featuring transnational practices that go from the tangible and concrete circulation of objects, products and economic capital, to the more ethereal and virtual contacts and exchange of information through the new information and communications technologies.

Therefore, beyond the impact that frequent and reiterated visits by migrants or the physical presence of returned migrants may have, the life of Qingtianese who have not migrated is also geared towards this mobility through several transnational practices and linkages where they take part as agents of change to the same extent as the migrants or returnees. As Chu (2010) pointed out in her research carried out in a *qiaoxiang* region in Guangdong province, mobility not only concerns people who travel abroad because “one did not need to physically leave China to be a subject emplaced within a larger global and transnational field” (Y. J. Chu 2010:11–12). In a similar way and in relation to social life in Hong Kong, Abbas states how “whether one goes or stays, the experience of migrancy is inescapable” (Abbas 2004:129).

What makes Qingtian a special transnational space - a *translocality* (Appadurai 1995) - is the flow of diverse and multidirectional movements of information, objects, money and people that take place from and to Qingtian.

Diverse transnational practices channel the lives of most people in Qingtian. Even if they have not migrated and do not intend to do so, Qingtianese people do participate in the social lives of their friends and relatives in Europe. Thus the region has become the node of multidirectional movements from and to Qingtian making it a place of encounter between different socio-cultural realities and networks where several individuals, in different places, and using different means, are actively involved.

Given that the extent of this research is limited to the scope of transnational practices from Qingtian to Spain and vice-versa, from now on I will refer to them as bidirectional ties acknowledging, however, the intersection with other nodes and localities that also merge in Qingtian’s mobilities.

An empirical-based analytical model: The logic of bidirectional transnational practices:

In this chapter I will analyze the diverse bidirectional transnational exercise and practices according to their different natures, from the virtual and intangible to the most corporeal and physical ones.

The vertical and circular vectors of the diagram of the figure 18 express the two main characteristics of transnational links. The circular vector illustrates the bidirectional nature of transnational practices, while the vertical represents its different nature and degree of corporeity.

The diagram's vertical vector expresses the degree of transnational practice materialization via the gradation of color that ranges from the clear blue circles representing the most ethereal links, to the darker interior circles indicating the most physical practices. The logic of this conceptualization lies in the ethnographic findings related to the possibility of playing an active part in a transnational and mobile life without needing to physically move. The circulation of information and money and the embodiment of objects and spaces are crucial in the Qingtian – Spain (transnational) space.

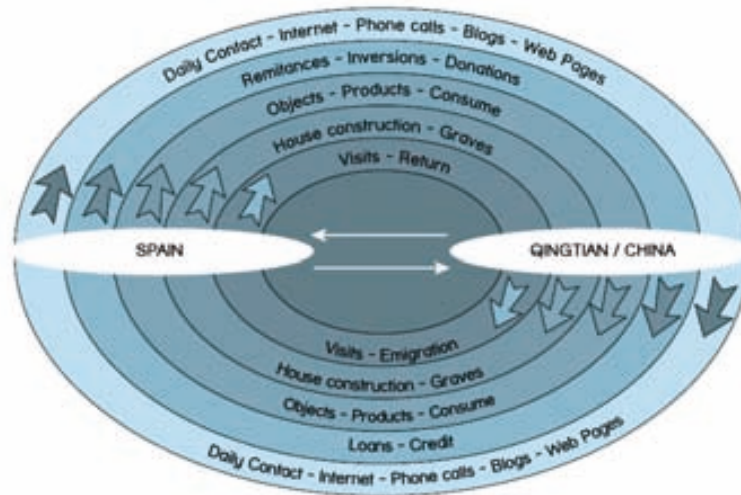


Figure 19. Diagram Bidirectional transnational practices Qingtian- Spain

The diagram's horizontal and circular paths express the bidirectional nature of these practices. The way I empirically discern and later develop conceptually the logic of the transnational links between Qingtian and Spain is essentially bidirectional. This bidirectional nature may well sound too emphatic or even redundant when talking about transnationalism but, as I have pointed out above, too often the stress and weight of these transnational links are only assigned to one side, generally to migrants in the "sending" countries, without completing the circle that embodies one of the most relevant characteristics of transnational experiences, which is its correlation or simultaneity value (Levitt and Schiller 2004; Tsuda 2012).

It has not always been easy to achieve this goal, but it has been my intention to underscore the circular and bidirectional agency of the transnational ties whose outcomes imply consequences and impact on both sides of the circulation, in these cases in Qingtian and the various places in Spain where the more concrete practices are grounded.

Of course my fieldwork was mostly carried out in China so in some parts I couldn't close the circle and some segments of the logic presented in the diagram are missing. I always tried, however, to enquire into the agency and impact of a given practice on both sides of the circulation, in Spain and in China. Sometimes I could do that without physically moving from China, sometimes I took advantage of my

visits to Spain. Furthermore, even though the fieldwork was mostly undertaken in China my informants were migrants coming from Spain and thus their oral accounts and my observation of their practices have also been a good way of approaching both sides while remaining largely at one of the bidirectional nodes.

For each one of the concrete transnational practices analyzed, therefore, I always tried to include actors and content from both sides. Thus when I refer to daily contact and information (circle one), objects circulation and places (circles three and four), and visits and physical movement of the bodies (circle 5), I cover the bidirectional movements, both those that go from Spain to China and in the opposite direction.

This is why I want to stress that the aim of this chapter is to analyze different itineraries, mobilities and transnational practices *from and to* Qingtian.

Firstly I will present the less visible transnational practices (first circle on the diagram), which are those that are performed more frequently and have a strong relationship with and impact on other practices linking the “online” and “offline” dimensions while not being seen as independent realities. This section will address the impact of virtual links based on the new communications technologies in all their different formats. I will start by looking at the daily connections maintained by using new internet-based technology and how this has transformed the traditional method of long-distance communications from a decade ago. Next I will analyze a concrete case study of how the use of new communication technologies are used to enact a popular religious ritual that enjoys a longstanding reputation and practice among Qingtianese. This example brings the simultaneity element of transnationalism to an end, and expresses how old and traditional transnational practices are not only being continued from a distance but are being intensified by means of virtual and long-distance communication.

In the second section, the next degree of materialization will be analyzed through the agency of objects in the places where they are emplaced (the diagram’s third and fourth circles). Here I will examine the outcomes of the money circulation represented in the fourth circle, given that remittances, investments, donations and loans are physically materialized in houses, business premises, schools and so forth. The logic of the money circulation will be illustrated by the cases I have chosen from the multiple circumstances detected during the fieldwork.

The first example of embodied mobilities will focus on analyzing a traditional ritual that encompasses the donations of large candles to the temple that is most relevant to the Qingtianese. The transnational meaning of these objects and the ways in which the ritual is performed entail a symbolic and object-mediate migrant presence in their hometown. The combined analysis of the virtual and corporeal transnational ritual practices will lead into a deeper look at the local temples as concrete translocalities.

The second example will look at how mobility is expressed and embodied in Qingtian through the circulation of objects that involve the transit of symbols, ideas and social practices. I will present the agency of the gifts and goods that are sent in

both directions through a number of channels and by adopting different social values, from the more practical to the most symbolic. The analysis of these objects will be linked with their emplacement in houses, which is the third in my set of case studies on transnational embodied mobilities and the fourth circle on the diagram. Here I will look at the context of Qingtian's building activities and examine the houses in their materiality, as being an embodiment of the transnational links.

The circulation of different types of objects (gastronomic products, medicines, popular culture items, ritual objects, etc.), their location in different spaces (houses and temples) and the way people related with them, also helps shape a solidification of transnational practices. By focusing our gaze on the objects and the spaces where they circulate, interact and express their value, we will be able to understand the relationships between various social actors involved in mobility: migrants, returnees and non-migrants. In this aspect there are two crucial theoretical perspectives. One is the perspective led by Appadurai (1986) on the social lives of things and the analysis of objects and products in their materiality. The other is the methodological approach to transnational links through a space lens (Bivand 2011; Gielis 2009).

In order to complete the exposition of the analytical model developed and used in this research here we should advance that the third part of the dissertation (chapters 5 and 6) will bring us to the most physical and solidified transnational links through migrants' presence in Qingtian and the Qingtianese who do not migrate to Spain, the diagram's fifth vector. Visits and, I would also argue, contemporary return practices are themselves corporeal and tangible transnational practices by means of their physical movement.

It's important to emphasize that these diverse transnational activities and exercises are not exclusive but are, indeed, strongly interrelated and entangled.

For analytical purposes I will present transnational practices separately according to their different degree of embodiment as a way to disentangle and stress the significance of different expressions and agencies of nowadays mobilities and develop a method to observe, grasp and analyze how different movements related to things, ideas and people are integrated and take part in the nowadays transnational practices. Hence, in each section we will see how virtual, object-mediated and physical movement of bodies are in fact entangled in the empirical life and are mutually implemented.

In this sense the analytic model I present here shares similarities with the five interdependent "mobilities" defined by Urry (2007:47-48). Beyond the concrete mobilities he identifies what I want to reinforce is Urry's emphasis "on the complex assemblage between these different mobilities that may make and contingently maintain social connections across varied and multiplied distances" (Urry 2007:47-48).

The ways in which the different transnational practices represented in the diagram are interrelated vary historically. Hence, it's important to provide a diachronic perspective for each one of the practices. Invisible information flows, object-based remittances and physical mobility of people are nothing new in Qingtian society. The comparison with previous social practices might sometimes be the clue to understanding the present through its continuities and variations with the past given. Moreover it's important to bear in mind that it is common in China to "use the past to serve the present"⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ Expression from the title of the book edited by Unger (1993) and quoted by Beltrán Antolín (2003:35).

Chapter 4.Virtual mobilities: Reshaping social relations and historical practices

“Nothing seems more archaic than the futures of the past”.
(Cresswell 2010:29)

In the theoretical discussion of transnationalism and mobilities we have already stressed the caveats of these approaches when novelty is overemphasized and transnational links are used as a object of differentiation between old and new global orders and migration settings. Internet and virtual contacts are the benchmark of this stress on novelty.

Communication networks and information exchange are characteristic elements of migration from a diachronic perspective. There has always been the desire and the need to establish channels of communication and information distribution between the places of origin and settlement. These wills have been materialized, with greater or lesser success and intensity, depending on the technological possibilities and the socio-political context of the countries involved. As expressed Kambouri and Parasanalou (2010:10) “from letters to telephones and from mobile phones to Internet possibilities, communication networks seem to play central role in migrant lives”.

The analysis of the impact of new communication technologies and information - which that affects the whole of society - is especially relevant in the case of migrants who have historically maintained links, relationships and practices involving transnational flows of information, people, objects, ideas, symbols and capital across national borders. New technologies, and especially Internet, have become increasingly popular tools used to engage in transnational practices.

Recognizing the existence of transnational links and mobilities throughout history, different scholars have emphasized how the development and use of the internet imply changes in the magnitude of overseas participation in their society of origin (Chen 2006; Cheong and Poon 2009; Hiller and Franz 2004). In this chapter we will see that it is also true in the other way around, and that internet imply an intensification of non-migrants participant in the lives of their relatives and friends living abroad.

The next question should be: what is the impact of these changes in technology on migrancy networks and transnational involvement for both migrants and non-migrants? In a way, we might think that it involves new ways of doing old things. However we might also consider, as Vertovec points out quoting Landolot (2001:220), that “a quantitative change results in a qualitative difference in the order of things” (Vertovec 2007:151).

In his study on the impact of the internet on transnational Chinese entrepreneurship, Chen warns us that while modern transportation and communications technologies are always present in the theoretical discourses, there has been little systematic research on how immigrants actually use these technologies to participate in transnational activities (Chen 2006:1). The empirical case studies I present below would contribute to the empirical body of knowledge on internet use in everyday transnational practices.

On the one hand, Internet is used by migrants as a tool of "private" communication through chat and videoconferencing programs that increase the chances of being in constant contact with people who are geographically dispersed. The uses of internet in private communication and networks will be reflected in the first two sections related to "virtual visits" and the way traditional ritual practices are performed from Spain.

On the other hand, Internet is also used as a tool for the construction of public spaces of representation, communication and socialization through forums and blogs where the local and transnational scopes of migration are reflected. The use of Internet as public esphere of social interaction of migrants will be illustrated by the Analisis of the most popular website among Chiense people in Spain.

4.1 From letters to Weixin: The development of a virtual space between Qingtian and Spain

Given that most of the Qingtianese migrated from the beginning of the 1980s we are not talking about a long-term historical frame. However, the changes are relevant in a country like China where analogic telephone calls and even email are already regarded as old-fashioned, traditional technologies for contacting people. The situation in Qingtian is not an exception and I would argue that digital communications technology, and its widespread use across different generations and social classes, is even more prominent in Qingtian than in other regions of China.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when the contemporary chain migration towards Europe began, few telephone lines were operational in Qingtian and, at the other pole of the circulation, migrants' access to public telephones in Europe with its expensive international call rates prevented them from using this system. International communications technology could not rely on a strong infrastructure in Spain either, and international calls were not common practice at that moment in time. As many migrants remember and have told me, letters were the main way of staying in touch with Qingtian, with unusual phone calls reserved for special occasions.

Qingtian County's improvement of communications technology dates back to the latter part of the 1990s and involved contributions from international migrants. The

impact of migration on Qingtian resulted in a faster process of telecommunications development than in other rural areas in the province. International migrants were a key motor of transformation in this sense through their investments and donations to construct infrastructures that would broaden international telephone connections in their hometown. As a result, in 1998 Fangshan became the first township in Zhejiang province where all 20 villages had international phone connections (Zhang 2007:76). Demand created swifter development and supply.

Nowadays prepaid cards and international phone calls, which were developed between the end of the 1990s and the 2000s, have been almost totally replaced by the use of online communications programs based on computers and mobile phones.

The internet industry in China has developed very rapidly since 2000 and is changing social relationships as well as self-representations (Wang 2013). Chinese companies have developed their own digital communication software. QQ is a popular messaging and video-conferencing program, but in the last few years the mobile phone-based program called Weixin in its original Chinese version and WeChat in its international English version, has fast become the main communication tool in China covering a different range of possibilities that, in our field of interest, goes from simultaneous transnational communication to the representation of mobility throughout the "social wall" were user post images, reflections and links that appear as diaries of their daily lives.

The introduction of digital technology into all the interstices of Chinese society is conspicuous in Qingtian. Nowadays the 3G signal is reachable from any area in rural Qingtian and most households have an internet connection contracted specifically to speak to and see their relatives who live abroad.

Most Qingtianese migrants in Spain have access to these new technologies based on mobile phones, and this is also true of Qingtian where people from different generations and across different economic and cultural backgrounds have daily access to internet technologies. It's not at all unusual to see old women and men using a computer or mobile phone to reach their families in Europe. Low-income families and individuals are also equipped with digital communications technology for the same purpose.⁶⁵

Different scholars have asserted how new digital communications technologies enable migrants to take part simultaneously in the social life of both the host and the origin countries (Chen 2006; Hiller and Franz 2004). This well-known assessment finds its counterpart in the plurality of digital communications programs and software used by Qingtianese migrants to maintain contact with these two spheres and societies that merge as a continuum in their daily lives.

During fieldwork I could see how Qingtianese migrants used the abovementioned Chinese programs such as QQ and Weixin to contact co-ethnics in Qingtian, Spain

⁶⁵ This phenomenon is widespread across different localities in China as shown by the ethnographic articles published by Wang in her blog that show the interaction of Chinese migrants and low-income communities with digital technology: Bytes of China <http://bytesofchina.com/>

and other countries and nodes of transnational networks. On the other hand, they used similarly purposed Western programs such as Skype, Messenger or Whatsapp to create and maintain social relations with non-Chinese people in the countries where they have links or have settled. Li Minghuan (1999b) uses the sentence "we need two worlds" to emphasize the transnational logic of migrants' social capital between sending and receiving societies. And I argue that, in order to keep this continuity across the "two-worlds" and transfer the social capital between them, migrants nowadays need "two-software" technology: Chinese-produced applications to be in touch with co-ethnic (whether if they are located in China or in Spain) and American-designed ones to contact with non-Chinese people in Spain or other nodes integrating their transnational trajectories. In other words, the relationship and links with these two groups are experienced and represented on a daily basis by using two types of digital communications programs. Hence, the multiple attachments and transnational social life of migrants are thus expressed in the multiple digital programs used in their daily lives.

The internet is a tool for private and semi-private communications through chat and video-conference programs that increase the chances of being in continuous and simultaneous contact with people who are geographically distant, as well as recovering or creating new networks. It is also used to build public spaces of communication and socialization via forums and blogs. The interaction by Chinese migrants in Spain on different Chinese-language websites is a good example of these practices.

4.1.1 From near and far: Virtual visits and bidirectional involvement.

Simultaneous contacts between people located in far-apart geographical spaces have transformed the social relations and involvement of Qingtian migrants across different countries, as well as the participation of those people who stayed behind in their friends' and relatives' lives abroad.

Nowadays Qingtianese living in Spain, likewise any people who live apart from their relatives, have the opportunity to speak, see and virtually interact in a daily basis with their relatives in Qingtian.

By "virtual-visiting" Qingtian migrants have access to the images and sounds from their places of origin and are involved in their relatives' practical life. Thus their hometown is rarely regarded as an elusive, far away reality, since the new communications devices enable them to keep a "close" track of changes happening "far away".

Equally the internet and daily contact with relatives abroad have also become a part of everyday life for people in Qingtian who did not migrate. The communications and "virtual visits" are not unidirectional. Through these virtual meetings and contacts not only do migrants have input about their hometown, but people in Qingtian can also see, hear and get knowledge about their relatives' and

acquaintances' lives in Spain. We are talking about a bidirectional process with feedback from both parts even if it is generally only the first part that is emphasized.

This bidirectional involvement has led to a less remote perception of their hometown by Qingtianese living abroad, and a more realistic image of migrants' lives in Europe by people still in Qingtian.

The following extract from my fieldwork might serve as an example. After witnessing the virtual meeting between a 55-year-old woman in Qingtian and her daughter living in Spain, the woman told me what she had learnt about her daughter's life and how life is for migrants in Spain from the webcam she had been using for the past five years.

"Today I am relieved to see that [her daughter and her son-in-law] are living in their own apartment and that soon they can take Xiaomei [her granddaughter] back to Spain. When I first saw the place she was living when she arrived, it was a small room shared with other people, you know, so, yes, then I felt the hard life (*ku*) of my daughter and all the people living in the same situation. Now things are better but I know it is a hard life" (Fieldwork notes, Qingtian, July 2011).

This transnational family keeps in continuous contact using computer-based programs and they are aware of the changes and transformation in each other's lives. The three-year-old girl born in Spain and brought to Qingtian to be with her grandmother is often positioned in front of the webcam so her mother can see how she is growing. During the conversation the two women were discussing and preparing a trip to China in order to reunite the three-year-old girl with her parents in Spain.

During fieldwork I realized how familiar Qingtianese people are with the lives, problems, situations and achievements of their close relatives in Spain and this corresponds in large part to the impact of those daily connections provided by long-distance communications technology. They even take part in the decision-making process to the same degree as migrants have a voice in practical things involving Qingtian life. This is especially the case when the nuclear family or the first level extended family are located in different settings.

First, what I am arguing here is that, due to the wide spread of these simultaneous communications systems, migrants' involvement in Qingtian life has increased while, at the same time, the level of participation of people who remained in China in their relatives' lives abroad is also deepened. This pragmatic involvement will be illustrated in the next chapter related to transnational ritual activities.

However these online meetings and virtual visits do not replace in-person contact, and neither imply a decrease in local interaction. As we have seen with the example of the conversation between the three generations of women from one transnational family, the information about local places is relevant and, at the end of the virtual session, the communication is aimed at the final steps in moving the little girl back to Spain. The transference and relationship between online and offline spheres are specially relevant in the network building that I present in the next section.

The use of online communication technology and the virtual space it might create, is not an autonomous ambit of socialization separate from the physical world. On the contrary, as we shall see throughout the dissertation, online activities and contacts have a clear impact on physically embodied transnational practices. Being “there” and meeting “the others” in-person matters and, as pointed out by Chen (2006:5) “cyberspace is not an isolated place segregated from the physical place”.

This aspect leads me to underline two main elements for the empirical case at hand. First, no matter how deeply and how often they might be “connected” through digital communication methods, the physical person-to-person experience between social actors located in geographically distant places is crucial and brings about different outcomes.

Secondly, different localities stand out as relevant social realities for people immersed in this global mobility circulation and online socialization. The ever-growing use of digital technology and the powerful emergence of online socialization spaces have sometimes been associated with the domination of the global in detriment to the local. Similarly, the emphasis on transnationalism has sometimes brought about an imagining of migrants living in a non-concrete space and attributing the online space as a metaphor of their globalized/deterritorialized situation. It is true that Qingtianese people are living a mobile life, but their daily experience is formed by a number of concrete physical realities conferred by global flows, communications and several other dimensions.

Instead of reinforcing the dichotomy between the local and the global – as well as the dichotomy between the traditional and the modern, or the on-line versus the off-line worlds - the fieldwork underscored how the global and the local, or the mobility and dwelling meets and constructs each other.

The online socialization space and exchange of information meet in and enhance local places and serves to migrants to see Qingtian and to local Qingtianese to grasp the localities where their relatives or friends live. Besides, as we have seen in the case below, the purpose of most of these online contacts is addressed at the eventual physical encounters between the actors that take part in them in the given localities. The articulation between the online and offline space is a crucial component in modern-day transnational life and activities.

4.1.2 Transnational ritual practices: *Qiuqian* 求签 across borders

The Qingzhen Chansi 清真禪寺 – that from now on I will refer as the Qingzhen temple - is located in the heart of the Fushan rural district (阜山乡).⁶⁶

During the last twenty years the communications and transportation between Fushan and Hecheng have greatly improved thanks mainly to the donations for infrastructures from overseas Chinese. Thus the narrow mountain path that once used to connect Fushan with the town of Hecheng - keeping the area rather isolated - is nowadays a paved road that facilitates the influx of an increasing number of visitors from Qingtian town and other close cities of Zhejiang province to the temple.

Qingzhen temple is a relational place located in a transnational social space, and a central node in the transnational religious links between the Qingtianese living overseas and their hometown society.

Qingzhen temple was the first temple in Qingtian County to be rebuilt and re-established after the Cultural Revolution and it was also one of the first in Zhejiang province (Yuan 1996)⁶⁷. Originally the temple was named Qingzhen Tang (清真堂) and it was a Daosit temple devoted mainly to the worship of the local god Li Mi (李泌), also known as “the white clothes prime minister” (*baiyi chengxiang* 白衣丞相). When the temple was rebuilt and officially registered in 1984, the name was changed, removing the word *tang* (堂) that is usually associated with non-Buddhist Chinese temples, and adding the character *chan* (禪), which linked it to Buddhism. This name changing and the introduction of Buddhist images reproduce the standards of the official recuperation of religious sites and practices in China during the 1980s.

Beginning in the late 1970s, China’s state policies shifted from suppressing religion to recognizing its legitimacy (Ashiwa 2000; Dean 1993; Feuchtwang 2010; Potter 2003). However, these new policies were grounded in a highly evolutionistic perspective and thereby excluded from the category of religion those activities related to local gods, fortune tellers, and spirit mediums, which were devalued under the term “superstition” (迷信 *mixin*) (Ashiwa 2000:21). Changing attitudes towards religion were first officially manifested in the document issued in 1982 by the Communist Party declaring the protection of the five religions allowed in China: Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism (Feuchtwang 2010; Potter 2003). However, the Daoist association was the last to be formed and recognized because of its close links to the local ritual activities that were referred to as “superstition” and “popular beliefs” (Feuchtwang 2010:180).

⁶⁶ We have described and analyzed Fushan in relation to the primary schools see chapter 3.3.3

⁶⁷ In his research about the revival of temples in Fujian, Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces during the 1980s, Yuan(1996) lists Qingzhen Chansi among the eight temples rebuilt between 1984 and 1987 in Zhejiang province. Except for the Qingzhen Chansi of Qingtian and the Wanshou Temple of Changshan, the other six temples belong to Yiwu.

Consequently the introduction of Buddhist gods, and applying for Buddhist affiliation, has been a common strategy to skip the official prohibitions on worshipping local divinities and performing popular rituals in the local temples of southeast China (Feuchtwang, 2010; Yang, 2004). Thus, although Qingzheng Chansi was officially registered as a Buddhist temple, we find a coexistence of Daoist and Buddhist images around the local divinity Li Mi, who is the central and most worshipped god of the temple.

The present structure of the Qingzheng Chansi is the result of the rebuilding process started in 1980 that has enlarged the temple to more than twice its original size. As is the case with other temples in southeast China, the funds for the rebuilding came mainly from international migrants' donations (Ashiwa 2000; Dean 1993; Tan 2007c). It is important to note that the first donations for the temple's restoration coincided with the first relevant flows of new migration from Qingtian to Europe. Thus, donations to the temple were the new migrants' first contribution to their hometown, along with the funding for Fushan Middle School's renovation.

Even though the temple has been completely restored the donations continue to come in and every year new plaques listing the name and the amount of each donation are included on the temple walls. The donations are grouped according to the countries from where they are sent and, not surprisingly, Spain and Italy are the top two points of origin.



Figure 10. Qingzhen temple, Fushan.

Nowadays, overseas donations are the main source of finance for new local government plans to increase tourism in Fushan and the Qingzhenchan temple is promoted as one of the main tourist attractions of Qingtian County.

Over the last few years, the donations have been used to restore the surroundings of the temple, which includes a recently built square with reliefs of the life of Li Mi, and a large canteen attached to a reception office. These new constructions, which are being carried out by dint of a strong cooperation between the temple and the local government, reveal how transnational donations to improve and embellish the hometown are still channeled mainly through the Qingzhen temple, which has been

historically the main institution for collecting overseas donations intended for development of the area.

Regarding the transnational links between later generations of Chinese migrants in Malaysia with their “ancestral hometown” in Shishan (Fujian) Tan Chee-Beng (2007c:88) has argued how even though *qiaoxiang* areas are nowadays developing economically and some people are wondering whether donations are still needed for infrastructures, they keep on donating to restore old temples or build new ones. Even if we are talking about totally different historical processes, the relevance of ritual and religious involvement as a way of channeling economic participation with the hometowns is relevant for this case study.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork I visited several old and new temples in different villages in Qingtian County where I always found a visual reference to commemorate the donations of Qingtianese people in Spain and other European countries. Taoyuan Township’s sumptuous, newly built temple illustrates this involvement of international migrants with the construction of new religious sites that are designed and promoted mainly as development infrastructure and tourist attractions. In the figure 20 we can see, for example, the detail of the inscription next to the main God of the temple showing the donor resides in Spain. Religious and hometown attachment, Fushan temple’s list of donations and the plaques on the new Taoyuan temple are relevant emblems of social prestige for the donors.



Figure 21. Taoyuan newly built temple, Qingtian

However, even though new temples are emerging in almost every village in Qingtian, people clearly know which are the powerful spiritual sites that have gained a good reputation over the years and these are the places where they go to ask for advice and protection from specific gods.

It is important to note that the area of influence of Qingzhen temple is not limited to the geographical boundaries of Fushan. Although local divinities are considered the protectors of a concrete geographical territory - in this case the villages forming Fushan district - and have the power to protect all the domestic groups of a given area (Feuchtwang 2010:190), it is not uncommon to find people from other Qingtian County localities or from the nearby area of Wenzhou going to the temple to give donations and ask for protection and guidance from the main divinity: the local god Li Mi. When I asked these people about their reasons for making the journey to Fushan instead of going to the local temples in their respective areas, I received the same answer: "Li Mi has a very strong *ling* 灵". In this context the concept *ling* refers to the capacity of the divinity for effective responses to the prayers for protection and guidance (Feuchtwang 1991:190)⁶⁸.

Li Mi and Qingzhen Chansi are surrounded by a special efficacy response (*ling*) and reputation respectively, and therefore are emerging as a major local deity and temple in the Wenzhou-Qingtian area. This reputation persists among the diaspora, and the temple's area of influence extends beyond the local and provincial level, effectively encompassing transnational involvement from the migration countries, including Spain.

During the visits to their hometown, some migrants go to the temple individually to worship the local god and practice divination rituals, while others organize longer and more elaborate family rituals that can last all day. However, migrants' links and participation with the temple are not restricted to occasional physical visits. The ethnographic fieldwork has revealed other kinds of transnational practices that don't require any physical movement, and are performed from a physical distance.

4.1.2.1 Invisible religious links: Kinship mediated long-distance divination practices

While discussing the role of overseas Qingtianese in today's activity at Qingzhen temple, the temple manager, who has a daughter in Madrid, told me the following:

"We receive more and more visits from "huaqiao. Now it's more convenient to come back than ever before, it's cheaper and faster. Nowadays a lot of huaqiao come back for New Year and also during the summer holidays. I am too old to travel, if not I would easily go to Spain and stay with my daughter and grandson for a while. But anyway nowadays... now it is different, I can talk to and see them every night using my laptop". (Interview with the manager of the temple, April 2011).

⁶⁸ According to Feuchtwang (2010:82), a divinity that is considered to be efficaciously responsive has obtained a "local following after being proved over the years". Feuchtwang's analysis of local temples gives important insight into the social and historical construction of the *ling* concept, which has a major influence, along with the notion of reputation, in the construction and vicissitudes of a given temple.

This 80-year-old man's response illustrates two basic but crucial points regarding current transnational links between the hometown and migrant communities. First, the facilities for regular return trips to Qingtian imply migrants' occasional religious involvement with the local temple during their return trips. Furthermore, the temple manager's reference to the daily communication with his relatives in Spain using the internet finds its counterpart in the migrants' regular participation in the temple in spite of their geographical remoteness.

We are talking about a participation that does not require any physical displacement and that is performed between Spain and Qingtian through the kinship network, using traditional communications systems such as long-distance phone calls, as well as online technology.

The religious links originating in Spain and reaching Fushan temple by means of regular contact with relatives are directed mainly towards the goal of the migrants seeking guidance from the local god, Li Mi, in their daily lives. The divination ritual executed by the method of bamboo drawing rods (*qiuqian* 求签) in front of Li Mi's altar is strongly integrated in the Fushan temple, just as it is in other local temples in southeast China.



Figure 22. Qingzhen temple's man altar with the drawing roots

It's not only local people who go to the temple to ask about their future, but Qingtian migrants from Spain do so, too. Even though Buddhist and Daoist temples have been built in those cities in Spain where there is a higher density of Chinese people, they would rather look for the guidance and protection of Qingtian's local gods because their power has already been proven, and their effectiveness garnered them a strong reputation over the years.

The ritual's conventional performance implies communication between the person who requests the divination service and the divinity, normally mediated by a ritual specialist who interprets the god's answer. The questions put to the divinity include personal issues from everyday life, and that is why, even though migrants take the opportunity provided by their return visits to address some questions to the god, the divinatory practices are mostly performed from Spain, which is where they face

the everyday situations that require seeking advice from the divinity. According to Feuchtwang (1991), this divination practice implies a normalization and externalization of the uncertainty about the future of the person who is making the question.

During fieldwork I encountered different cases of long-distance divination practices whereby migrants sought the guidance of the local god in Fushan through their kinship network. The Qingtian migrants use the divinatory practices to inquire about their daily lives in Spain whenever they face difficulties or have to take important decisions, mostly regarding business and financial matters such as starting, changing, expanding or closing a business. The migrants consider that the local gods and temples, and especially the Qingzhen Chansi, have a strong spiritual power (*ling*) to solve these practical and everyday matters.

The broad reach of long-distance communications systems based on the internet (chat and video-conferencing programs) makes it easier and quicker to address questions to Li Mi, the local god in Fushan, by contacting relatives in Qingtian. Through this process, migrants regularly reach out to the local temple without travelling or changing their physical location. Thus the impact of new communications technology on transnational links plays a central role in the participation of Qingtianese migrants in the temple.

Here, an example of this transnational divinatory practice will help elucidate the logic and process of this transnational involvement.

A 35-year-old woman born in Fushan who works as a teacher in a primary school in Hecheng, explained how her cousin had recently contacted her from Madrid to ask for divination mediation before making the final decision about his change in business. The young man was planning to close the small bar where he had been working for the previous seven years, to open a wholesale shop in an industrial area on the outskirts of the city.

Even though the woman stressed that she did not believe in the gods and the divinatory practices, she agreed to go to the temple and ask the question on her cousin's behalf. The answer was positive, but the woman tried to dissuade him because she was aware of another close relative having a similar business in the same area and did not want them to compete with each other.

This example shows how the transnational divination ritual encompasses a bidirectional flow of information that is illustrated in the figure



Figure 23. *Qiuqian across borders. Bidirectional flow of information*

The first flow of communication, originating in Spain, is addressed to the god, Li Mi, through relatives who will mediate the divinatory practice. The question is supposed to be as concrete as possible, thus through this first step the relatives in Qingtian expand their knowledge about Qingtianese lives in Spain, acquiring information about their business activities, problems and financial situation.

The second flow of information goes from Fushan temple to Spain, once again through contact with relatives. In this second and final step of the information's circulatory flow, the migrants get the divinity's answer as well as the advice and comments of their relatives who act as mediators in the ritual. These transnational divinatory practices add at least one step of intervention to the conventional execution of the ritual, which is usually mediated only by the religious specialist who interprets the divinity's answer.

Even though some people interpret the results of the divination for themselves, in most cases they do go for the interpretation of a ritual specialist before reporting back to Spain.

Through the mediation of the divinatory ritual, the woman in the example mentioned above obtains information about her cousin's business situation in Spain, and at the same time uses her role as a mediator to convey her opinions and points of view based on her prior knowledge about other relatives' business activities in Madrid. Therefore these transnational ritual practices originating from Spain and addressed to the Qingzhen temple in Fushan involve a bidirectional flow of information and knowledge that affects both the migrants and the relatives who stayed behind.

The two-way flow not only implies the involvement of Qingtianese migrants in their hometown, but also generates a participation of those still in China in their relatives' daily lives in Spain. In this sense the divinatory practices imply the simultaneously character of transnationalism as referred to by Tsuda (2012), or the "simultaneous engagement of migrants towards home and host country" as expressed by Levitt and Schiller (2004:1012).

It has been said repeatedly that the hometown is no longer a memory supported by occasional contact, but that nowadays it can be an intimate aspect of daily life due to the choices available for maintaining contact (Hiller and Franz 2004:735). However the same level of analysis has not been applied to those who have not migrated having the chance to be part of their relatives' lives overseas. With this example of the transnational ritual undertaken telephonically and via the internet we have seen how the involvement is reciprocal and how non-immigrants are also part of life abroad due to new communications technology.

The transnational divinatory practices, articulated through these invisible and circular links between Qingtian and Spain, illustrate the relevance of the local temples as powerful spiritual sites for Qingtianese living abroad, and show how the area of influence of Qingzhen Chansi temple extends beyond the local and the provincial levels and embraces the social realities and networks related to the countries where Qingtianese migrants live. The migrants' involvement is mediated by new means of communications and technology that open up this local place, which is filled with networks, experiences, and social realities associated with different localities. Traditional local practices and sites are thus being *glocalized* and updated due to two elements: the presence of international networks and the use of digital communications.

4.1.3 Public virtual spaces: Meeting the global and the local.

In this section we will focus on the use of the internet as a public space for information creation and distribution, as well as a virtual space of social interaction through the analysis of one of the most popular websites for Chinese people living in Spain, which is the Chinese language website Xihua. Apart from the international news and newspaper facilities, what I will examine is the large and diverse interaction in the website's forum and its impact on local and transnational levels.

- ***Origins and structure of Xihua: Heterogeneity of Chinese in Spain***

The Xihua Forum currently has more than 10,000 registered users and is one of the reference sites for people of Chinese origin linked in one way or another with Spain. It is important to note that necessary to register to comment or post information but not to enter the forums and read the information.

The beginnings of this website coincide with the personal blog that a migrant from Qingtian created when he arrived in Spain to work in a relatives' restaurants. He started writing his blog in 2001 and the post dealt mainly with the life in Spain and with Spanish language. Seeing that the items included in the blog received more and more views and comments, he decided to open a small Forum in his personal blog, which he called Xihua.

The social interaction mediated by this blog led to the creation of cooperation networks among Chinese people living in different localities in Spain. From this first blog a small team decided to go forwards and they created the current Xihua website in 2003.

The place of origin in China and different migration experiences of the three administrators of the page, reflect the increasingly heterogeneous population of Chinese origin in Spain. The creator of the first blog came to Madrid from Qingtian in the 1990s to work in a family business when he was 20. The second person who joined the project is the daughter of one of the first families who came to Spain in the late 1970s. And the latest incorporation to the team, is a young man from northern China who arrived in 2005 to pursue master studies in Barcelona and, therefore, reflects the most recent profile of Chinese people in Spain.

The heterogeneity of the migration trajectories of the three administrators is reflected in the diversity of topics of the Forum of Xihua website, which is structured through the 39 sub-forums divided into three main sections. The first part includes practical information of general interest intended for all users. The second section serves as a great interactive bulletin board with information of interest for different user's profiles. And the last section, which is titled "entertainment", is a broad discussion forum to share hobbies, concerns and discussions on different changing topics.

Each sub-forum has a moderator, usually a user with a high degree of participation in the website. The moderators take turns in their roles to balance their responsibility in the forum with work and family issues, as well as their visits to China. It is a website built by its users, and the income from advertising is used to cover the costs of maintaining the site (servers, providers, technicians). The forum content is woven through the information, thoughts, and comments that are daily added by its users.

The Xihua forum is a space for discussion and exchange of information that meets the local and transnational realities as two sides of the same coin. On the one side, the foro is a space for information circulation and social interaction at the local level, involving different Spanish localities and encouraging links between ethnic Chinese residing in one place in Spain. On the other side it is also a virtual space involving and mediating in the transnational practices such as the circulation of information, objects or people.

- ***Local and transnational scope of virtual spaces***

Locally, users set active links for different reasons such as looking for a job, selling or buying items or doing business, getting legal advice, dating, making friends, sharing interests, language exchanges, etc.

But the forum it is not only an area of on-line interaction, it also fosters the creation of social relations in the physical space. Regular meetings are held to participate in activities organized by the community in different cities in Spain. Whereas some of the gatherings are integrated only by Chinese people, the forum is also used to inform and participate in broader activities involving the local society where they are living. The conversation initiated by the post informing everyone about the 2011 celebration of the festival of La Merce in Barcelona, included a long list of comments that show how people took part in various of the festival activities.



Figure 24. Image of the Post informing of La Merce festival in Barcelona, 2011 screen grab of Xihua forums

Alongside this domain of local participation the forum is also used as a platform to carry out transnational practices such as circulation of objects and bodies and also adds relevant discussions on the feasibility of return. The impact of the forum on these practices will be analyzed in the chapters related to these practices. Here it is important, however, to mention the transformation in information flows between China and Spain related to migration possibilities.

Although until recently most people arriving in Spain had obtained information and tips on the procedures to follow through kinship and affinity networks established in Spain, we are currently facing a new situation where students, professionals or business people are arriving from different places in China and not only from qiaoxiang. Since they do not have a prior network of contacts they go to the forum for information about their special circumstances.

The circulation of information for people who plan to migrate to Spain is an important element in the Forum that raise a especial interest from the users already settled in Spain. Throughout this information they compare, explain and reflect on the situation of China and Spain. It should be noted that whereas the vast majority of connections to Xihua are made from Spain and despite the problems found by administrators of the page to still be present in the Chinese cyberspace requesting information on employment and business opportunities by people considering migration to Spain is a increasingly reality that raise a special interest from forum users.

Chapter 5. Embodied mobilities: Objects and places

“Human agency is exercised
within the material world”.
(Gell 1998)

Virtual mobilities are intercepted and mixed with more material mobilities such as those that are mediated by objects, or those that imply individuals' physical movement. In this chapter we will analyze the object-mediated transnational practices and in the third part we will pay greater attention to the circulation and movement of people.

Transnational ties and practices in Qingtian are expressed and embodied in concrete material support, particularly in objects or commodities (ritual objects, luggage items and by sending parcels, etc.) and in the places or buildings where they were emplaced (houses, temples, restaurants, schools, streets etc.).

These objects and buildings - as properties of material culture - might be considered representations of transnational ties. Beyond a merely representational function, however, in this chapter we will see how the meaning of the objects and things related to transnational practices in Qingtian play a key role in these activities and consequently in the Qingtian – Spain migration culture. They do have an agency and a capacity to act beyond their representation value. By focusing our gaze on the objects, their circulation, and the places where the objects are emplaced, interact and express their value, we will be able to understand the relationships between various social actors involved in the mobility: migrants, returnees and non-migrants.

In this chapter we will look more closely at the third and fourth circles of the diagram (see figure 19) which correspond to the bidirectional transnational movements between Qingtian and Spain embodied in the objects in their materiality and in places as relational entities.

5.1 Transnational candles and the Qingzhen temple as a translocality

The invisible links mediated by kinship networks, and articulated through the long-distance divination practices were analyzed in the previous section (4.1.2). In this part we will see how the involvement of overseas migrants in the Qingzhen temple can also be traced by a more corporeal means, through the donation of the monumental candles called *qianjin zhu* (千斤烛) to the local god, Li Mi⁶⁹.

5.1.1 The embodied presence of migrants in the temple through ritual objects: An analysis of monumental candles in their materiality.

The covered area in the courtyard situated in front of the altar to Li Mi holds the monumental candles that can weigh between 300 and 500 kilograms and can reach almost two meters in height. The price of the candles goes from 2000 to almost 6000 RMB⁷⁰ depending on their weight and dimensions and are mostly ordered and purchased by Fushanese living in different European countries.



Figure 25. Pavilion of the monumental candles, Qingzhen temple, Fushan.

Although the candles are normally acquired for New Year, to ask for general protection including health, business as well as kinship and emotional matters, whenever people come up against specific problems, they will also buy and donate a candle to ask for the intercession of the god on their behalf.

The overseas migrants are closely involved in the local tradition of purchasing large candles to seek protection from the divinity. Some candles are bought and donated to the local divinity during the return visits at New Year but most of them are ordered from Europe through the relatives who remain in Qingtian. There are migrants who do not go back to Qingtian regularly, but who continue to purchase a candle annually through their kinship networks to be placed in front of Li Mi's altar,

⁶⁹ The contextualization and relevance of the Qingzhenchan temple and the local god Li Mi have been presented and analyzed in chapter 4.1.2.

⁷⁰ The equivalent to 230 to 700 euros.

or do so when they face difficulties in their daily lives and want to ask for the god's intercession.

Traditionally the candles were burning day and night from the first day of the New Year until the moment, depending on their dimensions, they went out at the end of the year. Nowadays, however, the candles are blown out every night to prevent fires in the temple's wooden rooms. Nevertheless during the first months of each year, large candles do stand and burn vigorously in front of Li Mi's altar, while at the end of the year the red wax remains lie over the floor of the courtyard and around the complete candles that have been donated during the course of the year, asking for the god's protection for some particular issue.

A close examination of the candles in their materiality reveals the involvement of overseas Qingtianese with the temple and the agency of these ritual objects as a an incarnation of dispersed families. This analysis follows the methodological and theoretical work of Appadurai (1986) and Gell (1998) towards a restitution of the agency of objects beyond their representational functions.

The design of the red candles is divided into two parts as can be seen in figure26.

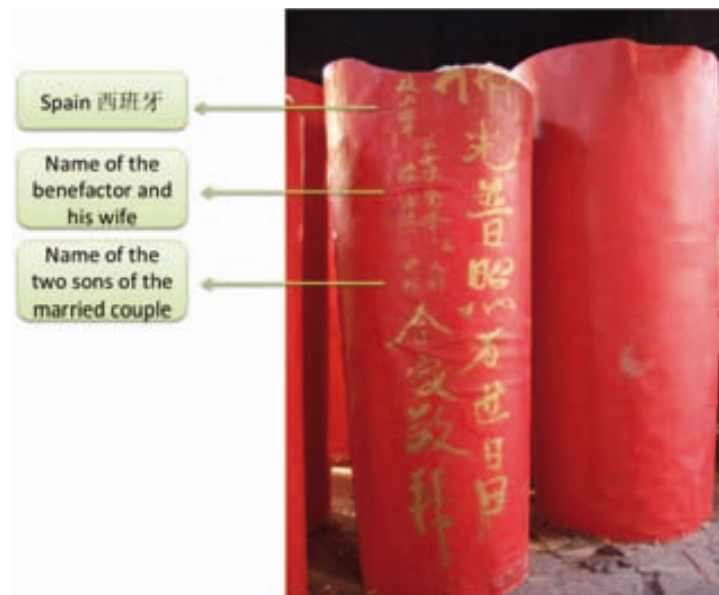


Figure 26. Candle of a nuclear transnational family.

On the right hand side, the candles are personalized with gold-color calligraphy, including the name of the benefactor and the name of the relatives he or she wishes to receive the divinity's protection. Next to the names, the country where they reside is introduced by the verb *lǚjū* (旅居) that means "living away from one's native place" and is generally translated as "sojourn". The personalized part of the candle is accompanied by conventional sentences inscribed in bigger characters expressing the request to the god as follows: "all in the family respectfully pray" 合家敬拜).

It is important to note here that, during my last visit to the temple in April 2014, the design of the candles had been totally simplified and unified. Instead of the hand-written golden calligraphy and the individualized design, nowadays the information

relating the name and countries of the benefactor and the people included in the protection request are printed out on white sheets of paper that are stuck over the large candles.

A detailed observation of the courtyard where the candles are located reveals how these ritual objects map the Qingtianese migration to Europe. The main destination countries are represented in the different candles, mostly from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Holland, Poland and Bulgaria. According to the annual list of candle donors, almost all the candles are donated by people born in Fushan who have migrated to different European countries⁷¹.

Each candle expresses the involvement of overseas Qingtianese in the life of the temple, and gives us rich information about migration journeys, settlement and connections in multiple locations, as well as transnational belongings. The following two examples will illustrate the symbolic presence of transnational families in the temple through the candles.

The first example materializes the presence of a nuclear family spread between China and Spain as it can be seen in the figure 26. We can see the characters referring to Spain as the place of residence, and the names and kinship relationship between the relatives included in the protection petition: the donor, his wife and two sons.

The candle was acquired during the New Year's festival by a 43-year-old man born in Fushan who migrated to Spain with his family when he was twelve years old. Mr Chen grew up in Spain where all his relatives still live. However for the last five years he has been living and doing business in Jiangxi province while his whole family remains in Madrid. He goes back to Spain once a year only for the Christmas holidays, and travels regularly from Jiangxi to Fushan during Chinese holidays and festivals. I met him in Fushan during the Qingming festival⁷² when he went to visit his ancestors' grave in his hometown.

Even though, during the interview, Mr Chen located his home in Jiangxi arguing that it is the place where he works and has daily social relations, on the candle he states his belonging to his nuclear family in Spain, and also their attachment with Fushan by placing the candle there. The complementary analysis of both the interview and the information inscribed in the candle express the dynamism and multiple dimensionality of home in Mr Chen's transnational life between different localities in China (Jiangxi and Fushan), and the place to where he migrated and grew up, and where his family currently resides in Spain.

⁷¹ I am grateful to the kind welcome I received from the temples' management at various times during my research and for letting me consult the registration notes of candle donors, including personal information that will be kept confidential.

⁷² *Qingmingjie* (清明节) is generally translated into English as "Tomb sweeping day". On this day Chinese families pray for their ancestors and visit their relatives' tombs.

By way of contrast to the previous candle, the second example includes an extended and transnational family spread across three different countries.



Figure 27. Candle of an extended transnational family.

As we can see from the calligraphy, the candle donor and his wife reside in Poland, their three sons live in Germany, and his elder brother settled in France with his nuclear family comprising wife and two sons. The names of the benefactor's parents are written without specifying the place of residence. Even though the candle does not reveal their location, a member of the temple's staff informed me that the old couple lives in Fushan and occasionally travels to Poland and France to visit their sons.

This candle physically manifests the essential transnational links within Qingtianese international migration: the links between different nodes of the diaspora and the links with the hometown. While the inscription of the relatives' names and countries of residence represents the transnational ties between the family members spread across three different countries, the desire to acquire and place the candle in front of the local divinity Li Mi shows the whole family's transnational links with their hometown.

The two candles materialize the symbolic presence of transnational families in the temple and, by extension, in their hometown. The overseas migrants, who regularly acquire and place the monumental candles to seek the god's protection, regard the temple as a central religious node and a place where they can express their symbolic presence in the hometown. Thus candles become a proxy presence of the migrants and a physical manifestation of their connections with Fushan. The analysis of the candles in their materiality reveals how they express and convey ideas about the multiple identities and belongings of Qingtianese migrants.

Moreover these large candles standing in the most relevant place of the temple are contemplated, observed and discussed by the temple staff, local regular visitors and the people who come to the temple from other localities attracted by the reputation (*ling*) of the god and the place. These candles are therefore indices of agency as defined by Gell in two senses.

First, candles are an index of agency of the migrant family that donates it. They specify in its materiality the identity of the family members who donate them, and by this process incarnate their presence in the temple and their hometown. Through this first "process of abduction" (Gell 1998:14–15) the relationship between the objects and their producers is forged, and thus the candles act as an index of agency of the transnational belonging of the donor migrant family⁷³. Here the candles are passive receptors of the migrants' agency.

Conversely, in the second process of agency the candles are active agents with respect to the people who attend the temple and interact with them. Through this second "process of abduction" these candles take significance (agency) and convey messages related to the migrants' social standing. During fieldwork every time I went to the temple I saw people reading the calligraphy on the candles, commenting about the particular family situation and relating the success, problems or news about the people represented. The larger the candle, the more visible it is and the more people know how expensive it was, thus endorsing the family represented with greater social prestige. Candles are a conspicuous referent that give social distinction to the families who purchase them and therefore the donation of candles is a form of "public ritual expenditure" (Yang, 2000, p. 486) deeply related to the international migrancy phenomenon.

Besides that, local people also esteem and highly value this migrants' practice that shows the "internationality" of Fushan by means of the calligraphy inscribed on the candles. Thus candles are also a symbol identifying Fushan's close relationship with the countries where Qingtianese people have settled.

Through the two agency processes the candles act both as presence and representation of transnational migration.

⁷³ For Gell the first "process of abduction" forges the relationship between the object and the artist, who is the producer. In the case at hand, the artisan who inscribes the calligraphy on the candle transmits the will and the message of the benefactor who as for that.

5.1.2 Meeting invisible and embodied links: Qingzhen temple as translocality

The analysis of the candles and the previous examination of virtual divinatory rituals has shown how Qingtianese migrants in Europe are engaged in popular religious activities that are closely related and oriented to the local temples and divinities in Qingtian. Both sections illustrate how Qingtianese migrants stay connected with their hometown through the ritual activities addressed at seeking guidance and protection from Li Mi, the local god of Qingzhen temple.

The analysis of the two ritual practices performed by the migrants from Spain reveals how religious transnational links are localized in the temple and are significant transnational practices that keep migrants linked with the community in their hometown without physically moving.

Firstly, we have seen how religious involvement of overseas migrants with the Qingzhen Chansi encompasses regular contact with the relatives who stay in Qingtian by use of long-distance phone calls and internet-based technology.

While the divination rituals imply private and invisible links with the local temple, the practice of offering candles entails a public manifestation of these hometown ties. Even though migrants do not come back or do so only occasionally, they express and materialize their hometown belonging by acquiring the large candles that are placed in the center of the temple. In this sense, the candles are emblems of specific overseas experiences and agents of the rising social status of the families who purchase and donate them.

The temple-related activities of the Qingtianese overseas migrants imply a proxy presence of transnational families in the hometown. The overseas migrants reinforce and highlight the hometown ties and transnational belonging through the candles offered to the local god, Li Mi. The analysis of the candles in their materiality has revealed how they express and convey ideas about multiple identities of Qingtian migrants and images of international migrants.

Finally the joint analysis of both the invisible transnational divinatory practices and the materialized transnational links through the candles illustrates the relevance of Qingzhen Chansi as a powerful translocality conferred by different networks and mobilities with different meanings.

The temple becomes a central node for the Qingtianese diaspora where both the invisible and the materialized transnational religious links are localized. Taking into consideration the invisible and embodied practices, Qingchen Chansi can truly be grasped as a "migrant place" (Gielies 2009) where transnational networks, products, and symbols are condensed.

First, the analysis of candles reveals how multiple belongings and localities are interrelated in the temple. The presence of these ritual objects meets the first dimension of migrant places according to Gielis (2009), who suggests a methodological approach to transnational links through a space lens. According to

Gielis, the places trespassed on by transnational practices are inhabited by objects and symbols that refer to different practices and social networks undertaken “beyond the local”. The references materialized in the candles of the transnational kinship ties widespread among different countries and localized in the local temples are a clear example of this first dimension of migrant places.

Through divinatory rituals the Qingchen Chansi meets the second dimension of “migrant places” as defined by Gielis (2009). Based on Appadurai’s notion of translocality⁷⁴, Gielis defines migrant places as sites in which “transmigrants reach out to (people in) other places without corporeally changing location” by virtue of new communication systems (Gielis 2009:280). In his definition of “migrant places” the author refers to the impact of new communications technology in local places, which plays a central role in the participation of Qingtianese migrants in the lives of their relatives overseas.

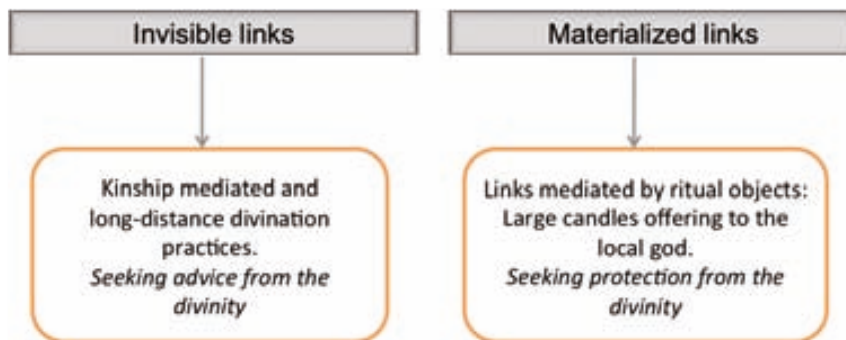


Figure 28. Diagram. Qingzhen temple as a translocality

⁷⁴ Appadurai’s concept of translocality that refers to the mediated presence of multiple localities in one physical place by means of the new communications systems (Appadurai 1994) is the main analytical tool of the second characteristic of migrant places presented by Gielis.

5.2 Things in motion: Circulation of objects between Qingtian and Spain

Next to virtual connections and the circulation of bodies, one of the most striking outcomes of the bidirectional transnational practices between Qingtian and Spain is the two-way circulation of objects and products that are used, shown and consumed in semi-public places (bars, restaurants, tee shops, offices, etc.) and at home.

Within the diverse amalgam of stuff that is sent in parcels or travels inside the luggage of those who move in one of the two directions, fieldwork enabled me to identify three categories of things that can be found in both directions' flows. Food, medicines and cigarettes are the common objects sent both to Qingtian and to Spain or other European countries. These three groups of things are the common embodied remittances and reverse remittances through which both migrants and non-migrants play an active role in the daily lives of their relatives either in Spain or Qingtian.

The transnational circulation and consumption of the same type of objects adopt different meaning in each of the flows. Food and gastronomic products, medicines and cigarettes incorporate the local specificities of the place of origin and adopt different meanings in each of the flows.

These common objects' bidirectional circulation practices thus bring us to talk about hybridism in the migration culture sphere and has led, on one hand, to the introduction of "foreign/Spanish" products in Qingtian where they adopt a practical and symbolic value, and on the other has contributed to the continuity of pre-migration habits in the daily life of Chinese people in Spain.

Taking the different nature of bidirectional transnational ties represented in the diagram (see Figure 19) we need to discern two different flows of objects travelling from Spain to China depending on the people involved in these practices and their relationship with migration and mobility.

On the one hand, we find the movements involving the objects that people living in Spain bring or send to the non-migrants (relatives and friends) remaining in China. And then there is the other, different, type of flow that encompasses the objects that migrants bring for their own use during their long-term visits to China or the ones aimed at the "returnee".

In this section I will describe and analyze this bidirectional flow of objects from a relational and processual perspective and thus emphasize the strategies and ways of traveling, and the meaning adopted in different contexts across time and space. But before presenting each one of the flows, I will discuss the characteristics of the travelling objects' constraints and the ways in which different strategies of objects' embodied circulation meets virtual space.

5.2.1 Virtual meets the embodied: Strategies and constraints of object circulation.

Chinese people living in Spain use their network relations to carry or send objects between China and Spain. It is important to take into account that in the last ten years increasingly affordable transportation facilities have seen a greater number of travellers between Qingtian and the place where migrants reside in Spain.

Whenever somebody needs to send something to China or Spain they would rather try to find a way of sending the objects by taking advantage of the continuous movement of people between China and Spain than post the parcels. I myself carried things in my luggage on both routes whenever Qingtianese in Spain or China knew I was going to make the journey. Asking relatives and friends to bring things in their luggage is the first choice and strategy for object circulation between Qingtian and Spain. Nevertheless, as we will see later, even if the first choice is to try to find somebody travelling in the direction needed, the main post office in Qingtian is a remarkable place for observing the involvement of non-migrants in this transnational circulation of objects.

It's important to note that most Chinese travel agencies in Spain and Qingtian offer their *fellow citizens* good deals related to the amount of luggage permitted for each passenger⁷⁵. Instead of the standard 20 kilos allowed on low cost international flight tickets, Chinese travel agencies have agreements with the air companies that allow them to carry double the amount without paying any extra. These agreements imply benefits for both parties since flight companies are trying to attract the potential market that is international migrancy.

The banners celebrating the Chinese New Year in The Netherlands' Schiphol Airport duty free shops are signs of these strategies to attract Chinese clients (migrants or tourists) as well as markers of another type of globalization where the core is not only the Euro-American tradition. Therefore Chinese people in Spain and their relatives in Qingtian try to mobilize their connections whenever they need to send things in either direction (see figure 29).

⁷⁵ Most of the customers of Chinese agencies in Spain are Chinese people and therefore they sell tickets to their "fellow countrymen and women". The first time I went to one of these travel agencies to purchase my ticket I was told that the double luggage allowance was solely for "Chinese people going back home" and thus they could not give me, a Spanish national, the same ticket benefits. After a conversation with the agency's director it was clear to me that being migrant and ethnic Chinese was what counted for him, more than citizenship status. I was just starting out on my research and, after speaking with the director and feeling rather annoyed, I went to another Chinese agency where they sold me the ticket without any reference to a problem with my ethnicity, nationality or home-based belonging. After that I realized this was an important ethnographic experience from which I started to learn.



Figure 29. Banners celebrating the Chinese New Year in The Netherlands' Schiphol Airport

As an addition to the existing networks used to carry out object circulation, virtual spaces have also emerged as relevant tools for sharing information and building up connections and strategies for sending objects between Spain and China that take advantage of the continuum movement of people between the two locations.

The use of internet platforms aimed at Chinese people living in Spain, such as the Xihua webpage already mentioned in chapter 4.3, are partly set up with this in mind. In different sections of the Xihua portal we can find several posts where people are sharing information and establishing contacts related to sending objects from Spain to China and vice versa. From these online publications we learn not only about the priorities and choice of items that migrants consider most significant, but we can also see the procedures developed to carry out these movements of objects. One of the most relevant topics of online "conversation" related to sending objects consists of countries' policies and regulations.

As with the mobility of people, the circulation of products and objects is constrained by the nation states' regulations. Transnational theorists have often emphasized the de-territorialization and the *free* movement of migrants beyond the limits of nation states borders without taking into account the power of state institutions in limiting and/or promoting those movements as they please and when they need. Like many others, this research demonstrates that political borders matter, that the movement of bodies is not free from control and that "movement across state boundaries is inherently a *political* matter" (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004a:1.183). These political restrictions and controls do not only limit the movement of bodies but also interfere in the transnational circulation of objects.

Apart from the common international legislation related to the type of items allowed on flights that has intensified since 2001, each country has their own policies and regulations regarding "foreign" products that they will allow in based on the nation's health security. Migrants are usually the main targets of these national constraints on both sides of the itinerary. Among other restrictions, Chinese customs forbid the entrance of raw meat, meat with bones and limit the amount of other significant items for migrants such as powdered milk. Later I will address the specificities of each one of these items but here just want to stress how airport customs control emerges as the source of the highest number of complaints from

Qingtianese people who return to China with their suitcases packed with cured ham, sausages and powdered milk, among other food stuffs.

As well as the information regarding regulations and policies on object circulation, the forum also works like a traditional bulletin board where interested parties can get in touch with potential mediators for sending or receiving objects. It is commonplace to find ads where people travelling from China back to Spain offer space in their suitcases. In the example selected the person offering the service asks for 8 Euros per kilo delivered and states that he/she can take "all kinds of things".



Figure 30. Ad aimed at taking things from China to Spain, screen grab of Xihua webpage.

This ad only received six responses, however more than 200 registered users visited the post and perhaps contacted the interested person by the QQ number posted, which is one of the more popular chat and video-conferencing systems in China.

Alongside the ads of people travelling with free space in their luggage several announcements are to be found where those who are not traveling but need to send or receive things are requesting a mediation service. In the second example chosen the person posting the ad offers a pick-up service at Madrid airport in exchange for a book that can be purchased through *Taobao* (淘宝), which is the most popular e-commerce site in China (see figure 31).

This example leads us into a discussion about another important element in object circulation from China to Spain that is mediated by internet technologies.

The growth in China's online shopping and e-commerce consumerism is unprecedented. Clothes, electronic devices, items for the home, books, and anything anybody could possibly need can be purchased mainly on the internet, with *Taobao* being the most popular site. I myself encountered this consumer behavior on several occasions when living in China and asking somebody where I could find such and such an item. People would look at me strangely and answer "I don't know any shops where you can find that. But I do know *Taobao*, where I'm sure you will find it". A fast delivery service, refund practices and low prices have

lead to e-commerce's deep penetration in young and middle-aged Chinese people's consumer habits.



Figure 31. Ad requesting mediation to buy a book in China and offering pick-up service as a exchange, screen grab of Xihua webpage.

The transnational connections and ties between Spain and China have extended the influence of Chinese websites beyond the national borders and have impacted on consumer practices among Chinese people in Spain. However, although they can access these sites and order the stuff they want from Spain, the delivery system and payment methods are circumscribed within the national borders of China⁷⁶. So some people ask their friends or relatives in China to purchase the commodities they want and then try to find the cheapest way of bringing them to Spain through network relations, either pre-existing or ones found on the Xihua noticeboards, much like in the example presented.

While I was conducting fieldwork I found this transnational online consumer phenomenon related to many instances. Chinese people living in Spain purchase different types of things through the Taobao website, mediated by relatives and friends in China: from electronic devices (mobile phones, batteries, etc.) to books, clothes and traditional paraphernalia.

The ethnographic documentary presented as an Annex to this dissertation incorporates one example that illustrates the sequential combination of different types of transnational practices in one single event. Mr. Mao returned to Qingtian from Spain in 2001 where he had lived for more than 20 years. In summer 2011 he was preparing to travel to Madrid where all his relatives live to take part in the wedding of his younger brother. He was the person in charge of buying all the traditional items needed for the celebration, such as the dresses, ornaments and traditional instruments (object-embodied mobility) through Taobao (virtual) and bringing said items to Madrid where he would meet all his family and celebrate the wedding (physical mobility).

⁷⁶ Recently agents have been playing the intermediate role and Taobao shopping services are also now available outside China. However international shipping methods are not easy and are expensive.

Actually, this example underscores how the transnational practices that we are analyzing separately throughout the dissertation are usually entangled.

The data presented here show how object-embodied practices find their counterpart in virtual transnational spaces, as well as in the physical movement of migrants between China and Spain that I will examine in chapter five. New strategies of transnational commodities circulation meet three different transnational practices, according to their degree of materialization: the virtual, the object-embodied and the physical movement of bodies.

Moreover through digital meetings, conversations and ads on the Xihua website we learn which items are usually selected to take to China: Spanish local products that in Qingtian acquire an important symbolic and practical value (such as wine, ham or coffee), as well as other products considered unfit for consumption in the wake of scandals involving their unreliable provenance (powdered milk and cosmetics).

5.2.2 Gifts and object-based remittances: processual analysis of “foreign products” reception in Qingtian.

An observation of the products circulating in the private and public spaces of Qingtian gives us many-layered data about the particularities of the region and its international connections.

The first time I arrived in Qingtian my eye was caught by the mobile counters of the cigarette vendors next to the bus station. While in most Chinese cities foreign cigarette packets stand out for their English language wording, manifesting their origin and emphasizing the common correspondence between the foreign products and habits with Anglo-Saxon traditions and goods, in Qingtian the cigarette vendors’ portable tables map the international connection of the place, indicating the main countries where Qingtianese have migrated – in the same way that the candles in the temple do.



Figure 32. Cigarette vendor's table in Hecheng, Qingtian.

Besides mapping Qingtianese migration trajectories, the collage-image made by several cigarette packets from different countries around the world, with their

corresponding different languages, also materializes a different conception and extent of foreign connections and consumption in Qingtian compared with other places in China. This everyday image condenses and underscores the specificities of the circulation of “foreign products” in Qingtian and its penetration in the social routine as an identity marker, which I will address in this section.

As I have already mentioned, the objects circulating in the Spain–China direction “travel” mainly in the luggage of visitors to Qingtian. I encountered very few cases of Qingtianese people in Spain sending parcels back to China. First of all, the people who travel back to China always bring gifts for their relatives or friends, as well as things that they might have asked for. Along with that, non-travellers also take part in these activities by using their contacts’ networks or those they find in virtual spaces.

The group of objects circulating from Spain to Qingtian is framed in the realm of gifts and plays a relevant role in many angles. They are the materialization of migrants’ economic success and thus markers of their social status and, by extension, of their relatives’ connections abroad; they are also a proof of migrants’ *filial piety* and their responsibility towards relatives in Qingtian, and they also act as tools to strengthen, recover or create “social connections” (关系 *guanxi*). Lastly, these objects are agents of changing social habits in the daily practices of Qingtianese non- migrants⁷⁷.

Of course, the penetration of European objects through the means of gifts brought by overseas relatives is already an old practice in Qingtian. The materialization of international connections in objects and buildings can be traced to pre-1950s migration experiences, but the contemporary transnational object-embodied ties date back to the 1980s. A lot has happened and changed since then in relation to the re-introduction of “foreign goods” in China after the economic reform and “open door” policies promulgated in 1978, and in relation to their special condition, uses and status in the *qiaoxiang* areas of southern Zhejiang province. Therefore the typology, meaning and uses of these “foreign” objects have also changed over the decades and have special characteristics in Qingtian because of migration.

Lijing, a 37-year-old woman who “migrated” to Spain with her mother in 1985 when she was six years old to reunite with her father, told me about how she remembers her paternal aunt’s⁷⁸ first visit Qingtian in 1980 through the agency of the gifts she brought. As Lijing expressed in the interview, nowadays every household in Qingtian

⁷⁷ The relevant role of gift giving is common in Chinese society. Yan’s (1996) ethnography is one of the reference works on the role of gift giving in Chinese rural communities. The anthropologist explains how the social exchange of the transaction is actually reflected in the etymology of the Chinese word for gift, *liwu* 礼物, which express the social agency and ritualized feature of gifts in Chinese society. The first character of the term (*li* 礼) is related to rituals and “ceremonial expressions of ethical ideals”, while the second character (*wu* 物) means material things. Therefore, Yang expresses how “a *wu* without a *li* is just a thing, not a gift” (Yan 1996:44).

⁷⁸ The elder sister of her father 姑妈

has relatives abroad but at the beginning of '80s it was not so common, and even less usual was have relatives visiting from overseas.

It was at the end of the 1970s that the contemporary mass migration flows from Qingtian to Europe began, and few of those who had already migrated could make it back in the early years. However, Lijing's family case is a little special and her aunt was probably one of the first migrants to return to Qingtian at the beginning of the '80s.

Lijing's aunt and uncle's main reason for emigrating was not economic but mainly political. During the Cultural Revolution the husband of Lijing's aunt was, like many others, accused of being a capitalist and a counter-revolutionary on account of being the descendant of a landowner's family. Running away from persecution by the Red Army, Lijing's aunt and uncle found their way to Macao and from there the couple managed to reach Lisbon⁷⁹. Lijing didn't know exactly how they finally came to settle in Spain but the couple opened one of the first Chinese restaurants in Madrid in 1975 called "Hangzhou"⁸⁰.

After the promulgation of "open door" policies in 1978 and the resulting relaxation of entry and exit restrictions, Lijing's aunt tried to find the opportunity to travel back to Qingtian to visit her parents. She managed to do that in 1980, three years after the beginning of the internal and international political transformation in China.

Lijing's account of her aunt's visit to the village illustrates the agency of the objects in the social status of the families and brings us back to the re-emergence of a migration culture in Qingtian through the eyes of a middle-aged woman living in Shanghai⁸¹ who associates her childhood memories of her aunt's visit with the objects she brought from Spain: pens and a dress, and money to buy a TV.

My aunt came back to visit us in 1980, I remember that perfectly. I was at primary school then and I remember that she brought me pens, when, at that time, we only had Chinese fountain pens and I had never seen a simple pen before. A pen! You can imagine how happy I was and how all my friends wanted to look at my pen (laughing). She also brought me a dress and she bought a TV for my grandparents. We had the first TV in the whole village (laughing), a black and white one, very

⁷⁹ There were more cases in Qingtian of people finding their way out of China to Macao or Taiwan during the Cultural Revolution to avoid persecution through official or unofficial means. Beltrán describes the situation of those "counter-revolutionary" emigrants and explains how, by contrast with the early years of the Cultural Revolution, at the beginning of the 1970s Zhou Enlai allowed a certain relaxation of China's exit and entry policies. Even though the possibility of getting an exit visa was still difficult and restricted to old people and those individuals who posed a "cost for the state", the use of social connections (*guanxi*) and the circulation of *hongbao* (red envelopes with cash incentives for obtaining a favor in "jumping" official rules) enabled the emigration of people who acquired exit visas which were almost impossible to get before 1973 (Beltrán Antolín 2003:64–65).

During fieldwork I found several families with this migration background that tells us that even though Qingtian migration to Europe is basically an economic one, the generalizations and political constraints of sending and receiving countries are also relevant.

⁸⁰ The restaurant existed under the same name and with the same characteristics until 2006 when, after the couple's retirement, their eldest son took the business over and changed it into an "Asian cuisine" restaurant where they serve mainly Japanese food.

⁸¹ Lijing left Spain to "come back" to China in 2005 where she works in a consultancy with Spanish investors in China, a business she owns with a Spanish partner.

small but it was the first TV in the village. You have to think that before, you only could buy televisions and other luxury things if you had *waihuiquan*⁸². How could I forget that? I was the only girl in the village with TV at home! I remember that overnight I became a popular girl in the village. Everybody wanted to be my friend, people looked at me in a different way because, of course, I had a beautiful dress, pens and a TV! You have to think that nowadays everybody has relatives abroad but only a few families did back then. So I would say that my aunt's visit changed my situation in the village. Well not just mine, our family suddenly became a special and distinguished family in the village. (Interview with Lijing, Shanghai, April 2013).

Lijing's memories of her aunt's visit to Qingtian elucidate the relevance of embodied-objects remittances in the social life of migrants' relatives in the society of origin. As she expresses, her family's social status was transformed all of a sudden by means of those gifts that acted as markers of their international connections and social mobility and the "*filial piety*" of the daughter towards her parents. More than that, if we place this situation in relation to China's social context, we should recall that at that time "foreign objects" were conceived in China as a materialized window to the "outside world" after a decade (1965-1975) of the Cultural Revolution's strong prohibition against anything related the outside world.

It is not my intention here to discuss and analyze the complexity of "foreign goods" penetration and consumption in post-Mao China, as this has been a focus for extensive research (Hooper 2000, 2005; Jackson 2013; Kjellgren 2004), but some appreciations are needed in order to distinguish the particularities of the social meaning related to the consumption of "foreign" objects' and gifts' giving in Qingtianese society both past and present, in contrast with other places in China. Several scholars have emphasized the relevance of local interactions in the consumption of "foreign goods" in any given society beyond the simple explanation of transnational consumption in terms of "globalization" being equal to "homogenization". Therefore different concepts such as "glocalization", "hybridization" or "indigenization" have emerged to describe the articulation between the global and the local and how the same products are differently used and consumed in divers localities. Schein has stressed how the different ways of consuming foreign goods in post-Mao China are shaped by specific cultural forces (Schein 1999) and this reality is also relevant within the particularities of different localities in China. The same objects have different socio-cultural connotations and are consumed quite differently within China's socio-cultural and geopolitical space.

While the widespread presence of foreign goods over the last three decades is a prominent reality in China, as in many countries around the world, it is true that the

⁸² The *waihuiquan* 外汇券 or "overseas remittance coupons" were a currency for the exclusive use of foreigners and "overseas Chinese" (*buaqiao*) released in 1980 and absolved in 1995.

dominant dichotomy between “foreign” and “Chinese” - which stills plays a relevant role in different facets of Chinese society - has also been transferred into product consumption. The preference of the Chinese urban middle-class for foreign goods, especially American and Japanese, is still a fact and generally explained in terms of quality, modernity and reliability as well as social status (Jackson 2013:169). In response to this fascination for foreign products and the subsequent consumption behavior, China’s resistance strategy has been to develop national production of these commodities with an assumed foreign origin– a prime example being red wine (Hooper 2000; Kjellgren 2004). However this national production of desirable “foreign” items is also linked to the *huaqiao* narrative reflecting the triggering function of migration in the introduction of products strongly related to “foreign” aspects⁸³. Moreover, the desire for foreign products in China is still strong and is intimately linked with the widespread Eurocentric notion of modernity.

Even though the presence of foreign products in Qingtian shares some elements with the contextual situation concerning the whole of China from the 1980s up to the present day, I argue that the particular characteristics of Qingtian history and society - and specifically ways in which the products circulate and arrive in Qingtian - entails different meanings and uses of these objects both in the past and in the present due especially to the outside connections forged by migration.

As we have seen through Lijing’s family experience, migration was an important agent for the early introduction of “luxury goods” in Qingtian *qiaoxiang* compared with other rural areas in the province. In the 1980s televisions, washing machines, refrigerators and other electrical equipment were indicators of rising standards of living in China (Hooper 2000). Alongside this significance, objects that were introduced via migrants’ relatives in Qingtian adopted another social function in *qiaoxiang* areas as indicators of kinship connections abroad and actual perceptions of a possible “better future life” in Europe. Instead of being an imagined modernity like as is the case in most rural areas of China (Schein 1999)⁸⁴ in Qingtian the foreign products were not only received through advertising campaigns but in a materialized way through the input of migration patterns that have been growing since the 1980s until right up to the present day. Even though, at that time, Qingtian was still a very poor region, the growing influx of migration and the receipt of money and objects-based remittances dramatically changed the relationship Qingtianese people had with the “outside world”, encompassing a higher consumption of European goods than in other rural areas in the province that lacked this migration *habitus*. These influxes, however, also brought the introduction of

⁸³ In an article about contemporary Chinese red wine production, Kjellgren analyses the “search for native roots” strategies and narratives of what is today “by most Chinese perceived as quintessentially Western and non-Chinese” product. In one of the three Chinese wine histories analyzed by Kjellgren, the pioneer of wine production and the introduction of the first vine into China was a “patriot returned from overseas” (*guigo huaqiao*) from Guangdong province who migrated to southeast Asia and when he returned in 1892 brought the influence of his encounter with a French army officer and set up the first Chinese vineyard in Shandong province (Kjellgren 2004).

⁸⁴ Schein (1999) states that in most rural areas in China the media and advertising were the main objects of people’s consumption rather than the acquisition of the objects themselves.

social inequalities based on migration and on the possibility of developing transnational ties.

The agency of migration has also been identified as a triggering element within the scope of the urban consumption of foreign. In the commentaries on the results of the 1997 survey on consumer behavior covering ten major Chinese cities, Hooper argues that "the highest proportion of people consuming foreign goods were located in the coastal cities of Guangzhou and Xiamen, not only because of their prosperity or their "openness" (which would also apply to Shanghai) but because of frequent contacts with relatives and others from outside China" (Hooper 2000:446).

Beyond this greater consumption of foreign products in places characterized by migration practices what I want to emphasize is that the meaning of these objects is quite different in places where migration plays a relevant role in society. First we have to take into account the special way in which these products circulate and arrive at the locality in question (in this case Qingtian) through relatives and acquaintances. Secondly, given that these goods have been introduced and penetrated into their daily lives to quite a different level of intensity, people have a different relationship with these objects and thus the products themselves adopt different social meaning and agency.

The television that Lijing's aunt bought for her parents back in 1980 nowadays seems a distant reality. Things have changed dramatically in China and in Qingtian since 1980 and these days in Qingtian everybody has basic electrical appliances for the home although the social inequalities created by migration have also increased. During my fieldwork I saw on a number of occasions how migrants brought another kind of domestic electrical appliance from Spain related to one of the most relevant everyday practices introduced to Qingtian through migrants' mobility: coffee. Right from the beginning of my fieldwork I saw how people from Spain brought small espresso machines, the type that uses capsules, for their relatives as the latest trend in coffee drinking. Neat, modern-design espresso machines brought from Europe have a place in several houses, shops and offices in Qingtian. The changes in this kind of domestic electrical appliance materialize the transformation of Qingtianese society and follow the logic of object-based remittances.

Hecheng is full of cafés and bars with professional espresso machines where non-migrants often go to drink Italian coffee and spend time chatting to friends. Coffee machines are also to be found in all the institutional offices in Qingtian. Whenever I went to interview somebody in his or her office (politicians, school directors, company managers, etc.) I could see a coffee pot standing next to the tea set and the question "tea or coffee?" has also been introduced into this region. And finally, coffee machines are also present in some houses where they basically stand as a symbolic object indicating the close links with relatives abroad, especially since Qingtianese prefer to go out and have a coffee in semi-public places like cafés and bars than do so in the private domestic space.

Even though cafés are a new trend in Chinese urban areas, the design of the places, uses and clients of Qingtian cafés are very different to those we can find in Shanghai, Xiamen or other big cities in the Zhejiang and Fujian coastal cities. In the

third part of the dissertation I will explore the characteristics of these concrete places in more detail.

We can differentiate two types of “foreign” objects according to their uses and the values they adopt on arrival in China. On one hand we find the foreign goods that have a visual interaction with the “Western modernities” in China while taking on a specific symbolic and practical value in Qingtian (red wine, food products...) and, on the other, we find an amalgam of objects related to body and health treatments such as medicines, cosmetics and childcare products that have been introduced into Qingtianese society based on the components of higher quality and reliability.

Twenty years ago, when international travel was not as convenient and affordable as it is now, these objects essentially had a symbolic value as a materialization of the social prestige associated with the successful returnee, as well as a visual reference to identify those homes and families with overseas connections. However over the last ten years increasingly affordable transport has brought a greater number of travellers between Qingtian and the place where migrants reside. Thus even though objects’ symbolic value is still significant, their practical value is also growing as Qingtianese who have not migrated are incorporating these products and gastronomic practices into their everyday lives. Thus it is not unusual to find different types of sausages (*embutido*) hanging in the kitchens of migrants’ family homes.

These “foreign products” that are regarded as a delicacy and are relatively expensive goods sold in fancy shops and restaurants in larger Chinese cities, have been incorporated into Qingtianese gastronomic habits and become a common item in migrants’ kitchens and, by extension, in Qingtianese food practices. However the way they eat this Spanish produce illustrates their adaptation to local culture, in this case to Chinese gastronomic practices.

Whenever I witnessed somebody arriving in Qingtian from Spain, there was a great air of expectation surrounding the moment they would open their suitcase, presumed full of gifts. Among the objects filling their luggage we can distinguish two types of commodity. The first group includes those products that visually identify the particular origin and specialties of the place where the migrant resides (in this case products from Spain), while the other group consists of commodities without any obvious markers of foreign-ness but desired for their perceived quality. In the remainder of this section I will present the characteristics of the common objects found in migrants’ luggage when they return to visit Qingtian.

Cigarettes are a common denominator in most suitcases. Whether or not they are smokers, when visiting Qingtian men usually carry around packets of foreign cigarettes (Italian, Spanish, etc.) showing the concrete country of residence. Offering packets to friends and acquaintances has become a social norm that reveals people’s lives in mobility, in this case mainly male, and visiting China. By exchanging cigarettes – a normal practice in China – the individuals who offer them can strike up a conversation about “life overseas”. Alongside the cigarettes brought from Spain

the counterpart on the exchange is represented by the wide variety of expensive Chinese cigarettes that the migrants will proudly take back to Spain. It is not strange to find non-migrant males in Qingtian carrying cigarette packets of diverse origins to show off the range of plural connections he has with international migrants.

Gastronomic products are second on the list of common items in migrants' suitcases related to the particularity of the place where the migrants have settled.

The transnational food sphere related to migration has been more thoroughly analyzed from the "settlement perspective" that is, the dissemination of different local practices that migrants take with them and reproduce abroad (Codesal 2010). Next to these practices, however, migration processes and bidirectional transnational links also bring about a transformation in the food practices of the society of origin. Food products from Spain and Italy such as olive oil, *jamón* (cured ham) or *chorizo* (Spanish cured sausage) have been introduced into daily life in Qingtian. These commodities adopt a symbolic value in Qingtian related to the identity and international connections of the family and the place, as well as embracing a highly practical use as the products have been integrated into local food practices. Curiously, Qingtianese do not refer to these products with their Chinese name but the words *salami* and *jamón* have entered the day-to-day lexicon of the region.

In almost all the migrants' relatives' houses I visited, there was always some food—mainly sausage or ham - from Spain either brought directly by relatives or sent through friends' connections. I could observe how the introduction of Spanish food practices has entered private domestic practices, changing the cooking methods through, for example, the use of olive oil for everyday cooking instead of peanut or sunflower oil which are more usual in China.

Food goods from Spain are not only eaten in the domestic space but whenever somebody gets a package from abroad they will take a selection of items to cafés and bars to share with friends. So, while it is common to find plates of ham and chorizo on bar and café tables these products, instead of being purchased on the premises, are normally brought or sent from Spain. The way these products are consumed in Qingtian illustrates how Spanish gastronomy fits into Qingtianese food practices. For example, slices of sausage are often mixed with soya sauce and manipulated with chopsticks instead of being eaten with bread and olive oil.

Red wine is the next most common suitcase item. One of the outcomes of Qingtian's migration patterns has been the introduction of Spanish and Italian food, and red wine. Hecheng town is full of so-called "Western restaurants" and imported wine shops normally managed by returnees or in co-operation between migrants and relatives who remain in China. I will analyze these shops in depth in the third part of the dissertation, however, here it is important to see how most people in Qingtian obtain these products through the physical mobility of migrants instead of purchasing or consuming them in the imported shops or restaurants in Hecheng. According to the Qingtian wine shop managers the main clients of their establishments are official government departments or private companies who have introduced wine in their protocol making it one of the main items workers get for

Chinese festivities such as New Year. "Instead of buying some expensive Chinese wine or spirits, in Qingtian official departments and companies prefer to buy and give Spanish, Italian or French red wine".

As with the food, in almost all the houses I have been in in Qingtian, both in towns and small villages, the wine bottles always stand in a prominent position as a marker of the family's migrant character. Food and wine do not simply have a social status and symbolical meaning identifying the person who owns it with international migration, but they have also been introduced into the daily lives of non-migrants in a locally adjusted way.

Then, to a lesser extent than the gastronomic items described, the suitcases reveal popular culture items such as books, dictionaries or products related to famous sportstars, such as Spanish football club T-shirt, etc. However, these objects remain secondary in comparison to gastronomic products.

While wine and food have a similar function to the local character and flavor of the place where migrants have settled, other products have also found their way into Qingtianese daily life based on their perceived purity versus the perceived adulterated national production of the same foodstuff.

Leading their concerns is the infamous powdered milk for babies and, consequently, one of the most popular luggage items of Chinese coming from Europe. Qingtianese, like most Chinese people, have continued to distrust Chinese-produced powdered milk ever since the first scandal broke in 2008 where powdered milk was found to be adulterated with melanin. In the face of this nationwide situation, Qingtianese have taken advantage of their international connections to develop strategies for receiving milk powder produced in European countries. It is important to note that in contemporary China most women choose to give powdered milk to their babies rather than breastfeeding so that they can get back into their daily routine and return to work as soon as possible, letting the grandparents perform the basic childcare tasks. In any case, there are many children in Qingtian whose mothers live in Europe (see chapter three) and therefore the use of powdered milk is a basic childcare product from birth onwards.

Most of the babies in Qingtian are fed with foreign milk sent or brought over through the continuous mobility of people between Qingtian and Spain or other European countries.

As well as powdered milk we can find other childcare products that are in demand for the same reason: an unreliable home source. Once again, Weixin's virtual space is a relevant place where this commodities circulation is reflected. In the example found in figure 33 a young woman posts a message asking fellow Qingtianese if they are interested in tapioca that a friend of hers brought over from Italy.



Figure 33. Ad sharing tapioca from Italy, screen grab of Weixin's Social wall.

Western medicines are the other items that travel the miles between Spain and Qingtian. I remember that on one occasion in Qingtian I was feeling unwell when a friend saw me at the chemist's buying medicine for a simple headache. She took me by the arm and told me to come back to her house where she had Spanish medicines that were, in her opinion, much better than the Chinese ones. I had it in mind to buy a "Western medicine" produced in China but my guide stopped me, took me home and gave me a simple paracetamol that her sister had brought over from Spain. In addition to these basic medicines there are also cases where special medicines that are expensive and difficult to get hold of in China are sent to people with diagnosed health problems.

Finally cosmetics and personal care products of European manufacture can be found in most Qingtianese bathrooms.

The array of objects requested by Qingtianese from their relatives in Europe that relies on the strong conviction of a dichotomy between those authentic, foreign products versus the fake, Chinese-produced ones is diverse. The example of the request posted on Weixin by a Hecheng bar manager wanting to buy alcoholic drinks from "guowai" (overseas) exemplifies these conceptions shared by most Chinese people. Just as we saw with the Xihua website, here Weixin is used as a tool to look for connections to get the products they need.

From this description we can see how the Qingtianese share some of the perceptions and social meanings ascribed to foreign products in China, especially the quality and reliability of cosmetics or products related to food and health. However, the meaning of red wine and foreign food –the main foreign goods with social caché in China – along with their uses are different in Qingtian due to the close relation with everyday life in European countries through migration experiences. Qingtianese have been living a more everyday and generalized mobility through the presence and use of "foreign products" than other places in China that do not enjoy these migration contacts, so red wine and "Western food" add special social meanings to those shared by the rest of Chinese society.



Figure 34. Ad asking for foreigner produced alcoholic drinks for the bar in Hecheng, screen grab of Weixin social wall.

5.2.3 Inverse embodied remittances

The object distribution is bidirectional and the main common articles travelling from Qingtian to Spain area, once again, food and medicines. The circular logic of transnational links embodied in the same types of object but with different characteristics according to their origin illustrates two main features of migration and inter-cultural processes. The first reveals hybridism practices resulting from transnational links and effecting both poles of the movement, and the second the relevance of *difference* as a basic element of socio-cultural capital for people related to migration processes.

If migration has transformed the landscape of Qingtian it has also been an important agent in the penetration of Chinese products and traditions in the countries where migrants live, and this is just the same of Spain. Even though Chinese products can now be found in restaurants, shops, etc. in most of the Spanish cities with a high concentration of Chinese people, the circulation of articles from China to Spain is still relevant and illustrates the agency of migrants' relatives in embodied transnational links.

While the objects circulating from Spain to Qingtian are generally carried in the luggage of those who move back and forth, the relatives who do not move have an active role in the presence of Qingtian's local products in Spain. Alongside the gifts that visitors to Qingtian take back to Spain, the parcels sent by non-migrants are also relevant in this object circulation. Simply by spending time in Qingtian's main post office, in Hecheng, it is easy to observe how migrants and their families are active agents in these comings and goings of local products, mostly food and medicines.

Hecheng post office is different from most of the post offices in Chinese rural towns. Here the staffs are trained in and aware of the prices, rules and procedures of international deliveries and all the systems to do with them. It could be said that this

small town post office specializes in the international distribution of parcels and money.

During the course of my fieldwork I would spend some mornings in this post office speaking with the workers and observing the activity of the place. On not one of the days I went there did I come back home without witnessing someone sending a parcel to foreign countries, especially Spain and Italy.



Figure 35. Women preparing parcels to send to Europe. Post office in Hecheng, Qingtian.

Migrants' relatives often get to the post office laden with plastic bags full of dried food, herbs and sometimes clothes, accompanied by a piece of paper with the handwritten address in Spain or other countries that they hand over to the staff.

From the coding to the packing, the procedure is so automatic and standardized, that in just a matter of minutes the parcels are standing behind the desk ready to travel to their destinations.

The items included in the parcels are mostly homemade dry food. Green vegetables cultivated, seasoned and dried at home are some of the top items included in the parcels along with other regional gastronomic goods such as dried meat, mushrooms and local nuts and dried fruits. Chinese medicines are also common items, from dried herbs to prepared tablets. Even though most Chinese people use biomedicine or "Western medicine" for diseases or severe illness, they continue to use the popular knowledge of traditional Chinese pharmacopeia for minor health problems and to nourish their body in the logic of the Chinese concept of *yangshen* (养神)⁸⁵. In fact, in this sense the line dividing gastronomy from medicine in popular usage is sometimes very fine.

⁸⁵ Definition of *yangshen*



Figure 36. Woman sending a parcel with traditional medicine herbs and dried food to her relatives living in Barcelona. Post office in Hecheng, Qingtian.

Women's clothes are often included in the parcels. Whenever I have asked why they sent or requested clothes from China the answer is based on different tastes and aesthetic tendencies. Most Qingtianese describe the Chinese fashion and taste as the opposite of the perceived "simple" (简单) way of dressing of foreign women. On various occasions I have heard Qingtianese stating how they can distinguish whether people passing by in the street, especially women, come from Europe and whether they have been living there for a long time by the way they dress. According to my informants instead of highly decorated T-shirts and accessories, people who have been living in Spain for a long time "dress like foreigners", that is, they wear plain colors and less embellished clothing.

Although most of the people I spoke to send parcels to family members who are in Spain for a relatively short time (fewer than three years), I also found cases of people sending parcels to family who have been away for longer. Most people sending parcels recognize and are aware of the proliferation of Chinese product shops in Spain. However they stress the relevance of regional differences and the relevance of homemade food products with a local taste. "Even if they can find dry vegetables and meat where they are they will never taste as good as the ones from Qingtian," they often say.

The same process of migration that has brought the proliferation of cafés, "Western restaurants" and imported product shops in Qingtian has also changed the landscape of some Spanish cities through the introduction of Chinese shops and restaurants. In Chinese neighborhoods there are supermarkets, butchers,

restaurants, hair salons, travel agencies and a range of small businesses and establishments aimed mostly at co-ethnics⁸⁶.

Even though they were initially for Chinese people, these establishments are welcoming an increasingly higher number of non-Chinese costumers either because of their lower prices or because the consumption of Chinese gastronomy and social practices is also slowly being introduced to people of other origins (Spanish, Maghrebis, South Americans, etc.) who live in these neighborhoods. The small restaurants where the Chinese go are increasingly attracting the attention of Spanish people who perceive the food and the atmosphere of these places as "authentic" by comparison with the early Chinese restaurants that catered for "Western" tastes.

The circulation of objects and social practices originally belonging to different socio-cultural backgrounds and their penetration in different contexts entail a transformation of the daily activities and practices of people from Spain and Qingtian that "receive" the secondhand influences of migration and have the opportunity to experience mobility, even if it's just a little, without physically moving outside their neighborhoods.

Thus the circulation and penetration of products from different origins is a double-sided phenomenon transforming the landscape of the different localities comprising the concrete migration and mobility circulation.

⁸⁶ Recently a couple of Chinese greengrocers in Santa Coloma de Gramente have also started renting allotments in order to plant Chinese vegetables instead of importing them from China.

5.3 Transnational houses in China

“Migrancy means not only changing places but means changing the nature of the places”. (Abbas 2004:129)

The socio-cultural changes inherent to migration processes are manifested in the material world through object circulation as well as within architectural designs and building activities.

One of the earliest and most relevant outcomes of remittances and physically reverse transnational practices - such as visits and returns - is the construction activity. The architecture of “remittance houses” (Lopez 2010)⁸⁷ is one of the most relevant and visible aspects that shows Qingtian to be a *qiaoxiang*. In contrast with the donations for public and community buildings such as temples or schools, vernacular architecture configures an embodied expression of family and private uses of money circulation. The profuse and energetic building activities in Qingtian over the last two decades meets the conversion and embodiment of remittances in the material form of houses, thus linking the second and fourth sections of the graph that illustrates bidirectional transnational practices.

Just as with the gifts and objects sent by migrants visiting Qingtian, migrants’ houses do not imply an intrinsic novelty but were the first embodied expression of the successful returnee. Although the history of Qingtian *qiaoxiang* is not as long and prosperous as in other emigration villages in Guangzhou and Fujian provinces, for instance, there are some examples of early returnee migrants’ houses scattered around Qingtian. These large houses were built during the first half of the XX century integrating Western and Chinese iconographic motifs, architectural styles and designs (See Annex of early returnee house). In contrast with the older *qiaoxiang* areas in Guangzhou and Fujian where old migrants’ houses have become museums and tourist attractions, in Qingtian these houses have not yet been restored as new trends towards the conservation of the “migration heritage” under private incentives are only just emerging, as we shall see in this section.

Even if the hallmark of migration in Qingtian is to be found in the pioneering migrants’ ancestral family houses, the contemporary building environment is intimately related to the mass emigration flows that started in the 1980s. Ever since then, the landscape began to change but it was not until the beginning of the 2000s that the current building fever created a boom in the area’s construction industry and transformed Hecheng and the surrounding villages, which are currently going through a rapid urbanization process. In fact during three years of fieldwork I myself

⁸⁷ This is a common process that can be found in different migration contexts and leads Lopez to use the notion “remittance houses” to describe this transnational materialization of remittances in the case of Mexican emigration villages (Lopez 2010).

could see and document the massive transformation of these villages. In fact, the best illustration of this unceasing change related to migration found in Abbas' quotation at the beginning of the section, is the recurrent and emphatic migrants' expression when they claim that "every time they go back to Qingtian, they get lost trying to find home".

In fact, the two senses of migrancy's "changing places" nature as underlined by Abbas (2004) are perfectly materialized in the two main implications of using houses as a unit of analysis.

Firstly, vernacular architecture is a manifestation of the "changing places" character of migrancy given that migrants build, purchase, and restore houses in different places according to their migration journey, mobile itineraries and current situation. These houses are materialized forms of transnational life and simultaneously embody migrants' perceptions and experiences of home in different localities. Migrants might use different houses in different places concurrently with one another, each house having different symbolic and practical uses, and materializing the migrants' fragmented, plurilocal and versatile sense of home. Thus analyzing the house in Spain and the house in China and the relationship between them reflects migrancy's mobile and "changing places" character and sheds light on the different layers that are integrated in the home-making process of Qingtianese migrants.

Secondly, an analysis of concrete houses in their materiality - both the exterior of the buildings with the styles and aesthetics, as well as the examination of their interior - and the building environment of a given place, elucidates the transnational links and the transformation of local places and landscapes due to the impact of migration. Next to object circulation, the Qingtian building environment reflects its migration history and, thus, the materialization of transnational ties in the vernacular architecture and built surroundings meet the "changing nature of the place" referred to by Abbas.

In this chapter we will focus particularly on the transformation of places - Abbas' second point - through analyzing the vernacular architecture and built environment in Qingtian. To do that I will sketch the changes in infrastructure and social practices embedded in building activities. On this point the correspondence between social and architectural space is basic such that "social life might be registered in a legible and secure way with the architectural and urban forms that frame it" (Cairns 2004:2).

Houses embody transnational links and crucial materializations of migration's impact on Qingtian, acting as powerful visual indicators of the notion of *qiaoxiang*. Just as we have seen with objects and things in the previous chapter, houses also embrace a range of symbolic and pragmatic functions and values. Large detached houses in hometown villages stand out as the memoranda of successful migrant families while modern apartments in "urban areas" possess practical values as they are inhabited by relatives who stay in Qingtian, as well as by returnees and migrants during their visits. Besides, new trends towards the restoration of traditional old wooden houses entail different meanings of modernity and re-appreciation of lost ties by people

who grew up or have lived in Spain for long periods of time and envisage a transformation of the *qiaoxiang*.

Over the following pages the two main types of building activities in Qingtian based on the location (urban area/village hometown), the architectural design and appearance (modern apartments/large new detached villas or old traditional houses), and the type of use and meaning (practical value/symbolical and ritual value) will be examined.

Location	Urban areas	Hometown villages
Architectural desing	Modern apartments in high buildings.	Large houses with "neocalssical" western ornamentation and design.
Value	Practical and use value "Houses to be live in"	Symbolical and ritual value "House to be seen"

Figure 37. Typology of migrants and returnee houses in China.

5.3.1 Urbanization process in the *qiaoxiang*: A place to stay, a place to live in Qingtian

During the last three decades migrants' remittances and donations have dramatically affected the landscape of Qingtian. House construction activities and infrastructure development are the main outcomes of this monetary circulation. Qingtianese often complain about the cost of living in the area, claiming that the circulation of international currency has changed Qingtian into a place with very high prices, in some instances reaching the same level as in the large cities of Zhejiang province. Housing is perhaps one of the main domains receiving such commentaries and the space where inequalities related to the migration process are best visualized.

The impact of migration in Qingtian's urban development was originally circumscribed to Hecheng, the first place where imported product stores, cafés and the so-called "Western restaurants" (西餐厅) run by returnees in co-operation with friends or relatives were established. The small city of Hecheng has become the social gathering place for Qingtianese migrants coming back to China on short-term visits or for more extended return trips, and therefore a strong construction industry has emerged. The business, which incorporates elements from the European countries where Qingtianese have emigrated, and the modern 20-storey apartment blocks where migrants reside during their visits are exceptional in the way they have transformed the town's landscape and way of life.

The correspondence between high buildings and modernity exerts a powerful hold over rural China. When I was teaching Catalan in Santa Coloma de Gramenet one day the students began a discussion about Qingtian landscape transformations. I paid careful attention to my students' accounts, perceptions and reactions, as at that

time I had not yet visited Qingtian. Most of them were aware of the transformations in Hecheng whether it was via images they received through mobile communication devices or websites and bulletin boards, or through their own visits and trips. However a 45-year-old woman who had not visited her hometown since she left in 1990 listened in astonishment to the other students' report, and was shocked to hear about the 20-storey apartment buildings in her hometown.

But it is not just the migrants originating from Hecheng who are buying new houses in the main urban area of the county. Even if they have never lived in Hecheng and their hometown is one of the surrounding villages from where the emigration flows started (Fushan, Fangshan, Youzhu, etc.), migrants would prefer to stay in the county's main urban area rather than spend their vacations, or provisionally settle, in the villages where they were born. The new building activities, which are intimately linked with remittances and return migration, have brought an intensive building boom in the last few years. This strong construction industry has turned Qingtian into a destination place for internal migrants mostly coming from Henna and Sichuan, who are the workers in private construction building companies, and has also attracted the return of Qingtianese migrants investing in real estate.

The income of a given family determines the type of constructions and buildings they acquire. Some families decide to remodel pre-existing buildings constructed in the 1980s or '90s, while those with the highest income purchase new and modern flats in the high-rise buildings with modern facilities. Almost all the families that own an apartment in the new tall building complexes are involved in the migration dynamic. Some apartments are empty most of the year and are used by migrants during return visits, mostly in the summer holidays and during the New Year festival. The second type of inhabitant of these modern apartments includes migrants who come back to settle down for a longer period of time. And, finally, some of these new flats are the "practical homes" of relatives who didn't migrate and have used remittances to buy new houses.

In the third chapter we have already described the movements from the villages to the main urban areas within Qingtian County that reproduce, on a small scale, the logic of internal migration fluxes within China. Fushan Middle School's director explained the decline of his center due to the preference of most Qingtianese people for living in modern city apartments rather than staying in their old village houses. Indeed most of the people who have the opportunity to buy apartments in town - generally those with relatives abroad or those young people who found jobs in the cities - would move to Hecheng, the new urban areas nearby or other larger cities. So, over the last two decades, Hecheng has experienced a large influx from the outside villages.

Next to the high demand, the topography and geographical features of the place - sited between the mountains and the river - are also influential in the high housing prices, which are almost on a par with the big cities such as Hangzhou or Shanghai. Reference to the scarcity of flat land, which was traditionally evoked to explain the

harshness of Qingtian life, is now used to explain Hecheng's high-priced housing market.

Shuinan (水南), a neighborhood located opposite Hecheng on the other side of the river, was the first place to be transformed from fields into town. In fact, as soon as the bridges connecting the two sides of the river were built at the end of the 1990s, Shuinan was integrated as a part of Hecheng Township where the hospital, the train station, the museum and a different array of apartment buildings were constructed. Nowadays the housing prices in Shuinan have already reached or surpassed levels in Hecheng, with luxurious apartments contrasting with the cheap, simple buildings erected in the latter half of the 1990s where internal migrants and humble families who have no recourse to overseas income now live. The social inequalities originating with the development of Qingtian's migrant *habitus* are clearly materialized in the mixture of houses.



Figure 38. Hecheng and part of Shuinan, winter 1992. Photo taken by Joaquín Beltrán and Amelia Sáiz



Figure 39. Hecheng and Shuinan, winter 2012.

This area's transformations are clearly illustrated in the pictures taken in 1990s and in 2012. In the first picture (figure 38) there were no bridges over the river and Shuinan was empty farmland with few houses between the river and the slope of the mountain. Fifteen years later, the three bridges had changed the daily life of this area and the landscape was completely transformed with high buildings on the Hecheng side, and the construction of a totally new town in Shuinan.

The development of Qingtian County's infrastructure, with bridges, tunnels and highways that twist and turn, connecting the different villages located around the mountains and the river has dramatically changed the life of the people living there. Again we have to place these changes within the larger context of China's development. Infrastructure development and building activities have been undertaken in hundreds of towns and cities all around the country over the past two decades. However the construction fever affecting the whole of China with its empty houses and an emerging real estate bubble, is especially striking in *qiaoxiang* areas such as Qingtian where remittances, return movements and visits have a strong effect on the building industry and in pushing house prices up. Therefore next to the changing behaviors and lifestyles concerning the wider scope of Chinese society, the building industry in Qingtian is strongly influenced by the impact of international migration and the behavior of using remittances in the construction of vernacular architecture building. In 2002 Qingtian was the county with the highest rate of investment in real estate out of the seven counties that form the Prefecture of Lishui (Zhang 2007) and, based on my own ethnographic observations, I would have said that this trend still persists today, especially affecting the region's villages.

Currently the rising prices of the real estate market, the lack of empty space in Hecheng and Shuinan and the potential saturation of cafes, restaurants and imported product stores in the region's main city are bringing about further movements that imply the reproduction of Hecheng's business and building model in other cities in Lishui prefecture, as well as in the small villages near Hecheng, encompassing the urbanization process of the migrants' ancestral villages.

Youzhu is the first place where this "urbanization of rural" *qiaoxiang* is happening by virtue of its location near to Hecheng and Shuinan. The highway going through a tunnel and over the mountain has dramatically reduced the distance between this village and the town. The journey from Youzhu to Hecheng, which used to take the whole morning 15 years ago and required the use of different transport systems (ferry, carts or a long walk through the mountains, etc.), is now a convenient bus ride that takes no more than 15 minutes.

The large advertising hoarding hanging at the entrance of the tunnel in March 2011 anticipates what we will find on the other side (see figure 40). Next to the pictures of the new apartments, the sentence in English on the real estate company's advertising states "*In Qingtian, life as in Paris*", illustrating the main economic activity in the villages that are now within easy striking distance from Hecheng and the reference to imagined European lifestyle patterns as a selling point and identity marker.



Figure 40. Real estate advertisement, Youzhu, Qingtian

And this is what we find after passing through the tunnel to Youzhu: a newly built residential area that started development in 2007 in the intersection of the neighborhoods comprising Youzhu (Ya'ao and Youzhu Shang).

Nowadays this area, that used to be just fields and a few isolated houses, appears to be a "town in progress" with wide avenues and new streets where high building compounds with their gardens and recreation areas are being constructed. Again families related with migration processes are the main clients purchasing the apartments in these new compounds. Up in the mountains, as in Hecheng, the landscape is also dominated by the presence of villas and large detached houses. Real estate and the construction of luxurious compounds to the "European taste" are the main economic and business activities in the villages close to Hecheng.

During my first visit to Qingtian in 2011 I stayed for a number of days in Youzhu with Zhuju, a 55-year-old woman living in Barcelona who had just retired and sold her small "Todo a 100" shop in Santa Coloma. She invited me to stay in her new house in Youzhu and I soon realized that she was staying there for the first time even though she had bought the apartment in 2008 and had travelled to Qingtian on three different occasions since then. The first morning I helped her to remove the plastic sheeting protecting the doors and windows and to buy the basic stuff to help furnish the place. She told me that since she had bought the apartment she just hadn't found the right time to stay there, and she preferred to live in the old house in Hecheng with her parents whenever she travelled to Qingtian. However my presence was a good occasion to stay in her new apartment in Youzhu and prepare it for the summer when her daughter and grandsons were planning to spend the holidays in Qingtian. For Zhuju buying the apartment was an investment of her savings and from selling her shop in Spain. Even though she doesn't want to return

to Qingtian definitively because her daughter, sons and grandsons all live in Spain, and it is where her husband is buried, she still has her parents in Qingtian. As she points out:

I'm in the middle, I'm the middle generation, with my parents here (in Qingtian) and my sons and grandsons there (in Spain). Where should I stay? I guess now that I'm retired I will live between both places but when my parents are no longer here I will stay more in Spain where I also have my house. Sometimes I wonder if I made the right decision in buying the flat here but in some way it's the right thing to do, it's my hometown and I have to have a house here. (Interview with Zhuju, January 2011, Youzhu, Qingtian).

Buying a flat in Qingtian is "the right thing to do" and she feels safe knowing that she has "a place to stay in Qingtian" for her and her descendants and relatives. Families whose relatives are all in Spain, including ascendants and descendants, are also following the pattern of buying apartments in urban areas. The reasons behind migrants' house purchases in Qingtian range from the ideological domain behind the "myth of return", to a more pragmatic logic that sees the houses as a form of investment or a place to spend vacations⁸⁸.

Zhujū was not the only migrant I met who had bought an apartment in Youzhu but chose to stay with relatives in Hecheng. Even though migrants are buying apartments in the new compounds they do not always use them when they visit Qingtian, at least during the early years following purchase. Most of these apartments remain empty, and some of them are not yet finished and ready to be lived in. The empty new houses need some time and work to be got ready and thus, if the visits are too short they prefer to stay in relatives' houses or even in hotels in Hecheng.

As well as the above reasons, the surroundings of the new residential area also have a lot to do with choosing to stay in Hecheng. In 2011, other than the "Café de Paris" - opened by a returnee from France - a couple of "rural" restaurants⁸⁹ and some small grocery stores, the streets looked quite empty of people going about their daily business and of any social life - much like other places in the world, especially those where construction and real estate have been regarded and institutionally promoted as a main strategy for investment and development such as in China and Spain⁹⁰. In 2011 most Youzhu businesses were concerned with housing, covering a broad extent of activities from stores filled with construction materials to electrical

⁸⁸ A similar mixture of reasons is reflected in different contexts as in the analysis of house consumption of Pakistani migrants in their hometowns (Bivand 2011).

⁸⁹ 农家乐 *nongjiale*

⁹⁰ One of the main triggers of the economic crises affecting Spain since 2008 is related to the real estate bubble created during a long-period of excessive construction that has left hundreds of newly built residential areas lying empty on the outskirts of the cities.

equipment and furniture shops with large advertisements lead by young, Western models.

However, in 2012, the place changed in various ways. More than three cafés started up and were busy and lively, and new shops and supermarkets were also opened.

Figure.

But the most prominent change was epitomized by the new luxury apartments compound erected at the end of the main avenue overlooking a place where a small hill with tombs used to stand. One year after my first visit to Youzhu instead of the small hill stood an empty plot encircled by advertising hoardings covering up the work on a new private sports complex for use by the apartments residents. In 2011 I had heard about the plan to demolish the hill and remove the tombs. A man from Ya'ao, one of Youzhu's old neighborhoods, who lived between Italy and Qingtian, told me that the people whose ancestors were buried on the hill were trying to resist demolition, apparently without much success. As I could see with my own eyes one year later, the hill was no longer there and in its place were cranes, deliberately going about their business.⁹¹



Figure 41. Future private sports complex where a hill used to stand, Youzhu 2012.

The sports centre belongs to the most expensive and luxurious apartment complex in Youzhu's new residential area and in 2012 the houses were all sold out although nobody had yet moved in. However the other buildings that were almost empty the first time I stayed in Youzhu, by 2012 were busier and generally inhabited by people who had returned from Europe and migrants' relatives who had moved from the villages to these new urban areas.

The urban area apartments in Hecheng or Youzhu have a practical function as a place to stay or live in Qingtian. Their formal exterior is often related to the transnational ties and international nature of the region. Much like the advertising on the bridge that we have already seen, there are new building complexes that

⁹¹ The man told me that the government paid some compensation to the families who had ancestors' tombs on the hill. When I asked how they paid up, he answered, resignedly "less than it costs to have a coffee every day for six months".

include traditional nomenclature related to migration, such as the word *huaqiao*, as a visual marker on their facades (see figure 2.1, pag 21).

However it is inside Hecheng and Youzhu's new and old apartments where the pragmatic nature of the houses and their transnational links are best materialized. These houses are filled with objects that embody the incorporation of Spanish lifestyles and habits, and materialize transnational ties. The presence of objects and everyday practices characteristic of Spain is not only a distinctive feature of returnees' houses, but can also be found in the apartments where migrants live during the holidays, as well as in apartments inhabited by migrants' relatives who stayed in Qingtian.

Kitchens are the main space of expression of these hybrid transnational cultures resulting from the exchange and circulation of objects, ideas and symbols across national borders in the context of migration. Spanish gastronomic products - mostly olive oil, ham, and different types of sausages called *embutido* in Spanish - are some of the main items that migrants bring with them as gifts when they travel back to Qingtian. As well as sausages and olive oil, we can find other relevant products such as chocolate, red wine, and a variety of different cooking spices and sauces sitting in the kitchens and fridges of these houses.

When I began my fieldwork I was surprised to find house-cleaning products such as washing up liquid and floor-cleaning detergent, as well as shampoo and shower gel in migrants' apartments. I soon realized that these products were merely characteristic of the houses where migrants spend their holidays and are seldom present in the other two kinds of migrant house: returnees' and relatives' homes. One of the main aspects that migrants underline when comparing their "dual homes" located in Spain and China, is precisely the hygiene and cleanliness of private (houses) and public spaces (streets, parks, restaurants...).

The presence of the cleaning products in their houses is related firstly to the shared idea about the low quality of the hygiene products made in China but an image of pre-1980s Chinese society also endures, when these products were difficult to find or were not as effective as the ones on sale today. Thus Qingtianese that emigrated in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s and have regularly lived in Spain ever since, are the ones that bring these products for personal use in their homes in Qingtian, in the assumption that they will not easily find them in China and thus reproducing stereotypes that divide their world between an undeveloped China versus a modern Europe. As soon as they realize how China has been transformed and that they can find the same cleaning products as in Spain two different reactions come about. Some migrants recognize their naïve attitude in thinking that China was still the same as when they left, while others hold on to the common perception of low-quality Chinese products versus the reliability of European ones. On some occasions this small domestic detail also points to the symbolic function of those objects that move with migrants and materialize their international lives.

Alongside these basic cleaning products we also find diverse beauty products, which, like gastronomic goods, carry a mixture of symbolic and practical values.

Medicines and powdered baby milk are other items that can be found in migrant houses and are related to transnational objects for everyday living.

In addition to cleaning and gastronomic products that belong to the realm of day-to-day life, migrants' homes in China are also full of other objects related to transnational leisure and avocation, as well as communication and language dimensions. On the shelves and decorative furniture, especially in returnees' homes, there is a range of Spanish books (from materials for learning Spanish to bilingual dictionaries and novels), Spanish music, football club posters and photos, and other paraphernalia that inform us about the inhabitants' living experience and background in Spain. As we have seen in the previous section, on their trips to China their suitcases are full of Spanish products and material culture. The same process goes back the other way. Migrants' suitcases are filled with local Qingtian products that are going to be stored and consumed in their Spanish homes.

The interior of the urban apartments where migrants stay during their long-term visits reveal how migrants' houses in China are "transnationalized homes" (Leung 2007). They are inhabited by a mixture of objects and material culture, which give us many clues about the life of these people who are involved in two language settings, having homes in two countries and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders (Portes, Guanizo, and Landolt 1999).

For migrants, these flats have a relevant practical value as places to live during their visits, but are also key elements in their future plans for post-retirement. That said, the idea of a return does not mean they lose their house in Spain because, as we will see in the third part of the dissertation, these return paths are not always conceived as a final step.

5.3.2 A house in the hometown: Ritual and symbolic value.

Migrants' housing practices in Qingtian are not limited solely to the new and modern apartments located in urban areas. Depending on their income, migrants can fulfill their desire of owning two types of house in Qingtian: an apartment in the urban area of Hecheng or Youzhu, as well as a large house in their rural hometown. Whenever they stay in Qingtian they would rather live in the city and visit their home in the villages on special ritual occasions.

As in other emigration areas around the world, the aim of building a large house in the hometown is a relevant transnational practice among Qingtianese migrants.

We find different types of houses in the hometown embodying the specific circumstances of the migrants who finance and built them. The typology of house is diverse and ranges from large, colorful, luxury residences and villas, to the extended vertical cement-block houses, which have different practical and symbolic values for different members of the family. Alongside these already institutionalized building activities new trends towards the restoration of old and "heritage houses" are also emerging among Qingtianese migrants.

5.3.2.1 Houses and villas: Symbolical and ritual value

Large houses and villas with highly ornamented, colorful and sumptuous façades are scattered throughout the villages. These houses were among the first hallmarks of migrants' embodied and symbolic presence in their hometown.

The majority of these houses remain empty for most of the year and are emblems of the rising social status of the families who finance them. Whether the owners of the houses are living in Spain or whether they have returned to China, they seldom spend more than a few days in their village house. Whenever they stay in Qingtian they would rather live in the city and visit their country house on special ritual occasions. Ethnographic observations reveal how the houses are particularly lively at Chinese New Year and during other relevant celebrations related to ancestor worship such as *qingmingjie*.

These houses symbolize the migrants' success and prestige and embody the presence of the families whose members are spread across different cities in China and several countries in Europe. These vernacular architectural forms are a way to obtain reputation and prestige, and thus to gain social standing. The external appearance and facades, more than their interior plays a relevant role among the community.

The external design of the houses generally includes Western architectural elements fashioned into a totally unique shape. There are different forms and designs going from the castle look-alikes covered with colorful tiles to detached large villas and luxury houses with lavish decorative entrances integrating Chinese motifs. Neoclassical columns and pilasters normally flank the door and windows of the large remittance houses, which are erected either on empty plots in the middle of the countryside or in the heart of small villages and neighborhoods.



Figure 43. Remittance house in Fushan.

Next to these sumptuously decorated houses some migrants decide to build large chalets of a simpler design that could be found on any high-status residential estate in Europe. The two identical houses in the figure 44 belong to the best known family in Fushan related to the foundation of the village school at the beginning of the XX century. In 2005 they built the two chalets next to the old family house that they had also recently restored.



Figure 44. Chalets of migrants in Fushan

Each of the twin houses consists of three floors and several spacious rooms that can accommodate the extended family. However each nuclear family has bought their own apartment in Hecheng or Shuinan where they spend their holidays, so they simply go up to Fushan for exceptional and ritual-related occasions. Thus they have the ancestral home shared with all the patrilineal relatives still standing in their hometown while following the modern structure of urban living in Hecheng and Shuinan where they have their “home-from-home” in Qingtian.

Instead of the practical value we observed in the migrants’ urban apartments, the village houses mainly hold a symbolic value. The houses built in the migrants’ hometowns or villages are not regarded and used as “homes-from-home” - expressing the everyday social relations and practices of their inhabitants- but are “houses to be seen and commemorate”. They convey the migrants’ normative and ideological identity based on place of birth and ancestry and thus their external design and appearance is crucial.

Right from the start I realized that the more sumptuous and extravagant remittance houses in Qingtian do not bear any resemblance to the vernacular architecture in Spain or Italy but, instead, are local prototypes of what is supposed to be “Western” and “modern”. I soon recognized that these houses covered with colorful tiles in a fantasy-castle shape with pointed towers on both sides of the façade, as well as balustrades and neoclassical European architecture motifs, also appear on houses in other cities within Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, especially in Hangzhou. This

typology of houses can be seen in a few of the cities along the train ride from Xiamen to Shanghai and are especially concentrated in Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province.

This unique house style, created from isolated architectural elements taken from European traditions, has been adopted by middle-class urban dwellers and dominates the outskirts of Hangzhou, configuring a unique architectural form that has emerged in China as a benchmark of modernity and “Western lifestyles and modes of dwelling”. The correspondence between the *qiaoxiang* migrants’ houses and Chinese middle-class urban families’ homes illustrates the shared prototypes of modernity and Western vision in contemporary China⁹². In this sense, the houses in Qingtian reproduce the encounters of transnational ties in Qingtian – lending them its particular flavour – and the localized forms of globalized material culture within the larger scope of China.

While some years ago all villages had only a few of these houses belonging to the most distinguished families, there has recently been a wave of building activity in the hometown construction of large houses. The forms and designs introduced by the first remittance houses have entered into Qingtian’s general building repertoire and thus we find a diversity of houses built with different materials and to differing standards, emulating the same design and motifs that the remittance houses present. As in other localities strongly influenced by migration these architectural motifs have become a status symbol in Qingtian.



Figure 45. Old house and new house. Construction with neoclassical motives, Shankou, Qingtian

⁹² The correspondence between the *qiaoxiang* migrants’ houses and the houses of middle-class urban families is also identified in the ethnography undertaken by Chu (2010) in Longyan, which is *qiaoxiang* located in Fujian province specializing in migration to the United States. These links led Chu to argue that the notions of Americanness in the rural area of Longyan are most influenced by the “urban dreamscape of modern and cosmopolitan modes of living” found in the city of Fuzhou than through transnational ties and migration practices (Y. J. Chu 2010:44–45).

During my three-year period of fieldwork I could see how the building fever was not restricted just to Hecheng and nearby areas. The villages in Fangshan, Fushan and other places where migration originated are also going through a relevant process with the widespread construction of large houses and villas and the reproduction of perceived Western-based motifs that are incorporated in almost all the new buildings.



Figure 46. Construction of villas following the neoclassical repertoire, Renzhuang, Qingtian

5.3.2.2 Multi-storey houses: Mixing of symbolic and practical-value.

The second type of village remittance house is represented by the multifunctional homes that meet both symbolic and practical uses. The façades of these houses are not as sumptuous as the villas, but the neoclassical pillars and the balconies with ornamented balustrades still identify the house and the family with international migration projects.

These houses are built upwards and include as many storey as there are brothers and sisters in the extended family that finances it, each floor having all living facilities including its own kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms.

The first floor is usually intended for the day-to-day living of the parents of first generation migrants who stay in Qingtian for most of the year, and each of the upper floors is supposed to be used by the different nuclear families that belong to

the extended family. The most sophisticated and high-rise houses include elevators to connect the different apartments destined for each of the nuclear families⁹³.

The large living room and kitchen located next to the main entrance – with the ancestors’ altar in the center – is the meeting space where all the relatives gather when they are in their hometown, serving a similar function to the traditional houses’ central courtyard. However, as in the villas described above, the upper floor apartments are empty for most of the year with overseas nuclear families only going there for relevant celebrations. In some cases one of the siblings remains in Qingtian to care for the parents and is normally the one who dwells in the first floor apartment.

The frequency of these houses in different villages in Qingtian and their homogenous appearance makes it difficult to distinguish between them. Migrants take part in financing their part from Spain and in some cases they will not travel to Qingtian to see the house until long after it is finished. They usually receive pictures and keep track of the building process, usually managed by the brothers or sisters in Qingtian. In contrast to the villas described above, which are totally empty for the most part, the vertical houses are built by families who have some relatives remaining in Qingtian and hold a mixture of symbolic and practical uses. In most cases the brothers and sisters who co-operate in financing the house are spread out across different countries, therefore each of the floors of the house represents the connections with a specific country.

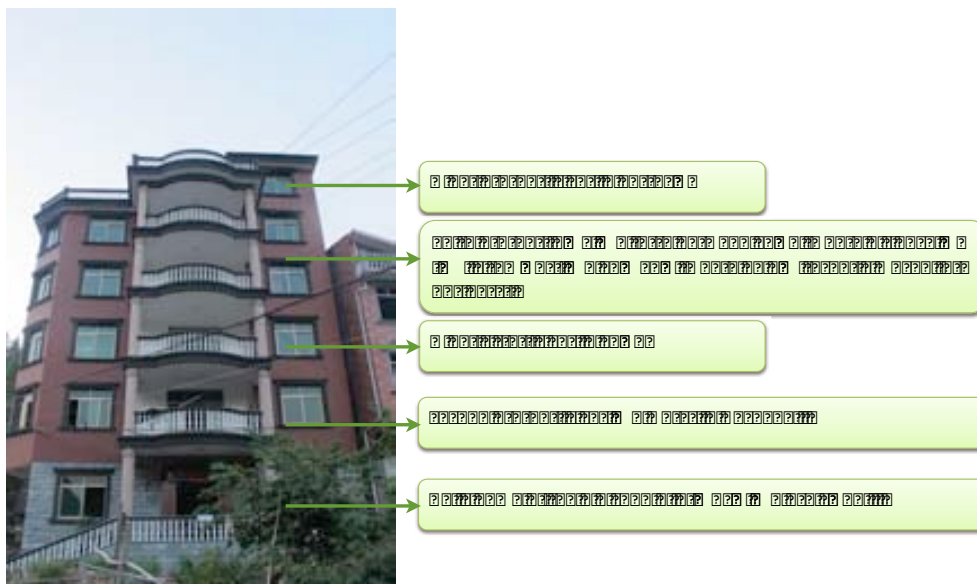


Figure 47. Diagram of a multi-storey extended family house in Fushan, Qingtian

⁹³ The text in this footnote is largely illegible due to heavy corruption in the original image. It appears to be a reference or citation related to the study.

The example provided in the diagram represents a five-storey remittance house. The ground floor has been home to the old couple since their daughter and sons built the house five years ago. The second floor belongs to the only son who didn't emigrate. However he works and lives with his nuclear family in Hecheng and even though he often visits his parents in the village he seldom stays overnight in the house. The third and fourth floors are intended for the older sister and brother who live in Spain, while the top floor is the space reserved for the oldest brother who resides in Portugal.

As we can see, the morphology and structure of the house express the symbolic presence in the hometown of an extended family and reveal how multiple belongings and localities "are present and interrelated" in the hometown. On the one hand, these houses are the everyday homes of the relatives who stay behind (normally the parents of first generation migrants) and on the other, they embody the symbolic presence in the hometown of the Qingtianese who live abroad.

The same symbolic manifestation of extended family presence in the hometown can be found in the ritual practices consisting of giving large candles with detailed and personalized calligraphy that relates the specific circumstances of the migrants who donate it (see chapter 5.1.1).

The ritual candles and the five-storey building described above physically manifest the basic transnational links in Qingtianese international migration: links between different nodes of the diaspora and links with the hometown. Using a different perspective and analyzing different transnational objects – the candle and the house – we may say that the desire to build a house in the hometown and place the candle in the local village temple, implies and symbolizes the whole family's transnational links with their hometown and are thus the migrants' embodiment.

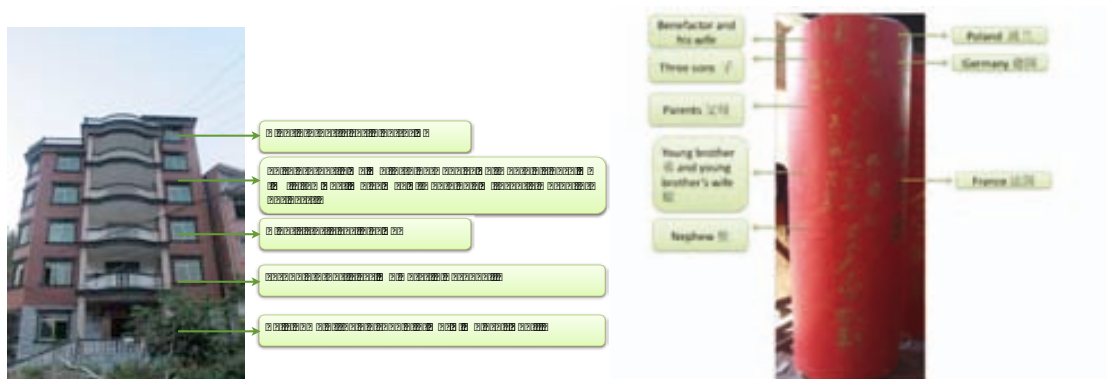


Figure 48. Symbolical embodiment of migrants in their hometown. Comparison between multi-storey houses and extended family candles.

5.3.2.3 New modern imaginations and inter-generation factor: Re-visiting the past and rebuilding old houses

Regarding the relationship between migrants and their hometown through the houses they build, there is one more typology that has to be taken into consideration, even though it represents a new trend that has not yet become common. Whereas the dominant tendency still involves new-build houses that incorporate Western architecture to express the migrants' success abroad and increase the family social status and prestige, there are currently new trends emerging surrounding the restoration and rebuilding of local architectural heritage. During fieldwork I detected the very beginnings of a totally different housing project consisting of the renovation and reconstruction of the old ancestral houses which are, for the most part, derelict or dwelled in by families with scarce economic resources.

I could observe that migrants have a special sentimental feeling towards these old houses, for memories of their growing up as well as for a way of appreciating the traditional heritage of Chinese culture. When travelling to Qingtian migrants usually visit the houses where they were born or spent some years of their life. During the 1980s and '90s the families that could afford to buy or build simple concrete houses moved out of the old houses they used to share with their extended family. These houses followed the traditional Chinese three-sided courtyard structure with different sizes and layouts, and were the homes of different nuclear families normally belonging to the same patrilineal family. From the second half of the '70s onwards the houses were progressively abandoned as their inhabitants either went to Europe or moved to new apartments or concrete houses in the villages or the city.

So even though all migrants generally have a special emotional perception of old houses, new perspectives and attitudes towards their restoration are emerging among the younger generations and middle-aged people who have lived abroad for a long time and incorporated another image of modernity. I have been a part of migrants' visits to these old houses on different occasions and following different generations.

Mr. Zhang is a 63-year-old man who has built his own remittance house in his hometown of Youzhu and, following retirement last year, he spends some months in Qingtian and some months in Spain with his children and grandchildren. When he is in Qingtian he often visits the place where he used to live before he left for Italy in 1981. In the figure 49 we can see him with a old female friend who resides in Barcelona and talking to a man who lives in the house now.



Figure 49. Mr. Zhang visiting the house where he was born in Youzhu.

This house, with rich filigree carved on the doors and windows, originally belonged, as did many others, to rich landowners and were confiscated by the state for peasants to use back in 1950. Following the structure characteristic of the late Qing dynasty, the rooms are located on three wings around a central courtyard where nowadays children play, chasing chickens between the clothes and vegetables hanging out to dry. This house, which these days is home to two families totalling eight people who have not had the opportunity to thrive and build a new house in the village, had housed more than 100 inhabitants during the 1970s, before Mr Zhang and others living there emigrated to Europe.

Although Mr Zhang often visits the house he nevertheless remembers the hard times he lived through there, and the improvements in his descendants' lives over the past decades. In a similar way to most people his age, these sites are a materialization of mixed memories based on hard times and nostalgia. However for Mr Zhang, as well as for the Qingtianese of his age no matter whether they have migrated or not, modernity and a better lifestyle are materialized in the remittance house he has built with the effort of a hard working life and he never showed any sign of interest in a restoration project for the old house that stands as a materialized form of times that are long gone.

The feelings these old houses engender are different among younger generations who were born in the 1970s and have lived in Spain for a long time. In contrast to Mr Zhang they have not experienced the hard times of the Great Leap Forward and either were small kids or were not yet born during the Cultural Revolution.

These generational migrants, both the ones who started their migration and the ones who reunited with their parents in Spain during their childhood (1.5

generation), have different memories and feelings for the old houses and, on different occasions, have told me that they would like to restore the houses in order to have a place to stay in the countryside and experience a different lifestyle to the one they have in Spain.

It is important to mention that migrants' social standing and image are changing with the times and with the generations due to both the different circumstances of Qingtianese who have not migrated and the conditions of the Chinese in Spain. The younger migrants sometimes disregard the large and lavishly decorated remittance houses, claiming that is a waste of money to play the game of the *mianzi* (social standing and prestige) that is particularly pertinent for international migrants and expressed by means of the large houses. These emerging attitudes envisage changes in the migrants' representation, the penetration of new modernity imaginings and bring about variations in the traditional model of *qiaoxiang*.

Instead of sumptuous houses that follow the institutionalized architectural repertoire, the younger migrants show a preference for the simplicity and antiquity of the old houses, arguing that this "heritage" could give a chance to their Spanish-born children to learn and experience the unique elements of Chinese culture and transmit part of their life history to their descendants.

This sensibility towards old houses illuminates the different perceptions between generations as well as between migrants and their same-age relatives who remain in Qingtian. I have repeatedly heard Qingtianese preparing for visits from their relatives. A 40-year-old woman who has all her siblings in Europe once told me that she would be very busy for the next days because her relatives from Spain were travelling to Qingtian and she had to accompany them everywhere.

"When they come here, they always want to go to see the old house where we were born and I'm the one who has to accompany them to the village. Sometimes it is a bit exhausting, going all over the place, and I don't know why they are so interested to see that, as each year it looks worse". (Fieldwork notes, Qingtian, March 2011).

Young migrants who have been living in Europe for long periods of time manifest their intentions and will to restore the old houses in order to use them during their holidays in China. A 35-year-old Qingtianese that came back from Spain and provisionally settled in Hangzhou illustrates the perception of these old houses held by his generation, the divergence perspectives in relation to the Qingtianese, and the difficulties of pursuing these projects:

"I am really serious about starting to restore my old family house... the problem is it is very expensive and people here look at you strangely if you say that, they don't understand. For me it's a pity to see how the house is getting more and more decayed... I lived there for just three years but I remember spending the summers with my grandmother in this courtyard in summer... I would really like to spend my vacations with my children there, surrounded by nature and in this old wooden

house. It's more authentic I think". (Fragment of an interview with a returnee, Qingtian November 2012).

These young migrants express a different relationship with the houses and have the will to save them, but this is a difficult enterprise to undertake for a number of reasons. Alongside the relevant economic investment required, most of these houses "belong" to different nuclear families scattered across different countries. It was not always so, but generally several households would share the houses. So it's not always easy to find out who has property rights and come to an agreement with the extended family about these restoration projects.

This is the case for the house in Shankou where Lina was born and lived until 1998 when she turned 14 and joined her parents in Spain. When I met her in 2012 she was visiting Qingtian and travelling around China and she wanted to show me the house where she used to live.

We didn't enter the house through the main door leading to the central courtyard but got in through the back door that brought us directly to the rooms where Lina used to live with her parents, her sister and her maternal grandparents.



Figure 50. Lina in the door of the house she lived in until she was 13 and moved to Spain with her parents

Lina's case is special as it shows the flexibility and adaptation of kinship and residential social norms to different circumstances and needs. Given that Lina's mother was an only child and her father a widower who had remarried, the couple moved to Lina's mother's family house and the man took his wife's surname instead of following the traditional Chinese patrilocal and patrilineal social practice. However, when Lina's family began to migrate to Spain in 1993 (first her parents, then her uncles, aunts and her grandparents) the paternal grandparents moved to

the house in Shankou to take care of her and her sister until they also left for Spain to reunite with their parents in 1998.

The southern wing of the house where Lina used to live, opposite the main entrance, was totally derelict and we went through the rooms that divided the labyrinthine homes of each nuclear family that would include one or two rooms with a kitchen often shared by two or three households.

When Lina was a child the house was home to 18 families – 120 people – but nowadays the south and east wings are only dwelled in by a family from Henan province who work in the construction sector, and the west wing has been totally transformed.

Breaking the sense of unity, the west wing is now a six-storey remittance house and is what makes the house so interesting for our purposes.



Figure 51. A multi-storey remittance house inserted in the west wing of an old courtyard house, Shankou.

In 2005 the family that was still living on the left side of the house decided to demolish their part instead of remodelling the existing structure so that they could erect a completely new vertical remittance house, taking the shape and functions of the ones described in the previous section. On the first floor a married couple whose sons and daughters all live in Spain are the only relatives of the Ling family who still live in the house. The upper storeys are empty and reserved for each of their children now residing in Spain.

Sitting in the courtyard the old man gets a bit nostalgic about how busy (热闹 *renao*) the house used to be before “everybody left”.⁹⁴ He explained that in 1940s the first family migrated to Belgium and although they still come back to Qingtian frequently they only go to the old house to “have a look” or to take part in ritual ceremonies (especially funerals) since they have bought a new apartment in town. The man goes on to tell me that the families started to leave the house and the countryside en

⁹⁴ 大家都走了。

masse from the 1980s onwards and that, since 2008 when the last family left, they have been the only ones remaining.

“Nowadays they are all in Europe and the old people have moved to new apartments in Hecheng. But I didn’t want to leave so that’s why I constructed this new house. When my sons come back we all stay here together” (Fieldwork notes)

Gazing in astonishment at the clashing result of this old house juxtaposed with the new building, Lina commented that some relatives opposed the project but given that the Ling couple are the only ones living in-situ nobody could do nothing to stop it going ahead. And, of course, it is much cheaper and easier to build a new house than restore an old one.

Lina told me that her family, and especially her and her older brother, were thinking of restoring the house but not pulling it down to build a new one as her “uncles” had done. After a few attempts, however, they realized how hard it is to make contact and set a deal with relatives located far away with whom they have almost lost touch. She says that her relatives who share the south wing do not have any intention of joining their project.

Actually the large room where ancestral rituals take place is in the south wing, next to the rooms where Lina’s family used to live, and is the only space in the old house that all the relatives still use⁹⁵. The large hall opposite the main entrance has a ritual use and is the place where ancestor worship and funeral ceremonies are celebrated. Even if people do not live in the house any more, relatives of the deceased would always try to perform funeral rites at the ancestral home, whether the person was in Qingtian or Spain.

The last time Lina visited her ancestral home was in 2005 when her grandmother passed away in Spain and her sons brought her ashes back to Qingtian to celebrate the ritual. We will come back to this funerary practices in the next chapter but here I just want to emphasize the centrality of the old houses as places related to the whole family and their ritual values and uses, especially funerary ones.

Restoration projects are not easy to accomplish due to the bureaucracy and legal issues involved, not to mention the large sums of money needed for sinking into them. This brings us back round to the main difficulty expressed in the interview extract quoted above (page XX...).

There are already several finished projects carried out by wealthy families with a long and famous migration history in Qingtian. However these pioneers’ examples of restored old houses point towards another direction, as they do not have a practical use as a place to stay but, instead, have a new symbolic use related to the family’s history and the heritage of the place. These houses stand as museums and

⁹⁵ During the communist era these houses changed their initial social function in relation to the spaces they contained.

spaces where historical and cultural heritage can be presented, but they are not places to live in.

The first example is located in Fushan and involves the history of one of the first Qingtianese families to settle in Spain, the same family that founded the Fushan School in 1920's. Along with the overseas adventures of the well known Chenxi and Chenying, who travelled as officials of the Republic of China, Chen Tse-Ping was the first person from the Chen lineage who travelled to Europe in the 1930s and settled there⁹⁶. The overseas connections of the family and the fact that they were landlords and "intellectuals" led to them losing their properties in the 1950s and being a Red Army target during the Cultural Revolution, when they lost their position at the school.

As we presented in the previous section, in 2005 the Chen family built two villas next to the old house that was their family property before the communist collectivization campaign. Then, in 2009, the family focused all their efforts on restoring the property and rebuilding the large old house that these days holds a small museum about the family.

This house is elegantly restored maintain the original structure and claim to having the two most elaborate courtyard-style traditional of the area.



Figure 52. Chen family museum in Fushan, Qingtian

⁹⁶ Chen-Tse Ping also went abroad as an official but after losing contact with the Chinese government he stayed in France for a while, travelled to Germany and finally settled in Spain where he founded an itinerant acrobatics theatre with his Spanish wife who took his surname (Manolita Chen). This man, who is not "remembered" and commemorated in official accounts and public representations of the Chen lineage and Qingtian migration history, was in fact the man who triggered one of the first direct chain migration flows from Qingtian to Spain in the latter part of the 1970s.

In 2012, a renowned Fangshan family, also with a longstanding history of international migration, began the same process as the Chen family had undertaken three years before. Although I didn't get the chance to meet members of the family, the villagers told me that relatives living in different European countries were at that moment trying to buy the different parts of the house that had been confiscated. Unlike the Chen's Fushan house built in the XIX century following the traditional Chinese style, the building in Fangshan is one of the most impressive houses constructed at the beginning of the XX century by a pioneer returnee, and introduces European architectural styles into the traditional structure of three wings flanking a central courtyard

These two examples are exceptional cases of Qingtian's emerging self perceived heritage related to houses and the migration history of well-known, wealthy families. Along with this we have also seen how common people demonstrate preliminary new trends and present another type of relation between migrants and their hometown.

On one hand, for the older generations and people who have not migrated, the old houses are perceived as an image of a past society that they want to forget in order to consume and own new material products, including houses, that in China are conceived as symbols of modernity and prosperity. On the other, younger migrant generations born in the 1970s who have lived and inserted in Spanish society have integrated another sense of modernity and practices related to the modern lifestyles in the countryside and a re-evaluation of traditional, old heritage. But in order for that to start happening history has needed to move on and the situation of Chinese people in Spain has also needed to change and improve.

PART II. DYNAMIC ROADS: PHYSICAL MOBILITIES

Introduction. Being “there” matters

Every day an increasing number of people are crossing borders and living a transnational life without physically moving. Nevertheless, in the scope of this research, the outcomes of mediated long-distance mobility cannot be truly grasped independently from the concrete physical movements of people between China and Spain.

In chapter four we have seen that different invisible and object-embodied transnational practices are interconnected and somehow prompted by physical mobility. Indeed, different natures of transnational practices - from the most ethereal and invisible to the most physical- are highly interconnected and mutually linked.

Even though virtual and embodied transnational practices and ways of staying in touch long distance have intensified and generalized within the scope of the Qingtian migration field, this does not mean that physically *being there* is not needed any more. In fact, over the past few years, along with virtual and object-mediated links, the physical presence of migrants in Qingtian has not decreased but, on the contrary, has risen both in numbers and in its diversity of forms.

On the one hand, the features, aims and social outcomes of today’s visits and return migration practices from Spain to China are substantially different from those usual two decades ago while, on the other hand, we are also facing the emergence of new movements towards Spain over and above the framework of “economic emigration” that has shaped the arrival of Chinese migrants in Spain over the last three decades.

Following the chart, in this third part the most physical and solidified transnational exercises - comprising the fifth sector of the diagram - will be addressed by examining the actual presence of migrants in Qingtian through visits and return practices, as well as the new context for physical movements of Qingtianese towards Spain.



Figure 54. Diagram Bidirectional transnational practices Qingtian- Spain

Operationalization of the categories “visits” and “return”

Taking visits and returns as the most concrete and materialized forms of transnational mobility and placing them on the same analytic level – and thus on the same circle in the diagram - brings us to face to face with a central issue regarding the modern day theoretical conceptualization of different movements back to the country of origin.

The changing nature of reverse migration practices, as well as the multiplicity of movements back and forth between localities, is leading to an increasingly blurred line between these two analytical categories. In fact, the boundaries between visits and return may be as fluid and complex as the contemporary circulation of individuals between different localities in different countries is.

In his pioneering and renowned work on return migration, Gmelch states how “in some settings it is difficult to distinguish analytically the migrants returning home for a short visit or seasonally from those who have returned permanently” (Gmelch 1980:136). However, Gmelch conceptualizes return as the final step of migration involving the migrants’ resettlement in the country of origin. The same notion also lies behind Duval’s dichotomy between “return visits” and “return migration” in his analysis of the reverse flows among Eastern Caribbean migrants (Duval 2004). The aim of Duval’s work is to analyze how return visits - conceptualized as a transnational practice- might lead and facilitate return migration flows, which he defines as the “completion of the migration cycle” (Duval 2004:51–52). While I follow the conceptualization of Duval considering return visits as a “transnational exercise though which multiple social fields are linked” (Duval 2004:54), the empirical and conceptual problems of his model arise when limiting return migration to completed and final movements⁹⁷.

Therefore I will not distinguish visits from returns according to a definitive feature, as doing so will reduce and misapprehend what return practices are in the contemporaneity.

Even though I understand return practices as flexible and open-ended movements that may or may not be followed by subsequent steps – and, thus, acknowledging their potential transnational characteristics – I argue that there is still a difference between visiting the country of origin and residing there, i.e. returning. Hence the solution proposed by Oxfeld and Long (2004) to include within the category of “return” any kind of physical movement towards the country of origin - from short-term visits to long-standing return migration - doesn’t fit the empirical reality we want to analyze. Visits and return still involve singular and distinct empirical processes and bring about different outcomes in migrants’ lives. Therefore these

⁹⁷ In the theoretical discussion of the first part of the dissertation (see pages) we have already presented how “current transnational developments have complicated the tale of return migration” (Ley and Kobayashi 2005:112) and how “the study of return migration has the potential to sharpen our understanding of transnationalism as a process” (Teo 2011:807). In this research return practices are understood as “one of the multiple steps of a continued movement” including different ways and means of migrants’ residency in the country of origin or to their parents’ country of origin.

empirical distinctions of movement towards the country of origin have to be analytically and theoretically distinguished.

So, which are the criteria we might follow to differentiate these intricate and multifaceted solidified transnational practices involving migrants' presence in their country of origin for our case in hand? What's the difference between these two physical transnational practices illustrated in the fifth circle of the diagram including visits and return practices? How can visits and return be conceptualized and analytically distinguished in today's mobile world and how we will understand these two categories over the following chapters?

The length of stay in the country of origin, as well as an EMIC perspective that corresponds to the informants' self adscription and intentions before departure, are the main variables emphasized by Sinnati in her significant and meaningful discussion about the criterion used by researchers to draw the line between these two conceptual tools and empirical realities (Sinatti 2011:155–156). The premises underlined by Sinatti are the ones that best apply to the empirical reality of Qingtianese physical mobility.

Therefore, on the one hand I understand visits as time-framed stays whether in Qingtian for people who have migrated to Europe, or in Spain for Qingtianese who live in China. Visits, thus, will cover the bidirectional trips from Spain to China and vice versa during a fixed interval. No matter whether it's a stay of two weeks or two months, I include trips or visits of different fixed lengths of time and undertaken for different reasons from and to Qingtian within the category.

Whenever visits implicate an open-ended and undefined length of time and the intention is to settle, even temporarily, in China or Spain they will be included and analyzed as a return and emigration practice respectively. Thus when the stays in China are prolonged without a fixed date of "return to Spain" or when the person is moving constantly between the two settings I will include these movements in the category of return practices which, as we will see in chapter six, includes highly different empirical situations. Following the same logic when Qingtianese visits to Spain are framed within an undefined length of time and the intention is to settle for a long period we should consider these movements as emigration rather than visits.

In chapter five the different motivations, relations, changes and outcomes of the bidirectional visits from and to Qingtian will be analyzed from an intergenerational perspective. In chapter six we will focus on current return practices, and migrants' continuous mobile lives upon return.

Chapter 6. Visiting Qingtian, visiting Spain: Physical transnational practices

The increasing physical mobility of migrants and their relatives has led to a level of development in Qingtian's transport infrastructures that's quite exceptional for a small Chinese rural town. Whereas at the beginning of the 1980s it took more than two days to reach the closest international airport from the remote villages, nowadays the choice, speed and means of moving have dramatically improved and keep on developing still. In the same way that migrants were highly involved in the development of internet technology, their contribution to the construction of new means of transportation has also been decisive. Over and above internal improvements, several transport services connecting Qingtian with the major international airports in the province have also been developed, thus easing migrants' arrival and departure.

At least three buses a day regularly shuttle between the small town of Hecheng and Shanghai Pudong international airport. During Chinese New and the summer holidays the service may increase to five buses a day and so, given that each coach has a capacity for 30 passengers, during "high season" at least 150 persons are travelling by bus from Qingtian to Shanghai airport and vice versa. The buses adjust their schedule to the international flight timetables and tickets can be paid for in Euros, which illustrates how this transport facility is particularly intended for Chinese people living in Europe and coming to visit their hometown.⁹⁸

The bus station is located in Shuinan, next to Qingtian's largest square where the flags of the main associations representing Qingtianese people in different countries are displayed, thus sealing the international connections of the place.

The frenetic activity in the bus station surroundings before bus departure time, lends an atmosphere resembling a small domestic airport to the place. People who arrive to give a good send off to friends and relatives push luggage trolleys laden with suitcases and travel bags stamped with European addresses in large letter stickers. What might seem a chaos of people coming and going, bags being stowed in the buses' luggage holds, and workers screaming different orders at the passengers and the people accompanying them is, in fact, a well-organized system that always meets the schedule.

The bus service connecting Qingtian with the international Pudong airport in Shanghai is the first choice for people arriving in or leaving from Qingtian by public transport. Aside from that, a growing number of Qingtianese people with private

⁹⁸ For those taking international flights in the morning there are night buses leaving from Shuinan bus station, and there are also morning buses scheduled for the people taking night flights.

cars also bring and pick up their relatives to the closest Wenzhou airport or train station⁹⁹.

Furthermore the development of good transport is not finished and is, in fact, still improving. The impact of transnational ties on Qingtian and the influx of international comings and goings have led to the approval of a new high-speed train station in Youzhu, the new urban area in Qingtian County. In 2016, when the line is due for completion, Qingtian will have a direct high-speed connection to Shanghai, Fujian and Guangzhou in just a few hours.



Figure. High speed train panel with an old man sitting on a bench, Youzhu

This reality would have seemed a fantasy to the earliest migrants to leave the country, and these dizzying changes still startle elderly local people. Without the migration factor and the weight of increasingly physical movements between Qingtian and the different European countries where migration has been oriented, the investment and relevance of this transportation enterprise would have been unthinkable in a small rural county like Qingtian.

The unceasing growth and improvement of transport services – which are providing better and quicker connections between Qingtian and the outside world - reveal the character of the place and the key role of visits and physical mobility in social change.

⁹⁹ In 2011 the new train station in Wenzhou started functioning, covering the itinerary to the north towards Shanghai and to the south towards Fujian province.

6.1 “There is a Spanish friend in Qingtian”: Travelling to the hometown

Whenever I stayed in Qingtian every now and then people invited me to join dinners and meetings with friends or relatives who were visiting Qingtian from different European countries. Sometimes it was a “Spanish friend”, at others a “Portuguese” or an “Italian” friend¹⁰⁰.

The phrase “there is a Spanish friend in Qingtian”, thus, turned into a common expression during fieldwork. What is the meaning of “Spanish” in this persistent phrase? In other words, what is this “Spanish” in “a Spanish friend in Qingtian”¹⁰¹, and what is the relationship between these place adjectives and the ideology of Chineseness?

The linguistic way of identifying Qingtianese living abroad by using the country where they migrated and the place of actual residency mirrors the special relationship between Qingtianese international migrants and those who stayed behind in China, and reflects how migrancy is a key element in the identity-building process from a contextual and relational point of view. The social difference and contrasting attitudes towards migration lying behind the relationship between migrants and non-migrants emerges especially when they physically meet in Qingtian.

Throughout this chapter we will reflect on these questions but for now what I want to emphasize is how often this sentence occurs and therefore how frequent these encounters are. Qingtianese agree and repeatedly state how “in the last few years more and more migrants are travelling to and visiting Qingtian”. This EMIC consideration has historical and contextual rationality.

Twenty years ago, visits to the hometown were an occasional and extraordinary event led by those migrants who had achieved a relevant economic success abroad and were able to save enough money to adjust themselves – to a greater or lesser extent - to the local attitudes towards wealthy migrants¹⁰².

Obviously, even back then, local Qingtianese were aware that not all Chinese people in Europe shared the same destiny and were able to get rich overnight. However, the low-level physical presence of migrants in their hometown, the scarce and erratic phone calls and letters, as well as the still poor and hard living conditions in rural Chinese society, were all important factors in building up the extraordinary character of these occasional events.

¹⁰⁰ This way of identifying people with their country of migrancy was not used only when they interacted with me but it’s a common way of referring to migrants between people in Qingtian.

¹⁰¹ I am alluding to Vasantkumar (2012), who asks “What is this “Chinese” in overseas Chinese”?, in reference to the Stuart Hall’s question “What Is This Black in Black Popular Culture?” (Hall 1996).

¹⁰² The notion and expectations of international migrants as being wealthy people is a common feature among emigration areas in different parts of the world. Within China, this socio-cultural convention is expressed under the phrase 衣锦还乡 *yijin huanxiang* which can be translated as “Returning to the hometown with silk clothes”.

The comparison between migrants' visits to Qingtian during the 1980s and 1990s - such as the one that Lijing recalled -¹⁰³ and the now frequent presence of Qingtianese migrants in their hometown has brought a significant change in *qiaoxiang* values and a transformation of traditional conceptions towards migrancy.

The first episode of the famous TV series entitled *Wenzhou Yi Jiaren* (温州一家人), which relates the situation of a family living across Italy and China, depicts one of the early "homecomings" of a successful migrant from Italy to a small village located in the border area between Qingtian County and Wenzhou municipality¹⁰⁴.

The opening scene of the first episode brings us to Rui'an village 瑞安 in 1981 through the image of a girl wearing her red college scarf running through the forest to get to school on time. When she arrives in the almost empty classroom, a nostalgic teacher accepts her apologies for her lateness while explaining that few pupils will attend the lesson because most of the kids are helping their families. The image of an empty classroom and the teacher's remarks convey the difficult times in the region and the uncertain future for the younger villagers.



Figure 56. Class with A Yu and the teacher, *Wenzhou Yijiaren*, first episode.

A few minutes after the lesson starts -which consists of repeating slogans about Chinese Modernization - a man barges into the classroom to tell the little girl, named A Yu and who will be the series' main character, that she has to go back home as soon as possible because her uncle has just come back from Italy. The next scene is the welcome home party for the uncle in the courtyard of the family house with all the relatives, neighbors and political leaders of the village.

A tall, strong man in his mid thirties wearing an immaculate white suit plays the "visiting migrant". The tall build of the migrant and his Western-style clothes contrast with the shorter bodies of the villagers wearing their dark blue Maoist

¹⁰³ See page 129

¹⁰⁴ *Wenzhou Yijiaren* means literally "A family from Wenzhou". The English title of the series, "Legend of entrepreneurship", denotes the main plot of the story and reinforces the strong Wenzhou reputation for being business people.

clothing. This visual contrast portrays the image of successful migrants and expresses the traditional *qiaoxiang* values towards migration as the only way out of poverty.

This aesthetic contrast is complemented by the distinct attitudes of the characters. While the “outside” (*waimian*) modernity is represented by the figure of a single, reserved migrant, the peasants enjoying the buzzing puppet theater epitomize the Chinese (*guonei*) rural tradition.



Figure 57. The visiting migrant and villagers at the welcoming party.
Wenzhou Yjiaren, first episode

The visiting migrant walks around the lively party greeting everyone who has come to see him. The first sentence he addressed to little A Yu, who would be next in line in the family to follow the chain migration to Italy, introduces the value of objects and gifts in migrants’ early visits that we have already analyzed: “Do you remember me? You were very small when I left. I brought you a present”.

Even if A Yu’s parents initially wanted their two children to follow their uncle to Italy they now have to choose just one of them. After discussions and conflicts between the married couple, eventually the husband makes the decision to send the little girl with his brother to Italy, sell the family house in Rui’an and migrate with his wife and elder son to the city.

The episode ends with two emotional farewells representing the international and internal mobility characteristic of post-Mao society in the Wenzhou – Qingtian rural areas. The first farewell depicts the emigration trip of A Yu and her uncle leaving the village by *sanlunche*, which is the first vehicle in the long journey to Italy and expresses the outcome of early visits as triggering factors for further migration. The second departure portrays the rest of the family – the married couple and their son - leaving the village on foot, with all their belongings on their backs, receiving their

neighbors' best wishes through the symbolic gift of one *yuan*¹⁰⁵ from each of them. This final farewell that closes the episode, corresponds to the internal movements from the rural areas to the cities, which was a previous economic strategy among Qingtian/Wenzhou families that later on continued side-by-side with international migration practices (Beltrán Antolín 2003:16).

Albeit the exaggerated and dramatic atmosphere is characteristic of TV series, this episode brings together the basic impressions, values and beliefs about migration during the '80s and '90s among the *qiaoxiang* villages of the Wenzhou / Qingtian border area. The series was shot in 2012 so we can see how this past is evoked in the present through the media, and how migration is still used to explain and represent the specificity of the area. The choice of the migrant's visit from Italy as the main plot of the opening episode of the series is not casual but shows the relevant role of visits in the construction of migration values and "*qiaoxiang* consciousness",¹⁰⁶ both from an institutional perspective as well as from a grassroots level.



Figure 58. *Yijiaren* filming site, Rui'an, Wenzhou, screen grab of migrant's Weixin social wall.

The analysis of the reception of the series among Chinese people in Europe sheds light on the transformation of migration practices and values during the last three decades. The 36 episodes were sponsored by the Department of Propaganda of the Municipal Party Committee and gained great popularity within China as well as among Zhejiang migrants in Europe who see themselves reflected in the stories of the Zhou family¹⁰⁷. Indeed, the village where the series was shot is nowadays a tourist site attracting first generation migrants living in Italy, Spain and France, etc. which has somehow become a symbolic site commemorating the collective history of first generation international migrants. Migrants who left Qingtian during the

¹⁰⁵ Yuan 元 is the vernacular expression for the Chinese currency. Nowadays one Chinese yuan (rmb) is equal to 0.1 euros.

¹⁰⁶ The expression "*qiaoxiang* consciousness" is taken from Li (1999a).

¹⁰⁷ In November 2012 Wenzhou *Yijiaren* was the most watched series on Youku, which is a Chinese on-line video platform similar to Youtube.

1980s and 1990s praise the series as a realistic portrayal of their own lives and try to include a daytrip to the attraction during their contemporary visits to the hometown. A woman who lives in Barcelona and visited China in March 2014 posted a photo of the entrance to the site on her Weixin social wall, appraising the series as a “very real and touching” one¹⁰⁸. The fact that the series has been well received by migrants, regardless of the country they migrated to and live in and the concrete place they come from, underscores the similar experiences and collective memory of those people who migrated to “Europe” – more than to a concrete country or city – from the Wenzhou/Qingtian area - more than from a specific village. Thus, social class and similar migration experiences stand out from the locally rooted identities as a social identification element.¹⁰⁹

The series has also brought about a less enthusiastic appraisal from Chinese descendants who, contrary to their predecessors, find it rather unrealistic and cannot see themselves in the plot and the atmosphere. Additionally, some of them are unable to follow the story in Mandarin¹¹⁰. One of the posts on the dedicated to this series on the Associna Forum website says¹¹¹:

“Wenzhou Yi Jia Ren (literally Wenzhou, a family) is really a video that speaks about our homeland, Wenzhou and all the mainland (...) But after watching the video... I am not sure if it refers to us, to our actual situation, I doubt it. I do not have time to watch all the episodes and I have difficulties in understanding Mandarin but I have the feeling that it doesn't speak about us”. (Associna Forum).¹¹²

Indeed, the 37 episodes of the series reflect the situation of Zhejiang's *qiaoxiang* during the 1980s and 1990s, and the context of Chinese migrants in Europe during the same decades. Both realities, one at the origin and one at the destination, have substantially changed in the last two decades as did transnational links.

The appraisal of the series among different generations of migrants reveals the transformation of migration contexts and actors, their different relations and attitudes towards Qingtian and China, and the distinct input of migration experience

¹⁰⁸ 很现实，很感动。

¹⁰⁹ Regarding the country of migration there are obvious specificities related to the socio-cultural background of the place. However, at the beginning of the significant international flows migrants saw “Europe”, more than any specific country, as a migration destination (Beltrán Antolín 2003; Li 2013c:17). In any case, lots of migrants have had experiences in different countries and not just migrated to a single place. With regard to the precise origin of international migrants from Zhejiang, acknowledging that there are linguistic, social and cultural differences between rural Wenzhou and Qingtian, as far as the migration reality is concerned, the same social logic and feelings can be found in both areas.

¹¹⁰ Wenzhou people also criticized the film for being not realistic enough and they were especially upset about the strong northern accent of the series' main character. In fact Wenzhou TV dubbed the series into the Wenzhou local dialect.

¹¹¹ Associna is an online association created in 2005 by second generation Chinese in Italy that has an active internet site containing information related to migrants' descendants and different forum discussions. In a recently published article Marsden presents more in-depth details about the history and characteristics of the association (Marsden 2014).

¹¹² This “us” here refers to Chinese migrants' descendants. Like all the posts on Associna this comment was written in Italian and I have translated it into English.

in their lives. Certainly, the analysis of the series' reception reveals how relevant the contextual and generation shift is in truly grasping the current day situation of Chinese people in European countries, as well as their relationship with China.

In contrast to migrants' early presence in Qingtian, visits nowadays are far more frequent and are no longer surrounded by an aura of it being an extraordinary event. Junjie, a 28-year-old man born in Qingtian who has been living in Spain since he was ten, expressed the transformation in the physical presence of migrants in his hometown over time and its input into the changing relationship between migrants and non-migrants.

"I don't feel treated differently... You know what happened? Here there are lots of people coming from Spain, France, Italy, every day... so that the people here are used to it, it's nothing unusual. Maybe before it was, when my parents were young you know, at the time Qingtian was very poor. But not now, now it's totally normal here, Qingtian is not a poor place any more". (Interview with Junjie, Qingtian, February 2013).

In addition to the quantitative increase in visits, there is also a qualitative change so that migrants travelling to Qingtian encompasses a wider casuistic. Nowadays migrants who visit Qingtian include people in different economic circumstances and belonging to different social classes, people from different age groups and migration generations, people with different levels of incorporation into Spanish society (different language skills), and people who come back with diverse objectives.

In fact, this diversity reflexes the heterogeneity of Chinese people living in Spain, which these days is a well-known reality for local people who didn't migrate. The perception of European countries is not as remote and distant reality as it was 20 years ago since Qingtianese are aware of the economic and political situations of the countries where their friends and relatives live. Besides, the once wide gap between the Chinese and Spanish socio-economic situation is rapidly closing and, as Junjie asserts in the interview quoted above, "Qingtian is not that poor place any more".

The generalization and heterogeneity of the people able to travel back to China is bringing about changes in the perception of migrancy in Qingtian. Now we should ask, what has brought about this situation? Why are more people able to come back?

- **Structural changes and their impact on physical mobility**

The literature on transnational migration identifies globalization trends and the modernization of international transport as trigger points in the intensification of

migrants' visits to their hometowns in different geographical and social contexts¹¹³. Even though it is true that international flights are much more affordable now than three decades ago, and that Qingtian's transport connections have improved a lot in the last ten years, these are not the main reasons that explain the increase in and generalization of the return visits, but are, in part, consequences of these practices. The transport infrastructures' development and rapid transformation have impacted the circulation of entries and departures to and from Qingtian. Avoiding any kind of technological determinism we will see how other significant elements are entrenched in this new context.

The increasing presence of migrants back in Qingtian is involved with the changing conditions of Chinese people living in Spain over the last three decades. Political, economic and demographic factors have brought transformations in Chinese people's situation in Spain that are transferred to the widespread possibilities of visiting China and frequent travel back and forth.

The first aspect that plays a key role in the possibility of physically moving across different nation-states and, thus, visiting China is eminently political and is related to migrants' official legal status.

During the 1980s and 1990s most Chinese people reached Spain from other European countries and some of them did that without residency and/or work permits. Indeed until migrants got their properly official documents they would not have dared travel back to China, which would have implied the end of their pursuit of a better life in Europe. Actually, political developments play a key role in analyzing the nature, scope and transformation of physical mobility across countries (Salazar and Smart 2011:iii), hence "population movement across state boundaries is inherently a political matter" (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004b:1183)¹¹⁴.

The regularization processes undertaken in Spain between 1986 and 2006 brought about a chance for undocumented migrants already living in Spain to legalize their official situation, as well as for those residing in other European countries with stricter migration policies (Kostova Karaboytcheva 2006:11–13).¹¹⁵ These amnesties, which were promulgated by a government in need of a workforce and services' development, generated a relevant influx of Chinese people, among other nationalities, towards Spain. The pull effect of each of these processes lead undocumented Chinese workers to move towards southern European countries with similar immigration laws (Italy, Spain, Portugal) trying to "normalize" their situation.

¹¹³ See pag ... for a detailed appraisal of transnationalism studies.

¹¹⁴ Salazar argues how the political control of human mobility is an outcome of the nation-states formation in modern times, and how "control over people's mobility has become a central concern for projects of management and governance" (Salazar and Smart 2011:iii).

¹¹⁵ The first regularization program for illegal migrants was implemented in 1986 after the first "Law of Rights and Freedoms for Aliens in Spain" (Ley de Derechos y Libertades de los Extranjeros en España) issued as a requirement to enter the European Economic Community. Thus, the first immigration law in Spain came at the same time as the first extraordinary program in a series that happened during the following years (1991, 1998, 2000/2001 and 2005/2006). Italy went through a similar process in 1987-1988, 1990, 1996, 1998 and 2002, and Portugal in 1992-1993, 1996 and 2001. In fact southern European countries turn to these regularization programs as a way to fix the deficiencies of their immigration laws. Later on, Spain launched a new program under referred to as "arraigo" (rooted) which eliminated the need for previous special processes that had become ordinary, given their frequency.

In fact the significance of those processes is vivid in Qingtian where it is not unusual to find people who know the exact dates of the latest dashe 大赦(amnesties) in Spain, Italy or Portugal.¹¹⁶

This factor was especially decisive for the early migrants arriving in Spain from other European countries, as most of the Chinese who had arrived directly from Zhejiang did so through family reunification or working contracts.

However holding legal documents did not immediately translate into a physical movement back to China but just laid the foundations of one of the basic elements needed to proceed with this actual mobility. Waldinger explains clearly the changing nature of migrants' physical presence in their country of origin linking its political and economic dimensions:

“The sending of remittances is most extensively undertaken by new arrivals (...) By contrast, better settled migrants, possessing secure legal status, are more likely to engage in those cross-border activities involving physical presence in the home country”(Waldinger 2008b:8).

Thus the second factor triggering the increase in visits to China is related to the socio-economic phenomenon of migrants' settlement in Spain. Besides possessing legal status migrants should also have the economic means not only to buy the flights but also to bring gifts and be able to meet their expected role as conspicuous consumers in Qingtian.

The main classical strategy of economic development within Zhejiang migrants in Europe implies a first stage in which the whole family - both relatives in Spain and in China- is committed to the initial accumulation of capital to pay back any informal loans they may have requested to start the migration journey, and to be able to set up a family-owned business. During the first years migrants generally work as employees. Saving money to pay back debts and start their own business is a prerequisite in their lives. Therefore they would rather send remittances as soon as they can instead of spending the savings for their own trip back to Qingtian.

Given that the presence of Qingtianese people in Spain has already stretched across three decades, there is an increasing number of families who have already got through the first stages and have developed their own businesses - to greater or lesser success. Therefore, the economic means to visit Qingtian are more available now than at the beginning of the migration flows when just a few of them could meet these conditions.

Although this is the general trend so far, it is important to introduce here the nuance of the change in relationship between working conditions in Spain and visits to

¹¹⁶ While Spain's economic development in the 1990s caused the Spanish government to ease and promote the arrival of migrants, since the economic and financial crises burst into the public sphere in 2008, Spanish authorities have toughened their migration policies and all the means of entering Spain for foreigners considered susceptible to becoming "migrants". This neoliberal-centred way of dealing with migration will be commented on in depth in the next chapter.

Qingtian among younger generations of migrants. Visits during holidays are increasingly undertaken by young migrants working as employees, or by people who have sold their business or lost their jobs. These situations entail the increasing economic and professional heterogeneity of Chinese people in Spain, which finds its parallel in the diversity of conditions of migrants visiting Qingtian.

And finally, the third factor cementing physical transnational practices through visits is also linked with the historical process of the Chinese presence in Spain and is embodied in the generational change in two ways.

First, the longstanding presence of Chinese migration in Spain has brought about the already significant presence of Chinese migrants' descendants, some of them born and socialized in Spain. Ethnographic observations have shown how the passage of time and the emergence of later generations do not imply a cessation in transnational links but they could, in fact, lead to them being boosted.

Secondly, younger cohorts of first generation migrants have a totally different experience of their country to their predecessors. The generational gap in China between the people born after the "opening reforms" in China (*gaigekai fang* 改革开放) and the former generation is also transferred into the diaspora. Therefore new aims, and new economic structures and expectations are involved in the young generations' visits to Qingtian.

The politics, economics and socio-demographic aspects referred to above, together with the ease of international travel and Qingtian's developing infrastructure, are the main factors that have brought an increase in possibilities of moving between the two countries and thus have brought about the optimal situation for an intensification of the physical presence of migrants in their hometown.

6.1.1 Ways and means of visiting Qingtian

While staying in Qingtian it was common to meet migrants who were spending some time in their hometown. Throughout these visits people from different generations, different social classes, in different economic circumstances and working conditions, and with different ambitions or future plans meet up with their relatives and friends in Qingtian.

There are migrants who visit China regularly to see relatives, spend vacations or do business, whereas others travel to Qingtian occasionally for specific reasons such as buying a house, arranging documents or attending rituals.

Although the reasons, timing and activities undertaken during the visits are diverse, there are two overarching elements: kinship relationships and economic activities.

Those families who regularly visit Qingtian are the ones that still have close relatives in Qingtian – whether ascendants or descendants – and/or those families whose current business in Spain is somehow related to China. Generally, these two elements come together in migrants' visits to their hometown.

Indeed, as we can see throughout the dissertation, kinship relationships and economic activities conform an intricate and interrelated binomial, which lies in the background of different phenomena related to Qingtianese mobility. Even though I am presenting them in different sections I want to stress their linked-upness. Children, young and middle-aged people, as well as retired migrants are physically present in Qingtian due to a vast range of interrelated reasons that reflect the relationship between productive and reproductive social practices.

6.1.1.1 Visits to China and economic transnational activities

Migrants' visits to China are strongly related to an array of economic activities involving different degrees of physical presence. It is true to say that migrants have historically shown interest in investing in and contributing to their hometown in China. However the economic rise of China is leading to a substantial change in the involvement of migrants beyond Qingtian, now directed towards China as a land of economic opportunities.

Investments and transnational business are, in part, undertaken long-distance through online technology. However, people still need to be present in China to carry out transactions. Whereas investments might require only occasional visits, transnational businesses generally entail more regular and frequent trips to China¹¹⁷. Chinese migrants' investments in China correspond to the flexible logic of their economic activities and the distribution of their production and capital resources beyond national borders. Profits from investment might be considered as safe capital for an eventual and possible return but could also be reinvested and used in Spain.

- **Buying houses in China**

Housing is probably the most common investment migrants make in their hometown across time and different settings. As Sinatti observes in the case of Senegalese migrants "family property in the form of land or houses has become an important way of maintaining ties with the home-country while also offering a speculative and safe investment" (Sinatti 2009:50).¹¹⁸

Besides the symbolic and practical value involved in the practice of buying and building houses in Qingtian, these activities also have an economic dimension and might be a triggering factor for migrants' visits to their hometown, depending on the type of houses involved in the transaction.

¹¹⁷ I do not include here migrants' involvement in business and investments in China that require their lasting presence in China and thus bring them to live between the two countries. This situation will be analysed in the chapter devoted to "return migration practices".

¹¹⁸ The entrenched relation between transnational belonging and the investment value involved in building houses in the hometown has been identified in a number of different cases such as among Senegalese migrants (Sinatti 2009, 2011), Pakistanis (Bivand 2011) and Mexicans (Lopez 2010).

Migrants' contributions to the multi-storey family houses¹¹⁹ are generally undertaken from a distance through communications and regular talks with the relatives in charge of these building activities. Siblings or close relatives who stayed in Qingtian are responsible for contracting, controlling and supervising the construction. Sometimes, people who have "invested" money in these family houses will not see the building until some years after its completion. Given that these projects involve the extended family and the property will hardly be divided and sold, the economic value of these housing activities as investment is less clear than their symbolic significance¹²⁰.

On the contrary, the nuclear family apartments in Hecheng, Shuinan or the residential urban areas have a more clearly defined economic function as an investment¹²¹. It is true to say that some families give a practical value to these houses since they use them during their visits and they might also be regarded as a place to keep for an eventual return.

However there are lots of empty apartments in the modern compounds, which have been purchased not only for occasional visits or eventual returns but are also perceived as a speculative investment. Migrants are aware of the increasing price of land and housing in Qingtian so, if in the future they need their capital, they can sell up and reap money from their investment.

In this case migrants generally ask advice from their relatives who tell them about good opportunities, new real estate projects, and fluctuations in price. As in many other spheres, Chinese people in Spain depend on non-migrant relatives and friends in order to have full knowledge of the changing situation in China and Qingtian.

Few people, however, are willing to buy a house or an apartment without seeing it for real. Thus a family might begin the contacts and negotiations to build or buy a house in Qingtian from Spain through long-distance communication practices (i.e. phone calls or chat or internet based communication systems), and eventually travel to Qingtian to see the place and complete the transaction. Buying a house, therefore, is one of the reasons that will take at least one member of the nuclear family, normally the male, to undertake a visit to Qingtian.

Real estate companies in Zhejiang province are aware of the house purchasing tendency of Qingtianese migrants so it's easy to find young salespeople in Hecheng distributing advertising for apartments located in newly-built residential areas in Hangzhou and other cities in Zhejiang province.

- **Investments in Chinese companies**

As well as these family investments, Chinese migrants in Europe also engage as investor partners in Chinese companies as a way of making a profit from the rapidly rising Chinese economy. The investments are broad reaching and cover different

¹¹⁹ see pages 172.

¹²⁰ Some of these multi-storey houses are built on family land after the demolition of former buildings.

¹²¹ We have already seen how, beyond village-located family houses, migrants do also purchase modern apartments in urban areas.

sectors involving trading, cattle, mining, real estate and the services sector (restaurants, hotels...).

Migrants investing in China do so in cooperation with partners they know from before they migrated so that their presence is seldom required. They visit China every one to two years, to supervise or sort out various aspects of their investments but these economic activities generally do not require their regular and longstanding physical presence.

The motivations for investment might be seen as a first step in a planned strategy involving the actual return of the nuclear family, but can also be regarded as a way of having a second option in China if things do not go well in Spain or to keep some savings back for an eventual return post-retirement. Investment profits are not always circumscribed within China so the capital can circulate the other way, from China to Spain, to help develop their business further or pay for expenses in the city where they live (buying a house, paying for their children's schooling, etc.).

Investments in real estate (hotels, and apartments) in Qingtian and other cities in different provinces have been a leading economic activity for Chinese people in Spain over the past decade. But things are changing fast and, according to Qingtianese involved in the construction industry, nowadays there is a decline in this activity due to the extraordinary increase in real estate prices in China. An increase that is preventing many families from being able to buy an apartment - on top of the fear of a housing bubble that Chinese people living in Spain already know pretty well.

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- **Transnational business: Import-Export**

Over and above the timely investments requiring occasional visits to China, transnational business¹²² involves migrants' closer physical relation with Qingtian. In this sense, visits to China are especially relevant for the entrepreneurs oriented towards transnational business, especially the importation of Chinese-manufactured goods into Spain.

Wholesale and retail trade became one of the main economic alternatives for Chinese entrepreneurs in Spain after the saturation of the Chinese food market niche at the end of the 1990s¹²³. Since 2000 one of the main economic activities of Chinese people in Spain is the importation of different types of articles from China, which are sold at very competitive prices in the so-called bazars or los chinos¹²⁴, in specialized retail shops (clothing, electronics, etc.), and in wholesale superstores. Obviously not all the entrepreneurs who have retail shops in Spain import the articles directly from China. Bazaar and shop owners are generally connected to importers and traders in Spain. The wholesale stores are concentrated mainly in the industrial areas of the main cities and their clients include Spanish and other nationalities' shop owners as well as Chinese people.¹²⁵

The owners of the wholesale markets, as well as some retail shop merchants, travel regularly to China to *jinhuo* (进货) or to buy new stocks for their shops and warehouses in Spain¹²⁶.

Yiwu (义乌), a city located only 340 kilometers from Qingtian, holds one of the largest wholesale markets in the world and, obviously, this is a prime destination chosen by Chinese migrants doing import and trading business.

¹²² By "transnational business" I understand this as being the economic activities through which different phases of the transaction (production, distribution...) are undertaken across the two countries.

Beltrán (2007:25) and Beltrán and Sáiz (2009) analyze different typologies of transnational entrepreneurship among Chinese people in Spain, focusing specially on Catalonia.

¹²³ See the overview of Chinese economic activities in Spain page

¹²⁴ Bazars are an evolution of the "Todo a 100" (see footnote 17, chapter three).

¹²⁵ The main wholesale markets in Spain are located in industrial areas near Madrid (Cobo Calleja in Fuenlabrada) and Barcelona ("Polígono Sud" of Badalona). The wholesale market in Fuenlabrada (Madrid) is one the biggest Chinese wholesale markets in Europe and has been in the international news for a money-laundering scandal known as the "Emperor case".

¹²⁶ Not all the articles sold in these shops are imported from China. Chinese people in Spain or Italy produce some of the articles, especially garments, sold in Chinese bazars and wholesale shops (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2012).

Indeed the city of Yiwu has earned the nickname of “supermarket to the world” given that a high proportion of the items consumed across the continents come from the deals made in the offices and at the numerous stalls that make up the vast labyrinth of Yiwu market. The market covers all types of items organized into different buildings and floors, from clothing and ornaments, to electronics, ironmongery, do-it-yourself articles, clothes, and children’s toys to mention but a few.

Nowadays it’s not just Chinese merchants living in foreign countries who buy these articles in Yiwu but also importers from different countries and nationalities are attracted by this wholesale market where they can find all types of services to meet their needs: translators and interpreters, intermediaries and trade agents, restaurants and gastronomy of their own country, etc. Italian, Spanish and different regional African and Arabic dishes are present in the city’s catering business. In fact, the internationality of the place has also triggered a huge reception of international migration towards Yiwu, and in particular has attracted small African traders who have settled trading and services businesses in the city.¹²⁷

Local people in surrounding cities are aware of this reality and for that reason taxi drivers try to catch the attention of any foreigner around the main bus station of Wenzhou – the biggest city in the area - repeating the same words “Yiwu, Yiwu” thus revealing how wholesale traders of different ethnic origin are habitual clients of this market-city.

Migrants importing Chinese goods to Spain always combine their *jinhuo* trips (replenishing stocks) with a visit to Qingtian. And it’s easy to do so, especially as the two localities are so close to one another. There are several buses a day from Qingtian to Yiwu, the journey taking around three hours.

The last time I made the journey between Qingtian and Yiwu I was accompanying Wangping, a 35-year-old man who had just sold his bazaar in Madrid and moved to Mexico DF where he had opened a jewelry and accessories shop.

As the man recounted, “in Spain there are too many of us doing the same thing, specially in Madrid. So either you open a larger wholesale shop or you move to another place”. And he took the latter decision, involving geographical expansion to another country and continent, while his wife and children remained in Madrid waiting for business to get established so they could reunite with him. As he declared, “I’ve changed so much of my business in Spain already without much luck, so now I’m trying a change in place”.

Wangping comes from a little fishing village in Liaoning, on the northeast coast of China, but he is married to a Qingtianese woman he met in Madrid. He is the one in charge of the visits to Yiwu to replenish stocks and every time he makes the journey he stays for a few days in Qingtian, visiting his in-laws.

¹²⁷ While in Guangzhou – another important wholesale market in China - African migration is dominated by West-African countries (Nigerians, Malians and Senegalese), Yiwu has attracted people mainly from North Africa (Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) (Cissé 2013a, 2013b; Haugen 2012).

In Yiwu he visited a trade agent who introduced him to the producers with whom he had connections. After a day visiting producers, selecting articles, negotiating prices and taking thousands of pictures with an iPad, Wangping was planning to use the trade agent as an intermediary the next time he needed to buy stock in order to avoid repeated trips and subsequent steps (shipping, etc.). In fact, the development of e-commerce is striking in China, especially in transnational trade markets such as the one in Yiwu and it is making it easier to conduct transactions without physically being there.



Figure 59. Wangping in his jinhua trip to Yiwu

While Wangping is trying his luck in Mexico, Huang and his wife have a large wholesale shop on the industrial estate in Badalona and regularly travel to Yiwu. Like Wangping, whenever they travel to China to stock up they take the opportunity to visit their parents and friends in Qingtian and take some days off to have a rest; these are their annual vacations. As all couples generally do, they alternate the trips to China with each other so that the visits do not interfere with their business in Spain.

Whenever the married couple comes back separately, they visit the parents of both so they keep close contact with their ascendants relatives in Qingtian throughout these family/business trips. However, the fact that their children are growing up in Barcelona, encouraged the couple to make the decision to take a month's holiday and all travel together to China to show their children the place where their parents come from and that they still consider to be part of their children's "roots".

So, after long years of hard work and spending separate holidays in Qingtian, for the first time in the summer of 2012 the family all travelled together to China.

Similarly to Huang and his wife, Mao also travels frequently to Yiwu to buy items for his wholesale shop in Madrid and he also takes advantage of each of these business trips to visit his relatives in Qingtian, which in this case involves not just his parents but also his three-year-old son who lives with them.

These cases show how, in addition to and entrenched in economic activities, the physical presence of migrants in Qingtian is also stimulated by family ties, whether they are related to ascendant relatives (parents) or to descendants (children). Family and economic activities are at the core of the reasons and motivations for visiting Qingtian for first generation migrants.

6.1.1.2 Visits to China and transnational family ties

I am very happy that they [daughter and son] are growing up in Barcelona but now that they are getting older I am starting to worry that they do not identify themselves as Chinese (...) I am starting to tell them about where they come from, where their roots are because when I ask them where are they from, they answer first that they are from Barcelona, and then that they are from Spain. For that reason from now on I want them to come to Qingtian often, at least once a year, because their parents, grandparents, their ancestors come from here and so their roots are also here and they should feel that. Like me, they have two homes, one here and one in Barcelona, and I don't want them to keep only one, that would be a pity. (Interview with Huang, Qingtian, July 2011).

Mr Huang expressed his feelings in rather fluent Spanish. His attitude, as well as the content of the interview indicates how his incorporation into the Spanish society does not diminish his attachments to China and Qingtian. As he stated, he has two places to belong to; he has two "homes" that are more related to specific localities where his life has been developed (Barcelona and Qingtian) than to national borders and countries (China and Spain).

Huang is concerned about his children's future, and especially the fact that they might lose his translocal belonging shaped in the possibilities of having two "homes", two attachments, and thus two potential settings for their lives. These worries are not unique to this case, but are shared among a number of migrants whose children are being raised in Spain and are becoming "too Spanish", as they generally call it.

In Huang's interview "home" has two main connotations. First, it refers to an ideological notion captured in a transnational identification process, through which two places and cultures shape, as a continuum, one's sense of belonging. He has an ambiguous feeling towards his children's localized identity, which makes him proud and worried at the same time. He is satisfied because they are on the right path to becoming socially integrated in Spanish society and therefore able to upgrade their social status but, at the same time, he doesn't want them to identify **only** with one locality (Barcelona), one culture (Spanish or Catalan) or one country (Spain).

Secondly, having two homes has highly pragmatic connotations involving the possibility of developing abilities and skills that will open up a future in both these socio-cultural settings and create choices in the development of a flexible, mobile and transnational lifestyle whenever they need it.

In the end, Huang is concerned about his daughter's and son's locally framed identity, and that his children will not share his transnational life and belonging when they are adults. Actually, the extent to which migrants' children are building their lifestyle and their identities between two countries is not well known yet (Somerville 2008:25).

Essentially, the fragment of Mr Huang's interview echoes the question that researchers have been raising for the last ten years: will second generations maintain or forge attachments with their parents' hometown? To what extent will transnational ties endure over time and across generations? (Gowricharn 2009; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Levitt and Waters 2006; Levitt 2009; Louie 2006a; Nyíri 2014; Somerville 2008; Tamaki 2011).

According to some of the main transnational studies scholars, researchers should focus and shed light on these issues (Levitt and Waters 2006:3). Thus the same concerns expressed by Chinese migrants whose children are raised in Spain appear as central questions in recent transnational migration literature.¹²⁸

However, the role of individuals belonging to different generations in the increase in visits to the country of origin has not yet been analyzed. These intergenerational relationships are emergent key points triggering the current presence of Chinese immigrants in Qingtian.

So, taking this idea a bit further, two main questions arise: What is the second-generation's role in the increasing visits of first generation migrants to Qingtian? And what is the parents' role in the process of building transnational lives and identities for their children?

Indeed visits to China are a relevant factor in the negotiation of a second-generation position in a transnational life and we will analyze in depth the outcomes of the visits from the migrants' offspring's point of view in the next section. Right now we will address the first question to see how migrants' descendants are playing a new and relevant role in the increasing number of visits to Qingtian.

First-generation migrants' visits to China are nowadays strongly related to their children in two ways, both of which are closely linked with the two main family strategies for reproductive care: when parents and children live together in Spain, as in the case of Mr. Huang, and when they are physically separated and children are sent to Qingtian to be cared for by grandparents, as illustrated in Mao's case.

¹²⁸ The debate among scholars on the persistence of transnational ties and attachments across generations is presented and analyzed in the theoretical framework.

6.1.1.2.1 Migrants' visits to Qingtian aimed at fostering descendants' transnational belonging

Mr Huang migrated to Spain when he was 25 and, as he expresses in the interview quoted above, he is able to have two "houses" – two belongings – because he has lived in both countries for a good length of time and, furthermore, his wholesale business in Badalona often takes him and his wife back to China.

However, his children were born and are growing up in Barcelona and, until 2012 when they were ten and eight years old, they had had no physical contact with China. How can they have a home there? How can they regard Qingtian or China as their "home"? Knowing that, Huang and his wife decided to travel back to China with them to try to modulate their children's locally framed identity. Thus while the former visits to Qingtian were related to their business and visiting their non-migrant relatives, especially their parents, when their children grew up a new purpose for visiting Qingtian emerged.

In fact, Huang's children are being raised daily in a "transnational social field" (Levitt 2009) as they attend a Chinese language school every weekend, they watch Chinese TV at home, and speak Chinese with their parents¹²⁹. Whereas most of the Qingtianese families in Spain use the Qingtianese local dialect (*qingtianhua*), some households - such as Huang's - use standardized Chinese (*putonghua*) as a vehicle of communication to give their children the chance to learn a more "useful" and "educated" language. However, the place where they live and develop their social relations takes on a greater importance in their identity construction.

I was sitting with Huang in a Hecheng café when his daughter and son burst into the bar. As soon as they sat down opposite us, Mr Huang wanted to prove his concerns and asked his daughter directly "let's see, where are you from, Xiaowei?". The extrovert 11-year-old girl's answer elucidates how, for migrants' offspring, place of birth and especially the place where they grow up might be as important as their ethnic belonging and their parents' homeland in the configuration of their identity.

"You already know that Dad! I was born in Barcelona, right? So that's the answer. The only thing is that I have eyes like this [laughing, the girl pointed her slanted eyes doing the same grin that non-Chinese kids make when they want to look Chinese] and that's why people say that I'm Chinese". (Fieldwork notes, 29/07/2011).

The girl's self-perceived Chineseness is based on her physical appearance and is an outcome of the still important role of race and phenotypic features in the classification of identities from a relational perspective. As Benton and Gomez note "even minorities that integrate can be perceived as outsiders because of phenotypical difference" (Benton and Gomez 2014:1162).

¹²⁹ Most scholars identify potential second-generation transnational links by their skills in the parents' native language (Somerville 2008).

Not all migrants' children are that sharp in their assessment, but it is clear that there is a modification in the sense of belonging between migrants and their children, and that parents react actively to these transformations.

One of the main responses of migrants to increasing their children's Chineseness is to encourage their transnational practices by visiting Qingtian. Even if they are being raised in a "transnational social field", migrants view the physical presence of their children in China as a crucial activity that increases their language and social skills, and stimulates the development of a broader Chinese identity.

In addition to taking them to Chinese language schools at weekends and reinforcing the Chinese environment at home in Spain, migrants see the physical presence of their children in Qingtian as a key factor in their "transnational training"¹³⁰.

Hence, whereas Huang and his wife are used to travelling frequently to China to buy stocks for their wholesale business in Badalona and to visit their parents, their physical presence in China has been transformed due to their children.

Huang's response to their children's local identity by travelling with them to China is a widespread reaction among families in stable economic circumstances.

A number of middle-aged migrants who don't keep up economic links with China and only go back occasionally, also change their physical relationship with Qingtian as soon as their children start getting old enough to be conscious of their surroundings. The trigger of their increasing visits lies in the concern that their children might forget their "roots".

Therefore, as well as the combination of transnational businesses and family issues - which we have seen in Huang's case - people who are not involved in cross-border economic activities are also increasing their presence in Qingtian due to their offspring.

Li is 33 and she runs a bar-restaurant in Valencia with her husband. Albeit summer is the busiest time of the year for their business, in summer 2011 the couple decided it was about time they visited their hometown and let their children "discover" Qingtian. However, their economic situation and the stage of their business means the whole family cannot travel together. Six years after opening the bar, the business is doing fine but they can only afford for one of the couple to be off duty for a holiday.

So, Li returned to Qingtian nine years after her previous visit and spent the summer holidays there with her two sons of eight and five.

While the children studied Chinese in the Children's Palace School and stayed with their grandparents, Li visited friends and relatives, attended former classmates meetings, and witnessed Qingtian's transformations. Moreover, before coming back to Spain the three of them travelled to Beijing where they stayed for a week, sightseeing.

¹³⁰ Nyíri (2014) uses the concept "training for transnationalism" to describe the activities that second generation migrants are involved in Hungary, mainly educational, to keep the transnational links and belongings with their parents' birth country.

Like Huang's children, Li's sons were born and are being raised in a transnational environment in Spain. Nevertheless, in both cases, the migrants expressed their conviction of travelling to Qingtian with their children at least once a year. However, socioeconomic conditions are relevant to the means of going back as Li expresses here.

"I spent a lot of money this summer, we can not come together at the same time, one of us has to stay in Valencia. But from now on we will be coming more often, now things are different and we have the kids. Let's see what happens next year... If things are good, my husband will come with them and I'll stay in the bar. But if we cannot afford it, for sure we will send them again. They can stay with my parents here, they are happy to have them". (Interview with Li, August 2011).

From these examples we can see how both socioeconomic conditions, as well as different stages in migrants' life, are relevant factors concerning physical mobility towards Qingtian. In her essay about transnational ties among second-generation Irish, Dominicans and Indians in the United States, Levitt (2006) claims that transnational practices change at distinct stages of the lifecycle. I argue that this is especially remarkable for first generation migrants' physical mobility involving visits to the home country.

While Li and her husband didn't travel to Qingtian for many years, now their transnational links are changing and increasing from occasional to regular yearly visits. They have a stable business, their children are growing up and, moreover, Li's parents -who were, until recently, living between Qingtian, Spain and Portugal where Li's younger sister lives - are getting older and thus prefer to stay in Qingtian. So Li and her husband's life has changed and their relatives - both in the ascending and descending line - bring them physically closer to their hometown again.

- **Taking, bringing and visiting children:**

The second casuistic reinforcing migrants' physical presence in Qingtian due to their children is related with the still sustained practice of sending the Spanish-born children to China where they are raised by their grandparents.

First of all we should say that bringing children to China does not always involve the physical presence of the parents. The widespread practices encompassing children's circular mobility have encouraged the development of mediated strategies. People travelling to China or Spain and providing services of fetching and carrying food, books, medicines and other articles (see chapter 5.2), also include children as an item in this mediated circulation of "objects". Ads from people travelling to China who offer to take children can be found on traditional message boards in Chinese shops and restaurants, as well as on their electronic versions on the internet.



Figure 60. Xihua website screen grab. "I can bring children or other things"

People who are not yet well established in Spain, with lower economic resources or without the possibility of getting the time off required for travelling back to China would contact relatives travelling to Qingtian, or use these mediated services. Nevertheless, since international flight ticket fares are decreasing and reaching Qingtian is quicker and easier than ever before, one half of the couple usually brings the children to China.

Visits due to this transnational reproductive strategy are not limited solely to the two basic movements involved in the circulation of children - the taking and fetching. Although parents undertake regular "virtual visits" from Spain, they generally alternate yearly visits to China with each other to visit and stay with their descendants (children) and the ascendants who take care of them (parents).

Likewise, migrants' presence in Qingtian to foster their children's Chinese sense of belonging, the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and family structure are also interrelated in these cases.

Sofia is 28 and arrived in Madrid in her early 20s. She has been working in several relatives' restaurants and shops as an employee since then. In summer 2011 she travelled to Qingtian to take her one-year-old baby and to see her three-year-old son, who was living with her parents. Sofia stayed two months with her parents and children while learning to be a beautician in Hecheng with the idea of opening her own business in Madrid and, eventually, reuniting her family in Spain. Numerous hair salons and beauty shops are scattered all around Hecheng and some of them specialize in training young women, some of them migrants with the same plan as Sofia.

I am learning all the techniques because I want to open my own business in Madrid. Nowadays everybody seems to like this in Spain. And if I succeed and I can make it work, then I will bring my son and my

daughter to Spain. (...) Now it is good for them to stay here, my mother likes it, and it is also good for them to study for a few years in a Chinese school, because later, you know, Chinese is very difficult to learn. It's difficult sometimes to be far away from them, but you know we see them with QQ, we try to come to see them once a year and eeehhh emmm now we have to work long hours and do not have our own house to have our children with us. Here they are better (Interview, Sofia, 11 July 2011, Qingtian).

Sofia's interview materializes the decisive role of migrants' economic and working status in their decisions on choosing a concrete reproductive strategy. During the early years of migration, living in shared apartments or in the flats lent by Chinese business owners are common solutions to save money. Having their own apartment is a prerogative for migrants raising their children in Spain.

Nevertheless, this transnational practice is not only limited to families with lower socio-economic possibilities or the ones that are starting their business careers in Spain. Families with settled businesses and good socioeconomic prospects also follow this reproductive practice that is entrenched in contemporary Chinese society¹³¹.

Mao's case exemplifies this situation. Like Huang, Mao and his wife own a wholesale shop in Madrid, but they decided to take their son to Qingtian for several years instead of keeping him with them in Spain. Thus whenever they travel to Yiwu to replenish stocks they go to Qingtian to see their son and parents.

Sofia and Mao's visits to Qingtian articulate the encounter of young nuclear families' transnational productive and reproductive strategies and their outcomes in their physical presence in Qingtian. The circulation of people comes together with a dissemination of abilities, skills and products between China and Spain.

While Sofia imports the skills and abilities she has learned during training in Hecheng for a new business in Spain, Mao purchases and imports articles that will move to Madrid to be sold in his wholesale shop. In both cases their economic activities conflate with the responsibilities towards their children and bring them regularly back and forth between China and Spain.

.....

In conclusion, throughout this section, we have seen how common it is to find migrants in Qingtian who are making the journey back to their hometown either to take or see their children while they are being raised in China, or to spend summer holidays in their hometown with their children who are growing up in Spain.

While the first family structure involves a circulation of children from Spain to Qingtian, the second strategy might involve a circulation of elderly people - the

¹³¹ See chapter three, page...

children's grandparents –the other way round. Those families well established in Spain that decided to keep their children with them are inclined to bring their parents over to live with them.

The circulation of children and elderly people between China and Spain is intended to narrow the gap of the physical distance between ascendants' and descendants' relatives and, in this way, "reduce the costs of social reproduction" (Levitt 2009:1229), whether they are economical, logistical or emotional.

6.1.1.2.2 Visiting parents and non-migrant relatives

The same historical course that has brought an increase in Chinese children and young people linked with Spain, has also implied the increment of elderly Qingtianese people related to international mobility in a number of ways. Hence, it is not unusual to find children and elderly people in Qingtian holding European residency permits. The children are mainly born in Spain and spend the first years of their life with their grandparents in Qingtian. As for elderly people in Qingtian with European residence permits, we find individuals with different relationships to migration.

The first group includes the earlier migrants who left China at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s. After four decades, the demographic changes in the Chinese population in Spain have implied a growing percentage of children, as well as the emergence of a group of senior migrants. Those who migrated at the beginning of the '80s, when they were in their late 20s or 30s, are now reaching retirement age and thus are travelling more frequently to Qingtian visits¹³². Although this cohort is not statistically relevant, this group does have a social importance¹³³.

Depending on their family structure – whether their relatives are for the most part in Spain or in China - the ideological prospect of "return after retirement" is implemented to different extents. Generally, older migrants do not go ahead with a definitive return but instead travel regularly between Qingtian and the locality/ies where their relatives reside in Spain. Consequently, most of them keep their Spanish residency documents. Nevertheless, it is true to say that whenever migrants are ill or face the last stages of their lives, they would rather try to return to their home

¹³² Chinese people in Spain generally follow the Chinese retirement age, which is 55 for women and 60 for men. Even though in Spain they do not receive pensions at that age, they begin to release their business and working responsibilities to the younger generation.

¹³³ The statistics provided by the Spanish government show how the average age of Chinese people in Spain is lowering rather than increasing, and that the biggest percentage of people of Chinese origin with a residency permit in Spain is still the sector including those between 18 and 65. However it's important to take into account that if the average age of Chinese people in Spain is going down it is because of the rise in births. According to census data published by the City of Barcelona, from the total of 2,999 births to foreigners in 2012, 364 were children born to Chinese parents, followed by 331 to Pakistanis and 241 Moroccans (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013a).

country than stay in Spain, in this way following the traditional Chinese phrase “when the leaves fall, they return to their roots”¹³⁴.

The same attitude is shared by the second group of elderly Chinese people in Qingtian who have or have had, at some period in their lives, Spanish residence permits. I’m referring to those who arrived in Spain in their late 50s under family reunification through their children in order to help them with domestic and reproductive work. Migrants’ parents might “migrate” to Spain to take care of and raise their grandchildren when migrant couples decide to keep their children in Spain.

During their sojourn in Spain, “elderly migrants” are exclusively committed to helping in the reproduction tasks of their family and, in some cases, they travel between different cities to help their offspring, who have settled in distinct places often located in different countries. Nevertheless, as soon as their grandsons and granddaughters reach the age to be independent and no longer need intensive care, this older generation generally chooses to go back to China.

Middle-aged migrants are aware of the difficulties that physical distance can create when their parents get old and need help. Hence, young nuclear families with stable business and economic conditions are willing to have their parents closer in order to take care of them during the last phase of their lives. This is especially important when all the daughters and sons of the elders have migrated and no direct descendants or relatives remain in China.

However, for old people who have always lived in China being in Spain is difficult, not only for the language barrier, but also for the isolation and the abrupt changes in socio-cultural environment. Therefore few of them are willing to stay in Spain continuously but they prefer to carry on with short-term visits.

Even though migrants are connected to their parents on a daily basis via telephone or using modern long/distance communications technology, having parents back in China implies regular visits to Qingtian. Generally, siblings spread across Europe intercalate their visits to Qingtian so that their parents receive a constant flow of visits from their offspring¹³⁵.

Therefore transnational caregiving to younger children and elderly parents involves different subjects and directions of physical circulation, which converge in the increasing number of visits of first generation migrants to Qingtian.

Getting old and dying in Qingtian is a common denominator among first generation Chinese who arrived in Spain in the 1980s and at the start of the 1990s and are already retired, as well as for those who moved to Spain in their later years to help their descendants in the domestic and reproduction spheres.

¹³⁴ *Yeluo guigen* 叶落归根

¹³⁵ In fact concerns about transnational families and elder care in Qingtian has led to some migrants and entrepreneurs to start thinking about the development of a private geriatric clinic to care for those people whose younger relatives live outside China and who cannot live alone.

Certainly, throughout the years there has been an increase in Chinese people dying in Spain, and the consequent increment of funerals in the localities where they reside. However, the wish to be buried in Qingtian is still very strong among first generation migrants and, for that reason, people facing their final moments try to get back to their homeland before pass away. Moreover, the relevance of being buried in the soil of their birth, surrounded by Qingtianese societal rituals, involves a mobility of bodies beyond life through the flow of funerary urns back to the hometown to be buried following tradition.

In fact, one of the main reasons that encourages migrants to keep their Chinese nationality instead of changing it to become Spanish is related to the ease of flying to China without the need to apply for a visa. Having parents and relatives in Qingtian might cause them to have to travel to China regularly and, on some occasions, with little warning if something happens, such as a parent falling ill or a close relative passing away.

Indeed, funerals are the last of the migrants' commitments to their ascendants' relatives that imply physical movement towards China, and are the only ritual that enables all relatives to gather back in Qingtian at the same time.

6.1.1.2.3 Funerals: intergenerational encounters

Funerals are special events involving the simultaneous physical presence in Qingtian of migrants from the same family; not only those individuals who sustain regular visits to their hometown, but also people who come back specifically and solely in response to events such as close-relatives' funerals. Funerals are social rituals that epitomize the intergenerational physical presence of migrants in Qingtian.

And, the thing is, the complex and lavish ceremonies performed to honor the deceased play a key role in Qingtian in maintaining the binomial between international migration and wealthy families.

Funerals of migrants who have returned to their hometown, as well as ceremonies for individuals who stayed behind when their relatives migrated, are public ceremonies that act as social barometers of the success and social standing of a given extended family with international connections. Nevertheless, the generational change, and the increasingly crucial role of migrants' descendants, is leading to contrasting attitudes about image and expectations of international migrants.

That was the case with Babala's grandmother's funeral, which involved close relatives belonging to different generations physically mobilizing from Spain to Qingtian. Babala is 28 and grew up in a small town in Badajoz but, since 2011, has been living in Hangzhou with her husband and her two Spanish-born daughters. She was born in Fushan but "migrated" to Spain with her parents when she was two and, currently, is the only one of her family who lives in China. Her parents, siblings, uncles, aunts and cousins are all spread out across different Spanish cities.

When her grandmother was about to die, Babala was the first of the family to arrive in Fushan, as she lives at only a five-hour drive away from Qingtian. However, in less than four days 16 close descendants from three generations reached Qingtian in time to see the old woman and attend her funeral: the five sons and only daughter, two daughters-in-law, as well as four grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. (See appendix 1. Babala's grandmother's funeral attendance diagram).

Babal's father, who is the third son of the deceased, was the last to arrive in Fushan the night before his mother passed away. He told me that, as soon as he knew about his mother's relapse, he bought the first flight back, as he did a year previously when, after being hospitalized for two weeks, the doctors suggested that the woman should return to her house to pass away. On that occasion, too, all her children travelled to Fushan to be with her, but eventually the 82-year-old recovered and her offspring returned to their cities in Spain. None of the six siblings have changed their official national belonging status, as they were conscious that having old parents in China would require frequent trips to their hometown.

The week before the funeral, Babala and her husband played an active role in ensuring everything ran as smoothly as possible. As they live in China and have their own car they were the ones in charge of picking up relatives as they arrived at the closest airports and train stations.

Babala met up with relatives that she hadn't seen for a long time and she was especially surprised to see that two of her male cousins had brought their children to come to their great-grandmother's funeral, even though they had never met her. While talking about this subject during a drive to Wenzhou train station to pick relatives up, Babala explained that having the great-grandchildren attend the funeral was important in helping illustrate the length and continuation of the lineage.

However, she didn't take her own daughters to the funeral nor did they go to the previous week-long ceremonies. When I asked her about her decision, Babala argued that her daughters' presence was not required given that they are the offspring of the deceased's granddaughter and, thus, do not carry the family surname.

Traditional values associated with the patrilineal kinship system lie at the heart of Chinese popular religion and funerary rituals, which are underlined in the disposition and physical presence of three generations of relatives travelling from Spain to attend Babala's grandmother's funeral.

Given that all the children of the deceased migrated during the 1980s and they have all settled in Spain - where a third generation is now emerging - we have here a prime example of a 100% migrant household. Thus the migrants' social responsibilities towards their ancestors involve the organization of a large and conspicuous funeral to confirm their social status and validate the traditionally assumed prestige and economic success of international migrants in Qingtian.

The proper day for burial, and consequently, the funeral ceremonies that could last longer than one week are set according to the traditional Chinese calendar. The role of the ritual specialists, called *yinyang sheng* 阴阳生, with a presumed knowledge of astrology and traditional ceremonies, is fundamental in Qingtian and especially at funerals where the deceased's closest relatives have lived a long time overseas. There is a general tendency among migrants to feel "out of place" when they come back, lacking the knowledge and practical understanding to organize the ceremonies, and the subsequent concerns of failing in their social duties. The only daughter of the woman who passed away expressed these feelings as follows:

We need the help of everybody in the village because we don't know how to do things here any more. I can manage better in Spain than here, that's for sure. I don't know where to buy the things we need, I don't know where to hire a cook, what to do first and after that. The funerals are so complex here, everybody comes to the house every day, and there are a lot of things to do... So we hired five *yinyang sheng* to help us with everything. (Fieldwork notes, Qingtian, April 2011).

The ritual specialists therefore not only play a leading role during the ritual performances but are also in charge of preparing, supervising and hiring all the professionals needed for the public ceremony and during the days of mourning: the cooks who will take care of the family members over from Spain, as well as the guests and villagers visiting the house during the ceremonial days, the band that would play during the funeral, the gifts that are going to be presented to the funeral assistant, etc.

In Zhejiang rural areas, and especially in *qiaoxiang* villages, the magnificence of a funeral goes beyond the relevance of the deceased, what matters is the family's reputation and, in this case, the social status at a glance of the four sons and daughter who migrated to Spain. Although the link between public gifts and social status within funerary rituals is common across time and cultures, the penetration of capitalist values in Qingtian's funeral ceremonies has been especially striking in Qingtian since the 1980s, when the international migration patterns started to boom¹³⁶.

As Li Minghuan reminds us with the expression "we need two worlds" (1999b), behind international migrants' conspicuous consumption there is the logic of gaining social capital in the society of origin, to give meaning to all the effort that goes into making the migration experience. Lavishly decorated tombs and pomp-

¹³⁶ In her analysis of the ritual economy, Yang Mayfair argues how "the market economy and the ritual economy of expenditure emerged hand in hand in rural Wenzhou" (Yang 2000:487) . The same happens in Qingtian.

filled funerals are one of the main events where this expenditure, in the form of rites, is expressed¹³⁷.

Whereas the first generation migrants active respond to the expectations of their native society and are highly involved in the different stages of lavish ritual consumption, their offspring don't share the same perspective. Babala and her cousins, who grew up in Spain, shared contrasting attitudes towards their parents' involvement in the financial expenditure surrounding the funeral - what they described as "showing off" and a matter of "face" (*mianzi* 面子), which in Chinese society means to obtain social reputation. As one of the deceased's grandsons told me:

This is only so people will say, "oh look how successful these children have been on the outside, how rich they are!" You've seen it, right? But behind the scenes everybody knows it's not like this, but everybody keeps on playing the game here. For us it's different, we don't know a lot of people here and we don't share the same values. I guess my father will want to do something similar because he is from here, but I really think it's throwing money after nothing, just to show off. (Babala's cousin's interview, April 2011, Qingtian).

After the funeral, Babala's cousins returned to Spain with their children, but her father, uncles and auntie stayed in Fushan with her grandfather, who was in a weak emotional and physical state. After all, the old man now knew that after his wife's death he was alone in Qingtian. Even though his children suggested he join them in Spain he was reluctant to move. Three weeks after, the old man also passed away and a second funeral took place with a different set of relatives from the second and third generations travelling from Spain to Qingtian.

After the second funeral, the siblings stayed together for a month in Fushan to take care of the few acres of land they owned, discuss the inheritance (a few scare acres of land), as well as to clean and close the house where they grew up, that was remodelled some years ago and where, from now on, nobody else would stay regularly.

All the siblings were conscious that they would probably not all meet together in their ancestral family house again. All of them have their own apartment in the town where they stay whenever they travel to Qingtian. Thus the deaths of the parents implies a transformation in their physical relationship with their hometown although not necessarily a cut with their physical mobility towards China.

¹³⁷ Current law in China imposes cremation and forbids burial. However, Qingtianese continue to develop traditional funeral rituals by depositing the corpse's ashes in the wooden coffin. The proliferation and significance of lavish tombs in the Wenzhou area is analyzed by Yang(2000) and the same elements can be applied in Qingtian. Yang explains funerals' transformation since the 1980s, when the construction of private tombs in special places because of their geomancy locations (*fengshui*) was banished in favor of public cemeteries located on mountain sides. In Qingtian only those who built private tombs before 1990 can be 'buried' in them. In fact, Yang narrates the issue that arose in the 1980s when cadres of the local Communist Party wanted to destroy the tombs in Wenzhou and Qingtian and the local people resisted the campaign against "feudal customs" .

The transformation of the relationship with Qingtian wrought upon migrants whose ascendants passed away, was expressed by the son of a migrant who left China for Germany in the 1960s to reunite with his family that had left at the end of the '30s. After his father's funeral, the 35-year-old man who was born and raised in Germany expressed his emotions at knowing this was the end of the line for his family memories and links with Qingtian.

Now all this will be lost. My grandparents and my parents were very attached to Qingtian, we are much, much less, almost not at all... And this afternoon, after my father's funeral, I thought that yes, today one of the chapters of my family has come to a close. (Qingtian, fieldwork notes, August 2012).

Albeit the relationship with Qingtian might end, but John and his siblings' links with China are still pretty alive. At the time I met them, he was about to transfer his job position as a pilot from Germany to China and his elder brother was working in the German consulate in Shanghai. Chinese heritage, identity and opportunities are still playing a relevant role within migrants' offspring beyond Qingtian.

The exploration of funerals and the responses of those who travel to Qingtian to attend the ceremonies shed light on relevant elements related to transnational family and belongings, the impact of occasional physical presence in Qingtian, and the changing attitudes towards "conspicuous ritual expenditure" from an intergenerational perspective.

6.1.2 Identities in motion

Qingtian is not just a place of departures. The increasing numbers of migrants' visits and returns, as well as its growing position as a destination for internal migration, has also turned Qingtian into a place of arrivals.

The multiplicity of circular movements passing through Qingtian entwines the interaction between people involved in the migration process in different ways, and fosters the emergence of multiple identities. In much the same way, Salazar and Smart (2011) highlight how mobility may become a key feature in the production of new forms of otherness in our era.

Who is perceived as the "foreigner" and who is regarded as the "local" in a social field defined by such diverse forms of mobility? In this section we will see how the specificity of Qingtian as a space of transits and intersections of different directions' movements, adds complexity to the conventional dichotomy between local people (*bendi ren*) and foreigners (*waiguo ren*) in China ¹³⁸.

¹³⁸ As in other socio-cultural contexts, the tendency towards simplification between locals and foreigners has a long history in China (Kjellgren 2006:225).

6.1.2.1 "A Spanish friend in Qingtian"

Following this line of thought, first of all, we should examine what the perception and expectation of Qingtianese people are towards their migrants' relatives and friends who visit Qingtian more and more frequently. At the beginning of this chapter we stressed how local people address relatives and friends visiting Qingtian by using a place adjective that links and identifies them with the country where they migrated and reside. The phrases "there is a Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, etc. friend in Qingtian" express the production of otherness through mobility, as referred to in Smart and Salazar's work (2011).

This linguistic convention doesn't bear any relation to official or national belonging but illuminates how international migrants are distinguished as a different social group, and how they are somehow associated with a "foreign condition".

This attributed "foreign condition" is based on observable realities that go beyond their place of residency, but are based on behaviors, different life experiences and values. Some daily examples will elucidate this thinking.

Qingtianese people, for example, used to state that they can distinguish somebody who lives in Europe just by his or her attitude and the way they dress. On several occasions Qingtianese residents drew my attention to somebody in the street or in a shop, exemplifying what they meant. Being extra polite and saying "thank you" when it's not needed according to local standards and the vernacular use of Chinese language¹³⁹, is one of the most recurrent examples locals give to show the changing habits of Qingtianese people due to international migration. Once a woman told me: "Have you seen? They are like you, always saying thank you!" Other aspects such as fashion and food habits were also often stressed as indicators of their "foreign condition"¹⁴⁰.

During fieldwork I also noticed that this intricate way of considering migrants as a separate group also emerged - in a more subtle way - when Qingtianese residents explained how they perceive migrants' habits, behaviors and ways of life as being closer to the socialization processes associated with Spain than to the attitudes presumably related to Chinese culture. As they were telling me about cases and examples, the perceived differences between migrants and the people who stayed behind was expressed through the use of the linguistic pair "they/we". Sometimes local residents also used the pronoun "you" - which grouped migrants together with me - to differentiate themselves from those who behave according to the standards and values associated with *waimian* (outside) foreign countries.

Nevertheless, the expression "a Spanish friend in Qingtian", and the transfer of otherness in the abovementioned linguistic opposition "we/they", do not

¹³⁹ The abuse of greetings might be interpreted in oral Chinese language as a condition of distance and arrogance on the part of the interlocutor

¹⁴⁰ I have referred to the aesthetic difference and local people's perception of migrants' way of dressing in chapter four.

incorporate migrants as total strangers or outsiders and, certainly, they were not considered as “foreigners” as I was ¹⁴¹.

Firstly, migrants are recognized as ethnically and culturally Chinese and, secondly, their origins and life experience - as well as social practices and values- are also perceived as directly linked to and rooted in Qingtian. Hence, next to this “foreigner” condition, migrants are also considered as locals (*bendiren*). After all, Qingtianese who didn’t migrate recognize the hybridism of their migrants’ friends and relatives - whose life experiences are rooted to more than one locality - based on the observations and evaluation of their actions and behaviors when they visit Qingtian.

Along the same line, Oxfeld (2004) also detected how migrants visiting their homeland in Moonshadow Pond in Guangdong Province, were considered by the villagers both as family and foreigners, underlying the contradictions of the discourses and ideas about returnee migrants as guests and kin at the same time. ¹⁴²

With regard to the attributed “foreign condition”, Qingtianese residents are supposed to be hosts to their relatives and friends during their visits. They are in charge of guiding, entertaining, and taking them wherever they want to go.

Hence, a contradictory feeling surrounds migrants’ visits to Qingtian, certainly on the part of their acquaintances. On the one hand, local people are glad to see and receive them but, on the other, they admit the trouble these visits might entail by interrupting their routine. On several occasions Qingtianese told me how busy they are when close friends and relatives visit Qingtian as they have to *bei tamen wan*,¹⁴³ that is to say take them sightseeing, accompany them to see the old family home, visit relatives and friends, organize big meals with lots of guests, staying out until late at night, etc.

This guest/host relationship is directly proportional to the regularity of migrants’ visits. Hereafter, the more frequently those migrants visit Qingtian, the weaker their host obligation becomes.

Additionally, social status contributes to the production and transformations of the guest/host roles.

In her ethnographic accounts of local villagers’ expectations of their visitors in Guangdong province, Oxfeld underscores the relationship between “being a good host” as a “matter of face” (*mianzi*) and argues how “the higher the status of the visitor, the more face is gained by the host”(Oxfeld 2004:103). Whereas Oxfeld identifies this relationship as unidirectional, arguing that “overseas Chinese” provide the possibility of upgrading social status to locals who remained behind, I also see it from the opposite angle and claim that migrants also seek to forge friendships with important local people to increase their relationships (*guanxi* 关系) and upgrade their social status (*mianzi*) within their Qingtianese-Spanish domain.

¹⁴¹ Foreigner concept is strongly based on ethnic ancestry and appearance in China, among other features.

¹⁴² Oxfeld and Long (2004) understand returnee as any migrant heading physically towards her or his hometown including visits, as well as longstanding return.

¹⁴³ 被他们玩儿

Thus, while I agree with Oxfeld that the relationship between migrants and non-migrants in *qiaoxiang* areas is surrounded by practices and discourses on status (*mianzi*) and relationships (*guanxi*), the transformation of migrants' visits towards Qingtian throughout the past three decades has brought changes and nuances to the guest/host pair.

While formerly most migrants had more financial resources and higher status, that's generally not the case any more. The visits to China and Qingtian are surrounded by a need to recuperate relationships and connections (*guanxi*) and improve their status by being in contact with relevant Qingtianese locals. Being the guests of distinguished local entrepreneurs or politicians is also a way to obtain *face* for international migrants visiting their hometown.

Thus, I maintain that locals do not play solely a passive role as "social status collectors" but that *face* is a mutual need pursued by migrants and non-migrants alike. Visitors and guests confer *mianzi* on each other.

And here we reach the most striking aspect regarding the relationship between migrants and the people who stayed behind, expressed through the practice of conspicuous expenditure that we have already introduced in relation to funerals. Within Qingtian's transnational field, upgrading one's social status is closely related to a level of consumption that might take different forms: gifts, inviting people to eat, inviting friends out for the night, paying for relatives' trips, etc.

People here still have this mentality or this idea... mmm how can I say it? This symbol, yes, that in the outside (*waimian*) we all have lots of money and therefore it's our obligation to give *hongbao*, to give money, to pay when we go out, even though in some cases their economic situation is better than ours.

It is important to note that even though locals expect this behavior from migrants, they also see lavish consumption as a direct cause of the serious problems with inflation that are hitting Qingtianese society.

In chapter three we have seen how migration and the links with European countries are identity markers involved in Qingtian's self-image. Nonetheless, the impact of migration has also endured less enthusiastic responses from people who remained in China.

The portrait of Qingtian painted by local people emphasizes how, despite being a rural area with a small town at its core, the cost of living is very high in Qingtian. Local residents, as well as international migrants, complain about real estate prices as well as everyday expenses (food, clothing, etc.), claiming that they have almost reached the levels of large cities in Zhejiang province.

Several days after my arrival in Qingtian, I was sitting in a café in Hecheng when a waiter struck up a conversation with me. After the usual self-introductions and explanations of why I was in town, the young man inquired about how I viewed the

place. The conversation that followed represents the local perception concerning the input of migrants' visits in the rising cost of living.

- Qingtian has nothing special and yet living here is very expensive.
- Why is it expensive?
- Because there are a lot of **foreigners (waiguoren)** like you that come here with Euros and spend a lot of money, and that makes the prices go up.
- I see, but I haven't met many foreigners like me here, just one this month...
- Well, you know what I meant, **foreigners... I meant huaqiao, Qingtianese living outside (waimian)**. They come back often, they come with Euros, and then life gets very expensive here. But the salaries are very low, so it's impossible to save money. If you want to save money you can't do anything else. Just work and sleep.
(Fieldwork notes, February 2011).

The foreigner's character attributed to migrants is here related to their use of foreign currency. Taking this idea a bit further, the landlady of the house where I lived during the first month of fieldwork linked migrants' lavish public spending behaviour with their social status: "When *huaqiao* return, they spend a lot to "get face" *mianzi* and now Qingtian has become such an expensive place to live, you can see it, going to the market is even more expensive here than in Xiamen, right?"

Qingtianese consumer-oriented society was formerly aimed at migrants' consumption. Hecheng provides all the leisure and entertainment services ; restaurants, bars and cafés, as well as nightclubs and KTV, are located all over the town. Migrants are expected to spend money in Qingtian as a form of contributing to their hometown society and whenever a group of people includes somebody living in Europe it's generally assumed that he or she will foot the bill.

However, local residents also regard this expected consumer behavior as the driver of one of the most contested realities of Qingtianese society. Thus, here we have a second contradiction engrained in the changing and ambiguous perception of international migrants and the increase in visits to Qingtian by local residents.

More and more locals are aware of the problems of *qiaoxiang* development model saturation, which has been almost solely based on migrants' contributions through donations, remittances, investments and consumption in-situ.

A growing number of contested perspectives towards the created model are arising in Qingtian and the need for economic development on the edge of migration is starting to be a necessity and is certainly a matter of conversation among local people at the grassroots level. Some pioneering projects are slowly emerging in the field of ecological and rural tourism targeted at domestic middle-class Chinese.

There is a shared perception among local entrepreneurs that the Spanish financial crisis is knocking Qingtianese consumer-oriented society especially hard, arguing that migrants come back more regularly but with less spending power. Actually, this

transformation in migrants' contributions to their hometown through in-situ expenditure is not only related to the supposed loss of purchasing power of migrants residing in Spain, but is also due to the heterogeneity of people travelling back to Qingtian to whom we referred at the beginning of the chapter. The increase in multiple migrants' profiles in Qingtian has led to a transformation in the migration perception and a reconsideration of the Qingtianese economy.

Concurrent with the increasing heterogeneity of return visits, the upward social mobility of a segment of local Qingtianese society is bringing about the emergence of a new context and framework for physical mobility from Qingtian to Spain, beyond economic migration. These two elements reinforce each other and contribute to the changing idea of international migration in Qingtian.

6.1.2.2 Non-migrants physical mobilities: Travelling to Europe

Nowadays physical mobilities towards Europe are not exclusively instigated by migration logic. Along with the phrase "more and more people are coming back", local Qingtianese also expound that younger generations are not willing to migrate to Spain any more. These two perceptions that explain migration through the push/pull rationality are popular in Qingtian.

Although migration flows towards Spain based on chain migration and family reunion are continuing, it is true to say that there is also the emergence of new forms of physical mobility beyond the economic migration that reveals a Qingtianese upward social mobility.

Indeed there is a transformation going on within Qingtianese mobility towards Europe involving new intentions and motivations beyond saving money or making a living.

On the one hand we can find family visits that follow the same pattern as the migrants' trips when they visit their relatives in Qingtian and, on the other, we can also find new and emerging leisure and tourism trips also rooted within migration links.

5.1.2.2.1 Visiting Spain: Transnational families

Visits to see relatives, spend the summer holidays or be present at ceremonies are not only linked to the journeys from Spain to China undertaken by migrants and their descendants. The concentration of most relatives of a given family in Spain, is also leading to a shift in the directionality and actors of mobility in the opposite direction.

An increasing number of migrants' relatives living in Qingtian travel to Spain to visit their close relatives and spend the summer holidays.

This mobility especially concerns the circulation of the elderly and children. Combined with the visits of middle-aged migrants to Qingtian to see their children

and parents, they are also increasingly travelling to Spain with the same aim. Actually, I observed how, within the same family, the patterns, direction and subjects moving alternate to ease the increasing physical contact between them.

An example of this situation will elucidate the scope of these new transnational visits.

At 65 a widow whose two children reside in Spain is actively involved in the physical mobility of her offspring. She has raised her two grandsons in Qingtian while her daughter worked in different cities across Europe (Munich, Sofia, and Lisboa) before settling down in Lorca, a town located in the southeast of Spain (Murcia).

When I met Xiaoping in summer 2012 she was preparing her trip to Spain with her second grandson, aged 10 at the time. The boy, who was born in Sofia and grew up in Qingtian, sees his mother at least twice a year as she travels frequently to Qingtian but, this time, he was the one who was going to make the journey to meet his family and his future new home. One year after the summer holiday trip to Spain, the mother travelled to Qingtian to pick her son up and take him to live in Lorca with the rest of the family.

Xiaoping and her grandson applied for a “visiting relatives”¹⁴⁴ visa in one of the numerous travel agencies in Qingtian that specialize in arranging the documents needed to apply for Schengen visas. While young and middle-aged people generally go to Shanghai and apply directly at the consulate¹⁴⁵, older people have fewer resources to do that and thus they are liable to pay the often expensive agency fees in order to get through the procedures. Besides this convenience factor, the fear of having the application denied by the European authorities, and the highly visible publicity made by Qingtian agencies to safeguard their clients’ interests, progressively implies an increase in people applying for visas from Qingtian.



Figure 61. Advertisement for visa applications in travel agency’s shop window, Hecheng, Qingtian).

¹⁴⁴ 探亲访友签证.

¹⁴⁵ There are several buses a day connecting Qingtian with the embassy areas in Shanghai.

A 67-year-old widower whose daughter lives in Barcelona expressed the same feeling. Five years before I met him, he started travelling to Spain once a year to visit his family. In contrast to Xiaoping, he does not need to apply for a visa as he has a Spanish residence permit. While he is pleased to visit his family in Barcelona once a year, he is not willing to live there permanently and lose his daily life in a small village in Fushan.

Beyond the regular trips undertaken mostly by children and elderly people, Qingtianese also travel to Spain to attend social ceremonies, such as former classmates meetings. Nevertheless going to weddings is the most relevant event to bring Qingtianese people on occasional visits to Spain. Whenever the young couple's relatives are mostly spread across Spain and other European countries the wedding will be celebrated in their migration and residence countries. The few close relatives that remain in Qingtian are the ones that will make the trip to take part in the celebration.

6.1.2.2 Travelling to Europe or migration-based tourism

The second type of new movement towards Spain concerns young and middle-aged people and reveals the meeting point between the two main physical mobilities of our age: tourism and migration.

When I asked young and middle-aged Qingtianese whether they would like to go to Europe, the answer was positive but the emphasis was on a different kind of mobility than their parents and grandparents' generation. They do not want to emigrate to earn money and make a living but they do want to travel and visit friends and relatives in the various countries where they have connections.

Thus a changing paradigm in the mobility towards Spain is involving a shift from economic migration intentions to the sphere of leisure and travelling. Young and middle-aged people are eager to "leave the country" and "go outside" (出国) but just for a short time and for travel. Here we are looking at tourism development, but it should be stressed and born in mind that this tourism phenomenon is rooted and intimately related to migration as a consistent part of Qingtian's social structure, and reveals an upward social mobility among local residents. And here the thin line between migration and tourism is blurred, as different scholars have recently asserted (Coates 2013; Holert and Terkessidis 2009; Salazar 2011).

Actually, the design, itineraries and activities of these trips undertaken by nuclear families and young single people materialize the migration structure developed in Qingtian throughout the last three decades.

Few of the cases of young nuclear families travelling during the summer holidays are circumscribed to one country alone. Conversely, they visit as many countries as they can where they have close connections, whether through relatives or friends. A person willing to travel would mobilize his or her social network and will visit friends and relatives in different European countries. Most of the cases of tourism trips I have analyzed include visiting at least three countries that coincide with the main

destinations of Qingtianese international migration. Thus, Spain, Italy, Portugal, France and Germany are the top five countries visited by Qingtianese people travelling to Europe.

And so, if the place of migration was traditionally not seen as a single country but the meaningful migration destination was Europe as a whole, this way of perceiving the space has been transferred to the new physical mobility taking the form of tourism.

Nowadays middle and upper class Qingtianese do not travel to a concrete country but they make a journey to "Europe". When people talked to me about their trips they used to emphasize that they had "travelled to Europe" and after my interest in the itinerary they detailed the concrete countries and cities of their visit. But the meaningful space for them is Europe as a whole rather than concrete countries or localities.

Concurrent with this conceptualization of the cultural and geographical space, the tourism trips are related to migration in another relevant way.

Non-migrants who have succeeded in China – whether professional workers of state-owned or private companies, as well as self-employed and business people – who travel to Europe do not only go sightseeing like "normal" tourists, but their travel accounts always include reflections on the perception of the migrants' life.

The interviews and conversations I maintained with people who have travelled to Europe stress how the trip made them realize how hard life is for Qingtianese abroad especially stressing the long hours working shifts, and the small amount of time left to enjoy leisure and rest.

James is 38 and owns several restaurants in Qingtian and is living between his hometown and Shanghai where he is involved in the art scene. His history is already quite typical in Qingtian. Instead of emigrating, as most of his school classmates did, he stayed to start a business within China. When he finally got a tourist visa after lots of attempts, he travelled for two months and stayed in friends' places in Munich, Prague, Barcelona and Sardinia. They have kept in close contact throughout the years via the internet and migrants' frequent visits to Qingtian. Although he was aware of the hard-working and sometimes difficult lives of his friends, after the trip, he realized for himself the difficulties of an international migrant's life.

I knew that life in Europe was hard but I didn't know to what extent. (...) One day I told my friend, "Come-on! Take the day off and let's go to the beach", his shop is just two streets from a beautiful landscape, you know. And when we were sitting by the sea, relaxing and chatting, my friend told me that this was the first time that year he had taken a day off. When I heard that I felt very moved, felt pain, and actually the majority of Chinese people in Spain lead this kind of life, they don't know how to enjoy life anymore. (Interview with James, 20 November 2012, Qingtian).

A Xue is a schoolteacher in Hecheng and the only one of five siblings who got a degree and didn't migrate. She travelled with her husband and her 15-year-old

daughter to Europe to visit family in Barcelona and several friends in Italy and Portugal.

In the same way as James, A Xue also recounts that it was hard to see how difficult it is for Chinese people to lead “a life as *laowai* (foreigners)” in Europe based on the difficulties in communication due to the long hours spent working for the financial benefit and development of the family. In this context, “foreigners” indicated non-Chinese people and the mainstream population of a given country. However, her account of the trip also stressed how migrants’ children have a better chance to “live like foreigners”, i.e. to live as if they were Spanish, Italian or Portuguese in each country.

Interestingly, after the one-month trip to Europe the couple began to consider sending their daughter to study for a degree in Barcelona. Although they would prefer her to study in an English-speaking country, they also consider that having their family in Barcelona would ease the process and make her feel a little bit more “at home” while studying abroad.

In this case, therefore, the trip to Europe opened the door to a potential development of new forms of mobility of younger Qingtianese towards Europe in the scope of the higher education domain. Although Spain is increasingly receiving Chinese students for bachelors and post-graduate degrees, here we are facing the very beginning of a students’ mobility that is - in the same way as tourism - rooted and intimately linked with the migration patterns and transnational links forged by Qingtianese migrants over the last three decades.

Along with the increase in and heterogeneity of migrants’ physical presence in Qingtian, the multiplicity of ways of being in Spain – i.e. the physical mobility of Qingtianese non-migrants - contributes to the changing reality of mobility between Spain and Qingtian and implies a transformation in the idea of migration in the place of origin.

6.3 *Kanyikan* 看一看: *Going back to “have a look”*

After analyzing migrants’ visits from the perspective of those who stayed behind, and the outcomes of the new forms of mobilities towards Spain in the transformation of the migration notion, we should now inquire about the effects of return visit experiences’ from the migrants’ point of view.

Actually, return visits are related to economic activities in one further way to the ones we have already described above. More and more people – both Chinese and Spanish- are turning their gaze towards China. Young and middle-aged migrants are interested in investing in, developing business and using their social or economic capital in China in order to diversify the sources of their businesses’ income. Chinese migrants generally make the most of their visits to research the possibilities of undertaking economic activities in their country of birth.

Concurrent with visits of the self-employed and workers, the physical presence in Qingtian of people who have lost their job and are on unemployment benefit, as well as those taking some time off after selling their former business and thinking about the next step, is also significant.

Chen is 45 and migrated to Spain when he was 20. For more than 20 years he worked in different sectors in Spain and, in 2009, he began to travel frequently to China. Currently he has a real estate business in Shanghai and owns two clothing stores in Barcelona in cooperation with relatives. He lives between the two cities and, whenever he is in China, he travels regularly to Qingtian where he is a well-known *huaqiao*, highly respected by local institutions and entrepreneurs. In summer 2012, during one of our conversations, Chen stressed the changing directions of Qingtianese migration, not without noting the difficulties in making the move towards China. While discussing his perceptions he told me the following:

“Have you seen how many people are back from Spain this summer? I tell you, some years ago it was not like this. This summer lots of people come to find me and ask, ‘Chen, what can I do in China? What are good business ideas now?’. But doing business in China is not that easy, you need more than money; you need *guanxi* (relationships) (Interview with Chen, August 2012).

And indeed, people visiting Qingtian for different reasons - seeing relatives, bringing their children to get to know their homeland, spending holidays, or travelling for extraordinary events - usually say that they are also coming back to *kan yi kan* 看一看, “to have a look”, i.e. to see what economic activities might be possible in the country they left behind for a better life in Europe some years ago.

Being aware that their hometown is saturated with consumer-oriented businesses, they are especially interested in economic activities outside Qingtian and, through the guidance and suggestions of local friends and relatives, during their visits they travel to developing areas where new investment projects are starting up. While some years ago Yiwu was the main target, nowadays the new wholesale market that is being built up in Beihai (Guanxi province), is attracting a growing number of Qingtianese entrepreneurs. The other main places where they travel to “have a look” are mainly located in the northeast provinces of China.

In order to fix their sights on China, Qingtianese migrants are aware of the need to have good, solid relationships (*guanxi*) with local people who might help them in the process. Thus, regular visits to Qingtian are needed and a physical presence in China is a relevant transnational practice to recover, strengthen and widen connections that might give them a highly visible status and “social life” (*mianzi*) to open up possibilities of further movements.

However not all the decisions and moves are made based exclusively on economic benefits. It is important to bear in mind that the incentives of and purposes for

transnational migrants' movements encompass complex and rich social processes and motivations that cannot be reduced and explained through economic logic alone¹⁴⁶.

In fact, visits to China generate ambivalent feelings for migrants towards their future plans, their perception of China, as well as their sense of belonging. A mixture of practical and identity sense issues are related to these ambivalent feelings and, thus, visits might trigger or deactivate potential return projects.

On several occasions I could see how migrants visiting China experience difficulties in handling day-to-day stuff. They often need local people's help to manage different issues, such as official and bureaucratic procedures, purchasing important elements, travelling through China, etc. The sentence "I can manage better in Spain than in China" is a leitmotif in migrants' mouths during their visits, especially when they are returning after long years of physical absence from China. They feel uncomfortable with these situations.

Migrants also feel that they have lost track of Chinese society but what particularly worries them is that they might not have the required connections and social status, and thus they feel that they should increase their physical presence in China through regular visits in order to fit into Chinese society once again. The dichotomy between the complexity (复杂 *fuzha*) of Chinese society versus the simplicity (简单 *qiandan*) of the Spanish one is repeated again and again by migrants visiting or returning to China. There are other post-visit assessments about China that are also unfavourable regarding pollution, hygiene, food security, and other social practices that are not present in Spain, such as bargaining.

The relevance of physically being in China within migrants' feelings and lives generates debates that they explore in their online "spaces". In October 2011 a lively discussion about the lifestyles in China and Spain was sparked by a migrant's post-visit appraisal of China. The post published on the Xihua website compared life in both societies under the dichotomy 国内 *guonei* (inside the country, China) and 国外 *guowai* (outside the country, in this case Spain). The post attracted the attention of a lot of people and the thread was marked as 热帖 *retie*¹⁴⁷, one of the most visited and commented on posts of that website at the time (see figure 63).

¹⁴⁶ As Constable argues sometimes economic is the "easiest and quick answer", but there is much more beyond this that emerges with accurate observation and ethnographic fieldwork (Constable 1999:212).

¹⁴⁷ There is no direct translation into English of the term "retie" which is used mostly on websites to mark the trending posts that receive a considerable number of visits and responses.



Figure 63. Xinhua website screen grab. Discussion of Qingtian and China after return visits

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Besides these appraisals concerning practical life in China, visiting the hometown and travelling around China also prompts the emergence of latent identities that “contest” the Chineseness ideology prevailing in migrants’ discourses while they are in Spain.

Whereas in Spain they generally define themselves as Chinese - considering their ancestry and the perceived difference from the mainstream society - when they are back in China they realise how much the migration experience has changed them. They see themselves acting differently from their relatives and friends who stayed behind and, somehow, they feel the “foreigner” condition with which Qingtianese residents endorsed them.

Therefore, the same linguistic conventions based on the pair “they/we” that we commented on in relation to Qingtianese residents’ perception towards migrants, is also used by people visiting Qingtian from Spain. By using the sentences “here they do this, but we do that in Spain” migrants situated themselves closer to me - as a Spanish socialized person - than to their 老乡 *laoxiang*, i.e. the people from the same hometown.

Certainly these attitudes and actions show how much identity is a relational process instead of a straightforward outcomes.

The differences between migrants and non-migrants emerge when they physically meet in Qingtian and are expressed through linguistic conventions as well as through distinct behaviors and social actions.

Li, the woman who travelled to Qingtian with her two sons to spend the summer holidays emphasized how physical presence in Qingtian triggers the manifestation of her feelings towards Spain as her “second home” and how going back to the place of her birth does not make it her only hometown, as a one-dimensional and geographical bounded reality:

In Spain people see me as different, and sometimes I feel alone. I thought I would have felt really at home here, but I am also feeling a kind of foreigner and lonely too, somehow I don't fit here any more. (...) For our generation it's a bit difficult, we are in the middle; I've lived half my life here and the other half in Spain. Since I came back, I've been thinking that after that many years in Spain, Qingtian is my first "hometown" (老家 *laojia*), of course, but Spain has become my second "hometown" (老家 *laojia*). (Interview with Li, 28/08/2011).

Returning to China after a long time unleashes a recognition of the thin line between the "foreign" and "native" condition in both settings, China and Spain, and its relational nature. In the interview quoted above, Li states - in the same fragment - how she feels "like a foreigner" both in China and Spain and, at the same time, she considers both places as integrating her home. As stated by Ossman (2013:12) each displacement serves as a reminder of those homes where one does not dwell at present.

While first generation migrants see their roots, their culture and social values rooted in China, they recognize how their self-identity and feelings of belonging involve both settings, each one expressing one dimension of the notion "home".

Therefore while the expression 回国 *huiguo*, "return to one's country" is used only to denote the physical movement towards China, the phrase 回家 *huijia*, "return home", is used interchangeably when migrants travel either to China or to the place where they live in Spain. Most of them nationally belong to one country but their lifestyles and biographical experiences are related to both contexts.

Return visits give a chance to envisage whether they want and have the means to return on a longer-term basis.

6.1.2.3.1 Return visits and further mobility: From get people out, to get people inn.

Return visits have always affected Qingtian migration habitus, and have prompted further movements. Indeed, as Oxfeld and Long underline, return visits are an integral part of the migration experience (Oxfeld and Long 2004:3).

During the early decades of the migration boom, return practices were important in fostering new migration flows towards Europe. The description of Lijing's family migration story - which we have presented in relation to the changing nature of object circulation - materializes how a pioneer's return visit would stimulate further migration. On the one hand, the gifts that Lijing's aunt brought from Spain upgraded the social status of the family overnight¹⁴⁸ and, on the other, the physical presence of the aunt herself brought about the real change in Lijing's life as well as for the whole family. Right now almost all Lijing's relatives reside in Spain.

¹⁴⁸ See page 129

After my aunt's visit my father also migrated to Spain to help them with the restaurant, in fact it was my aunt who convinced my grandparents to let him go. And then, three years later we [Lijing and her brother] also left China with my mother. So yes, my aunt's visit changed everything for us. (Interview with Lijing, Shanghai, 15 /04/2013).

Chain migration, initially prompted through relatives' early return visits, is also the main storyline in the first episode of the aforementioned "Wenzhou Yjia ren" series.

Nowadays the physical presence of migrants in Qingtian has, as before, a crucial impact both in the transformation of the place, as well as in triggering further migration movements, but in a completely different way. As underlined by Levitt and Chiller "movement and attachment is not linear or sequential but capable of rotating back and forth and changing direction over time" (Levitt and Schiller 2004:1011).

The direction of mobility has changed and visits are more likely to evolve in longer-term return migration practices than in further migration flows towards Spain. Therefore, return visits are continuing to have a crucial role in fomenting a continuation of migration movements but, whereas before they took people outside China, nowadays they might bring them back in again, or they might prompt an increased physical transnational mobility between the two countries.

The relationship between return visits and return migration has been analysed by several scholars (Cassarino 2004; Duval 2004; Sinatti 2009, 2011) . In this line of thought return has been understood as a relevant decision involving previous transnational arrangements. As Cassarino argues "in social network terms, return takes place when sufficient transnational resources (linkages, knowledge etc.) have been accumulated to facilitate the move, to make it a feasible and not-too-risky option (Cassarino 2004: 10–11).

And it is in this sense remarked on by Cassarino that some migrants' visits to Qingtian are aimed at preparing the ground for further transnational practices and movements towards China, even if they do not always necessarily encompass a definitive return.

We have already seen that common actions among different profiles of visiting migrants include broadening their social network, upgrading their social status and having a look at what economic activities could be undertaken.

Furthermore, some migrants make the most of their visits to deal with practical matters that might improve their state in China. However theThe administrative issues involved in these arrangements are not addressed solely at a clear and decisive return. Migrants are handling these practical issues to ease their transnational mobility that might take multiple forms, as we will see in chapter six.

Applying for a Chinese driving license is a usual activity among migrants who are making long-term visits to China or those who have intentions of doing so in the future. As in other spheres - and due to its official category as a *qiaoxiang* - it is much more convenient and easier to get a driving license in Qingtian than in other administrative areas, especially for Chinese migrants. Albeit driving in China is one of those practices people who have lived in Spain for a long time are a little reluctant about, whenever they decide to be back regularly or return on a long-term basis, taking out a license is one of the first things they do. Having a driving license and being able to have their own car gets them out of their 'guest' role and the need to be continually helped to get around¹⁴⁹.

Buying a house might also be considered a practical investment for an eventual return but houses have other relevant social uses as we have already seen. The preparations I am referring to here are better illustrated in the scope of bureaucratic and official ways of exercising their rights as Chinese citizens.

The most usual arrangement for smoothing the way of transnational practices and setting the course for further mobility towards China is especially illustrated by the practices aimed at reinstating their official belonging in China. Even if they hadn't changed their citizenship, people who migrated before the mid-2000s still need to go through bureaucratic processes that presumably require a long-term return to China to enable them to enjoy all their rights as Chinese citizens.

People who emigrated prior to 2004 had to give up their identity card (身份□ *shenfen zhen*) which in China is linked to the rigid "household registration system" (□□ *hukou*). The *hukou* system was established in 1955 as a way of controlling both the internal and international mobility of Chinese citizens and functions a bit like a "domestic passport" (Chan and Zhan 1999:818)¹⁵⁰.

At the time of issue in the '50s, the *hukou* system demanded that Chinese citizens willing to go out of the country should obtain a certificate at the Public Security Bureau in their place of residency (Ho 2010:13), renounce their *hukou* status and apply for a passport to leave the country.

Although the relaxation of migration policies and the subsequent flexibility in leaving and returning to China began in the early 1980s, it was not until 2003 that the stipulations preventing Chinese citizens going abroad for more than one year without losing their *hukou* status were abolished.

Therefore those people who emigrated prior to 2004 can recover their *shenfenzheng* and *hukou* only "upon their physical return" (Ho 2010:13). But, what does this physical "return" in the case at hand actually mean?

¹⁴⁹ The use of private cars in Qingtian is, as well as in China's cities and prosperous areas, an ever increasing practice. Purchasing new, expensive and foreign brand cars is a relevant practice linked with social status (*face*, *mianzi*) in areas that have swiftly gone from poverty to abundance and prosperity in just a few decades. It's astonishing to see how jammed up with cars a little town like Hecheng can get.

¹⁵⁰ In recent years Chinese scholars have analyzed and claimed the need for an increasing flexibility of the *hukou* system, especially regarding the differences established in function of individuals' rural or urban residency .

Not all the Qingtianese applying for the restoration of their *hukou* status are returnees. According to my own observations and the information provided by Qingtian Entry Exit Bureau, a significant number of the migrants who increasingly are going through these bureaucratic formalities are indeed “returning” to Spain after they got their *shenfenzhen* back.

The time needed to accomplish this target varies according to each case in terms of the interpersonal relationships (*guanxi*) of the applicant. While regulations in Qingtian promulgate that the person requesting their *hukou* should stay between at least three and four months in China, those people with good connections try, and most of them succeed, to get their official status back faster. Thus, issuing *shenfengzhen* is not only and always a matter of certain return, but it implies easing mobility and provides status to enjoy their rights as citizens whenever they are in China.

Recovering the identity card and *hukou* status bring relevant advantages to the migrants in terms of house buying, doing business, looking for a job, obtaining pensions and healthcare, etc. Apart from that, migrants also emphasize that having a Chinese identity card is also convenient for travelling around China. If they do not hold an identity card they have to use their passport to register in hotels, buy train tickets, and other formalities during the trip¹⁵¹. According to my informants having an identity card might help them “look less like” foreigners and avoid the different treatment that can translate, sometimes, into more expensive rates in hotels or for tourist services.

With a passport everybody knows you don't live here, that you're a *huaqiao*, and they treat you differently. Some of them assume you are rich, others don't see you as truly Chinese. It's like going around Spain without DNI, imagine... But in China it is even more important. When travelling it is better to use a *shenfenzhen* than a passport, even if it's Chinese.

The reasons for applying for official identity status are highly pragmatic and concern people across generations. Middle-aged people who migrated before 2004 are now taking advantage of their visits to arrange their official situation in order to ease house buying and do business. Pioneer migrants who are reaching retirement age in China represent the second group, and probably the most numerous. In order to try to get the retirement pensions proportional to the time they worked in China, they first have to reinstate their *hukou* and obtain an identity card. And finally, I also met some migrants' descendants going through these formalities during their holiday, encouraged by their parents. As we have seen, first generation migrants are eager to provide their children with the means and skills to open up their future possibilities in both settings.

¹⁵¹ In China you need to use an official document to register in hotels, buy train tickets, etc. Chinese migrants who lost their identity card use their passport to identify themselves when necessary. Even though it's a Chinese passport the fact they do not hold *shenfenzhen* straight away identifies them as international migrants or Chinese residents living abroad for a long time.

Obtaining full rights as a Chinese citizen is a relevant target of return visits to Qingtian so that possibilities for further movements are opened up, either increasing transnational practices or so that they can undertake different types of return migration movements.

I agree with Teo (2011:817) in the way he sees that "citizenship may not necessarily reflect the layered nuances of a migrant's identity". What is essentially related to their sense of belonging is the process of *physically being there*, of moving back and forth between their two homes and experiencing latent identities in motion.

Based on the idea sustained by several scholars who argue how the readjustment process upon return corresponds to migrants' changes rather than to the transformation of the societies of origin (Chiang and Liao 2005; Chiang 2011), we can say that return visits are condensing the intercultural experience of migrants and are moments involving the emergence and crystallization of the changes that a person has experienced throughout his or her migration journey.

6.2 Discovering and re-discovering Qingtian

It's really funny. When I'm in Madrid and I tell my friends that I'm going to my *pueblo*¹⁵² (hometown), they all think I'm going back to China! [Laughing] But what I mean is that I'm going to spend some days in Zafra with my father. It seems that because I look Chinese my *pueblo* can't possibly be in Spain! But I feel I belong to Zafra; that's where I grew up (Interview with Babala, Qingtian, April 2011).

This 29-year-old woman illustrates in just a handful of words the "problems" of the mainstream society in recognizing the localized identity of descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain. According to Babala's perception – as well as in the reference of Huang's little children to her slanted eyes¹⁵³ – the phenotypic features seem to be, once again, the element preventing recognition of her local belonging.

Babala was born in Fushan in 1982 and moved with her parents to Spain when she was two years old. The family settled in Zafra (Extremadura), where they opened a Chinese restaurant and Babala lived there until she was in her early 20s, when she moved to Madrid to study at the university.

Thus, as we can see from her words, the understanding of hometown goes beyond the meaning of merely the place of birth, and the significance of the term is intimately linked with self-perceived and attributed identities.

Babala has good memories of her childhood in Zafra – the place where she localizes her hometown – and underlines that she felt much like the others around her. "We

¹⁵² "Pueblo" means "village" in Spanish. *Irse al pueblo* – the expression that the women used in the interview- is a common expression to designate the trips to the villages where they come from among people in Spain who have migrated from rural to urban areas.

¹⁵³ See page...

were the only Chinese family in Zafra at that time. As a child I did not feel rejected or notice any racist attitudes towards me; I was just one more in the village”.

Like other descendants of migrants that grew up in villages and small towns, Babala explained how her relationship with the mainstream society changed when she moved to the city: “In Madrid there were more Chinese, more migration, more chaos, like in any large city, and there I was “*la chinita*” for the people in the street, the people who didn’t know me.”

Babala’s parents got divorced soon after she started university and while her younger sister and brother moved to the city with her mother, her father stayed in Zafra. When she is in Spain she often visits Zafra to see her father, old classmates and friends.

A second anecdote related to Babala sheds light on the relational process of identity and production of otherness through the designation of particular places of origin – i.e. of hometowns - by descendants of Chinese migrants in a transnational setting integrated by Spanish and Chinese people, but now living in China.

As mentioned when describing her grandparents’ funerals, Babala moved to live in Hangzhou with her husband and two daughters. During the first year of her “new life” in China, she attended a Chinese language course in Hangzhou University with other foreigners, some of them also Spanish.

One day, the teacher asked the students to write an essay entitled “My Hometown” (我的家乡 *Wode jiaxiang*). Babala was hesitant and not sure whether to describe Qingtian or Zafra, given that since she was at that time living in China she felt closer to her place of birth and since then, when she went to “*the pueblo*” she went to Qingtian, where her husband’s relatives live. While her teacher wanted her to talk about Spain, her classmates encouraged her to write about Qingtian.

The different proposals made by her teacher and classmates shed some light on how crucial the perceived difference and the production of otherness is in the relational process of fostering the identities of migrants’ descendants. While her Spanishness was the insinuated value of difference enhanced from the Chinese point of view – represented in this case by the teacher -, her Spanish classmates emphasized Babala’s Chineseness, related to her family roots and ethnic appearance.

This simple example underscores the dilemmas, contradictions and expectations lying at the core of attributed and self-perceived changing identities in the context of Chinese people moving across different socio-cultural settings.

Identities are not fixed realities but are, above all, relational and process-related. That is to say, identities are contingent to the relationship with the major groups in specific societies and, therefore, the same subject identity may be differently shaped in China or in Spain. While the majority of the Spanish population stresses Babala’s Chineseness – and sees her hometown in Qingtian –, when Babala is in China the majority group perceive her identity as rooted in Spain. Thus, in both cases, a sense of difference is attributed to her. The stereotypes involved in this

logic may arise from the difficulties of mainstream societies in acknowledging the locally-rooted, multiple and changeable self-identities of migrants and their children.

The interview fragment quoted at the heading of this chapter and the anecdote of the Chinese language course assignment, brings us face to face with two relevant aspects of the discussion related to the "hometown" of migrants' descendants and their sense of belonging.

Firstly, these situations echo back to the question formulated by Benton and Gómez in the introduction of a recently published issue about generation shifts within the scope of Chinese international migration (2014:1157): "Why do governments and majority groups find it hard to grasp or acknowledge identity transformations among immigrants' descendants?"

And secondly, it also brings us to review how academic literature has conceptualized and, somehow, taken part in the essentializing discourses of ethnic groups or migrants' descendants. Although there is growing recognition of the diverse forms of migrants' homes and identities, as well as the relevance of socio-cultural change over time, most of the research aimed at shedding light on the relationship of migrants' descendants towards their parent's country of birth still uses concepts such as "ancestral villages" or "ancestral hometown" to designate these places, and "ancestral culture" to describe their bonds/links with it.

In this chapter I will argue that this nomenclature has an intrinsic essentializing way of understanding the identities and sense of belonging of the daughters and sons of Chinese migrants, who have been totally or partially socialized in Spain and/or other countries.

As we will see, visits to China and to Qingtian are important events in the identity building process, as well as for the future plans of migrants' children. But, in order to understand and analyse the ethnographic data collected in Qingtian about the visits of migrants' descendants, we should first describe the diversity of family migration processes within this heterogeneous group and the impact of this mobility on their lives.

6.2.1 Descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain: Generations, historical changes, mobility and lifestyle.

Individuals that make up the group I refer to as "migrants' descendants" are involved in different situations and conditions that have been already presented throughout this dissertation. We are faced with a highly heterogeneous group shaped by class, gender and different local settings and biographical accounts.

Actually, there is growing concern among scholars to stress the diversity of the so-called second or later generations, i.e. a need to "de-homogenize new generations" (Benton and Gomez 2014:1166) and rethink the notions related to the term "generations" within migration studies (Eckstein 2006; King and Christou 2010; Lee 2011; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Levitt 2009; Rumbaut 2004).

In the case at hand, there are three essential factors related to the notion of “generation” that need to be addressed in order to underscore the diversity among Chinese migrants’ descendants in relation to their condition in Spain and their visits to Qingtian: their socialization settings, the historical time-frame, and the different types of involvement in parental mobility as children.

6.2.1.1 “Migrants’ generations” or the socialization settings of migrants’ descendants

The first element differentiating migrants’ descendants is related to their socialization settings. In this sense, we need to distinguish those individuals who have lived some years in China before moving to Spain, from those who have not, or who were too small to remember and integrate the outcomes of the experience. These two clusters - that share commonalities with other migration contexts in the world - are commonly regarded as “one-and-a-half generation (1.5) migrants” and “second-generation migrants”, respectively. Although I will use these terms to distinguish migrants’ descendants who have had previous experience of *being physically* in China from those who have not, some clarification is needed.

First, we should ask: when is a person supposed to be no longer regarded as a migrant by mainstream society, institutions and academics? Is migration a transferred inheritance? We have to be aware that it is inappropriate to refer to the descendants of Chinese migrants as “migrants” simply because their parents had emigrated.

As we will see, some children are involved in their parents’ physical mobility; others migrate of their own accord when they are adults, whereas others remain in Spain. But, if we are not talking about mobility as adults, we have to take into account that the term “migrants” is unsuitable and, thus, the concept ““second-generation migrants” is an oxymoron” (King and Christou 2008:2; Rumbaut 2004:1165).

However, the differences among migrants’ descendants regarding their previous experiences in China are relevant for the discussion of their subsequent transnational physical links. Hence, and given that a better expression has not been coined yet, I will use the term “migrants’ descendants” when I want to generalize and speak for both cases, but I will also use the concepts second- and 1.5-generation migrants when their former experience concerning their relationship with both China and Spain is relevant for the discussion.

Chinese second-generation migrants in Spain include both children born and socialized in their parents’ migration country (Spain, or other countries they have been to before settling in Spain), as well as those born in China but who moved to Spain at pre-school age. And here we come to the second troublesome point which is the dividing line between the two groups, widely discussed by King and Christou

(2008:5–6). Although any point is somewhat arbitrary, it is agreed that school age is seen as the cut-off point between second and 1.5 generation.

Given that the Chinese begin primary school at six years old, I will consider children that have finished at least one year in school, and therefore arriving in the migration country at 7 years of age, as 1.5 generation.

Along the same lines, the second relevant group of Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain includes the people who have attended school in both settings. This group does not only include children born in China arriving in Spain after six years of age, but also Spanish-born children who are sent to China to be raised by their grandparents and, in some cases, to study during the first school years. Hence, what matters is not the place of birth, but the place or places where one has been brought up and socialized. This group has been labelled as 1.5 generation, expressing the proximity to the migrants' generation in their experiences residing in China (there, the 1st generation), but closer to the second generation because they have arrived in Spain before adulthood and have therefore formally attended school in two settings¹⁵⁴.

The difference between these two groups is transferred to relevant aspects regarding transnational practices, in which language skills stand out¹⁵⁵.

Generally speaking, 1.5-generation children are reasonably fluent in oral Chinese and, whereas they might not be confident in writing, they know the basic characters and are able to read basic texts. Conversely, the children who have only attended school in Spain have more difficulties in grasping competent skills in Chinese even if they attend language courses at weekends and are surrounded by Chinese media at home (TV, movies, books, etc.). It is important to take into account that the local language in Qingtian - *qingtianhua* or the Qingtian dialect - is the main vehicle of communication between parents and their offspring in most of the Chinese migrants' households in Spain.

Limei, for example, arrived with her elder sister in Vilanova i la Geltrú – a coastal town near Barcelona - when she was eight years old. She explained the difference between herself and her younger brother, who was born in Barcelona, in relation to the uses of languages spoken at home:

It's very funny because at home we speak a mixture, we mix languages. For example, I speak Chinese with my sister, well Qingtian dialect, yes we speak Qingtian dialect or Spanish but never Catalan. With my brother I speak Catalan or Qingtian dialect. And with my parents I just use Qingtian dialect, sometimes it's chaotic. But at home we never speak Putonghua. And I remember that before coming to Spain my grandfather insisted a lot that we should learn Putonghua, but at that

¹⁵⁴ Following the same logic, migrants' descendants arriving at later ages have been labelled 1.25 generation migrants because they are closer to their parents' socialization settings (Rumbaut 2004).

¹⁵⁵ Jones-Correa (2002) argues that the level of fluency in the "ethnic language" is a relevant prerogative in the transnational practices of migrants' descendants with their parents' country of origin.

moment I didn't take him seriously; now I can see that he was right. I can speak good Chinese, but my brother mmm.... he can only understand basic things but if you speak as fluently as a native Chinese person he doesn't understand you". (Interview with Limei, Barcelona, August 2012).

The double socialization process undertaken by Limei is embodied in her multiple language skills. She expresses herself in totally fluent Catalan and Spanish and, unlike her younger brother, she is also able to speak Mandarin "like a Chinese person". It is important to notice how her identity as a Chinese person is highly related to her ability to speak the language.

These differences are relevant in the visits that migrants' descendants make to China, which can be experienced as "discovering" or "re-discovering" Qingtian depending on the former mobility experience of migrants' descendants. Continuing with the Limei case, she states that for her brother "going to Qingtian is an obligation, but I go back to China because I want to".

Limei arrived in Spain in 1996 when Spain was starting to receive an increasing number of descendants of migrants from different parts of the world. Beyond the kinship notion of "generation" within migrant families', another meaning of the term is relevant to disclose the heterogeneity within the group of descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain, which is related to the historical transformation of the two countries involved in these transnational links.

6.2.1.2 "Historical generations" or the change of migration flows towards Spain

The history of Chinese migration in Spain has started to be long enough for its generational depth to be significant. On the one hand, there is the emergence of the children of descendants who are still little children (i.e. third generations are also emerging) and, on the other hand, and this is what I want to emphasize here, there has been a relevant social change both in Spain and in China within these three decades.

The situation and context of descendants of Chinese migrants who arrived and grew up in Spain in the 1970s and 1980s is totally different from the contemporary context. Spain has only just started to be a relevant international migration reception country since the mid 1990s; the new communication technologies enabling connections over geographical distances without physically moving are also quite recent, and the patterns of Qingtianese international migration have also changed throughout the last three decades. This generational depth - that affects first-generation migrants - is also very important in the analysis of the links of their descendants with China and Spain.

Most of the migrants' descendants in Spain are children and youngsters born to small entrepreneurs who migrated to Spain in the 1990s and 2000s. Next to this predominant group are also a few people in their thirties or forties, born to migrants

that led the first significant migration flows to Europe in the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s.

While these two groups join to form the same cluster of second-generation migrants, they have actually experienced quite different socialization processes and life experiences. Thus, if we do not take the historical perspective of generation into account, we will fail to disentangle different socialization settings within the same geographical places over time. Nowadays, the need to consider the historical dimension of the term "generation", concurrent with its biological meaning /sense, is stressed by a growing number of researchers (Eckstein 2006; King and Christou 2009; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Louie 2004; Rumbaut 2004)¹⁵⁶.

The generational shifts shaped by historical transformations are self-perceived by the informants themselves. Valeria is one of the earliest descendants of migrants I interviewed. She was born in Belgium in 1978 and spent most of her childhood and youth in Seville (Andalusia). Like Babala, she moved to China as an adult prompted by her husband and, during the interview, while reflecting on the historical generational shift she identified herself as a second-generation migrant without my raising the question.

In Spain I'm second generation but... ehmm... an earlier second generation. Because my nieces are also second generation but, how can I explain... its' totally different. **I am second generation of another age.** People in Spain were not used to seeing Chinese at that time, it was very different. I remember that people always spoke to me clearly in basic Spanish - "you want Coke" - it was really like this [laughing]. But when I answered or started speaking they said "Hey, what the heck you've got a Sevillian accent!". (Interview with Valeria, Lishui, October 2012).

Following this line of thought based on language, from the second half of the decade of the 1990s, along with the rise in relevant international migration flows, Spanish public institutions began to develop and apply programs addressed at migrants: in schools, special support courses were designed for students arriving in the middle of their school years; regional and local institutions implemented free Spanish and local language courses for adults (Spanish, Catalan or Basque), and mediators and translators - as well as booklets published in the Chinese language - were slowly made available in hospitals and other public services.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, these resources have gradually been withheld and are decreasing due to the way

¹⁵⁶ The influential theory of Karl Mannheim (1952) on the notion of generation is still the theoretical reference of migration studies.

¹⁵⁷ Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López (2001) have analysed the situation of Chinese students in Catalan schools and compared formal education systems in China and Spain. Moreover, the authors have also discussed the perception of the two education systems from the migrants' perspective.

On the other hand, Vargas Urpi (2012) has critically analysed the projects and materials offered by the Catalan public services addressed to Chinese people, emphasizing the role of translators and/or interpreters in these activities.

politicians are dealing with the financial crisis by cutting back on the budgeting and funding of social services.

Next to institutional changes, mainstream society has also started to get used to seeing people of other ethnic backgrounds in the street and has somehow begun to live alongside people coming from other countries and socio-cultural backgrounds. However, as we can see, problems still exist to acknowledge the local allegiances within Spain of people that "look like" foreigners because of their ethnic differences. Closely linked to this generational change, we should draw attention to the different mobility experiences of the group encompassing the descendants of migrants.

6.2.1.3 Migration trajectories of migrants' descendants

Whereas some descendants of migrants have been physically located mainly in Spain, a relevant range of physical mobility exists among second-generation and 1.5-generation migrants. I want to underline this last point in order to disclose the fact that the heterogeneity of migrants' descendants is related to their different mobility backgrounds.

6.2.1.3.1 Mobility of "second-generation" migrants: Transnational socialization within Europe:

Not all second-generation migrants – i.e. the ones that did not spend socialization time in China - grew up in a single country. While nowadays most of the migrants generally move directly to a specific country where they have a stable and safe network - and keep on moving back and forth between China and the migration country -, during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the common Qingtianese migration pattern involved the displacement across several cities located in different countries, which were well connected through solid transnational links¹⁵⁸. As we have seen in the overview of Chinese history in Spain, people used to move across different European countries attracted by new and better economic possibilities and/or more flexible migration policies. In some cases, their daughters and sons accompanied them.

This situation is especially relevant in the case of descendants of earlier migrants such as Valeria's case that we introduced above.

Valeria was born in Belgium some years after her parents opened a Chinese restaurant in Brussels. Valeria's father migrated to Belgium in 1974 to meet his uncle who, in turn, had left China during the 1950s as a street vendor. Her mother and older siblings - who were born in China - joined the father in the following years. Valeria is the youngest of six siblings and the only one born outside China.

¹⁵⁸ We should take into account that transnational links are not only restricted to the ties between the place of origin and the migration country (in this case, Spain) but also between the people from a same area disseminated across different countries.

In 1988 the eldest brother, who was already married, remained in charge of the restaurant in Belgium while the rest of the family emigrated again, this time heading to Spain. As Valeria stated, "at that moment everybody said that in Spain there were almost no Chinese and the economy was growing and developing, so my parents moved there to start again with a new business". They settled down in Seville and opened one of the first Chinese restaurants in the city.

Aged 9, speaking French, holding a Belgian passport and with Chinese phenotypic traits, Valeria arrived in a place where - as she stressed many times - "people looked at me as if they had never seen a foreigner before, a person of another race I mean, or at least a Chinese person". She stressed that this was a totally different experience compared to her life in Belgium where "there was more variety, more foreigners and of course, many more Chinese".

When Valeria turned 15 she moved once again with her parents. Since all the older children had already married and had their own business, Valeria's parents decided to return to China with their younger daughter. However, before going back to China, they passed through Belgium to see their relatives and, there, Valeria's uncle convinced the couple to open another business before going back to China for retirement.

Valeria knew that the new restaurant was intended to be for her, but she had other plans for her life. After five years working in Brussels in the restaurant with her parents, Valeria told her parents that they could now retire and return to China, but that she would be going back to Seville with her two elder sisters to start a new life there. Valeria was 19 and did not want to lead her parents' and siblings' lifestyle working in a restaurant so she made her first migration movement as an adult, which involved a second "return", in this case to Spain¹⁵⁹.

Back in Seville, she studied an executive secretary training course and found a job in a Spanish company where she worked until she moved again, in this case her first "migration" movement, to China.

Where would Valeria's "hometown" be located? She counts as a second-generation migrant but her socialization process has taken place between Belgium and Spain, and with a Chinese environment at home, wherever it was located. Moreover, as an adult, she moved again to her parents' country of birth, which has also become her home since then.

In the end, beyond official belonging or place of birth, Valeria's life account reinforces the crucial role of the place where a person lives and grows up, which shapes the multiple senses of belonging and identity.

I have a Belgian passport and I have been living in China for the last 15 years but I still feel I'm Spanish somehow; that's where I spent the most important years of my life when I was a child and then as an adult. I have very nice memories, and all my family is still there, except for my parents. But I also feel close to some Belgian aspects, and closer and closer to China since I've been living here and my sons are growing up

¹⁵⁹ Her first "return" involved the move back to Belgium from Spain following her parents.

here, even if it was very hard to fit in at the beginning. It sounds a bit confusing but it's not [laughing]" (Interview with Valeria, Lishui, December 2012).

We will analyze the situation of migrants' descendants moving to China as adults in the next chapter, but what I want to stress here is the second-generation socialization process in a highly mobile context and the transformation of the perception of roots and identity throughout life.

A similar situation is portrayed by Giorgio, who followed his parents across three countries during his childhood, including a provisional and short stay in China. Giorgio was born in Youzhu in 1982 and arrived in Italy before he was two years old with his mother and older sister to join his father who had migrated one year before. Giorgio grew up in Italy until he was eleven, when the family returned to Qingtian. In 1994, after one year in China, Giorgio's parents decided to re-migrate and this time they headed towards Spain, where they worked for two years in a restaurant owned by a fellow villager. In 1996, when Giorgio was 14 years old, the family left Madrid for Lisbon where they opened their own restaurant.

While his parents worked in Portugal until they retired and went back to Qingtian, Giorgio continued his migratory journey as a student. He decided to study his bachelor degree in Spain, instead of doing it in Portugal, and therefore he lived four years in Madrid and often visited his parents in Lisbon. Afterwards, he kept on moving due to his university education, and studied one year of Chinese language in Beijing and, later on, a Master degree in London. When I met him in Youzhu in February 2012, while he was visiting his parents, he was working in a bank in Lisbon and was planning to move to China.

The outline of the migratory trajectories of Valeria and Giorgio is aimed at revealing the differences among second-generation migrants due to different mobility experiences that add complexity to the identity and multiple senses of belonging of migrants' descendants. Valeria and Giorgio have been used to being on the move since their childhood, through their adolescence and into adulthood; first following their parents and, afterwards, making their own life choices. In these two cases, physical mobility is accompanied by upward social mobility as we will see later.

These two cases are commonly regarded as "second-generation" migrants as both of them grew up mostly outside their parental home country. But Valeria and Giorgio have experienced a completely different socialization process compared to descendants who have only been socialized in one country, in this case Spain.

Although the mobility paths presented through these two cases have been common among Chinese migrant families - especially during the 1980s and 1990s - not enough attention has been paid to their outcomes from the perspective of the children of migrants. In much the same way, scholars have not taken into account the differences among second-generation migrants based on their physical mobility as children.

Being a migrant's child implies a highly situated reality and, therefore, the commonly used categories and concepts have to be adjusted to different empirical cases. I argue that the differentiation among second-generation migrants based on children's mobility is relevant and needed, at least in the case of the descendants of Qingtianese migrants.

Valeria and Giorgio have grown up and been socialized used to physical mobility and they have led a transnational life since they were children, either based on the contacts between Qingtian and the countries where they were living at that time, or based on the movements and contacts within the European countries where Qingtianese people forged strong connections.

As we will see next, besides these cases of second-generation mobility within European countries, we should also address the experience of mobility of 1.5-generation migrants who arrive in Spain as children.

6.2.1.3.2 Transnational socialization within the scope of Qingtian and Spain

People who migrated between six and fourteen years of age have memories, vague as they may be, of their life in China and their arrival in Spain. How do 1.5-generation migrants perceive and integrate their mobility and their parents' mobility between China and Spain? How did they perceive their parents over a distance? How did they feel when they arrived in Spain? And, how are these experiences - their transnational childhood - related to further movements as adults?

While family strategies involving the emergence of 1.5-generation migrants have been documented and analyzed within the Chinese diaspora (Amelia Sáiz López 2012; Waters 2010), little research has been done from the point of view of the descendants themselves instead of their parents' perspective¹⁶⁰. In this section we will approach the most common situations through the voices of the migrants' children.

While we have seen before how some children followed their parents on their trajectories across different European countries, other families left their children behind in Qingtian until they had gained a stable situation, and only then did they apply for family reunification to bring their offspring to Spain.

This is the case of Wenjun, whose parents left China in 1986, when he was six years old, and relocated to Spain after residing some years in Holland and Belgium. Wenjun grew up in Wenxi with his paternal grandparents and when he was 10 years old he was reunited with his parents in Madrid. He cannot recall the precise moment when his parents migrated as they used to spend long periods working in other cities when they were in China. This case shows how international migration in

¹⁶⁰ In the work of King and Christou (2009:14) on return visits of second-generation Greeks and Cypriots, they underlined the different long-term physical experiences of descendants in their parental homeland and analysed the outcomes of transnational childhood on their visits as adults.

Qingtian was a prolongation of an earlier practice of internal movement as we have seen through several examples throughout this dissertation.

I was used to them not being at home, it was something normal. When they left, nobody told us anything and we [he and his younger sister] didn't ask either. Then... after some time I realized they were not there anymore (Interview with Wenjun, Wenxi, March 2011).

It is important to bear in mind that while Wenjun's parents migrated to Europe when he was six years old - and he has some vague memories of them before they left - other children were much smaller when they parents migrated and obviously had no reference of them. Nevertheless, whether they had lived with them or not before they left, most of the people expressed a similar impression towards their "absent" parents. Children raised in Qingtian by grandparents did not have a clear picture of their parents until they moved to be reunited with them in Spain, and they explained that their parents were "strangers" to them.

Generally speaking, despite not having a clear image of their parents, they do have memories of their life in China. This, of course, depends on how old they were when they arrived in Spain. The younger they were, the easier it was for them to forget their "Chinese past". It is also important to note that they did not feel they had a different status for being raised by grandparents, as a lot of children were in the same situation in Qingtian. As they explain, it was normal to see children starting and leaving school when they were children.

The migrants' children I interviewed, and who are referred to in this section, are nowadays in their mid/late 20s and arrived in Spain around the second half of the 1990s when they were aged between 6 and 14 years. It is important to bear in mind that, at that time, it was not possible to undertake "virtual" visits like today; phone calls were still very expensive and therefore not used so much, and few people could return to visit their relatives during the first years of migration. As we have seen in previous chapters, this situation has changed a lot and nowadays the contact between parents in Spain and their descendants in Qingtian is much more frequent. However, more time must pass before we can see the outcomes of this new situation, as the children raised in the digital age are still too young.

I had seen them in pictures, but they were like strangers to me. At that time it was not like now; calling was not so easy and of course there was no internet ... I remember they put me on the phone, just a few, very few times, but I didn't know what to say, it was really weird. (Interview with Junjie, Qingtian, February 2012).

Like Junjie, other descendants also recall random phone calls with their parents and they all share the same feeling of disassociation. Junjie was two years old when his father left and five when his mother did. He moved to Madrid when he was ten years old with his elder sister and during those eight years his father only went back to

Qingtian once to visit them. He was eight years old when he met his father for the first time in Qingtian but he has no clear memories. He has the perception that "everything was very quick, he was there one day and gone the next, almost like a dream".

Of all the people I spoke to, only some of them received a visit from their father but none of them reported a visit from their mother. As they explained to me, men were the first to leave the country and some years later women followed them. Therefore, when they had the slightest chance to return, the ones that had been away the longest were the first to go back. However, beyond this logic, gender issues also played a key role in the alternation of visits within families at a time when visits were, as we have seen, highly related to portraying the image of the successful migrant. Regarding *mianzi* and the social status of a given family, men rather than women were in-charge of transferring the image of the whole migrant household.

Limei recalls two visits of her father, the second one involving her own displacement to Vilanova I la Geltrú. Limei's father migrated in 1982, when she was just eight months, while her mother did four years later.

She explained her first memory of her father when he visited Qingtian, and like Junjie, she had the feeling that he had just stayed one day. Afterwards Limei knew that her father had stayed just a couple of days in Qingtian and had gone with her uncle to another city to do some business. She stressed the unknown feelings towards the man who everybody said was her father but she did not recognize as such.

I mean they put a man in front of you and... my uncle was also there, my father's brother, and I remember that I clung more to my uncle than to him, because I'd been with my uncle since I was little so...and I don't know ... [Laughing]. It was like "do not leave me alone with this man who I don't know who he is." I mean, however much they told me that he was my father, he was a stranger to me. (Interview with Limei, Barcelona, August 2012).

The second time they met, Limei was eight years old and she has a very clear memory of this visit because it involved her move to Spain with her sister. Limei's uncle, who had taken on the role of father to the two girls until they left, travelled with the two of them to Beijing to be reunited with their father. Limei remembers that before leaving China the three of them stayed some days in Beijing sightseeing and getting to know each other and she says that this was the best way to get in touch with him again.

Indeed, Limei was somehow privileged because most of the children of that period had to get to know their parents, their new house, their new city, their new school, language and friends all at once.

In many cases, they had memories of the first moment in the airport when their parents came to pick them up, if the children had travelled alone. They all explained that they were happy to go to Spain with their parents, but for all of them the beginning of their new lives was hard due to communication problems. When the children arrived in Spain, their parents generally already had their own business, which was, in almost all cases, a Chinese restaurant.

The age at arrival is very important for the future of the 1.5 migrants in Spain, especially regarding the possibilities of continuing their studies.

Children arriving after ten years old have more problems to re-adjust to their new school environment, especially because of the language. Generally, at that time, they are placed in the course following on from their previous school year but many of them repeat the first school year, which is almost always addressed at learning the language.

Most of the children who arrived between 6 and 10 years report how lost they felt the first months at school and at home, unable to understand anything or anyone, but most of them gradually passed the course and some continued studying towards university.

Lina is one of the 1.5-generation descendants who arrived at a later age in Spain. She moved to Zaragoza with her younger sister when she was 13 years old and she regrets that it was too difficult for her to get the language to the level needed in that school year. For that reason, she left school after finishing secondary school.

I struggled in school, I was already 13 when I arrived. My sister was better; she was younger so I guess it was easier for her. But my classmates were very good to me, they helped me... as I was the only Chinese girl in class they treated me very well. But studying was difficult for me because of the language. For that reason I stopped studying when I finished secondary school (Interview with Lina, Qingtian, September 2012).

Lina also links the development of her character to the difficulties of the language:

I've always thought of myself as a very shy person, but maybe it's since I was 13 when I arrived in Spain and I felt embarrassed about not being able to communicate, about my pronunciation, my way of conjugating verbs... When people laugh at you, because you are not a small kid anymore but you can't speak well, you can really become a very shy person (Interview with Lina, Qingtian, September 2012).

Lina speaks good Spanish with some minor grammatical and pronunciation errors that indicate that she has not been completely socialized in Spain. However, she has a very good command of daily Spanish and did not seem shy to me at all during the days I spent with her in Qingtian. She sees her character change as related to her

current job. After helping her parents in their Chinese restaurant, working in a Chinese travel agency as an administrator, and doing several part-time jobs for Chinese and Spanish companies, she has finally opened a Spanish bar-restaurant with her older brother.

It is in fact in this tension between family responsibilities, and studying and finding a job outside "home" where the main element of identification as a group of descendants of Chinese migrants in Spain is found.

All migrants' descendants, no matter if they are 1.5 or second generation, acknowledged in the interviews that they have had a different childhood from most children belonging to local mainstream families.

Helping in the restaurant of their parents is something they all share and the main element that they refer to to differentiate themselves from most of the Spanish population of the same age. Helping in the family business during weekends, holidays and afternoons after school is something normal for all of them; an activity that they accept without questioning.

But it is true to say that it makes them feel different from other children, but not in a negative way. Beyond the fact that when the others go out they have to be in the restaurant, the children of migrants who are now in their mid or late twenties regard this experience as a way of "maturing faster", of developing important skills and attitudes for life that may sometimes involve a different way of seeing life from their "Spanish" friends. In the end, they perceive themselves as people with a higher level of responsibility than their "Spanish friends".

This is the main aspect that makes descendants of Chinese migrants identify with each other and sheds light on the inter-ethnic niches that might appear among them, especially among 1.5 generations. What makes some ethnic Chinese youth get along with each other and not with the majority of the society is more a question of shared experiences and class, rather than a cultural phenomenon. What is generally regarded as a cultural difference is in fact based on socio-cultural factors. Hence, we should better focus on the socio-cultural settings of individuals rather than on the essentialized relationship between ethnic traits and cultural milieu.

Descendants of Chinese migrants that continued their studies and entered university are the ones that have closer friends and networks outside the Chinese ethnic group, but who also recognize the same differences. As we will see at the end of this chapter, apart from some problems recognizing changing identities and localizing the sense of belonging of migrants' descendants in Spain, social class and social mobility also play an important role in the segregated youth socialization settings that have sometimes emerged among ethnic Chinese people or their descendants in Spain.

6.2.2 Continuation and transformations of transnational visits: Migrants' descendants in China and Qingtian.

Within the more extended context of Chinese migration to the United States, Louie argued that "for each generation, <<returning>> to China carried a very different significance" (Louie 2004:6). Louie's ethnography is probably the work that analyses with greater detail the outcomes of the visits of migrants' descendants' to China in the construction of identities. Although the situation of ethnic Chinese in the United States and Spain is completely different, what I want to stress is Louie's claim to the need for a longitudinal perspective in the study of migrants' visits to China.

Gowricharn, for his part, argues that, given the differences among migrant generations "it would be surprising to find only one kind of transnationalism" (Gowricharn 2009:1622). The transformation of transnational practices over time and generations is best embodied in the changes in the most tangible and physical ways that express these links, which are the visits.

However, should the trips of migrants' descendants to China always be considered "return visits"? And, as Louie expresses, "what do native places in China mean to people who have never lived in them and who do not possess the affective ties that come from having spent time in them?"(Louie 2004:47).

Previous experience in China plays a relevant role in shaping the significance of what are often regarded as "ancestral sites" or "hometowns". While for 1.5-generation migrants, visits to Qingtian involve a return to the place of origin and to the place where they have spent some time of their childhood, for second-generation migrants – both the ones born in Spain or in China - these trips are regarded merely as a visit to their parents' hometown.

Nevertheless, the notion of China as a whole stands out in the different types of visits to Qingtian made by migrants' descendants.

A 25 year-old man who moved to Barcelona when he was ten and returned to his hometown for the first time during the 2011 Chinese New Year, expresses the two main elements related to the physical presence of migrants' descendants in China. On the one hand, he states the different meaning of Qingtian for descendants who have lived there and for those who have not and, on the other hand, he introduces the relevance of physically being in China beyond Qingtian.

What can I say? Qingtian has nothing - it's not a very beautiful place, it's just a small town. It's important to me because it's my hometown, but for those born in Spain... Qingtian has nothing special; there's nothing to do here. (...) But China is very big and it is our country, our homeland. Now China is a country in economic revolution. You see, it is the second largest economy after the United States and there are many opportunities here. (Interview with Pablo, Qingtian, February 2011)

Pablo's words resonate with many descendants of Chinese migrants - the economic rise in China fosters increasing national identity and a sense of belonging as Chinese. Benton and Gomez have recently discussed the role of the Chinese economic rise in the "re-sinification alongside the more widespread hybridization of second-generation identities, in which interculturalism, cosmopolitanism and internationalism mix" (Benton and Gomez 2014:1167).

Migrants' descendants begin to widen their interest towards China when they grow up and become adults; at this moment, visits may be more addressed towards the biggest cities in China than to their "ancestral homeland". However, generally speaking, they all start by making contact with their country of birth, or their parents' country of birth, from the local space of Qingtian and through kinship ties. And here lies the main difference between other older Chinese international migration experiences and theirs.

While "return visits" of later generation Chinese migrants' to *qiaoxiang* villages in Guangdong province analysed by Louie (2006b) are highly institutionalized through the Searching Roots (寻根 *xungen*) programs, we are facing much more informal and family-related visits in this case. The visits of migrants' descendants' to Qingtian - whether by 1.5 or second generations - are strongly mediated by relative networks.

Along with the rise of Chinese language courses and schools in 2008, the first summer camp for migrants' offspring was organized in collaboration between the Youzhu Middle School and the Qiaoban¹⁶¹. However, after being held for four years, this summer camp has not been successful.

It is precisely due to these kinship ties that the summer camps organized in the Youzhu School are not really prospering in Qingtian. Qingtianese living in Europe prefer to send their children to spend their holidays in Qingtian with their relatives rather than sending them to a summer camp, which would be more expensive and would mean they are detached from their relatives and family life in Qingtian. Therefore, the Searching for Roots activities are not developed in an institutionalized way in Qingtian but through informal and kinship ties and, for that reason, these summer camp programs have not been as successful in the Qingtian migration *habitus* as Chinese language schools.

In this section, we will see that, whether they are children, teenagers or young adults, travelling alone or with their Spanish-based relatives, kinship ties and networks localized in Qingtian are the gateway to their eventual further physical presence in China.

¹⁶¹ Qiaoban (侨办) is the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs that has a department in each *qiaoxiang* area. Chuang (2014) has recently analyzed the transnational links mediated by this governmental institution in the case of Wenzhou migrants in France.

6.2.2.1 European ethnic Chinese in Qingtian: Children's and teenagers' summer vacation.

Qingtian wakes up very early and is full of energy: big cars, electric and traditional *sanlunche*, horns, passers-by, street sellers, dry vegetables and fresh fruits on the sidewalks... In Linjiang road - next to the Gonghui School and in front of the first café that opened in town - the sidewalk opens out onto a corner forming a small and improvised square where every morning women gather to do exercise.

Around 7:20, students carrying the same blue bags run through the group of women to enter school. Some arrive in groups, walking. Most of them come in *sanlunche*, and the younger ones arrive accompanied by adults who leave them at the door.

The image of children and teenagers entering school speaking Spanish, French or Italian to the sound of the *erhu*¹⁶² while women practice *taiji* in front of a restaurant where you can have a "café solo" just as you do in Barcelona, expresses the circulation of knowledge, social practices and people that makes Qingtian a place of changing transnational transactions. (Fieldwork notes, Qingtian, 10 July of 2011).

The increasing presence of migrants' descendants shape the social landscape of Hecheng, especially in summer when it is not unusual to overhear random snatches of conversation in Spanish or Italian while walking around the busy commercial streets of Hecheng. These conversations normally come from groups of teenagers and youngsters who live with their parents in Spain, Italy, France, etc.

Visiting Qingtian is a relevant movement and experience for migrant's descendants. With their physical presence in Qingtian, they reinforce and forge two types of transnational ties. On the one hand, they foster new relationships with other people living in different European countries and experience together Qingtian and Chinese society and, on the other, they strengthen their family background and discover or rediscover the place where their parents come from. These two kinds of transnational ties arise within the Chinese language school and the domestic and family space, respectively.

In Chapter three we analysed in depth how the increasing numbers of migrants visiting Qingtian have brought about a shift in the business related to language schools: from teaching Spanish to future migrants to teaching Chinese to the children of migrants. Gonghui School is the educational centre that brings together the highest number of students, coming mostly from Spain, Italy and France, but also from other European countries¹⁶³.

Children enrolled in the Chinese language courses embody different mobility backgrounds and transnational household strategies, which are transferred to their

¹⁶² Erhu is a traditional Chinese music instrument.

¹⁶³ For a detailed description and analysis of the Chinese language schools in Qingtian and the Chinese language students in summer 2011, see Chapter three.

different levels of Chinese language. For both second- and 1.5-generation migrants, the school is a place to meet people with similar life experiences, either from Spain or other European countries. Hence, the Chinese language schools in Qingtian are central spaces for the socialization of migrant's descendants visiting Qingtian, who develop strong links and networks with their peers residing in different countries.

Teresa arrived in Valencia aged eleven and had just finished her secondary school education when she returned to spend her second summer in Qingtian in 2011. Her command of Chinese is quite good and she was in the higher-level class of the Gonghui School. In fact, rather than learning Chinese, what Teresa enjoys about her summer is the international flavour of the environment created throughout the school. In summer 2011, Teresa and her classmates experienced Qingtian together through the activities carried out within the group.

I enjoy myself more here than in Valencia; this summer is really good, better than the last one - then I was bored all day at home with my aunt. I like it here because I meet people from different countries; I go out every day, I'm making really good friends and learning every day. I don't really want the summer to finish and go back to Spain. (Interview with Teresa, Qingtian, July 2011).

Relationships with classmates extended outside the classroom with self-organized trips and activities, which included meeting up in the evenings to eat in the "Western restaurants", walk around the town and try their first KTVs, and going out together at weekends, etc.

Whenever they went out together they continuously talked about Qingtian, comparing what they were experiencing and seeing with the situation in their own countries of residence. As I could see when I accompanied them, they shared the astonishment for some things they were not used to seeing - such as different types of food, popular practices performed in public spaces, etc. - and they criticized what they did not like, especially the noise in the streets and the lack of hygiene in public and private spaces. When they were together they did not need to pretend they liked or understood everything, as was sometimes the case when they were with non-migrant local residents.

Additionally, the relationship between Teresa and her classmates went beyond their summer encounter in Qingtian. When classes finished and everybody joined their families in their countries of residence, they kept close contact using phone-based applications, and some of them have already met up again in Barcelona and Rome.

This is not an isolated case - most of the teenagers and youth visiting Qingtian prefer to socialize with each other - with people that do not live in China - and only a few of them hang out with non-migrant people of the same age. Even if some relatives try to push them together, few interrelationships are forged between migrants' descendants and local young people of the same age. In fact, Qingtianese residents often express how different local children are compared to the ones that

come from Europe, alleging that the latter are much more mature, responsible and independent than their children.

Although the difference between the children of migrants and the local residents is continuously stressed in the public spaces and in their relatives' domestic areas, and they are regarded as foreigners for their *waimian* ("overseas", "outside") attitudes and behavior, in the school environment they meet people who have undergone similar life experiences and with whom they share social conditions, dilemmas, ambitions and wishes. They are all Chinese-looking people, i.e. ethnic Chinese, but have been raised in different European countries.

Hence, taking the relational perspective on the construction of identities a bit further, we could argue that the ambivalence involved in the identities of migrants' descendants' across different localities - which was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter - is the norm rather than the exception in the micro-social spaces of the groups-classes in Qingtian language schools. The diversity of situations among ethnic Chinese people in Europe is concentrated in the classroom.

For teenagers and youngsters, the relationships forged during their summer in Qingtian continue to develop after they come back to their respective countries and, therefore, they develop transnational networks that will be maintained by using smartphone apps, computer-based micro-blogs, and even potential face-to-face meetings. Hence, through the relationships with people living in different countries they broaden and expand their transnational relationship network beyond the Spain - China vector.

These affinities and networks among migrants' descendants, originating in their physical meetings in Qingtian, foster, in a way, a continuation of their parents' transnational links across different European countries. The condensation of youngsters and teenagers coming from different European countries with similar life stories and family backgrounds leads to the emergence of new connections across the transnational nodes where Qingtianese people have migrated.

While these ties are triggered for very different reasons from their former generation (before as migrants in Europe, now as visitors in China), undertaken in a completely different setting (before in foreign countries in Europe, now in half-foreign places in China), and by sharing different situations (before as workers, now as students), we could say that the new transnational links across Europe developed in the micro-social spaces of Qingtian summer language school courses shed light on the generation shift and the transformation of Chinese migration to Europe throughout the last three decades.

In parallel with these new international links, forged with other individuals of the same generation and with similar migration experiences, the visits to Qingtian are also a momentum to sustain transnational kinship ties that are condensed in the Qingtian - Spain nexus, but also embrace the indirect transnational links between family members settled in different countries. It is not unusual to find relatives widespread throughout Spain, Portugal or France meeting up in Qingtian rather than in some of their countries of residence.

Most of the migrants' descendants visiting Qingtian stay in the urban areas, whether in their parents' apartments or in the homes of their close relatives. Migrants have strong family networks in Qingtian and, even if they do not come back with their children, they prefer their sons and daughters to live with their relatives while studying in Chinese schools.

At weekends, they are all generally busy with excursions to the villages to visit relatives, see the old houses and the landscape and enjoy what their relatives present as the best things of their local area and culture: they visit temples, go to rural restaurants (农家乐 *nongjiale*) to eat the local fish called *tianyu* (田鱼), visit soapstone sculpture workshops, and make day-trips to enjoy the natural scenery. All these activities addressed at getting to know the specialties and peculiarities of the place are undertaken within the family domain, as the close relatives are the hosts of the migrants and their descendants.

Descendants who lived there when they were children have ambivalent feelings towards Qingtian and say that they can hardly recognize the place. It is especially moving for them to visit the old houses where they lived when they were little children in the villages; houses that are mostly abandoned nowadays¹⁶⁴. Most of them retain idealistic, nostalgic images of their villages and disapprove of the fast development of the rural areas.

Limei who has often come back with her parents explained her perception towards changing Qingtian, stressing that it was from her second visit in 2004 when she noticed the biggest transformation.

Something that struck me a lot in the village of my grandfather, in Fangshan, is that the river has practically run dry. Well, there is still the river bed where the water used to flow but it has dried up. There are loads of new buildings, like super luxurious ones all around it, but it's not the village I can picture in my mind anymore. (Interview with Limei, Barcelona, August 2012).

For her part, Lina also expressed the same feeling, but she moved to Spain at an older age and has reestablished contact with some old classmates from her days in Qingtian.

And Qingtian ... I don't know ... Now I like to go there because I have got in touch with some classmates again. But for a while I said "I don't want to go back to Qingtian because I'll be sad, because all my memories have disappeared from the real Qingtian, because it's totally different, it's like your memories have been bulldozed. Then for a while I felt rejection towards Qingtian. (Interview with Lina, Qingtian, October 2012).

¹⁶⁴ In the documentary annex we can see how migrants' descendants are visiting the old houses where they used to live accompanied by their grandparents.

Like Lina, Junjie was also impressed by the change of the place, which did not match his childhood memories. After two weeks staying with his uncles, aunts, and cousins, he was looking forward to meeting some of his friends from Madrid who were also travelling to their “hometown” to spend Spring Festival.

Visits to Qingtian also involve a chance for second-generation migrants who have not lived there and have no emotional feelings towards the place, to get to know their parents more deeply.

An 18-year-old girl born in Seville travelled for the third time to Qingtian in summer 2012 with her mother. She stayed in China for two months and although she found a lot of friends from Spain, she enjoyed walking around with her mother and explained how it was the way to get to know her more.

In Spain, they never speak a lot about Qingtian. Yes sometimes they say general things, or tell some story. But now that we are here, just strolling down the street she starts explaining things from her childhood or from her life before she went abroad. “Here so-and-so happened”, “this was your aunt’s house, but then they sold it”, “here this, here that”, and so on. (Interview with Cassandra, Qingtian, August 2012).

When I met Cassandra she had just started her bachelor degree in humanities and she was planning to study in China for one year to improve her Chinese language skills. As she stated, the next trip she wanted to travel by herself and get to know different places in China, not only Qingtian.

6.2.2.2 Physical and social mobility: Visits to Qingtian and beyond

Migrants’ descendants in their mid and late 20s began to be physically present in China via the visits they made with their parents to Qingtian. Most of them visited Qingtian for the first time for the funeral of grandparents and they remember going to Qingtian once every two or three years as children. However, we might ask now, what happens when the children of migrants grow up and become adults? What relationship do they have with China and Qingtian?

According to their lifestyles in Spain and their future plans, the relationship that migrants’ descendants have with China and Qingtian is differently shaped.

- **Following on from Spain – Qingtian visits.**

Some migrants’ descendants continue with holiday visits to Qingtian when they are adults. This is especially true in the case of 1.5 generations that have followed their parents’ lifestyle patterns and are working in the family business or have opened their own bar, restaurant or shop. In these cases, the young people reproduce their parents’ discourse towards visits and maintain that they travel to Qingtian to “have a rest” and get away from their daily workload.

Even though these visits are somehow a replica of the presence of first-generation migrants in Qingtian, important changes have been introduced.

Generally, they stay with their non-migrant aunts and uncles, but they spend much of their time with friends from Spain whose families also come from the area and with whom they arrange the trip together.

When I met Junjie in a café in Hecheng during the Chinese New Year holiday, he stated that coming back alone was extremely boring for him and argued that he did not like going out with his cousin's friends as much as with his own friends from Madrid. He was in fact waiting for them to arrive in Qingtian in the following days.

One of the things that most bothered Junjie about hanging out with local Qingtianese was the expectation and "obligation of wealth" towards people living abroad. The local expectations towards migrants is so integrated in Qingtian that it has been transferred to the younger generations, to the sons and daughters of migrants who were born in China but who have spent most of their socialization time in Italy, Spain and other European countries.

Although middle-aged migrants who grew up in Qingtian are actively taking part in this silent pact, younger people who were raised in Spain do not feel comfortable with these local social expectations.

When we go out with my cousin friend's, mmmm.... they expect me to pay for everything. I know that people when they come back spend a lot of money but that's because before it was different - my parents' generation. I don't like that - it's just to show off. I'm looking forward to meeting my friends tomorrow, they're also coming back to spend New Year. (Interview with Junjie, Qingtian, February 2011).

Hence, relating to people with similar experiences of mobility and lifestyle - rather than forging links with non-migrant individuals of the same age - is the common denominator among teenagers studying Chinese during summer and the young 1.5-generation adults visiting Qingtian.

Wenjun, who has a similar experience to Junjie, and has just opened a bar with his wife, stressed the different life conditions of his relatives in Qingtian and his family in Spain:

My uncle works here like Spanish people in Spain. From Monday to Friday, he doesn't work at weekends or holidays. He has a normal schedule. But we, the Chinese in Spain, we work from Monday to Sunday, except the odd day, but generally that's the way it is and all day long. Here, everything has changed; people have more money and know how to enjoy life. Before maybe it was not like this - everyone says that - but now it certainly is, I can tell you (Interview with Wenjun, Wenxi, March 2011).

The different lifestyles referred to by Wenjun are related to social mobility and are important elements in the heterogeneity within the group of migrants' descendants and their links with China.

Although continuing with their parents' lifestyles brings about a prolongation of the pattern and significance of the visits of the previous generation to Qingtian, the people who are trying to develop their life beyond the environment of family-based entrepreneurs forge different links with China.

- **Visiting China beyond Qingtian and family ties:**

The physical presence of migrants' descendants is not only limited to Qingtian; visits to China are also aimed at different interests and undertaken beyond Qingtian and kinship ties.

As children and teenagers, migrants' descendants follow their parents' transnational mobility in their visits to Qingtian, but when they become young adults their "voyages of discovery" are not always just centered on Qingtian. Their curiosity is not always just related to Qingtian but travelling across China embraces the aim of their visit and also shapes their identity discourse and future plans.

The step from travelling with parents or through family ties located in Qingtian to their own experiences in China is also often mediated by Chinese language learning activities. I encountered a number of young descendants of Chinese migrants enrolled in bachelor or postgraduate degrees in Spain who travel to Shanghai, Hangzhou or Beijing to study some months in language courses for foreigners offered by almost all Chinese universities. In addition, they also contact Spanish-based private agencies providing and designing language programs in cooperation with educational institutions in China.

This is the case of Limei who travelled to China with a Catalan friend who studied Chinese with her in Barcelona.

I've always dreamt of travelling around China and learning what things are like there... I often used to return with my parents when I was little, every two or three years we used to go back ... but it was more like they wanted to return, for Christmas holiday or so on. But when I was in my first year of university with a friend who was studying Chinese with me (...) as we had always said that one day we would go to China together to see what it was like and so on; so with the excuse of learning some Chinese in summer 2007 we went to Shanghai for a month. After the course finished, we travelled around a bit and at the end of our stay I showed her Qingtian - we stayed there three days before coming back to Barcelona (Interview with Limei, Barcelona, August 2012).

Like many children and youngsters not linked to migration, Limei's friend studied in a Chinese language school at weekends and shared Limei's curiosity for China. After that first trip and after finishing her degree in Psychology Limei has often travelled to China.

A growing number of descendants are organizing trips with friends to “get to know China better” and they spend vacations travelling around the top destinations for the young urban Chinese, such as Yunnan, Guanxi and Tibet.

These are totally different ways to be present in China compared to the physical transnational links of visiting Qingtian, typical of their parents’ generation. Contrary to migrants’ descendants who are directing their visits towards Qingtian essentially to “have a rest”, young people travelling around China are trying to launch a professional career outside their family business and see China as a possible place to do it.

- **Physical and social mobility among migrants’ descendants.**

Throughout this chapter we have seen how migrants’ descendants are indeed socialized within a migration milieu and have experienced mobility in a more or less embodied form since they were children. Some of them have been raised mainly in Spain, others grew up in different countries that might or might not have been China, and they have experienced more or less regular visits to China in their childhood. Despite this large range of experiences, and whether or not they have experienced physical delocalization, their parents’ mobility background has somehow been transferred to them.

Migrants’ descendants might, therefore, mimic their parents’ physical mobility in their pursuit for a better life and improve - according to their own standards - their social position. Hence, the same aims that brought their parents to migrate to Spain might lead them to undertake their own migration experience towards China.

Continuing with the case of Limei, we can see how these new mobilities are shaped. After spending one summer studying Chinese in Shanghai and finishing her bachelor degree in Psychology, Limei returned to China to work for three months in the Barcelona pavilion during the World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. This experience gave her an insight into the possibilities of making the most of her Spanish and Chinese socio-cultural skills to develop her professional career in China rather than in Spain.

- Now I’d like to go back to China, but not just for travelling; to do something, work there for a while. I think that working there maybe I can bring some added value to my profession. Here mmmm...yes, I’m a psychologist and that’s it, like many others. Well, maybe I could help Chinese people but I don’t know; they’re not really into that ... And now I’m more into international relations than clinical psychology.

- Okay, and going to China adds value to your professional profile?

- Since I was in Shanghai for the Expo I’ve realized that maybe I can contribute more things there, I can be a bridge between the Chinese and the Spanish. But here, I don’t see what options and opportunities I have. I don’t want to stay in the restaurant or open a business yet. Here, I think there are no opportunities for the mixed skills I have; here, I don’t know how to apply them to the job.

(Interview with Limei, Barcelona, August 2012).

Limei, like other people in her situation, explained that she wants to “work and live like Spanish people do, not like the Chinese”. Nowadays, however, young Spanish people are also heading out of their country to develop their careers. Therefore, this pursuit for upward social mobility might make Limei return to her country of birth and the country from which her parents departed for the same reason. Hence, in the effort to take advantage of their transnational growth and university education, some descendants of Chinese migrants envisage a return to China.

The new physical relationships with China arising from visits are contingent upon the descendants’ education and working profile in Spain. Thus, we might argue that different lifestyles in Spain, portrayed by continuing in the family business or developing a professional career outside the traditional self-employed model, lead to different physical contacts in China and might foster potential migration movements. Not everybody can gain access to this lifestyle of mobility, as economic or socio-cultural capital is needed to make this migration take place. The outcomes of visits and current migration practices towards China of migrants and their descendants are going to be analyzed and discussed in the next chapter.

7

Moving on by going back: Present-day return mobility patterns

In Chapter five we have seen how migrants' visits to Qingtian today play, as they always have done, a relevant role in triggering further migration movements. However, instead of prompting migration flows towards Europe, visits may also act as a barometer for gauging movements towards China for both migrants and their descendants.

While it is true to say that the impact of return visits on further movements has been reversed from *bringing people out to bringing people in*, we also have to take into account that not all migrants visiting China share the will to reside there in the long term, and that not all of those who consider this option – who are willing to return – are in the situation required to engage in this mobility pattern, given that moving back to China requires having enough social, cultural and/or economic capital. Hence, it is important to bear in mind the relevance of economic and political constraints in return mobility patterns.

Following the diagram, returning to China is, next to visits, the most physical transnational practice within the bidirectional circulation that takes place between Spain and China. These transnational practices are embodied by individuals directing their lives towards China in different life- stages, having different plans and diverse relationships with Qingtian, China and Spain. We can find middle-aged migrants going back to their country of birth to continue or change their professional and business activities undertaken in Spain, young descendants of migrants who move to China to complete their studies or start their professional or entrepreneurial career, as well as retired people who see their opportunity to spend more time in their society of origin.

Hence, structural changes, aspirations for a better life and upward social mobility have placed the empirical realities involving return or reverse transnational flows from Spain to China beyond the traditional model, involving mainly a complete return after a "temporary sojourn" abroad.

Nowadays, return migration practices designate pragmatic movements that might take very different forms, and which lead migrants to reside in China again for more or less fixed, extended periods of time. Therefore, not only might the periods of residency abroad be regarded as "sojourns", but also the stays in their country of birth may have a mobile, temporary nature.

References to increasing return migration flows due to the Spanish economic crisis have been a constant leitmotif during the fieldwork undertaken in Qingtian¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶⁵ The fieldwork was done between 2011 and 2013 when the economic crisis in Spain is still striking the society. The outcomes of economic crises in Spain are materialized in the unemployment rate that, increased from 7,9% in June 2007 to 26,3% in June 2013.

Whenever I began a conversation about current migration trends towards Spain, I would get the same answer: “not only have many migrants already returned, but many others are also thinking of doing so”.

In fact the topic of *huiguo* (回国 “return to one’s own country”), as a response to the Spanish economic crisis and Chinese economic development, not only emerged in informal conversation throughout the ethnographic study, but is also reflected in several blogs and websites created and intended for Chinese people residing in Spain. In September 2011, for example, one of the posts that received more comments and feedback on the Xihua website prompted a survey with the following question: “If the economic situation in Spain continues to get worse, will you return to your country (meaning China)?”¹⁶⁶



Figure 64 . Discussion on economic crisis in Spain and return to China, Xihua Website screen grab.

As can be seen in figure 64, returning to China was not the only option given in the survey but, next to the *huiguo* option, “moving to another country” was presented as the third alternative to the structural difficulties in Spain. The three possibilities – staying in Spain, returning to China or moving to a third country – reflect the logic of returning to China as a way of moving forward.

It is true to say that structural global changes are especially relevant among young and middle-aged Chinese people living in Spain, including those starting their university studies or professional careers (migrants’ descendants), as well as adults in their mid-career life cycle. They are attracted by a perceived new context of economic and business opportunities in China and, in both cases, the comparison between China and Spain is weighed up and leads to the possibility of an actual movement towards their country of birth or towards their parents’ country of birth. However, as we might see in the following pages, although specific structural global dynamics are influential in the return migration process, the reasons that bring people back are diverse and triggered by different interrelated aspects such as

¹⁶⁶ 西班牙要是经济越来越差，你会回国吗？

family issues and personal factors. Even though economic considerations certainly act as a pull factor, it is not possible to isolate these structural factors as the only elements prompting mobility towards China. Economic aims and structural logic are inserted and entangled with personal factors mostly related to family strategies and structures.

In this chapter I will present the different modes of current return mobility patterns to China of Qingtianese migrants, which may go from highly physical transnational movement to rather stable modes of migrant residency in China.

First, the most mobile transitional lifestyle will be presented under the rubric "*feilai feiqu*" 飞来飞去, an expression commonly used by Qingtianese migrants to express their life by means of "flying back and forth", i.e. living between China and Spain. Secondly, more steady forms of migrant residency in Qingtian and other Chinese localities will be analyzed from an intergenerational perspective and we will see how return is rarely regarded as the final movement but is entangled with transnational mobility lifestyles and implies a different way of understanding dwelling and belonging, besides the uniquely local experience.

As we shall see, while some migrants continue the "returnee's" business activity, which is already socially institutionalized in Qingtian, others decide to settle down in larger cities in the Zhejiang province, such as Hangzhou, or in Shanghai, thereby further increasing the number of places susceptible to becoming home.

In the third section, I will analyze how these different return movements are entangled with other transnational practices that we have analyzed throughout the dissertation. We will then see how different modes of transnational practices and the links of migrants who have returned to China are still the driving force behind migrants' lives, even in those cases that feature a rather stable return mobility and transnational practices of a different nature.

7.1 *Yeluo guigeng* or the mythology of return: Thinking and living the return to China and Qingtian

Return migration practices are obviously not a new phenomenon among Qingtianese. There have always been different conditions and motivations for return migration and these movements have always been decisive in the impact of international migration on Qingtian, along with other practices such as remittances, investments and donations. However, the typology, modes and expectations of the return increase as migration processes become more complex and as the countries of origin develop - mobility is the pervading element in our times.

Chinese international migrants have been traditionally referred to as *huaqiao* "sojourners", a category of migrants who are considered to be provisionally away from their homeland and who, it is always assumed, will eventually return "home" one day. Return migration - conceived as the positive and successful result of migration, and a rather permanent movement - has played a relevant role in shaping Qingtianese migration flows and the "*qiaoxiang* consciousness"¹⁶⁷.

Qingtianese pre-Mao pioneer migrants generally resettled in their hometown, although some of them also relocated in larger and more cosmopolitan cities with other migrant compatriots.¹⁶⁸ According to Beltrán Antolín (2003:121), whether in Qingtian or in other localities, most of the pioneer migrants who left Qingtian for "Europe" in the republican era eventually returned, thus following the traditional way of understanding migration as a temporary practice to earn and save money abroad with their sights set on their return to China to invest their capital or retire¹⁶⁹. Migration was mostly male-centered and undertaken individually and was aimed at the objective of return, even if return projects were vague and their accomplishment contingent to different elements, such as the socio-political situation both in China and in the migration countries, as well as personal factors and events in the lives of the individuals.

If they did not manage to make enough money to come back at a productive age to invest in China, they tried to do so after retirement, as in the case of John's grandfather who migrated to Germany in the decade of the 1930s and returned at the end of the 1970s as a rich *huaqiao*, when the relaxation of migration policies in China allowed him to spend the last years of his life in Qingtian following the traditional *yeluoguiheng*¹⁷⁰ way, which relates hometown to one's roots.

It is true to say that the metaphor of roots and references to a single "ancestral home" are intricate in the representation and ideology of migration in different

¹⁶⁷ As in Chapter three, I use the expression "Qiaoxiang consciousness" from Li Minghuan (Li 1999a).

¹⁶⁸ Several people referred, for example, to a neighborhood in Hangzhou known as the "Qingtianese *huaqiao* area", given that several migrants who returned before the 1950s settled there.

¹⁶⁹ We can find several cases of this traditional conceptualization of migration as a movement with an idea of return. The return migration ideology of Portuguese migrants illustrates especially well these discourses and practices (Brettell 2003) .

¹⁷⁰ The literal translation of the sentence 一落归根 *yeluoguiheng* is "when the leaves fall they return to their roots". The expression is used among migrants to express the desire to return to one's birthplace after retirement.

settings (Brettell 2003; King and Christou 2008), but we should go further and inquire how these representations are intertwined with empirical praxis; i.e. how do people actually move and, in the case at hand, how do the Qingtianese return? How is the ideology of return migration representations related to the actual experience of embodied mobility patterns?

Praxis and ideology are two intertwined elements in the production of mobility (Cresswell 2010; Salazar and Smart 2011; Salazar 2011) that are extremely important when dealing with return migration practices.

Given that the notion of return carries with it strong sets of ideological representations – which may be more or less in accordance with the way embodied movements are practically experienced by different people –, being aware of the relationship between the representation attached to movements and the ways these movements are experienced and practiced is especially pertinent when doing research about return mobility patterns. It is only by doing that (i.e. being aware of these two elements and disentangling them) that we can avoid the cliché of the mythologized idea of return within migration studies.

According to Cresswell, physical movements are the “raw material for the production of mobility” and this positivist quantifiable motion is entangled with two other elements, namely its practice and representation (Cresswell 2010:19–22). Therefore, the same movement, for example, from Barcelona to Shanghai is integrated by different embodied practices and experiences, as well as by diverse sets of ideological meanings associated with them. A vignette extracted from my fieldwork notes exposes Cresswell’s awareness about the difference between “raw movements” of mobility and the way they are practiced and experienced by different individuals.

(...) Since I started the fieldwork I’ve made several trips between Spain and China. On each occasion, the journey itself is emerging as a micro-space of transit and intersections, of continuities and discontinuities, where various forms and modes of mobility emerge. In fact, the fieldwork begins in the airports - in the waiting rooms, restaurants and shopping areas - as well as inside the planes, where I'm one more in this space of transit made up of people from different nationalities and ethnic origins, children and elders, tourists, migrants, students, executives, small business owners, etc. The life of each one of us, and the relationship with the points of arrival and departure highlights the different shape that our same movement takes (Fieldwork notes, Schiphol Airport Amsterdam, August 2013).

The next step in the disentanglement of mobility implies the recognition of the relationship between practices and representation, which is the central point for movement that matters here: the return. Cresswell (2010:22) exemplifies the representational element of mobility – the third element under discussion - with cars and cell-phone advertisements, and Salazar (2011:586) sheds light on the role of the

media in the construction of “imaginaries” or representations of migration mobility in Tanzania.

We have already seen how the first episode of the series *Wenzhou Yijiaren* represents the traditional pattern of mobility within rural Wenzhou and Qingtian *qiaoxiang* villages¹⁷¹. Moreover, we should now recover the images and representations of migration that we presented in Chapter three to underscore the role of return imaginaries in the ideological representation of Qingtian mobilities.

We have seen how migration is brought to life and represented through banners, posters and advertisements in public and semi-public spaces and how these representations are intertwined in the building of the notion of Qingtian as a *qiaoxiang*, i.e. as a locality spanned by several embodied, object-mediated, virtual mobility patterns.

Alongside the term of “migrants” as sojourners (华侨 *huaqiao*), the concept of “hometown” (故乡 *guxiang*) also appears as a key element in shaping the traditional notion of Qingtian *qiaoxiang*. Both concepts allude to representational ideologies that play an important role in Chinese migration ethos, based on the idea of a single hometown within a framework that contemplates migration as a temporary period with the assumption of an eventual return.

As we can see in figure 65 the poster hanging on the main hall of the Qiaoban – which is the political organism related to international migration – portrays the political representation of return as a proof of one’s loyalty to China. The poster of Hecheng represents Qingtian and reminds migrants that their hometown is related first to China (中國), and secondly to Qingtian (青田).



Figure 65. The photo of Hecheng dominates the entrance of the Qiaoban Offices in Hecheng.

Moreover, banners and posters stressing the need to return to one’s “place of birth” as crucial elements in the construction of the migrants’ identity and the Qingtian economic model are also widespread in institutional public areas as well as within private business. To this end, one of the most common sayings “return to one’s

¹⁷¹ See page 182.

place of birth to pay respect to one's ancestors" (*huanxiang jizu* 还乡祭祖), has been updated and is used nowadays by travel agencies as an advertising strategy to increase flight ticket sales, exemplifying the potential power of representation in present-day migration movements.

In fact, it is true to say that ideologies and representations of migration practices may definitely influence return practices (Brettell 2003), but the way in which physical movements and representations of mobility practices are interrelated with each other varies historically (Cresswell 2010:27). Therefore, while three decades ago return practices to Qingtian were probably closer to the ideology of return, nowadays the traditional ethos of migration and the way people undertake migration movements are rather dissociated.

Although we have seen how this ideological representation leads to practical movements such as the circulation of funerary urns and the sights of elderly people set on returning to China, what I wish to point out here is that the impact of traditional return migration ideology on contemporary experiences of Qingtianese reverse migration practices is fundamentally increasingly discursive. During the informal conversations and semi-structured interviews, the discourses of Chinese migrants were almost always mediated by the ideology of return by using the abovementioned *yeluo guigeng* saying, which links return practices to the metaphorical reference of the single root and ancestral belonging. However, their everyday practices point to different realities that are also recognized by some respondents:

"Although we all have the feeling of *yeluogugeng*, few of us are really returning, because our children, our houses, our lives are actually abroad (外面 *waimian*)" (Fieldwork notes, Qingtian October 2012).

Hence, current return practices of retiree migrants clearly demonstrate the encounter between orthodoxy and orthopraxy – ideology and praxis - within Qingtianese movements towards China. As we will see throughout this chapter, this transformation, which is especially striking among the elderly, is also embedded across different generations and profiles.

This diversity within actual current return migration practices are challenging the traditional way of understanding rural international Chinese migrants (*huaqiao*, sojourners) and the binomial that links a single home with the place of birth (hometown).

By disentangling the relationship between ideology or representation and experienced practice we can grasp the different modes of returning to China by an increasingly heterogenic group of people in highly diverse circumstances.

The sequences of movements we will describe in this chapter involve localities in Spain, in other countries where they might have lived before, as well as the localities in China they reside in upon return and other places they may move to afterwards.

Besides, these sequences of physical movements and moorings are interweaved with other different mobility patterns, such as virtual, object-mediated and other physical and embodied transnational practices involving return visits to Spain.

As we shall see, these physical movements back to China are empirically and conceptually completely different from the traditional ideology of return migration related to temporary migration and a single place as home, which in the Chinese cultural migration context is generally expressed by the abovementioned proverb *yeluo guigeng* (叶落归根) that refers to the “retirement – return” binomial.

Far from representing the return as the completion of the migration cycle, current movements of migrants back to China emphasize the connections between sending and receiving societies, underlying the continuous and dynamic process of migration beyond a simple act of leaving and returning. Moving beyond the realm of the ideology and mythography of return to the actual practices of return today implies a conceptual shift that supports Ley’s notion “from roots to roads” (Ley 2010:5186).

7.2 *Feilai feiqu* 飞来飞去: Dynamic departures and returns

Among the different types of return mobility patterns, living between here and there or “flying back and forth” (*feilai feiqu* 飞来飞去) - as the informants generally express it - is the utmost manifestation of present-day mobility lifestyles embodied by Qingtianese migrants. Individuals whose lives follow transnationalism embodied by *feilai feiqu* have functional houses in at least two localities situated in China and Spain, and they stay some months here and some months there.

We can find two main profiles following this type of life. On the one hand, people born in Qingtian who have retired after having worked in Spain for many years and, on the other hand, middle-aged migrants doing business or working in China while their nuclear family remain in Spain. The second type of return, involving a division of household and transnational family strategies, has been referred to within migration studies by the expressions “astronaut migrants” or “astronaut families”; a terminology initially used in the 1990s to describe return migration practices of Hong Kong males who kept on travelling back and forth between Hong Kong and the countries where their relatives were residing (Chiang 2011:120; Manying 2006:77).

While the second profile of migrants has been widely analyzed in settings such as Taiwan and Hong Kong (Chiang 2011; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Ley 2010; Plaza 2008; Salaff 2006; Shen and Chiang 2011; Wong 1999), the mobile life of elderly people has not yet been analyzed in depth.

Following the logic that we have seen throughout the research, productive and reproductive elements are yet again entangled in these highly physical mobility lifestyles for both elderly and middle-aged migrants. For both cases, being able to

undertake such a return migration experience and lead this type of embodied transnational life implies, above all, having enough socioeconomic resources and capital.

Before describing the specificities of these mobility patterns for each profile, I must explain why I conceptualize *feilai feiqu* movements as return mobility. As I was able to ascertain, this type of highly embodied mobility lifestyle may start after living in Spain for several years with occasional visits to China. In this case, *feilai feiqu* mobility implies different living conditions based on an increasing physical movement towards China and reduced physical presence in Spain, alongside other transformations that we will see in the following pages. Nevertheless, we also have to take into account that the continued circular mobility between two localities is not at all rare for Chinese migrants¹⁷² and there are also individuals with enough socioeconomic capital to start the migration experience with a lifestyle entailing such physical mobility. Obviously, this last migration pattern - which implies continuous *feilai feiqu* mobility from the outset - will not be regarded as return migration and, thus, will not be included in this chapter.

7.2.1 *Feilai feiqu*: Mobile lives after retirement

Migrants that retire after working most of their adult lives in Spain and in other countries where they may have lived before, barely proceed with a definitive return to China.

Although the will to go back to their place of origin when they get older is common among first-generation migrants who left Qingtian in the 70s and 80s, they do not really regard and experience this movement back to China as a definitive return. On the contrary, they are the ones that the *feilai feiqu* lifestyle best applies to.

This type of “between here and there” lifestyle of the elderly underscores the attachments and integration of Chinese people in Spain, as well as the transformation and spreading of roots across the different localities involved in the extended family migration trajectory.

When discussing her situation after retirement, Zhuju - a woman we have already introduced when talking about the practices of purchasing apartments in Qingtian¹⁷³ - described her generation and physically interweaved condition as a result of her mobile life. While her elderly parents reside in Qingtian, her daughter and son - as well as her four grandchildren - live in Barcelona and Madrid respectively. Thus, she feels caught between two generations, a condition that leads to her liminal situation between the two countries.

¹⁷² Fan (2011a) analyses “going back and forth” mobility patterns and on-going circular mobility of rural – urban migrants within China as a household strategy beyond the difficulties for arranging *hukou* status.

¹⁷³ See page ..., chapter four

A vignette of Zhuju's life is needed to understand her dilemmas towards her binomial retirement and return that illustrate a common tendency among her age cohort.

Zhuju migrated in 1985 when she was 32 after the state-owned factory where she had been working since she was 15 closed down and made all the workers redundant, leaving them with few opportunities to make a living in Qingtian. Two years after the factory's closure, Zhuju headed towards France to be reunited with her husband, who had left one year before, and their two children stayed behind in Qingtian with their paternal grandparents. Like Zhuju and her husband, most of their former co-workers had also migrated to Europe when the factory closed down.

After staying in France for a while, the couple arrived in Barcelona where they worked in several restaurants owned by Chinese people. Two years after their arrival, and before saving enough to pay back the debts for their migration trip and start their own business, Zhuju's husband passed away. Obviously, the family did not have enough money to send back the funerary urn to Qingtian, so Zhuju's husband was buried in Barcelona.

Over and above the fact that Zhuju's offspring live locally in Spain, the fact that her husband is buried in Barcelona is also a decisive element in strengthening her roots with the city. As she told me, despite the fact that Qingtian is her hometown – the place where she was born and lived until she was 33 - she wants to be buried next to her husband in Barcelona. This case is not exceptional and demonstrates the physical spread of "roots" across localities in different countries, which goes beyond their often-related metaphorical significance.

After her husband's death, Zhuju had to go ahead alone in Barcelona, as she knew there were not many options for her back in China at that time.

After long years of working hard day and night in three different jobs, she eventually succeeded in saving enough money to open a small *Todo a 100*¹⁷⁴ shop in Badalona and bring her already teenage children to Spain. Her daughter continued her studies in Spain and is currently a college teacher in Madrid, and her eldest son has a restaurant in Barcelona. While both of them travel often to visit their grandparents in Qingtian, they are not considering moving back to live and work in China.

At the age of 55 years, and after selling her small *Todo a 100* shop in Badalona, Zhuju bought an apartment in Youzhu and began to prepare her retired life between Qingtian and Barcelona. However, as soon as she began to put her new life project in motion, she realized the practical difficulties and economic expense of her double belonging and *feilai feiqu* prospects.

When Zhuju came back to China to recover her identity card and sort out her retirement pension for the years she had worked for the state-owned factory, she learned that she could not get her pension as easily as she thought. She contacted and mobilized all her former co-workers, who are nowadays widespread across Europe facing the same situation, to contest and fight for their perceived rights.

¹⁷⁴ "All for a pound shop".

Now that I'm retired I would like to live between here and there, six months here and six months there, but if I cannot sort out the issue of the health insurance and retirement pension I will not be able to do that. What if I feel bad here and I have to go to the hospital? If I have no insurance I don't know how I will do it... it's very expensive here, isn't it? It would be a nightmare living here without health insurance. I have to pay for a private one but ... It's not just a matter of money; it is a matter of the rights of Chinese citizens who have worked for the state, who have worked and contributed here. Why shouldn't I get the insurance? Eh? Why? Tell me? They really do not know how difficult it was for us to leave, and how much we suffered in Spain, we went through a lot; they were harder times for us than for the ones who stayed here, even if Qingtian was very poor at that time" (Interview with Zhuju, Youzhu, April 2011).

Even if she has relatively modest savings to afford her retirement before getting her Spanish pension, and she also has the support of her children, as we can see from the interview fragment quoted above, she feels betrayed in her rights to return to China. Her indignation towards the unfair situation as a result of her migration is related to the issues of citizenship and rights of migrants living a highly mobile life.

We are as much Chinese citizens as those who stayed here. I have not changed my nationality, and I have come back to Qingtian whenever I could. And I bought a house here in Qingtian with all my savings, to live here now that I'm getting old but the government is not helping us at all. If finally they don't give us medical coverage I'll let it go (算了 *suangle*), I'll sell the house in Youzhu and then I can pay the mortgage on my apartment in Badalona and live more peacefully! (Interview with Zhuju, Youzhu, April 2011).

The pressure of Zhuju and her co-workers on the state did not succeed and they have not been able to obtain a retirement pension in China yet. However, she did not sell her apartment in Youzhu and, since I met her in 2011, she has been travelling twice a year to Qingtian to visit her parents, but she is increasingly determined to stay closer to her children in Spain rather than increasing her physical presence in Qingtian, especially when her parents pass away.

Although Zhuju has not really fulfilled her wish to live between here and there, many others have implemented and adopted this type of lifestyle after retirement, whether they have a pension or not. This is the case of Chenying and her husband, who retired in 2011 after selling their restaurant in Madrid.

Unlike Zhuju, who comes from the town of Hecheng and worked for a state-owned factory before migration, Chenying and her husband come from a peasant family from Youzhu, so they were not expecting any compensation when they returned.

Before migration Chenying laboured in the fields and her husband worked as a carpenter¹⁷⁵.

Regarding the practical details of their return to Qingtian, Chenying's husband stressed how relationships (*guanxi*) and the help received from people they had helped sometime in the past have made things easier when they have encountered some problems since they are back. Chenying's husband describes this mutual help as an enduring social institution in Qingtian: "Qingtian has changed a lot since we left, but there is something that is still here and that is the tradition of *helping and being helped*¹⁷⁶".

This "duty to help" people of the same village is a social norm in rural China involving an unwritten agreement that leads to mutual benefit (Li 2005; Liu 2009). In fact, this "solidarity" and help based on mutual interest is the key to the success of Qingtianese mobility across Europe, and it is also performed on return.

In 2010, Chenying and her husband sold their Chinese restaurant in Madrid and came back to Qingtian for six months to renovate the house they had built some years ago on a plot of land in Youzhu belonging to the male lineage.

The house is based on the multiple-storey structure and mixes functional and symbolic values. Chen's kitchen is full of Spanish *embutido* (cold meats) and the woman generally cooks Chinese food with a Spanish flavour, which she has learned in the local Spanish bar that her daughter runs in Barcelona. While the retired couple use the first two floors of the house, the second and third floors are intended for the nuclear family of their son, who lives in Croatia, where the couple had also lived, and for their daughter, who lives in Spain with her husband and two sons.

Two years after retirement the couple have followed the *feilai feiqu* pattern of embodied mobility and, as Chenying expressed, "now that we are retired we have more freedom. We live in three places, in Barcelona, in Zagreb and in Youzhu, we often fly back and forth (*feilai feiqu*) between these three places".

The mobility of the Chens brings us back to the materialization of transnational families, taking the form of the ritual candles of Fushan's temple that we have analyzed in Chapter four. As we have seen in figure 27 while the calligraphy related to the benefactor and his siblings is connected to a specific country of residence, his parents are not linked to a concrete geographical place. The blank space where the calligraphy of the country of residence should be written, expresses the mobility of elderly Qingtianese and their multi-localization across China and the places where their offspring reside.

While elderly migrants keep thinking of returning to their hometown after retirement their family networks are widespread throughout Europe and, thus, the initial will to return and its ideological sense related to a single destination have been lost. The significance of the original soil and the notion of hometown is not a given reality but

¹⁷⁵ The rural – urban dichotomy is sometimes reflected by informants in Qingtian, differentiating those people born and raised in Hecheng from the ones that come from the villages of the County.

¹⁷⁶ 别人帮你你帮别人 *bieren bang ni ni bang bieren*

a social construct built up in a network of social relationships, of which kinship ties are the most significant.

7.2.2 *Feilai feiqu* and transnational households

As in the case of retiree migrants, *feilai feiqu* mobility embodied by middle-aged people is also used as a strategy to reduce the outcomes of enduring physical separation among relatives, but in this case among members comprising nuclear families and domestic units.

In Chapter five we have seen how middle-aged people who migrated at young ages to Spain are increasingly setting their sights on China's economic rise and entrepreneurial opportunities. Although occasional visits are a means to *kan yi kan*, i.e. "to have a look" and envisage potential economic and professional activities in China, these physical transnational practices may evolve to an on-going lifestyle characterized by continued back-and-forth movements between the two countries.

People are increasingly engaging in business and economic activities in Qingtian, Lishui and several middle-sized towns in Zhejiang province, as well as in large cities and "developing areas" in other provinces.

When migrants opt for the development of their Chinese business as potentially the main economic activity of their households - rather than a marginal investment - they generally begin to change their lifestyle by reducing their physical presence in Spain and increasing their mooring times in China.

However, those migrants who are progressively and increasingly turning their sights and efforts towards their economic activities in China are not willing to completely break away from and forsake their lives in Spain. Those Qingtianese who are integrated in some way in specific localities in Spain (where their children are growing up, where they bought a house, own a business, and where part of their background, daily lives and friends are located), share the same perspective and are not willing to "leave everything they have in Spain in *the twinkling of an eye* (一下子 *yixiazi*)". On the contrary, by "flying back and forth" and circulating between China and Spain, they keep their lives and their future open in both settings.

Therefore, most middle-aged migrants who are returning to China to develop new business and economic activities keep two functional houses and are simultaneously involved in productive and reproductive activities in two localities, located in China and Spain.

Feilai feiqu mobility among this group is especially characteristic of married males who adopt this circular lifestyle while their nuclear family – wife and children – stay behind in Spain. Thus, while men are usually in-charge of starting and developing a new business in China, women stay behind taking care of the Spanish-based business and the daily domestic duties. This frequent strategy allows the income sources of a given family to be diversified and economic activity to be tried out in

China without moving all the family, especially when Spanish-raised children are involved.

Hence, the *feilai feiqu* mobility patterns of middle-aged migrants emerge as a transnational strategy to reduce the physical separation of the household and allow one member of the family – generally males – to return to China without leaving Spain completely.

7.2.2.1 Feilai feiqu: Mobile lives of Qingtianese entrepreneur

In the theoretical background we have seen how the relevance of circular mobility patterns and back-and-forth movements upon return among the so-called economic migrants from rural areas specialized in international migration, i.e. *qiaoxiang* areas, has somehow been overlooked. There is no in-depth research yet into non-definitive return migration or investigations into back-and-forth movements of international rural migrants returning from Europe to China. However, the expression *feilai feiqu* - which directly involves the praised “back-and-forth movements” within urban elites - was widely used by my informants. There is a mobile hierarchy based on rural / urban pairing in which ordinary Qingtianese international migrants are regarded as being on the bottom rungs of the ladder.

In a way, “new migrants” (*xin yimin* 新移民) from rural areas who left for Europe upon the opening of China are supposed to follow the traditional paths of migration encompassing temporary or definitive relocation, rather than developing perceived modern paths of mobility involving circular migration, which in the PR China is mainly related to urban academic students and highly-skilled professionals comprising the *haigui* category.

The ethnographic data presented until now in this dissertation, however, is pointing to a quite different scenario. Embodied transnational practices are increasing among Qingtianese people in Spain and new return migration patterns that imply circular mobility are growing. This increasing mobility is partly in response to socio-economic structural shifts in China and Spain, but is also related to widespread practices based on physical mobility in contemporary Chinese society, and especially embedded in the socialization process of middle-aged migrant Qingtianese in a highly mobile setting or “migrant habitus”.

Wangping and Zhousen grew up in Qingtian when migration was being strongly incorporated into the social practices of the area. They were classmates in Fangshan middle school but both of them started working before finishing secondary school. In the first half of the 1990s, when they were in their early 20s, they both migrated to Europe through their family networks and lost track of each other. They met up again in Madrid some years later, where both of them ended up opening Chinese restaurants and, from that moment on, they have forged a firm friendship.

When I met them in November 2012 they were in their late 30s and had returned to China one year before to open two large café-restaurants, one in Lishui and the other one in Jinhua (金华), an important city in central Zhejiang province, a three-

hour drive from Qingtian. Their migration trajectory reflects the *feilai feiqu* mobility patterns among middle-aged Qingtianese

Since Wang and Zhou have set up their businesses in China, their wives have stayed in Madrid not only taking care of their children, but also working in the restaurants in cooperation with relatives. So the two men have been travelling back and forth between Madrid and Lishui, where they rent an apartment, given that their properties are located in Qingtian. Thus, they alternate mobilities with moorings both in Madrid and Lishui, and they regularly visit Qingtian.

For both of them, their return, which is shaped within the *feilai feiqu* mobility pattern, is encouraged by the prospects of a better life for the whole family, whether their wives and sons are eventually reunited with them in China or continue to follow this “astronaut” strategy. It is an open-ended decision, a practical choice susceptible to being transformed according to changing personal and also economic circumstances. It is important to say that whenever the family strategy implies a continued circular migration of the men without reunification of the family in China, a percentage of the benefits of the Chinese-based businesses are sent to Spain to increase household funds.

As they explained, being a *laoban* 老板 (boss) in China and in Spain implies a totally different lifestyle and different types of responsibilities. While in their Spanish-based restaurants they have to work long hours and the role of the boss is generally blurred with that of the workers, in China - as is common in sizeable catering enterprises - they have hired a large waiting staff and, as bosses, are busy managing, organizing and meeting potential clients that will expand their *guanxi* and allow them to develop their business. En fact, changing the country implies a transformation on their entrepreneurial status.

Wang told me that while work in Spain is physically exhausting, in China it is mentally tiring and he has to be up to date with everything related to business that will allow him to have the relationships (*guanxi*) needed to succeed.

Thus, this return has involved a change of lifestyle not only because of their increasing physical presence in China, but their social position and working activities as bosses has also been transformed.

Wang and Zhou’s migrant trajectories, socio-cultural backgrounds and family structures are rather similar. However, their integration in Madrid society is relatively different. While Wang speaks good Spanish and has expressed some difficulties in getting used to his new life in China, Zhou’s Spanish is very basic and he has spent much more time in China over the years, where he was previously engaged in occasional investments in cooperation with a relative. Moreover, and contrary to Wang, Zhou had few relationships with non-Chinese people in Spain. The different level of integration in the local community in Spain, as well as the different involvement in previous transnational practices, is relevant in shaping their attitudes towards return mobility.

For his part, Zhou regards his mobile life involving the physical circulation between Lishui and Madrid as a potential on-going lifestyle for years to come, but Wang has not yet decided whether to continue in China or return to Spain with his wife and his six-year-old daughter. Nevertheless, for both of them, moving between here and there and the consequent split of their households is nothing extraordinary but a commonplace strategy that they recognize as a shared attitude and behaviour among Chinese people. The following statement by Wang is significant in this respect:

"For now I want to develop the business here, see how things go here and in Spain and then... we'll see ... For now I will be between here and there, it's not a big deal, we are used to living away from our family, it's not a big problem. In this way, we Chinese, are different from you" (Fieldwork notes, Lishui, November 2012).

Wang's reference to mobility as an identifying element of Chineseness, raises the question of mobile structures as a relevant part of contemporary Chinese society and its "hegemonic project of modernity" (Y. J. Chu 2010:10). Actually, one of the pillars of the socio-economic reforms in post-Mao China has been precisely the physical mobility of people as a strategy and vehicle towards "modernity", "civilization" and "success" (Nyíri 2010:5–9).

Based on the recognition of physical mobility embedded within Chinese society, Coates (2013) underscores how young Chinese migrants in Japan experience movements as an "everyday and mundane practice" rather than as an exceptional event. The same experience of mobility as a "tactic that fits into wider regimes of mobility between China and Japan" (Coates 2013:22) is applicable to the case at hand. The circular life of middle-aged Qingtianese living between China and Spain fits into the broad range of transnational practices and mobility patterns between the two countries, widely observed throughout this dissertation.

Apart from the value of mobility in contemporary Chinese society, we have to bear in mind that middle-aged Qingtianese grew up and were socialized in an exceptionally mobile society, where migration movements were the norm rather than the exception.

7.2.2.2 Reunification of nuclear families in China or in Spain

Although circular mobility between China and Spain may be conceived and exercised as an on-going, continued practice during years, it can also be regarded as a momentum of transit.

This is the case of Shenming who migrated at a young age to Europe and in 2009, aged 37, returned to China to develop his business career. He took the step to move to China after closing the photography studio he owned in Barcelona. In fact, the case of Shenming exemplifies other cases I met of people owning photo shops and studios that mainly offered developing services. The impact of technological changes from analogical to digital photography has led most of these businesses to

close down and several of the owners to set their sights on China for starting up a new economic activity.

Shenming did not relocate to Qingtian but invested in a mattress factory in Putian (Fujian) with a local friend. The relationship network one has is what finally charts people's trajectories and maps out working/investment places in China.

Unlike Zhou and Wang, Shenming had a clear plan from the outset and was still convinced when I met him in 2011 - two years after his return - while he was visiting some friends in Qingtian. Although he had decided to move back to China to start up the business and often visited his wife and children in Barcelona, he was planning to move back to Spain as soon as the business was stable and his presence was not needed so much. From that moment on, he explained, he would mostly be located in Spain with his family while sometimes travelling to China to oversee his business. Shenming explained that it would have been an upheaval for their children to come to China, and that his wife is also very used to live in Barcelona. Hence, for Shenming the *feilai feiqu* practice involves a temporary return as an economic strategy to continue living with his family in Barcelona.

Hence, the *feilai feiqu* lifestyle may be regarded as a sustained long-term transnational mobility pattern, or a momentum of transit before moving back again to Spain. Moreover, *feilai feiqu* mobility patterns may also lead to another type of mobility and can be the first step of a gradual return to China of the whole nuclear family.

The logic is similar to the movement of Qingtianese migration towards Europe. The nuclear family is again temporarily divided between China and Spain in order to see which and where is the best way to proceed, and here the role of mobility within Chinese family strategies is significant.

This is the case of Li, a 36 year-old woman who followed her husband to China after three years of transnational separation of the domestic unit. Li's case exemplifies the common family strategy that entails a return process divided into two phases: first, the return of one of the members of the couple –as we have seen, generally the man- followed by a second movement that implies reunification with the women and children in the country of origin.

Li arrived in Spain when she was 18 and met her husband in Barcelona who migrated also from Qingtian at a young age. The couple has lived in Spain for twenty years, their two sons were born in Barcelona, they own two restaurants in Barcelona; one intended mainly for co-ethnic Chinese and a Wok restaurant located in one of the main tourist centers of the city. The return process began when Li's husband started a goods manufacture and export business in Anhui province in collaboration with a Spanish partner. While her husband was going back and forth between Spain and China –as an "astronaut husband" - Li stayed in Barcelona taking care of the children and working in the Wok restaurant.

This frequent strategy allows income diversification and the economic activity to be tried out in China before taking the next step that eventually will bring the whole family back to China. However, as Li explained, the physical distance between the married couple was prolonged over time more than they expected. After three

years, this physical distance began to be a burden and prompted Li and her two Spanish-born sons to move to China.

It's a plan, you know? First we want to see how it works, we cannot leave everything all of sudden (一下子 *yixiazǐ*) ... and if the business doesn't work in China? Then what? Then we could go back to Spain. Yes, so the idea was that I remained in Barcelona to see if the business worked out or not in China ...(…) But in the end, ah it was not as good and quick as we expected here, it's not bad but progressing slowly. But then I thought, such a long time separated is not good, so I said 'for the sake of the children, for the family, I'm going back to China too'. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, summer 2011).

While generally *feilai feiqu* mobility patterns are more widely influenced by a pragmatic decision than a wish, it is also true to say that these practical choices coexist with the emergence of the sense of a locally-rooted belonging in the place where migrants have lived for many years in Spain, which may be different for each member of the nuclear family. And this is the case for Li and her husband.

My husband always had the idea of returning in his mind but I I didn't. I feel at home in Barcelona. Okay, when I am back in China I feel very comfortable because I also feel at home here, of course. I spent my childhood here in China, and every time I travelled to China, I felt very comfortable. Visiting is okay but to live here.... my husband has no problem - he feels better here than in Spain, but for me... maybe I just need more time but it's not easy at all. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, summer 2011).

Indeed, Li was having a hard time adapting to her life in her country of birth as by means of this migration movement she had returned to her "home country" and, at the same time, had left her home in Barcelona. That is why, as we shall see in the later, she still belongs to and develops strong transnational practices with Spain, the place she wants to return to after retirement.

Li is not the only women I met who had followed her husband's will to move back to China. On the contrary, this is a rather widespread situation. In some cases, underlying the practical and pragmatic choices, the economic growth in China is also a favorable setting to carry out the return project, and this motivates men more than women.

Not all men who initiate the return of the family by means of a first step involving the life between here and there are following a will to return, but they do it because the situation requires it. The separation of the productive and reproductive sphere between men and women leads them to start this process, sometimes against their will. Starting this process, which is probably in the mind of a lot of families nowadays, is not that easy. It needs a significant economic capital and people are

afraid of losing everything by returning to a place that once was home, while leaving the place that is currently home. As we can see in the after-dinner conversation between Li and her brother-in-law in the documentary *Transits*, Li's brother-in-law, who migrated to Spain when he was 18, settled in Lisbon when he was 25 and had been living between Portugal and China for one year, perfectly embodies the personal, emotional, political and economic difficulties of return mobility patterns. The mirage of a feasible mobile, cosmopolitan citizen is reserved for the economically well-off elite, which is not the case of most of the population in migration societies.

7.3 Returning to the *qiaoxiang*

Unlike extended families that have migrated almost completely, those people who come back to reside and work in Qingtian or in its surrounding area of influence - encompassing Lishui and other middle-sized towns in the vicinity - are generally first-generation migrants who still have close relatives living there - in most cases, siblings and/or parents. In this section I present the ethnographic data related to first-generation migrants returning to Qingtian after living long periods of their lives in Spain and also, in some cases, in other countries prior to their arrival in Spain. Most of the informants I will refer to arrived in Spain during the 1990s, when they were aged between 17 and 20 years, and have now been living in Qingtian for up to 10 years.

Regarding family structure, we can find single or divorced people, as well as couples, who normally return by following the second step of reunification after a period of *feilai feiqu* mobility. Whether it is a one-parent family, or a couple with children, middle-aged return practices generally involve movement to Qingtian of children who have been born and/or partly raised in Spanish localities and these factors mark the relationship and links they maintain with the place where they have lived in Spain.

In the following sections, I will analyze the return mobility patterns of middle-aged migrants focusing on reverse migration remittances and their ongoing process of socio-cultural negotiations to different local settings. These negotiations are especially conspicuous in everyday face-to-face relationships between people with different mobility experiences, as well as in the productive and economic activities they engage in with upon return.

7.3.1 The place of return in the cultural negotiations of mobility

Migration leaves no one indifferent. People who move across different socio-cultural settings and countries incorporate elements, ideas, values and social practices from the different places where they live. And return migration practices imply the continuation of these changes in people throughout another step of their mobility.

In an article aimed at reviewing the concept of “social remittances”, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011:4) state that “what migrants bring with them when they migrate affects their experience in the countries where they settle”. In much the same way, I argue that what Qingtianese bring back with them when returning to reside in Qingtian also influences their life experience in China. Hence, when migrants return to Qingtian, they bring with them the ideas, practices and values they have incorporated from the different places they have lived in, which makes up what Levitt denominated “social remittances” (Levitt 1998, 2001b).

We have already seen how return visits trigger the emergence of latent transformations in peoples’ self-perception and identities, and how these transformations are not exclusive to the descendants of migrants but are also significant in the case of first-generation migrants. Here, I will examine what happens when people move to Qingtian to live, focusing on the encounters arising between different life experiences that open up social spaces of cultural negotiation. By socio-cultural negotiations I am referring to the everyday interaction between people with different mobility experiences. Just as Qingtianese migrants in Spain are involved in a process of socio-cultural negotiation that is individually and collectively significant, when they return to China, they go through a similar process.

First of all we should consider the outcomes of the convergence between return mobility practices and other predominant transnational practices in the modification of peoples’ identities, behaviors and socio-cultural values that give meaning and structure to their world.

People coming back to reside in their “hometown” may have had more or less intensive and regular previous transnational links with Qingtian before return. We find people who return after gradually increasing physical mobility between China and Spain, as well as individuals who, even if they had little physical contact with their hometown, regard Qingtian as the right environment to move forward and start up a new business and life after having some trouble in Spain.

Obviously, the fact that migrants develop different transnational links and practices with Qingtian while living in Spain contributes to their persistent belonging to the society of origin, and it also leads them to continue living according to the values and practices rooted in Chinese society without implying an abrupt change in their lives. Consequently, these ties help them when returning to live in Qingtian. However, keeping transnational links and practices with Qingtian while living in Spain does not mean that returning to China has no effect on migrants’ lives, or that living in Spain or in Qingtian is more or less the same as long as one’s life is tied up with transnational social spaces. On the contrary, what I argue here is that however relevant transnational practices and links with Qingtian might be while living in Spain, or vice versa - however relevant transnational practices with Spain might be while living in China - living “here” or “there” does matter.

It is important to recall here that I do not see transnational links as a factor preventing the insertion of people in “receiving societies”. The relevant elements preventing Chinese people from integrating into the Spanish localities where they live is more related to social class than having transnational links with China or not.

Thus, regardless of the number of transnational ties with China, it does not mean that Chinese migrants fail to “integrate” in local Spanish societies.

What I am arguing here is that through mobility, migrants are involved in on-going processes of cultural negotiation related to transnational practices and local places. Hence, although Qingtianese migrants may live in a transnational social space while staying in Spain, returning to live to China generally entails a cultural negotiation process. Hence, migrants are not free of adjustments and transitions when returning to Qingtian and as several people told me “it is not the same visiting Qingtian often as living there on a day-to-day basis”.

Hence, re-adaptation processes after return, which were the main target of researchers in the 1980s (Gmelch 1980), are still nowadays a relevant field of inquiry even if, within a world of great mobility and increasing transnational links, the transformation of individuals might be less conspicuous and more subtle.

Referring to Gmelch’s (1980) description of returnee’s adjustments after return, Chiang (2011:97) argues that the problems of readjustment are best explained by the changes in the migrants themselves during their time abroad, rather than by changes in the place. Thus, the main element channeling adaptation processes is related to migrant identity and the transformation of everyday behavior through migration.

Taking this idea a little further, recently, some scholars have referred to the emergence of particular identities forged by the concatenation of movements and dwellings in one’s life history. Cohen et al. (2013:4) underline the significance of physical mobility as a “defining aspect of one’s identities” and Ossman’s (2013) ethnography deeply analyses the role of movement in shaping the identity of “serial migrants” - or people who move repeatedly across different countries - beyond ethnic or cultural variables.

These references to identity changes through mobility are relevant within the scope of Qingtianese return mobility practices, especially in the way they deal with and incorporate reverse social remittances when they move back to Qingtian.

Rather than analyzing the problems, dilemmas or contradictions arising from changes in individual as an “adaptation process in the society of origin”, I suggest that this mechanism is better understood as a process of socio-cultural negotiation in everyday life, in which migrants and non-migrants are actively involved. In fact, return practices are another step in the concatenation of movements and moorings - or the embodied transnational existence - bringing further social and cultural changes and, thus, additional processes of socio-cultural negotiations in the scope of the individual and collective domain.

While in Spain they are involved in a process of socio-cultural negotiation by means of interaction with people who have not migrated or with people coming from other origins who have followed different migration experiences, when they are back in Qingtian, apart from realizing how migration has changed them, they also experience daily interactions with local Qingtianese who have had very different life experiences regarding mobility.

Different everyday situations in Qingtian bring about social contact and communication between people who have returned from abroad with others who have never migrated, and these are the best scenarios to underscore the situations and spaces where these cultural negotiations arose.

- **Individual and collective reverse social remittances**

One night, I joined a group of six women in a late dinner in a fancy, newly-built restaurant in Hecheng. We sat for hours in a private room holding mundane conversations, from gossip (八卦 bagua) to casual chat on everyday topics, like in all informal meetings among friends. However, late that night, the account of a woman in town who was physically abused by her husband attracted the serious attention of the entire group. This topic of conversation led to the emergence of different attitudes towards gender violence and inequalities.

While Lorena and Linda, both returning from Spain and Italy, continuously asked why the woman in question had not yet reported her husband to the police, why the woman in question had not got a divorce yet, in short, why the woman in question did not actively react towards the abusive man, the other four women tried to explain the situation regarding gender violence in China, clarifying that the police do not usually interfere in “domestic and family issues”.

The conversation about this particular situation triggered a discussion on women’s rights and gender inequalities in China and Spain. Lorena energetically complained about and opposed the apparent conformity of her friends, when her best friend lost her temper and told her, half in anger and half condescendingly: “You have to realize that you are not in Spain anymore. As much as I agree with you, the situation is not yet like this in China. It has to change a lot yet, and it will, but here and now women can’t go to the police to report their husbands’ abuse as easily as they can in Spain”. On hearing her friend’s words Lorena nodded with a deep sigh. After paying the bill, she stood up and said goodbye, and we left the restaurant to go back home.

This situation is an example of the many other circumstances recorded in my fieldwork notes that highlight the socio-cultural negotiation of migrants in everyday interactions after returning to Qingtian. Apart from gender issues, other aspects and attitudes emerged in other circumstances oriented towards formal and informal children’s education, political freedom, and especially towards the role of *guanxi* (relationships) in doing business in China.

These socio-cultural negotiations, which imply the assessment of social norms, practices and behaviors of the country of origin, are also expressed in the personal sphere and life choices by means of emphasizing and employing the socio-cultural capital¹⁷⁷ they have acquired in Spain and/or other countries where they might have lived.

¹⁷⁷ Social capital is, next to ideas, values and behaviors, one of the four types of social remittances identified by Levitt (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011; Levitt 2001a, 2001b).

Lorena migrated to Spain in 1997, some months before she turned 18. She was sent to live with her aunt who had a restaurant at that time in Algeciras, a city located in the south of Spain, in the bay of Gibraltar. Lorena's parents proposed that she stay with her aunt to study Spanish because she was good at school and, according to her family, this chance would offer her a better future. However, as soon as Lorena arrived in Algeciras she realised that her days of studying were over and that her days of hard work and solitude had just begun. She stayed for two years working in her aunt's restaurant without receiving any salary, paying back the expenses of her trip to Spain with her work¹⁷⁸. She has very bad memories and feelings about these first two years and in 1999 she left her aunt's restaurant and moved to Madrid where she contacted some Qingtianese acquaintances and worked as an employee (打工 dagong) in several restaurants until she got married and began working in her husband's family restaurant in Madrid.

In 2005, eight years after her departure from Qingtian, Lorena came back to Qingtian to visit her parents with her four-year-old daughter, who was born in Madrid. From that moment on, she travelled often to Qingtian to spend holidays and, in 2009, after separating from her husband, she decided to come back to Qingtian for some time.

"I was having a very bad moment and I needed to be near my parents, I needed a break from Spain and I came back. I rented an apartment in Hecheng, because I didn't want to stay in Youzhu, and we spent a few months here with my daughter". (Interview with Lorena, April 2011, Qingtian).

One year later, Lorena met the man who is now her husband and decided to stay in Qingtian with him, instead of going back to Madrid, which was her initial plan.

"If I had not met him, I would probably have returned to Spain. First for Sonia [her daughter], at the end of the day her father is there, and because I missed my life there too. Actually, I still miss many things from Spain. Sometimes at night I keep having images of the life I had in Madrid, all these images going through my head - it's a very strange feeling, it's like another life" (Interview with Lorena, April 2011, Qingtian).

As we can see from the interview' quotations, personal circumstances brought Lorena back for a while, and also personal factors have kept her in Qingtian until the present. However, and even though she is rooted nowadays in her new life in Qingtian, she is involved in a transnational space keeping strong contacts with Spain, and she has not yet relinquished her residence permit.

¹⁷⁸ Although this is a common practice among Qingtianese not all the experiences are the same. While some people do not receive the treatment agreed upon before migration, others have better experiences and do not consider this practice as a form of exploitation at all.

Lorena consumes Spanish goods almost on a daily basis, from food, to cosmetics and medicines. She occasionally uses *Weixin* to contact people who live in Spain and are travelling to China to ask for the things she needs. Apart from this transnational consumerism, she often travels to Spain with her daughter to visit friends and to let her stay some days with her father.

The relationship of Lorena and her Spanish-born daughter with Madrid is strong and has made them follow a life spanned by mobility, as we will see in the last section of this chapter. Right now I will continue to use Lorena's case to exemplify the process of socio-cultural negotiation and the impact of reverse social remittances on her professional life upon return.

I met Lorena for the first time in 2011, two years after her return, when she was still teaching some Spanish language courses in the "Foreign Language Training School". However, after some months she left the school due to the small number of students and low salary.

At that time she was planning to study psychology and open a counseling service in Qingtian. She told me that she had realized that people in Qingtian were rather lonely, and how several emotional and family issues were involved in Qingtianese society as an outcome of the "migration culture", which broke up many households and kept the value of *mianzi* growing. She acknowledged the disapproving attitudes towards psychology in rural China, but she was confident that things could change and she expressed the will to do her bit towards those changes by introducing counseling services.

However, she gradually abandoned her initial plan in favor of her increasing role as a housewife in her newly-created domestic sphere. Leaving Hangzhou to study psychology began to be an idealistic dream for her.

She gradually started to have more friends and feel more comfortable in Hecheng. During the time I was doing fieldwork I could see how she was experiencing socio-cultural negotiations on a daily basis in order to find her place in Hecheng.

She progressively started to be much more pragmatic in her goals, especially related with her productive activities. Every time I met her she explained new ideas, from working as a tourist guide or opening a travel agency intended for Spanish-speaking tourists, to opening a professional translation office in Qingtian to help people who needed to translate official documents or to serve as a guide and intermediary for people wanting to do business between China and Spain.

One thing was clear in all her options; she wanted to employ the skills and socio-cultural capital acquired during her years living in Spain in her China-based business and professional activity. And this is what Lorena's case has in common with most of the migrants returning to China after living in Spain for several years.

Eventually she echoed the trend and, in cooperation with a friend, opened a café-bar, which is one of the main economic activities of returning migrants in Qingtian. Nevertheless, she wanted to open an "authentic local Spanish bar" and not simply reproduce the fixed model of cafés that returnees opened at the beginning of the

2000s and that have been reproduced again and again in Qingtian and in nearby towns, and medium-sized cities.

7.3.2. From the bar in Spain to the bar in Qingtian: Changes and continuities in the embedded social remittances of returnees.

Chinese people in Spain have always been related in one way or another to the catering sector; starting with the widespread formula of the so-called “Chinese restaurants” that emerged in northern European countries, to the growth of restaurants addressed mainly at Chinese people, and their increasing presence in local Spanish bars. Implementing this continuity with changes, catering is also one of the main economic activities migrants are engaged in when they return to Qingtian¹⁷⁹.

Understanding the role of cafés and bars in the socio-cultural negotiation processes of migrants both in Spain and Qingtian elucidates the continuum of transnational practices, pointing to variations and adjustments according to the different localities and socio-cultural settings.

While the bar has been the first semi-public place that brought Chinese people in everyday contact with their neighbors and mainstream society in Spain, back in Qingtian, it is also the place where they develop their economic activities and forge relationships.

In this sense, I will examine bars as spaces of cultural negotiations following Thurén (2002), who takes bars as an example of places for cultural negotiation in her study of gendered relationships in Spain. The author states that “In any given place where two or more people who have different views - i.e. experiences - meet and express these views, cultural negotiation is taking place, and cultural processes are going on” (Thurén 2002:2)¹⁸⁰.

In the case at hand, bars and cafés are semi-public spaces of cultural negotiations embedded in transnational practices as we have seen through the example of the Catalan bar-restaurant in Chengdu, where the preliminary questions of this research emerged¹⁸¹. The social interaction that took place in this Catalan bar marked the very beginning of this research, and has been followed by a series of other meeting places encompassing different realities and mobility patterns, whether in China or in Spain.

Given that we are talking about the implementation of social remittances – especially social capital – from Spain to Qingtian by means of return mobility, we should first overview the characteristics of the recent changes Chinese catering business in Spain.

¹⁷⁹ The research on the transformation of the economic activities involved with catering sector of Chinese people in Spain is analyzed in (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b)

¹⁸⁰ My translation from the original Spanish text.

¹⁸¹ See Introduction, pag. 1

7.3.2.1 Local bars as spaces of cultural negotiation in Spain

Spain is the second country in the world with more bars per capita after Cyprus (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b:98). The relevance of bars in Spain is not only quantitative but also qualitative, given that bars are central spaces of everyday socialization practices.

There is a wide range of bars in Spain especially in larger cities such as Barcelona and Madrid: cool and “alternative” cafes, nightlife bars, taverns, and “*bares de barrio*”, which I will refer to as “local bars” from now on.

People in Spain are used to going to local bars to have breakfast or lunch, to drink a coffee or a *carajillo* (coffee with liqueur), to have a beer and other drinks, and to meet people. Local bars are located both in large cities, small towns and villages. People go alone or accompanied to the bar and there they chat, play cards, and watch football, or even hold work- or association-related meetings. These local bars - which are the main semi-public spaces of everyday socialization in Spain - are the ones that are increasingly run by Chinese people¹⁸².

The tendency of Chinese people to buy local bars emerged in the largest cities; especially in Barcelona around 2005, and in the last ten years it has become widespread across Spain, including small towns and villages. By their penetration in local bars, the production and working places of Chinese people coincide with the first domain of local people’s everyday socialization practices. Thus, we may argue that bars are the first spaces of everyday social encounters between Chinese people and locals from different origins and social classes.

Local bars are generally located on the ground floor of apartment buildings and are generally built with terraces facing the street, so that the division between interior and exterior, or public and semi-public spaces is sometimes blurred, especially in summer. Depending on their size, bars may offer some *tapas* and sandwiches, or a set menu for lunch and dinner. Although running a restaurant entails occasional interaction between workers and owners and clients, the main feature of local bars is the interaction between bartenders and regular clients on a daily basis.

More than the table layout, the distinguishing standard feature of the interior of local bars is the bar itself and the social life it generates. The importance of the bar design facilitates conversation among strangers, as well as interaction between the clients and the people working “behind the bar”, who are usually the owners.

Local bars in Spain have always been related to family business, and this feature is maintained when the owners are Chinese. In fact, the lack of generational change is one of the reasons why the Chinese - and other migrant communities - have directed their attention towards this small and medium-sized business sector, which

¹⁸² In Chapter one we have seen how “*bares de barrio*” or local bars are emerging as spaces of productive and economic activities of Chinese people in Spain (see page 8).

was until recently mainly in the hands of local people (Beltrán Antolín and Sáiz López 2013b:99–101).

When the Chinese take over the business they keep it as it was before, without changing anything. The design, name and menu look the same; they continue to offer the same service to the clients who are already used to it. The only difference is that there are Chinese people behind the bar attending the clients. This situation entails a contradiction for a part of the mainstream population and usual clients, who were unable to grasp at first how Chinese people could be serving in such a culturally-rooted institution in Spain. However, local neighbors are taking part in this process too, and the already significant feature of bars as places of cultural negotiation has increased.

We have to take into account that in the last decades other transformations in Spanish society have also changed the uses and characteristics of the bars. For example, this once male-centered place is nowadays almost exempt of gender differences, at least in the urban areas and larger cities. Following this logic of social change, nowadays other types of socio-cultural negotiations are in course, in the case that occupies us now in relation to the introduction of people from different ethnic origins and traditions and, most importantly, with different life experiences based on their embodied mobility across different socio-cultural settings.

In a historical study of cafés and bars in European countries, Grafe (2007:386) state that bartenders are “arbiters of the affairs of the neighborhood”. And this definition fits perfectly in the case of local Spanish bars.

Once, I was present in the negotiations between a Spanish bar owner and a Qingtianese couple that were about to buy the bar. The older man, who wanted to sell his bar to the Chinese couple because his children did not want to take over the business, explained directly to the new owners: “You have to be open and speak to the clients, listen to them. Bartenders are armchair psychologists - that’s the secret of the business”.

Although I am not sure if the young couple really understood what the man meant at that moment, some weeks later they proved to have grasped the bartender’s role. In just a few weeks, the Chinese had learned the vocabulary related to the new business – the name of the drinks, sandwiches and tapas and other bar-related vocabulary-, and they sharply grasped the bartender’s role. They soon learned the name of their regular clients, and engaged in conversation with people sitting at the bar.

Like their Spanish counterparts, Chinese bar owners generally know the circumstances of their regular clients quite well; their family backgrounds, problems and dilemmas. At the same time, they also let themselves be known by clients and explain their background, family situation, etc. Eventually, these relationships based on every-day interaction may evolve into friendship.

Several returnees who used to have local bars in Spain before moving to China included the clients in their former bars among the “things or people” they miss the

most upon return. Some of them have kept in touch with them using mobile phone applications and, whenever they travel from China to Spain, they go to the bar to meet up with their former clients and nowadays friends.

The introduction of Chinese people in one of the most relevant spaces of everyday life is leading to ambivalent reactions from the general population. On the one hand, it is true to say that some people regard the investment capacity of Chinese people who are taking over more and more bars with suspicion. In this sense, reactions towards these families are imbued with the perceived “danger” of the economical growth of China from Europe. However, on the other hand, bars have allowed an everyday space for cultural negotiation between Chinese and local people to emerge. Conversations and interactions go beyond the repeated stereotypes related to the Chinese and vice versa. Those Chinese people who were not used to having daily contact outside the co-ethnic community, are now increasingly interacting with different types of people and visitors to their bar.

This transformation of the main everyday socialization process via the penetration of Chinese people has been summarized in the documentary “*Se l’han quedat els xinos!*¹⁸³” (The Chinese have taken over!), in which local people explain the changes in their “mindset” related to Chinese people, and Chinese owners reflect on this new economic activity.

7.3.2.2 Bars and cafés as spaces of cultural negotiation in Qingtian

One of the elements that migrants have in common when they arrive in Qingtian is the fact that they implement the socio-cultural capital they have earned during their migrant trajectories throughout Spain and other countries. The implementation of Spanish, Italian, French or Portuguese skills and social capital in their lives in China shapes the continuity of return migration from a historical perspective and is best demonstrated in one of the main types of economic activities they are engaged in.

While in villages and towns the hallmark of migration takes the form of large “Western-style” houses, the main impact of transnational migration in the town of Hecheng has resulted in imported product shops, cafés, and so-called “Western” restaurants (西餐厅), emerging one after the other. Generally speaking, returnees run this type of business related to “Western” products in cooperation with friends or relatives that did not migrate, staying behind in Qingtian

Nowadays, there is a wide range of bars and cafés in Hecheng, which are evolving, changing and influencing each other. The analysis of bars and cafés reveals changes in their use and elucidates the transformation of the socialization processes and spaces of Qingtian over the last 15 years due to two main factors: the

¹⁸³ “Se l’han quedat els xinos!” is a repeated Catalan sentence that local people exclaim when “another bar is taken over by the Chinese”. The documentary (Quintoés and García 2011) is an on-going, on-line project that can be visualized on the website. <http://portfoli.ccjardinspau.org/laura5o/>

implementation of returnees' social remittances, and larger-scope transformations undertaken in the areas of China where an urban social class is emerging in force.

I will now address the changes and continuities of return migration within the last decade by analyzing the development and types of café-bars related with returnee migration as places for socio-cultural negotiation in Qingtian.

- **Defining, reproducing and changing the formula: From a place to acquire social status to "a home away from home"**

The earliest cafés appeared in Hecheng at the beginning of the 2000s and were all condensed together along Linjiang street (临江路), the area called the "European town" (欧洲城 *Ouzhou cheng*). Concretely, the first café opened for Spring Festival of the year 2000 by initiative of a returnee who had lived first in Spain and later in Bulgaria. Even if the Café is still located in its original emplacement in the avenue next to the Ou River, the ownership has changed three times since it first opened, always under the management of returnees. Some of them have moved to other cities in China while the original owner lives most of the time in Bulgaria.

In the few months following its opening, more and more cafés were opened in the same street, echoing the trend. Most of these cafés also serve food, generally including a range of choices from Chinese to so-called Western food, mostly represented by simple salads, Italian pasta or steaks. Before that, coffee might have been available in the most luxurious hotel in town, but the space designated as a café-bar first appeared in 2000.

At that time, the Chinese catering business in Spain was still framed within the Chinese food restaurant phenomenon, either addressed at co-ethnics, or following the widespread formula of Chinese food for "foreigners" in several European countries.

The first cafés in Hecheng did not mimic the design or use of local Spanish bars, nor the style of cafés in Northern and Central European countries, famous for their refinement, such as the ones in Vienna or Paris. Like the architecture of remittance-financed houses, the bars, cafés and Western restaurants in Hecheng emerged as local prototypes of what was supposed to be "Western" and "modern".

This process finds its analogy in the creation and development of "Chinese restaurants" in Europe. Similarly, these restaurants did not resemble their homologues in the presumed society of origin, but migrants adapted Chinese food and place aesthetics to the needs, tastes and social practices of the local societies where they were living. Thus, in Europe, Chinese restaurants were aimed at satisfying the need for Orientalism by means of cheap, exotic food and an oriental atmosphere, while Qingtian cafés fulfilled the need of the local people for Western-based products, representing modernity, urbanization and progress in China. To do so, these products had to be expensive.

In both cases, the Chinese use and apply their sense of difference and authenticity in the catering business depending on the local setting. In Europe, they implement their authenticity, their Chineseness, through Chinese restaurants, and back in China their value of difference is based on their experiences abroad and, therefore, they

employ their social remittances brought from abroad in Western-looking cafés, restaurants and shops.

Throughout their lives across several countries and socio-cultural settings, migrants gain multiple skills and experiences that they implement differently depending on the place where they are living at any given time. Thus, localities and socio-cultural settings do really matter in the logic of transnational practices (Ley 2010:453).

Nowadays, the first cafés, which appeared at the beginning of the 2000s, have become the institutionalized model and prototype, reproduced throughout the whole town, and they have shaped the first types of café in Qingtian. Hence, the reproduction of the same style, aesthetics and uses has created a typical model of cafés characteristic of Qingtian and its area of influence.

The exterior design of cafés brought about a relevant transformation of Hecheng vernacular architecture. Apart from the introduction of architectural motifs related to European traditions, such as neoclassical columns and façades, the signs indicating the name of bars, written both in Chinese characters and Romanized letters, remit directly to the specific European city where the returnee managing the business has come from: Barcelona Bar, Café de Paris, Prague Impression or Vienne Custom are some of the examples of these spaces that make up the present-day Qingtianese institutionalized café-bar.



Figure. 66 Café Vienne Custom in Hecheng, Qingtian

Actually, the relevance of the names of these European cities and their Chinese translation can be currently found in different types of businesses apart from catering, and in the direct relation between the owners and the locality in question. A massage center located in the center of the town, for example, is presided over by a large sign with the characters 巴塞罗那 (*Basailuona*), which is the Chinese transcription for Barcelona.



Figure.67 Massage centre 巴塞罗那 Basailuona, Hecheng

When I asked the owner of the center about the name of her business she explained that she has some relatives in Barcelona, as most of the people in Qingtian do, but that this was not the reason why she chose the name. She took the Chinese translation of Barcelona as the name for her business because "it's a good advertising strategy, this is a very famous name in Qingtian". It is important to notice that, as we can see in figure 67, the name of the business is not translated into Romanized letters but the Chinese characters used to refer to the city have become a symbol of modernity and have penetrated on a grass-roots level.

Thus, the external appearance of cafés has influenced the landscape of the town by adapting the foreign names of the cities after which they are named into Chinese characters.

□



Figure. 68 Barcelona Bar in Hecheng

In a similar way, the café's interior design and uses have also undergone similar adaptive changes.

Large, heavy, marble-looking tables with comfortable, sumptuous sofas are the main feature of these cafés. Although espresso machines and Spanish ham are common, the actual bar is not really used by clients, who prefer to sit in the comfortable and

more private, intimate space at the tables. Thus, the bar is eminently a working place for the waiting staff.



Figure 69. Bar-restaurant in Hecheng

As we have seen before, being the owner of a catering business in China or Spain involves completely different tasks and roles. When the owner of a Qingtianese bar or café interacts with clients, he or she will generally do so by going to sit at the table with the clients, rather than in the more casual way previously depicted in relation to local Spanish bars.

Besides the large tables on the ground floor, most of these cafes also have an upper floor with private rooms (包厢 *baoxiang*), which are used either by those clients that are negotiating something privately, or by families that are having meetings to eat and drink, or to play *majiang*. Most of these cafes provide rooms with electronic *majiang* tables that are increasingly used by men and women alike, even though they were especially used by men at first.

The success of cafés in Qingtian mirrors the adaptation to the local society in question. The architectural design, as well as space distribution and use, express the adaptation of this space, perceived as “European” and “urban”, to local social practices and behavior.

Cafés and bars reflect the urbanization process in Hecheng and its nearby villages. Although it is true that cafés have become widespread across China’s large, “cosmopolitan” cities in recent years and are regarded as the quintessentially urban institution for middle-class people, the typology, development and the history of cafés and bars in Qingtian differ from the ones in large Chinese cities.

When they first appeared, cafés were used mainly by migrants during their visits to their hometown and had essentially a symbolic value as a way of demonstrating the social prestige associated with the successful returnee. They were gathering places addressed at an elite formed by successful *huaqiao* and upper-class Qingtianese

who had not migrated. As stated by Grafe, the first cafés in Northern European cities were places to “to present themselves as public personae (...) a place where they can improve themselves and their social standing” (Grafe 2007:267–276)¹⁸⁴.

In the same way, cafés in Qingtian were originally reserved for people who could afford the free time to spend in the café, as well as the expensive prices of the beverages and the food there. Therefore, cafés materially illustrate the presence of new places for social interaction where migrants can improve their *mianzi* (prestige) and *guanxi* (social relationships).

However, nowadays, this situation has already changed and bars are popular among a larger proportion of Qingtianese, whether they are physically experiencing mobility or not. In the last five years, cafés have started to develop rapidly and spread to different areas of the town. Even if nowadays the symbolic value is still significant and cafés are seen as the epitome of the “European taste” of the town, their practical value is also growing as the Qingtianese who have not migrated are incorporating these spaces and products in their daily lives.

Two main factors are behind the quantitative and qualitative growth of cafés in Qingtian. On the one hand, there are an increasing number of migrants opening businesses in the town and, on the other hand, the drastic change in Qingtianese lifestyle in the last few years, which has involved the transfer of social activities that were previously undertaken in houses, temples or outdoors (streets, avenues and squares) to the semi-public places of restaurants, cafés and bars. The emergence of bars, cafés and restaurants has transformed spaces and processes of socialization in Qingtian and are not only addressed at the increasing number of migrants visiting their hometown, but also at people who have never migrated.

As we have seen in Chapter four, migration has led to the introduction of coffee as an everyday commodity in Qingtian. But coffee is a commodity that is consumed in the semi-public spaces of bars and cafés, which are quantitatively and qualitatively relevant in Hecheng, rather than in the domestic space of the houses. We have already mentioned how coffee machines that migrants bring as a present for relatives and friends stand in their living rooms as symbols of their international connections rather than fulfilling any practical function. That is why the only coffee shop in Qingtian, of Spanish and Qingtianese ownership, did not succeed and closed some months after its inauguration.

Moreover, when somebody receives presents from Europe, such as ham, sausages or other food, they are much more likely to invite people to try and pass on their products in a café-bar rather than invite them at home. Middle-class Qingtianese use café-bars as collective living rooms or as “homes away from home” and, occasionally they bring their sausages or ham, directly sent from Spain, from home. Such a practice is related to the transformation of places of socialization, leading to an increasingly private use of domestic places and the widespread tendency to go

¹⁸⁴ The penetration of the beverage of coffee and the consequent blooming of café-bars in Western Europe is related to migration too, especially to Armenian and Turk migrants in London in the sixteenth century (Grafe 2007:311). As Grafe (2007:294) points out “its exotic and oriental flavour was one of its attractive features”.

out and use semi-public spaces, such as restaurants, cafés, and bars, as spaces for socialization and cultural negotiation.

While cafés were basically used at the outset by a small elite and mostly migrants during their visits, nowadays cafés are lively (热闹 *renao*) spaces for everyday socialization, where local middle-class people regularly meet.

While the first bars were concentrated in Linjiang street and the area around the Ou River, denominated the European city, nowadays there are more than 200 cafés in all the neighborhoods of Hecheng, and they are also reaching the villages in the County. This widespread use of cafés has led to the reproduction of the same structure not only across the whole town but also in nearby villages too.



Figure 70. Café in Youzhu

A 37-year-old man who returned from France opened Café de Paris in Youzhu in 2010. After trying to do some business in Hecheng and seeing the urbanization process of his hometown in Youzhu, the man decided to open a café, which is always full of people playing *majiang* in the private back rooms, drinking coffee and chatting, doing business or watching TV. In some way, the social activity of this place resembles a local bar located in a small village in Spain.



Figure 71. Café de Paris, Youzhu

Alicia is the Café de Paris owners' sister and she returned to Youzhu to help her brother with the café some months after opening. Her small telecommunications shop in Madrid, selling prepaid cards and mobile phones was a reasonably good business ten years ago, but nowadays the lack of demand in this sector has led her to sell the shop and come back to Qingtian for a time.

I met her when she had been back in China for six months and she explained that she was planning to stay in Youzhu for two years working with her brother and then decide if she would stay longer in Qingtian or return to Madrid. In the Café she was in contact with people going back and forth between Europe and Qingtian on a daily basis and, according to her perspective, the decision about her future depended on the place where she could make a better living.

Right now, it's almost the same for me to be in Qingtian or Madrid. I am basically leading the same life here than there. At first I really missed my friends but now I know more people here every day; it's okay. All of this has changed a lot, and nowadays living in Qingtian is not the same as when I left, a lot has changed. So I will decide whether to go or stay here in terms of job opportunities, we'll see (Interview with Alicia, April 2011, Youzhu, Qingtian).

Thus, similar to the process of migration from Qingtian to Spain by means of chain migration, Alicia's brother has helped her to overcome a difficult time in Spain by offering her the opportunity to return and help him build up the Café de Paris business in Youzhu.

The situation of the owner of Barcelona Bar, which is located in the main street in Hecheng, opposite the only five-star hotel, is also open to further changes and movements. The couple opened the bar in 2010 after living for ten years in Barcelona. However, they still have their business in Barcelona. As they are mostly located in Qingtian nowadays and often travel together to Barcelona, they have hired a local manager to take care of their Barcelona-based bar when they are in Qingtian. For the time being, the man told me, "it's okay like this because our son is only 2 years old and stays in Qingtian with his grandparents. In a few years' time, we will decide where to stay". Interestingly, while the small restaurant bar in Barcelona is called "*Tapas chinas*" (Chinese Tapas), in Qingtian they use the name related to overseas (Barcelona Bar), thus representing how they adapt their migrant experience in both localities with the names of their bar-restaurants in China and Spain.

- **Exporting the model: Reproduction of Qingtian Cafés in small and middle-sized cities**

The relationship between the return migration process and the business of bars and cafés is not confined to the geographical limits of Qingtian. Cafés and wine shops are already institutionalized commercial activities with a relatively long tradition in Qingtian, and the intensity in the permanent reproduction of such businesses run

the risk of potential market saturation. Thus, migrants going back to China, attracted by the perceived business possibilities, are increasingly choosing other localities near Qingtian where a growing middle and upper class are emerging.

Lishui was the first place to echo this trend. The administrative center of the region is a middle-sized city, with wide cultural and leisure choices (cinemas, museums, concert halls, etc.), as well as education centers. Even though young and middle-aged families move from Spain to Qingtian, they usually bring their children to private schools in Lishui rather than to schools in Qingtian.

Most of the cafés in Lishui are also owned and managed by Qingtianese migrants who set up their businesses in the city not only to escape the saturation of the sector in the small town of Hecheng, but also attracted by the life of a larger city with wider cultural and educational options and a more heterogeneous population. Apart from these attractive points for the returnee, the city is located at only 51 kilometers from Hecheng, which makes it very convenient for regular visits.

Besides reproducing Qingtianese-style cafes in Lishui, migrants coming back to Qingtian are also setting their sights on other middle-sized cities in the province, especially those in the process of being developed, where new districts on the outskirts of the city are being built to house middle and upper-class families.

That is the case of Beilei and Maliang, a couple who opened a Qingtian-style café-restaurant in a newly-built area in the main town of Jinyun County. Jinyun is well known for its natural scenery and is the first County under Lishui administration to start developing a significant tourist industry.

Beilei was born in Hecheng and migrated to Spain in 2005 when she was 25 years old. In Madrid she met her husband who comes from Dalian (Shandong) and arrived in Spain in 1998.

They chose to settle in Jinyun because they have some friends there and unlike Qingtian, which is overrun with cafés-restaurants, in Jinyun they opened the first one in the town. However, the places reproduce the same design and structure of the Qingtian-style café, mixing a variety of Chinese and European symbols and styles, objects and motifs.



Figure 72. "Modern Café" 现代咖啡 in Jinyun, Lishui Prefecture.

The case of Maliang represents the migration trajectory of people coming from the Northeast of China, which differed completely from the Qingtianese way of migrating to Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, as they did not come from a qiaoxiang area with strong migration networks with Europe. Young fishermen enrolled as workers on transoceanic vessels, taking the opportunity of their days off in some European harbor to leave the vessel and start a difficult migration process. Maliang sailed from Xiamen port in 1998 working for a Japanese tuna fishing vessel. He sailed for three months until the vessel arrived in Las Palmas and the workers were authorized to leave the ship for one month before returning to work. He was 18 years old, and when the month was up he did not enroll on the vessel again. He managed to arrive in Valencia and in the 2001 Spanish foreigners regulation process for undocumented workers he obtained his residence permit and legalized his situation in Spain.

However, he did not have a strong network in Spain and his insertion into the Spanish economy was much more difficult than in the case of Qingtianese migrants who had transnational links and connections before departing. He worked many years in restaurants and shops, and also worked as a bricklayer during the construction fever in Spain. When he was able to start considering opening his own business, the economic crisis arose. In 2010, Beilei and Maliang decided to return to open a business in China, and try to save money to move back to Spain at a later date.

This couple's return migration is framed in the economic structural shift encompassing Spain and China. As Maliang explained, for him moving back to China is a way of "skipping the crisis" (逃避经济危机 *taobi jinji weiji*) in Spain, and making the most of the growing economy in China.

Both of them state that they had never thought they would have ended up returning to China so soon, as they had imagined returning after retirement instead. However, as they see their situation, this return is just a mooring in China before continuing their migration trajectory, and their embodied mobility, by returning to Spain.

We are here trying to make this Café-restaurant work, to make money and then return to Spain to prosper, to invest the money we have made here. I really hope the Spanish economy will improve soon. My idea is to make money here and bring it to Spain, invest there. Because my life in Spain is much better than the one I have here. I'm used to living abroad and it's getting very hard to adjust here, I don't like living here (Interview with Maliang, November 2012, Jinyun).

Strategies to prosper in China are oriented at opening Western-looking catering businesses in the newly-built districts in Zhejiang province intended for middle and upper-class Chinese eager to take part in modern, urban institutions such as café-restaurants. Migrants returning to China are introducing the Qingtian-style café to many areas following this model.

- **The emergence of “authentic Spanish bars” in Qingtian**

The strategy for tackling the saturation of an economic niche by moving to a new location or transforming the sector - which is the typical way Chinese people operate when doing business abroad¹⁸⁵ - has also emerged in China among the economic activities that returnees engage in.

Apart from the strategy we have just seen, involving the reproduction of institutionalized Qingtianese cafés in other areas of the vicinity where there is a potential market, also emerging in Qingtian are new café-bar-restaurants that are introducing changes in the use of the bar as a social space for daily socialization in Qingtian.

Young people, who have been in Spain for many years and have some experience in the field of local bars, are triggering the transformations of semi-public places of cultural negotiation through the introduction of what they call “authentic Spanish” bars and shops rather than the already saturated model of the prototype inaugurated in 2000.

That is the case of Lorena’s choice. As explained above, she finally decided to open a bar but she wanted to do something different and implement her life experience and social capital by opening a new type of business mirroring the image of Spanish local bars.

Lorena’s bar has no private rooms to play majiang, and instead of the large, sumptuous sofas, three simple wooden tables and benches are laid out in the back of the bar among shelves with different types of books: travel, cookery and self-help books, and some novels. Besides that, the central point is the bar, located next to a large window overlooking the street, where people sit to chat to each other. The bar offers sandwiches, Spanish sausages and ham, and different snacks characteristic of Spanish local bars, as well as simple Chinese dishes. The similarity with Spanish bars is not only based on the design and use of the place, but she continuously stresses the authentic Spanish products and environment in the Weixin wall advertisement.

¹⁸⁵ The logic of changing sector and/or changing place strategies of Chinese migrants have been examined in depth by Haugen (2005) regarding more recent movements of Chinese people from European countries towards Africa.



Figure 73. Interior of Lorena's bar, Hecheng

7.4 From Spain to urban China: Intergenerational migration approach

I like to be here [in Qingtian] in summer when my family is back but the year I spent living here when we came to China was ... was a disaster for me. To be honest, I was bored, and almost depressed. I spent all day with the girls at home. Imagine I even missed going to work at the bar! Here I don't know anyone, all my friends, my brother and sister and my parents are in Madrid. (Interview with Keke, Qingtian, October 2012).

We have already referred to Babala in different parts of the dissertation. In 2009, after selling the local bar she ran with her husband in Madrid, Babala moved to China with her husband and their Spanish-born daughter. They took a year off and stayed some months in Qingtian while deciding the next step in their lives: staying in China to explore new professional horizons or moving back to Madrid. As we can see from the continuation of the interview, Babala and Tuane, her husband, do not share the same feelings towards Qingtian and she insisted on moving away from the small town as a condition for staying in China.

(...). And what would you do here? Open another café? This does not motivate me at all and it is not the place where I want my daughters to grow up. So I told him [her husband] that if we stayed in China it would not be Qingtian. He felt quite comfortable here and could have stayed a bit longer, but not me, not at all (Interview with Babala, Qingtian, October 2012).

The two main issues that I will discuss in this section can be inferred from Babala's words.

First of all, young and middle-aged people who have been in Spain for many years, regard Qingtian as a small country town that does not fulfill their life expectations. Apart from the saturation of migration-related businesses in Qingtian, they no longer have significant social relationships as most of their relatives and friends remain in Spain or live in other European countries.

Secondly, Babala's words also reflect the different meanings of moving to live in China for people who migrated as adults and for those who were born and/or raised in Spain. While Tuane migrated to Europe when he was 18 and arrived in Madrid when he was 19 - after living in Germany and France for some time -, Babala moved to Spain with her parents before she was even two years old, and she has grown up between Zafra and Madrid¹⁸⁶. Thus, although they were born with a few years' difference in the same area, Babala and Tuane have experienced completely

¹⁸⁶ See page 218

different outcomes of migration and this is reflected in the different meaning of their mobility towards China for them.

Analyzing different meanings of moving to live in China for first- and second-generation migrants is essential to disentangle and demystify the relationship between ethnic identities and belongings and “ancestral” countries of origin, which is sometimes taken for granted¹⁸⁷.

In third place, socio-economic and cultural capital is another crucial factor in mobility patterns of first- and second-generation migrants towards larger Chinese cities. People that have been in Spain for many years and move to China with an important economic capital do not tend to choose Qingtian as a place to settle, but are more likely to turn their sights towards large urban settings.

Hence, in order to understand present-day mobility patterns from Spain to China beyond Qingtian, we need to take into account the heterogeneity of Chinese people in Spain – regarding generation and class - as well as their family situation when they move: are they moving alone or with their families? Are there children involved in the return migration?

In this section, I will present the data related to young migrants and migrants’ descendants moving to China and settling in large cities outside the Qingtian migration *habitus* domain. Shanghai, or the relatively nearby city of Hangzhou, which is the capital of Zhejiang province situated at only 250 kilometers from Qingtian, are the main targets for young Chinese people moving from Spain to China, whether they are first-generation migrants or migrants’ descendants.

7.4.1 Social remittances and migrant agency in the process of cultural representation.

While people following a highly mobile life between China and Spain generally head for developing areas in different provinces, Hangzhou is one of the main choices when return involves the movement of whole nuclear families that have been in Spain for several years and includes children born locally and/or raised in Spain.

Although large cities and urban areas are the main target for this family-based return mobility, people still hold strong pre-migration ties with China and thus with Qingtian.

The lively commercial life of the tourist destination, Hangzhou, and the fact that the city is located at only a four-hour drive from Qingtian have converted the capital of

¹⁸⁷ In fact, the Chinese migrant community highlights the relevance of socio-cultural elements over and above ethnic features when commenting on this situation. Whenever a young first-generation migrant dates a migrant’s descendant in Spain, the relatives – both in Spain and Qingtian – will use the sentence “he or she is too Spanish” to explain any problems that might arise. Marital problems between first-generation and 1.5 or second-generation migrants are often related to “cultural incompatibilities” arguing that the socialization settings of the couple are too dissimilar.

Zhejiang province into the first target of nuclear families with high social-cultural and/or economic capital settling in China.

As in the case of Qingtian-based return mobility, people settling in Hangzhou also continue with one of the main sectors of Chinese entrepreneurship in Spain: catering.

This is the case we have already presented of Li, who moved to China with her two-Spanish born sons to be reunited with her husband, who had started “going back and forth” between China and Spain three years before¹⁸⁸. When Li moved to China in 2010, the family settled in Hangzhou. While the husband continued to go back and forth (*feilai feiqu*) - now between two provinces in China, as the factory he opened with a Spanish partner is located in Anhui - Li started looking for an opportunity to start her own business.

At first she tried to start a different economic activity from the one she had engaged in during her adult life in Barcelona, but eventually she decided to continue in the sector where she had always worked.

In the beginning, when I’d just arrived here, I wanted to do something different, to change a bit. I tried to do some trading business but soon I realized that I didn’t have enough contacts and experience, and besides I don’t like this type of business. What I know and I feel comfortable with is in the catering business. I worked all life in it and I’ve managed well. So I opened *La Pedrera* because everybody told me there was a market now for this kind of restaurants in China. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, August 2011).

Consumer practices of urban Chinese are growing intensively and young people are looking for different ones. The gastronomy and catering niche is where this need for “exoticism” can best be grasped. Apart from the huge growth in Japanese, Italian, French, and Thai restaurants, the number of Spanish restaurants has also increased in the last decade in large cities in China.

Behind the upsurge in restaurants serving Spanish food and offering a “Spanish atmosphere” in large Chinese cities, are an increasing number of Spanish people, who are also moving to China, attracted by better economic and business opportunities. However, even though the presence of Spanish people in China is growing, the agency of Chinese migrants in the emergence, development and transformation of Spanish restaurants in China is crucial.

As well as migrants returning to Qingtian, young and middle-aged couples with enough socio-economic capital to open restaurants in larger cities are implementing their social remittances, acquired in Spain, for their new economic projects. Although most Spanish restaurants in large Chinese cities still uphold the old, widespread stereotypes traditionally related to “Spanish culture”, migrants, who want to prove their authentic inverse socio-cultural remittances and the fact that “they have been there”, are increasingly transforming these images and introducing

new motifs, symbols and practices. Throughout this process they act as agents of cultural representations and intercultural relationships in a global world.

“La Pedrera” is a fancy restaurant in a trendy area of Hangzhou, where most of the foreign restaurants are located. The design and atmosphere of the restaurant take the symbolic, artistic work of the Catalan architect, Antoni Gaudí, as their point of reference. The façade of the restaurant, for example, reproduces the famous Barcelona building called *La Pedrera* (The Quarry), from which it takes its name.



Figure 74. *La Pedrera Restaurant in Hangzhou.*

We have already mentioned in Section 7.2.2.2 that the couple lived for twenty years in Barcelona, where they owned two restaurants: a Wok restaurant located in one of the main tourist destinations of the city, and a restaurant called “Casa Xinès”, which has gained the fame of being one of the most “authentic” Chinese restaurants in Barcelona. The same discourses of authenticity of Chinese restaurants in Barcelona are reproduced in Spanish restaurants in Hangzhou.

The introduction of Gaudí as a symbol to link the restaurant with Catalan and Spanish products challenges the rigid, traditional stereotypes that identify Spanish society and culture in China (Noya Miranda 2007). The introduction of new cultural references implies the emergence of narratives of authenticity of cultures and societies, and the agency of migrants in introducing, transforming and representing these realities. Li’s narrative referring to the reception of the new restaurant by Chinese people is illustrative:

At first, the Chinese said there was not much Spanish taste here because there is nothing of what they have in mind when they think about Spain. Then I started to explain about Gaudi, the Gaudi style, details... You know in China there is still only one image of Spain

as...well, the typical place of bullfighting and flamenco, but here it is different, I want them to discover that Spain is much more than that. And this happens not only with the decoration, but also with the food (...) You should tell them, explain and let them know what is authentic ... it takes time. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, August 2011).

The artistic universe of Gaudi has already been adapted for marketing in several countries, but in China it is still unknown among ordinary people. Along with the Gaudi symbol, the restaurant also uses images of Barcelona football club to identify its character.

When Li decided to open the restaurant, she contacted her friends in Barcelona to find a "qualified chef" to work in her restaurant. Finally, an Argentinean chef who had been working in important Catalan restaurants in Barcelona took the job and manages the place. Thus, this restaurant, aimed at upper-class Chinese urban people, is another space of social negotiations where different embodied mobilities, social classes and migration experiences converge.

With the help of the chef and two more Spanish people working in the restaurant – the maître and a waiter - the owner wants to expand the uses of the restaurant to a space to introduce Spanish society and cultural diversity. They organize different activities such as showing films, and local festival celebrations.

This example epitomizes the bidirectional flow of information, values and products that are involved in the dynamic process of migration and return. The presence of China in Spain through return mobility - in its many variants - is increasing and becoming more apparent and tangible. This is due, among other factors, to the intercultural processes inherent in migration. While migration of Chinese people in Spain has brought about the penetration of social remittances that migrants bring with them, return mobility has also implied the introduction of values, practices and products from Spain to China through the agency of young and middle-aged people moving between the two settings. Social remittances are circulating and penetrating in different local settings through migrant mobility.

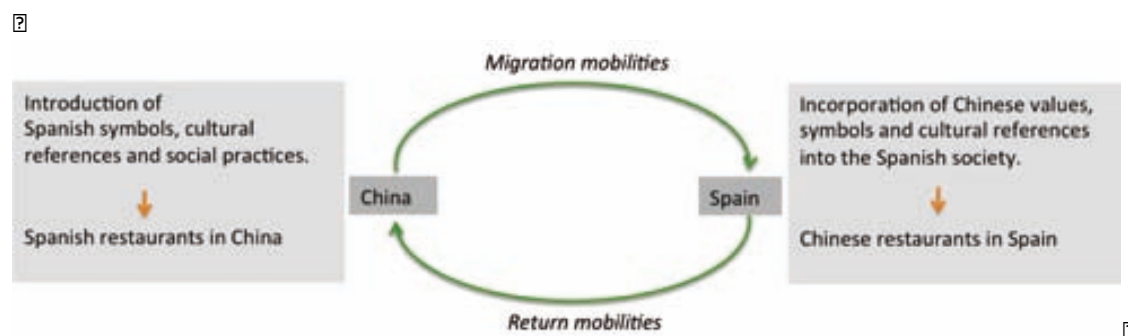


Figure75. Social remittances and agency of migrants in cross-culture

While the first businesses set up by Chinese people in Spain were Chinese food restaurants, considered exotic by the Spanish people, nowadays young migrants that are returning to China do the same with Spanish food restaurants. In China, they derive benefit from their difference by setting up a "Chinese - Spanish" or "European - Chinese" restaurant. The transition from Chinese restaurants in Spain to Spanish restaurants in China expresses a negotiation of identity, and the use of multiple socio-cultural remittances depending on the place where they are localized.

7.4.2 Mixed-generation couples moving to China: New professional activities and lifestyles

Regarding return mobility patterns directed at larger cities, but still strongly related to Qingtian, intergenerational migrant couples portray another relevant group. Return mobility embodied by first- and second-generation couples reveals a relevant intercultural practice that has not been taken into consideration by researchers.

Although "mixed marriages" in migration studies usually refer to interethnic couples formed by migrants and local people in the receiving country, marriages between first-generation migrants and migrants' descendants have not been considered so, since it is taken for granted that reference variables for peoples' identity are mainly ethnicity and essentialized interpretations of otherness rather than changing backgrounds of socialization.

The movement towards China of "mixed-generation couples" - formed by first- and second-generation migrants - sheds light on return mobility patterns from an intergenerational approach, understanding here generation as migration cohort¹⁸⁹.

Apart from the role of individual migration trajectories in the different meanings of return mobility, the two examples I will present in this section also underscore that, while some migrants continue with the same type of business they used to do in Spain, others change their professional activity when settling in China. Social class and previous working experience before moving to China also play a relevant role in shaping the experiences of return mobility.

- **Social Mobility: From a catering business in Spain to a professional employee career in China.**

The first case brings us again to Babala and Tuane, referred to at the beginning of this section. They moved to China in 2010 aged 28 and 32 years old respectively,

¹⁸⁹ See page 218 for a discussion of the "generation" variable in migration studies.

be included in the economic activity niche of Chinese people in Spain, oriented towards self-employment and small and medium-sized catering and trading businesses.

As for Tuane, he arrived in Madrid at 18 years of age and also worked in the same spheres as Babala. In fact, he was the one who wanted to open a Spanish local bar to be closer to mainstream society and leave the Chinese enclave where he had always worked.

Therefore, although Babala and Tuane have different relationships with China and Spain due to their distinct migration experiences and trajectories, they belong to the same social class and have had very similar work experiences in Spain, with the only difference that Keke had the chance to study, whereas Tuane did not.

Both of them wanted to change their lifestyle and China seemed the suitable place to do it. The initial idea of returning to China came mainly from Tuane who had been looking for an opportunity to change his professional activity and his family life style for a long time. He wanted to have a regular working schedule that left him enough free time to enjoy life and be with his family.

In Spain there are not many opportunities for us, for Chinese people, apart from working long hours every day of the week in the bar, shop, restaurant, whatever. And now with the crisis, it is even worse. I was tired of this life. We worked so hard and we are so young and in the end, one day I woke up and said to myself "I'm wasting my life away. I don't want to live like this". Every time I returned to China I realized the changes, the opportunities, and finally we thought... why not give it a try? (Interview with Tuane, April 2011, Qingtian).

For him the best scenario to do that (i.e. to start another professional career that would provide more free time for his family), involved returning to China. As expressed in his words and as we have seen in Chapter six, visits to China play an important role in the perception of China as a place for developing new economic activities.

Babala also wanted to change her life and even if she felt reluctant to move to China in the beginning, she realized that there were not so many opportunities for her husband in Spain besides the bar. She could see herself with more options of getting a steady job in Madrid that would give her more free time, but she recognized that it was not so easy for her husband.

They did not have a clear or specific business plan when they arrived in China, apart from the idea of starting a new life that would give them more time for the family. They first settled in Qingtian in Tuane's mother's house but Babala wanted to move to a bigger city from the very beginning. I met her in her first year when they were still living in Qingtian. She wanted to meet Spanish people living in China and she was trying to find out if there were any Spanish associations in Hangzhou to meet people from the same socio-cultural background, as she was feeling quite lonely. Moving to Hangzhou and starting to study Chinese at the university was the best

solution for her. Babala spoke fluent Qingtianhua and Putonghua but could not read and write them when she first arrived in China.

After spending eight months in Qingtian, the family eventually settled in Hangzhou where Babala started studying Chinese language and later she continued her university studies enrolling in an "International Relations" postgraduate course.

Tuane started working towards his new life and, after obtaining the official tourist guide certificate, he began working for several Chinese travel agencies as a guide for Spanish-speaking tourist groups.

He speaks good Spanish and is proud of his skills, which he does not want to lose since he is not living in Spain anymore. However, Spanish language is present in his daily life in Hangzhou, whether at home or in his new professional life in China. Babala is trying her best to keep speaking Spanish at home in order to give her children the opportunity to be as bilingual as possible. While she experienced a similar situation when she arrived in Spain as a little child - using Chinese at home and Spanish at school - she is envisaging a similar scenario for her daughters but the other way around.

When talking about his new job, Tuane stressed his double identity as Chinese and Spanish as an important asset for his professional success besides his Spanish language skills.

Look, here there are more and more Chinese who speak Spanish. They've studied at university but... I don't know, they speak very correct Spanish, but not colloquial Spanish. My bosses are interested in me because I have lived in Spain, because, you know, it's not just the language, it is also how you treat Spanish people. I understand what they'll consider strange, what they'll like... I also consider myself a bit Spanish, well after all these years... but of course I am Chinese. So for them it is like having a Spanish and Chinese tourist guide rolled into one. (Interview with Tuane, April 2011, Qingtian).

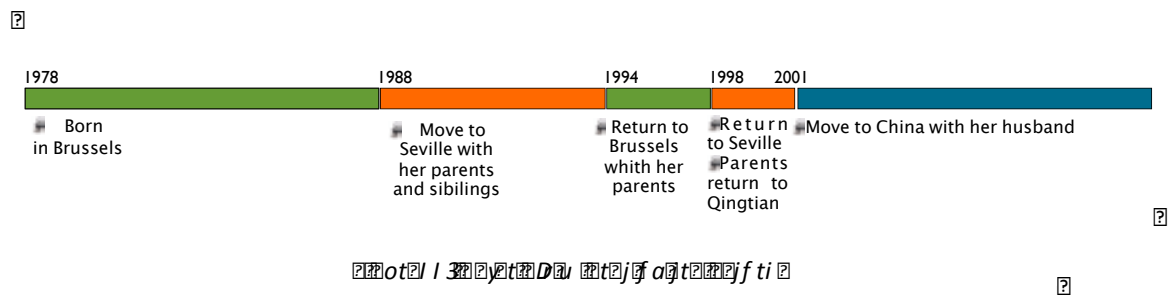
After four years living in Hangzhou they are both working in different fields where they can use their experience in Spain and they have upgraded their social status by working in several projects aimed at increasing the presence of Spanish-speaking people in business and tourism in China. As they both agreed two years after I first met them, "we are not earning as much money as in the bar in Spain but we have a private life". And this was their main aim when contemplating the possibilities of moving to China. They often travel around China with their daughters, and they regularly visit their respective families in Qingtian and Madrid.

Besides their strong connections with Madrid and regular visits there, Babala is already thinking of their future move back to Spain when they retire and their daughters have grown up.

- **Social mobility: From a professional career in Spain to a catering business in China.**

Like Babala, Valeria also moved to China prompted by her husband but her life changed in a different way and implied a shift from being a professional employee in Seville to becoming the owner of a small catering business in Lishui. While Babala and Tuane had shared a similar working experience before moving together to China, not only did Valeria and her husband have different migration experiences and were raised in a different socio-cultural environment, but they also had different social positions before moving to China.

In Chapter 6.2.1.3 we discussed the migration itinerary of Valeria between Belgium and Spain and explained that she grew up between the two countries^{Sj5}. Figure 77 summarizes her embodied mobility and biography.



Despite receiving Chinese socialization at home, her personality and social skills are also embedded in the background of her moorings in Spain and Belgium. When she was 19 she moved for the first time of her own choice as an adult, which involved returning to Seville to start a new life, breaking away from the economic activities of her entrepreneur parents and siblings settled between Belgium and Spain.

I didn't want to have a restaurant or a shop, I didn't want to have a small business and spend all day living for the business without doing anything else. My dream was to have a job and free time and I got it. I had my job, my apartment and my car in Seville. I used to go out at weekends, it was what I wanted, but suddenly I met my husband and I lost my head (laughing). (Interview with Valeria, Lishui, November 2012).

Having experienced great physical mobility as a child, moving to China was Valeria's first migration movement as an adult. For her husband, however, the same movement was experienced as a return to his hometown after having lived seven years in Spain working in a relative's restaurant.

¹⁹¹ [unclear] [unclear]

A year after I met him we got married and I came over here. I left everything in Seville, my friends, my family – well, my parents were already here but my brothers are all out - my work... I left everything I had to start from scratch in a place I didn't know at all. (...) (Interview with Valeria, Lishui, November 2012).

They decided to settle in Lishui since her husband had worked there before emigrating and had enough contacts and connections (*guanxi*) to resume his professional life. First, they invested in several catering businesses in Qingtian, such as a Japanese *teppanyaki*, a type of grill restaurant that started to be in fashion in China, and later on a Cantonese restaurant. However, none of the businesses seemed to last long and they were continuously changing.

In their first years in China, Valeria mainly dedicated her time to raising her two sons. Like Babala, she moved back to Spain to give birth to her first child, as at that moment she had just arrived in China and was unfamiliar with the Chinese healthcare system (see figure 78). She felt more confident with the Spanish health institutions, which she knew much more. However, she had her second son after living in China for seven years, so the child was born in Lishui. As we can see from figure 76, her two sons have kept their mothers' nationality as is the case with Babala's children. The decision again is highly pragmatic and reveals the continuation of mobility that will be discussed later.

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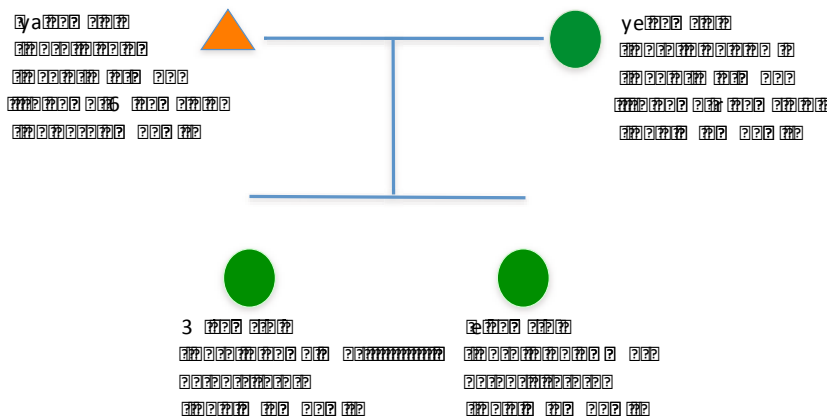


Figure 78. Mixed-generation family. Situation at the time of the interview in

□
□

In 2010, Valeria and her husband opened a new type of café, which was well received in Lishui. This café reproduces the latest catering business in Spain that combines a bakery and a café under the same roof. The cosy, quiet atmosphere has nothing in common with the institutionalized Qingtian-style café that emerged at the beginning of the 2000s and has also impregnated Lishui's social environment. Thus, like most of the people with strong links with European countries, Valeria has also opened a café, but she has introduced a new formula that has recently been reproduced in Qingtian. The café-bakery opened in Lishui by Valeria and her

husband is called Saint Belle. On my last visit in April 2014, I could see how the model is gaining in popularity. A couple, who recently returned from Barcelona where they had a Bazaar, have opened two more shops of the same branch in Hecheng this year.

Hence, although Babala and Tuane share a similar working background and experience, aimed at a similar life change, Valeria achieved the upward social mobility she wanted before moving to China, but she finally ended up having a catering business like her siblings. However, instead of being a Chinese restaurant in Seville or Brussels, she runs a European-style bakery in Lishui. When I asked her the choice of the name "Saint Belle" she said that for local people it does not matter if the name is Spanish or French, it has to sound good and the pronunciation should be easy to translate into Chinese characters. Commenting on this issue, she explained how her difference is perceived in Lishui:

People know that "I come from abroad", that's all they care about, they don't mind if it's Spain, Belgium, Italy or France" (Interview with Valeria, Lishui, November 2012).

Although they settled in Lishui, this city has been influenced quite significantly by Qingtian migration ideology and Europe is, therefore, the frame with which the difference between "inside" (*guonei*) and "outside" (*guowai*) China is conceptualized.

Valeria is the oldest second-generation migrant I interviewed and, comparing her situation with the migrants' descendants that grew up during the 1990s in Spain, she defines herself as "a second-generation migrant of another age". In the next section, we will see the difference in meaning and setting of these new migrants' descendants moving to China to live.

7.4.3 Emergence of new mobility patterns among descendants of migrants: Young Spanish-Chinese in Shanghai

Migrants' descendants (second-generation and 1.5 generation) with high levels of education are also moving to large Chinese cities as individuals. These movements are instigated for better professional opportunities and are not prompted by any type of kinship ties. Hence, these mobility patterns are far removed from the multi-generational family return migration analyzed above, and do not have anything to do with traditional *qiaoxiang* behavior or values. This new mobility reflects the upward social mobility of Chinese migrants' descendants in Spain and is mainly a feature of those descendants that want to develop their careers outside the family business.

In a way, these movements have a lot in common with recent migration flows of highly-qualified young Spanish people towards China, in particular architects, Sinologists, journalists, chefs, doctors and other specialists, heading to China for

better professional prospects. Spanish public opinion and political discourse has focused on the “brain drain” debate, questioning the way politicians have dealt with the Spanish economic boom and subsequent financial crisis.

However, although the movement towards China for migrants’ descendants is also regarded as migration rather than return, as we have seen in the cases of Babala and Valeria in the last section, it is true to say that it is different from migration movements involving Spaniards of their age and with similar educational backgrounds.

First, a relevant percentage of migrants’ descendants were brought to Spain when they were small children, and some of them are in fact returning to the country where they were born and raised for some years. Regardless of their country of birth, what is clear is that they have been raised in a transnational space so that most of them speak some Chinese, have cultural social references, and may have previously been there as children on family return visits or when they were little children. Here we have to recall the different mobility experiences of migrants’ descendants with China that were described in detail in Chapter six (6.2.1.3). Secondly, migrants’ descendants are ethnically Chinese and thus, they do not completely fit into the social category of “foreigners” in China, which is strongly related to racial factors. And finally, even if they act independently of their family networks, they do have some relatives in China and, while living in Shanghai, Beijing or Hangzhou, they occasionally travel to Qingtian to visit their relatives. However, most of these occasional visits coincide with return visits of their close relatives (parents and siblings) who are living in Spain.

King and Christou (King and Christou 2008, 2010) refer to this type of mobility as a “counterpart diaspora” or “counter-diasporic migration” in their comparative study about the movements of Greek-Americans and Greek-Germans towards their “ancestral home” in Greece. While the authors use the term “ancestral homeland” to designate the birthplace of second-generation migrants, they raise our awareness to the intrinsic contradiction of the term “second-generation return” and make it clear that migrants’ descendants are not returning, but can be regarded as “first-time migrants to their parents’ place” (King and Christou 2008:2). We have seen that clearly exemplified in the cases presented above of Babala and Valeria.

It has sometimes been underlined that second-generation migrants return to live in their ancestral homeland due to emotional links and idealized realities (King and Christou 2008:11). That is not the case at all young and middle-aged Chinese migrants’ descendants raised in Spain, who move to their country of birth or their parents’ country of birth mainly for practical reasons, to seek opportunities for a better life, in much the same way as their parents when they migrated to Spain. Thus, social factors and structural changes, both in China and Spain, are especially relevant in these new mobility patterns.

- **Who is moving towards China? Socio-cultural constraints.**

As with first-generation migrants, not all migrants' descendants want to move to China and, even more importantly, not all of them can do so even if they would like to. Cultural capital and higher levels of education are relevant factors within these mobility patterns.

Chinese society has changed dramatically over the last three decades and these transformations are reflected in the increasing proportion of highly-qualified young graduates and well-prepared professionals in China. Reverse growth involving increasing yearly rates of university graduates and stagnation in the creation of specialized jobs is starting to worry some Chinese intellectuals.

These changes are well-known for Chinese migrants' descendants in Europe, especially for those who did not gain access to professional or university studies but kept working in their parents' business or Chinese niche markets.

On the last evening of his two-month sabbatical in China, Marco expressed this situation clearly while we shared our last coffee in Hecheng. Marco moved to Italy with his parents when he was 7. After finishing secondary school, he started working full-time in his parents' restaurant, located in a small town near Milan. He gradually lost touch with his Italian classmates and started to mix only with ethnic Chinese with similar experiences, who were also working in their relatives' businesses. However, at 28, he realized that he was not following any of the paths "designed" for him. While most of his Chinese friends of the same age have already got married, have children and their own business, he remains single and has been working in different Chinese businesses in Italy since he left his parents' restaurant two years ago. On the other hand, he has had few connections with Italians since he left school. He wants to do something different and he regrets not having continued with his studies.

In a time of uncertainty he decided to come back to China for two months to "have a rest", travel around, and see if there was any chance for him in China. However, the long-term visit actually helped to confirm his previous thoughts. Talking about how he felt, he clearly explained to me:

Now it's even clearer than before. I have more opportunities in Italy than here. I didn't study and I don't have enough money to invest. I have nothing to do in China (Fieldwork notes, April 2013, Qingtian).

This case serves as an example for us to be aware of who is moving, but also who is unable to move because of lack of resources. Hence, the same difference regarding visits to China and Qingtian among those descendants who continue in the socio-economic profile of their parents and those who seek professional careers in other fields¹⁹² has also been reproduced in counter-migration movements of second-generation migrants from Spain to China.

¹⁹² See page

People with university studies trying to launch a professional career outside their family business see China as a possible place to do it, while those who continue to follow the self-employment model have better prospects staying in China.

- **Where in China? Which place to go? The Shanghai fever.**

The specific places to move to within China are subject to possible working contacts arranged from Spain, and university graduate or post-graduate courses, and can therefore be located in different cities. However, Shanghai seems to be the first target for migrants' descendants moving to China to live and work.

Shanghai is regarded as a modern, cosmopolitan and a rather more "Western" city than its counterpart in the north, Beijing. In fact, historically Shanghai – for its position – has been much more susceptible to internationalization and is one of the cities in China with a greater number of foreigners. While Shanghai is regarded as modern and Westernized, Beijing is regarded as more socially and culturally "Chinese".

Giorgio, who was working in a Bank in Lisbon and seeking an opportunity to move to China to work and live for a while, expressed it as follows:

Now I'm a bit stuck in Lisbon, and I'm considering moving to China. I would like to live in Shanghai for a while, but not in Beijing, I can't imagine living in Beijing – it's too Chinese and overwhelms me. I like Shanghai more; it's a more open, modern city (Interview with Giorgio, March 2011, Youzhu, Qingtian).

Thus, some people already have in mind to look for an opportunity without previous plans.

In addition, there are other phenomena that have prompted a relevant number of descendants of Chinese migrants in the city. The celebration of the International Exposition in 2010 was a chance for a lot of Chinese migrants' descendants from Spain to live and work in Shanghai for some months. Thanks to this first chance, several people found opportunities and moved there. As we have seen, Lina was one of the descendants who worked for the Barcelona pavilion and since then she has been trying to find the right time and opportunity to work and live in Shanghai for a while as she sees that her professional career will benefit greatly from this experience¹⁹³.

Thus, not only does moving to China have different dimensions when we contemplate first- or second-generation migrants, individual or inter-generational mobility patterns, but also when we contemplate the setting where these migration movements are directed. Migrants' descendants working in Shanghai work as employees or they open their own business.

¹⁹³ See page

Migrants' descendants as professional employees and entrepreneurs in Shanghai

Most young Spanish-Chinese people in Shanghai work for Spanish or Chinese companies, as well as for cultural or political institutions.

Marta is a 35 year-old woman who had been working in Shanghai for three years when I met her in 2013. She was born in Qingtian and moved to Spain with her mother in 1988, when she was 10, to be reunited with her father who migrated a few years before. They settled in Valdepeñas, a small town in the centre of Spain. Like other descendants raised in small localities where there were not so many Chinese co-ethnics, Marta easily adapted to her new life and soon got used to her new school. After finishing her university studies in Madrid, Marta got a grant to study in the UK and, from that point on, her migration trajectory as an adult began. She worked in London and in Germany, and finally she moved to Shanghai to work for an important Spanish Bank. For Marta, Shanghai is just another place in her concatenation of movements through different cities, but it is clear for her that home is still in Valdepeñas, where her family resides. She knows her parents will stay mostly in Spain, where her two brothers own restaurants and have their own families.

Marta does not have a close relationship with Qingtian as most of her relatives are in Spain. The last time she visited Qingtian was during her first year in Shanghai when her last grandparent passed away.

She speaks fluent Chinese as she studied in China until aged 10 and kept on studying in Spain to improve her reading and writing skills.

Talking about her feelings and future plans, Marta referred to mobility and the capacity to live in different socio-cultural settings as the most important things she has inherited from her family, expressing as follows the continuity among them:

What I inherited from my family is flexibility, the ability to adapt to different changes, to react in the face of difficulties. I'm here now because I work and because I care. Whatever happens tomorrow, we'll see and we'll adapt (Interview with Marta, Shanghai, June 2013).

Well-prepared professionals are also starting their own business in Shanghai related to trading, catering and international relationships. The next two examples clearly illustrate the structural shifts that have shaped the localization and character of the Chinese-Spanish who are trying to get the most out of their double socialization process and skills.

Lijing, the girl that received her aunt's visit and presents in 1980 and migrated with her family to Spain in 1985¹⁹⁴, moved to Shanghai in 2009, following a similar process to Marta. She studied Business Studies in Madrid and, when she finished her Master's degree, she opened a company in Barcelona with two classmates offering services to Spanish companies wishing to invest in China. She was in charge of the Chinese part and started to travel often to China for business. However, they

soon realized that the demand had been inverted and they started to focus on Chinese clients wishing to invest in Spain. From that moment on, she packed her suitcase and moved to Shanghai to find an office and set up the business.

She travels once or twice a year to Spain but, given that she has partners there, her duties are mostly restricted to China. After more than four years in Shanghai, she is starting to feel at home in the metropolis at the same time as her home is mostly linked to Madrid where all her family lives.

While Lijing and Marta represent highly-skilled women who have been raised in Spain but who spent the first years of their lives in Qingtian, Joan is a 26 year-old man, born in Vilafranca (Catalonia), who first moved to Shanghai to study Chinese language and finally stayed, recently opening his own business.

Joan's parents have two Chinese restaurants in the small town of Vilafranca and he has shown an interest in the restaurants since he was a child. When he finished school he studied tourism, but later on he studied his true vocation, a Diploma in Professional Cookery. Obviously, the family business influenced him in his decision but after working for two years in the family's restaurants, he decided to move to Shanghai to study Chinese. Even though he spoke both Qingtian dialect and Putonghua with his parents he did not know how to write them. After studying Chinese, he stayed in the city working in different "foreign" restaurants and learning about the business.

After three years of working as an employee he wanted to open his own Spanish restaurant in Shanghai. Although he had the knowledge and preparation to do so, he lacked the capital to invest. Joan raised his investment capital in the same way as his relatives in Spain had done three decades before. Networks based on mutual help among Chinese people in Spain provide informal loans and capital redistribution, making it easier to raise the initial investment capital needed to set up their businesses.

In much the same way, Joan borrowed money from his relatives and counted on the partnership of an uncle who sold his restaurant in Barcelona at the same time due to retirement.

Thus, from the individual cases presented of Spanish-Chinese people moving to Shanghai for professional development and better life prospects, we can see how the generational factor is relevant when dealing with mobility patterns of Chinese people from Spain to China. However, apart from the difference between migrants and their descendants, the examples show that a continuum exists between them, and that these realities cannot be understood as a completely separate phenomenon.

First, Chinese migrant's descendants have been raised in a highly mobile and transnational setting that has influenced them, as expressed by Marta. And secondly, entrepreneurship and support strategies continue towards second-generation migrants localized in Shanghai, as we have seen in the case of Joan and his restaurant.

7.5 Multiple returns and belongings: The continuation of transnational practices

We have analyzed different patterns of return mobility from Spain to China throughout the four sections of Chapter seven, paying special attention to the different modes and aims of the alternation of movements and moorings in China – whether in Qingtian or in larger urban settings. Moreover, we have seen how class (i.e. working background and economic circumstances) and different outcomes of migration in people’s socialization settings (i.e. migrants or descendants) play a key role in these moorings in China.

However, among the different cases presented, moving to China is not the end of a life of mobility. Even in those cases of long-term settlement, people may continue to physically move – by means of visits, migrating again to another country or returning to Spain - or take part in the places where they have lived in Spain via virtual or object-mediated practices.

Hence, the different types of transnational practices and mobility patterns illustrated in the diagram that I have followed throughout this dissertation do not cease upon return, but the combination and articulation of transnational practices of a different nature are key factors for understanding current flexible, dynamic practices that shape the mobility patterns of Chinese people moving from Spain to China.

By underscoring the continuation of mobility after return, I am not suggesting that cases in which people stay in China without considering changing their residence in the future do not exist. What I am suggesting is that migration experiences count, and therefore, those migrants that returned to China to stay “for good” may continue to live a life of mobility without physical displacement, as they did when living in Spain, but now the other way round.

Likewise, in the case of the transnational practices of Qingtianese living in Spain, the productive and reproductive spheres localized across the two countries are again the main elements triggering transnational practices from China to Spain of people who moved back.

7.5.1 The transnational productive sphere: Keeping economic links with Spain upon return

As we have seen, *feilai feiqu* is a mobility strategy allowing those families planning to return to intercalate movement with moorings in both countries. Many times I have heard that “one cannot leave Spain all of a sudden” (一下子 *yixiazi*) and people following this continuous embodied mobility keep functional houses and economic sources or activities in the localities where they reside in both countries. Transnational economic activities are not only restricted to *feilaifeiqu* mobility and do not cease when the whole family move to China. On the contrary, transnational economic involvement is also present among more stable moorings in China, to a different degree depending on the economic possibilities of each family.

Hence, we should ask ourselves what happens to the family’s economic activities in Spain when they move to live in China.

On the one hand, migrants might decide to sell their business, or one of them¹⁹⁵. In fact, the continuous circulation of shop, bar and restaurant ownership among Chinese people in Spain is strongly related to return mobility towards China. Small and medium-sized businesses belonging to Chinese people in Spain are connected to a wide range of family ties and, whenever somebody plans to move to China, the word will be spread in order to find a replacement. If nobody in their circle is interested in taking over their business, they will post an ad on websites intended for Chinese people living in Spain. Hence, every week several businesses-for-sale ads are published on the Xihua website notice boards, stressing, that the reason for the transaction is "return to China" (回国 *huiguo*).

However, selling the business is not always the choice and not all migrants moving back to China break off all their economic activities in Spain. The strategy of delegating the management of the Spanish-based business to relatives who "stay behind" in Spain - following different types of arrangements, such as earning a percentage of the gains, keeping interests, or temporarily transferring the business - is aimed at keeping the option of returning to Spain open, after living in China for a time.

This is the situation of different cases we have analyzed. We have already seen how the owners of the Barcelona Bar in Hecheng have continued to keep their restaurant – a bar called "Tapas China" in Barcelona - since they moved to Qingtian in 2010. Although they spend most of the time in China they do not want to relinquish the opportunity of settling again in Barcelona in the next few years.

This was also the case of the nuclear families that settled in Hangzhou. Babala and Tuane sold their bar in Las Rozas before moving to China but they have kept a clothes shop, managed nowadays by a younger cousin who migrated to Spain a few years ago and did not have her own business when the couple moved to China. Likewise, Li did not want to sell the Wok restaurant in the Olympic Port of Barcelona, which she is still running in cooperation with her uncle.

Apart from the logic of distributing the family income across different settings to take advantage of or avoid the structural circumstances of each context, keeping economic activities in Spain is also a way of not losing track of or abandoning their professional links or involvement in the place where they have lived for many years. This is made especially clear in Li's case.

I have many doubts about my next step... Look, do you know why I have doubts about the restaurant in Barcelona? Ah... the situation is very difficult now, right? There is an acute crisis in Spain and we are feeling it; there is a decline in business and that's for sure, every month declining. If the situation carries on then the restaurant will soon lose profit and I will have to start thinking about selling it but I don't want to do that. You know, Barcelona is also my home, I have my house there,

¹⁹⁵ We have to keep in mind that Chinese business activities are organized around wide kinship networks. While it is common for each nuclear family to own its own small or medium-sized business, cooperative entrepreneurial activities also exist between members of the extended family.

and I don't know if I want to stay here.... It's difficult. In a way, having the restaurant there makes me feel that I can go back when I feel like it and live there again. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, summer 2011).

The tendency to keep the house in Spain while returning to China, expressed in Li's interview, is common among people with enough socio-economic capacity. Again, the same logic expressed above is reproduced here. As renting their properties is a source of income, and given that nowadays is not the best time to sell property in Spain, this transnational practice is also a way of keeping a house in a place that has also become home. And this is especially relevant when kinship ties are involved. While some people rent their apartments in Spain, others, like Li, keep them empty to be used when they travel back on business or to spend holidays with the family.

7.5.2 Transnational reproductive sphere: Multiple socialization backgrounds and kinship ties as triggering transnational mobility of returnees.

Apart from these economic links the relevance of transnational practices upon return are related to two more phenomena. First, given that almost all the family members and friends are in Spain, migrants feel that Spain is also their "home" as they have established roots and are highly familiarized with the social context where they have lived at least half their lives. And secondly, they also want to give their children the opportunity to maintain links with Spain, the place where these special "third generations" were born and partly raised.

This situation leads most people who have moved to China to continue living a largely transnational life by means of transnational practices of a different nature.

Ley and Kobayasi (2005), as well as Cassarino (2004), have argued that transnational links are especially relevant and intense when the return involves physical distance from friends and relatives that remain in the "host society". Young migrants returning to China attracted by new business and professional opportunities are indeed living physically separated from their closest relatives - parents, siblings, etc. - and friends, who remain for the most part in Spain. Nevertheless, they maintain regular, daily contact with them via videoconferencing and online chat rooms.

- **Visiting Spain from China:**

Beyond daily virtual connections, regular return visits to Spain play a central role in the lives of Chinese migrants who have moved from Spain to China. They can travel back to Spain from one to four times a year depending on their current life circumstances, their business needs, and their free time.

Several reasons for visiting Spain have been revealed in the fieldwork, ranging from visits to do business or sort out business issues, to spend holidays and to visit relatives and friends.

Like return visits from Spain to China, the main trigger factor for return visits from China to Spain is also to visit relatives. Therefore, when people move to China and their closest relatives (parents and siblings) remain in Spain, visits play an increasingly regular and central role in the migrant's life.

The motivations, aims and timing of visits from China to Spain reproduce the same pattern of return visits made by migrants from Spain to their hometown. Thus, the bidirectional flows of transnational visits between Spain and China are condensed during summer holidays. In the following extract from Babala's interview, the negotiation between double visits is expressed.

Last year, my brothers, my sister, my mother came to China, and my two best friends. They are Spanish and wanted to travel to China. We stayed in my mother's house in Qingtian and also traveled a bit. But this year I told them not to come back, now it's my turn! I cannot wait to be back, to see my friends. We're already planning a thousand things to do. And to see how my daughter practices the Spanish I'm teaching her! (Interview with Babala, Hangzhou, April 2012).

The above extract also illustrates the role of children, who were born in Spain and are now incorporated in a Chinese socialization context, and are part of their parents' motivation for return visits to Spain. While second-generation Chinese migrants in Spain learn Chinese and travel back to Qingtian during summer vacation, the children of young and middle-aged people who have moved to China are also travelling back to Spain with their parents who want them to maintain their multiple skills and identities based on the same mix of practical and symbolical reasons we have already discussed¹⁹⁶.

The trips to Spain to visit relatives are not confined to holiday periods. Chain migration has led some families to have more relatives in Spain than in China, so weddings and other kinship-related rituals tend to be held in Spain rather than in China. Therefore, young people who settle in China also travel back to take part in relatives' and friends' weddings as well as in other social events and celebrations held in Spain.

Moreover, these strong links with Spain manifest themselves most clearly in the reproductive domain when migrants that have moved to China after many years living in Spain and leaving behind relatives – especially in the case of 1.5 and second-generation migrants - choose to go back to Spain to give birth, as we have seen in the examples of Babala and Valeria presented above. In the first place, Spain is where they have family support and the help needed after childbirth. Moreover, they are not familiarized with Chinese hospitals and have greater confidence in the Spanish healthcare system, at least during the first years upon return.

After returning to Qingtian, migrants' lives are again shaped by transnational ties mostly addressed at maintaining contact with their relatives in Spain and, in some cases, at controlling the business they keep in Spain. Thus, migrants do not want to lose their European residence permit so they can visit their relatives whenever they need to and keep a door open for a future movement back to Spain or to other countries. Hence, regular visits from China to Spain are also motivated by practical

reasons linked to the official status of citizenship, and the power of borders in the possibility of undertaking a life of mobility. First-generation migrants that have kept their Chinese nationality during their long stay in Spain do not want to relinquish their permanent residence permit when they move back to live in China.

In most cases, permits have to be renewed every five years. However, new regulations and stronger controls force migrants to have to travel often to Spain in order to avoid problems in the next renewal of their residence permit¹⁹⁷. Thus, the formalization of the entry/exit stamps in passports is also a relevant reason for regular trips between China and Spain. The fieldwork has shown how the desire to keep the permanent residence permit is not only to continue visits to their family members in Spain, but the intention of returning to Spain in the future is also important.

7.5.3 Flexible citizenship and political constraints of mobility and multiple belongings.

We might say that these practices can be described using the concept of flexible citizenship proposed by Aihwa Ong (1999) by which migrants try their best to adapt to different political and economical circumstances to maintain their mobility. And these strategies, portrayed by the will to maintain European residence permits while living in China, are best expressed in the circumstances that have led Li to start the procedures to change her nationality from Chinese to Spanish since she has returned to China.

After returning to China and opening the La Pedrera restaurant, Li began the bureaucratic process to apply for Spanish nationality. In the extract of the interview quoted below the pragmatic motivations for applying for Spanish citizenship are associated with the will to keep her mobile life and the desire to return to Spain in the future.

I never thought of applying for Spanish nationality before. When I was in Barcelona I did not care about it because I felt integrated, I had a permanent residence permit, I felt like I was another member of society no matter what nationality I held. But now with so much time outside Spain, I'm afraid I can have trouble renewing my residence permit and I want to return, that's for sure, I still don't know when, but yes, that's my idea. So to avoid these problems, I am applying for Spanish nationality. And then well... if I get Spanish nationality, I can bring my husband to Spain. My children have permanent residence permits too and I'll do the same with them. As a citizen of the European Community, I will be able to bring my family. (Interview with Li, Hangzhou, summer 2011).

Although Li never encountered any drawbacks to being a Chinese citizen while living in Barcelona, since she has moved back to China she has started to apply for Spanish nationality to be able to maintain her mobility and eventually return to

¹⁹⁷ According to several changing regulations, if migrants stay outside Spain for an extended period of time they might have problems for the next renewal of their residence permit.

Spain. She does not know when will she put an end to her mooring in China and move back to Spain again, but it is true that her socio-cultural negotiations in China are deepening, allowing her adaptation as much as in the other cases we have analyzed.

However, she maintains that if she does not return soon, she will do so after retirement and, thus, we meet again the return – retirement binomial, presented at the beginning of this chapter as the traditional representation of return migration¹⁹⁸. However, in this case the return after retirement is targeted at the place where she once migrated and the city where she has lived most of her life, but not to the land where she was born, raised and where her “ancestral” roots are. Accordingly, the Chinese language has another saying to express the relationship between home and roots, which is very suitable to represent the mobility trajectories of the Qingtianese: “roots grow where they (leaves) land” (落地生根 *luodi shenggen*)¹⁹⁹. I learned this saying in the first months of fieldwork and its meaning has become increasingly clear to me as I learned about migrants’ trajectories, dilemmas, future prospects and double – or multiple – feelings of belongings. In the end, they use this saying to express how they have built and constructed another home – without losing the one in Qingtian - in the places where they have migrated, where their families reside and their children are growing up. With time people put down roots in different societies, making different localities their homes, and thereby opening up the possibility of returning to different places.

The relevance of transnational ties presented in this section and the importance of visits to Spain in the lives of people who have moved to China reveal how this return is far from being conceived as a final movement. The return mobility patterns presented here do not necessarily imply a permanent relocation and are not restricted to a single movement towards only one place. The possibility of these multiple directional movements tells us about the multiple memberships, belongings and identities of those who emigrated, returned, and are thinking of returning to their other home in the future.

¹⁹⁸ see page 257

¹⁹⁹ The saying *luodishenggen* has been translated in many different ways into English and was first officially introduced in the Chinese migration context in a relevant Conference on Overseas Chinese held in 1992 in the University of California and entitled “Luodishenggen: Falling to the ground and sprouting roots” (Berkeley,). The first references of these metaphor in the migration studies came from the hand of Wang (Wang 1998, 1991) However, it is important to notice that while this saying has sometimes been used to express certain kinds of assimilation projects - especially in the United States - I am not using it in that sense but I interpret it as a way of expressing one of the outcomes of mobility that implies the dual (or even multiple) senses of home of the people I have spoken to.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

This study has shown that transnational social practices have changed in meaning, intensity, direction and dimension in the last few years and that new modes of mobility are arising within the China – Spain scope. Besides, the research revealed how nowadays transnational connections and mobilities are involved in a complex set of factors related to structural changes, generation continuum, class and different nature of mobility.

Indeed new structural shifts on a global scale (rising Chinese economy and economic crisis in Europe, especially in Spain), changing conditions of Chinese migrants in Spain (the emergence of a second generation, the growing insertion of Chinese people into Spanish society, and localized feelings of belonging), as well as the transformation of Chinese and Qingtianese society, have all brought about changes in the transnational links between Qingtian and Spain and have led to an increasing diversity of its physical manifestation by means of diverse forms of migration and return practices.

Whether we are referring to migrants or to their descendants, nowadays movements from Spain to China featured by Chinese people cannot be explained as a return in its traditional sense. These practices not only involve a physical but also a social mobility and are aimed to keep on “moving on”. Similarly, the physical mobility patterns from Qingtian to Spain are changing and are increasingly oriented towards new realities that imply the encounter between tourism, international education and migration. The ethnographic-based model of analysis that I have used throughout the dissertation has shown how these bidirectional physical movements between China and Spain are interrelated with other mediated transnational practices that do not need physical displacement.

On the one side, the analytical model has disclosed the relevance, in the nowadays transnationalism, of the different degrees of embodiment – virtual, object-mediated and physical movement of bodies - that can be undertaken separately or at the same time. On the other side, the model has also underscored the truly bidirectional transnational practices by analyzing the outcomes of each one of the ways to perform mobility in the everyday life of people related with migration in different ways: Qingtianese who didn't migrate and stayed behind China, for those who migrated and remain living in Spain, for the ones that are “flying back and forth” (*feilai feiqu*), and for those who have moved to live in China again after residing in Spain or other countries for long years. Therefore, this analytical model has demonstrated the agency of different social actors involved in transnational mobility even if they experience migration and movement in very different ways.

8.1 The agency of non-migrants in transnational practices and the emergence of new mobilities from Qingtian to Spain.

The transformation of transnational links between Qingtian and Spain have brought about an adaptation of local economic activities originated and related to the migration practices, as we have seen with the examples of the language schools, and the transformation of catering business in Qingtian related with “Europeans” or “Western” imaginations and realities. In a place like Qingtian, where almost everyone has connections in Europe, and where more than half of the population is engaged in international migration, the impact of transnational flows of resources is visible in all the corners of the region.

We have seen how migration has become an identity marker for local Qingtianese who stayed behind. The analysis of banners, posters and slogans as well as the people’s discourses has shown how local Qingtianese people - from the grass-root level to the institutional domain – have incorporated migration and the “European atmosphere” as the main factor of their identity. Migration is thus used as a way to produce otherness and is stressed as the main element to differentiate Qingtian from the other localities in the vicinity.

This cosmopolitan identity is visually incorporated as a marker to delimitate the symbolical borders that circumscribe Qingtian; an area where the European taste is localized. The outcomes of these symbolical and visually framed borders are materialized in the banners and the conspicuous ornamentation of the place, and reminds us to the ethnographic vignette of the two women in the train that I presented to introduce the reader to Qingtian. The versatility of uses of internationality as a local marker in Qingtian implies the encounter between mobility and enclosure, or the local and the global.

This element that is present in the public and collective spaces is also reproduced in the individual and family domain that is especially conspicuous in the social practices related to consume and leisure. As we have seen the circulation of objects from Spain to China, as well as the incorporation of esthetic and architectural motifs are key tropes in the materialization and representation of migration-related identity.

However, beyond the visually materialized impact of transnational connections this research has shown how Qingtianese who stayed behind are playing a relevant role in the lives of their relatives and friends living abroad. The study case of the transnational divination ritual addressed to solve daily problems of Qingtianese migrants in their countries of residency - which are mostly related to entrepreneurial activities - not only demonstrates the relevance of bidirectional flows of information but also the active role of the person who is mediating in the ritual towards the life of the migrants asking the question to the god. Moreover, the frequent "virtual visits" are also central in the agency of non-migrants to their relatives living in Spain.

The transformation of transnational links in its nature, orientation and aims has brought relevant changes in Qingtian society implying transformation of the migration culture or habitus and the directions and the objectives of migration flows. As we have seen due to the changes of the transnational practices the image of migrants and migration is changing in contemporary Qingtian. The pervading motivations to migrate to Europe - that shaped Qingtianese society from 1980s to the end of 2000's - is nowadays in stagnation and, in its place, new physical movements towards Spain are emerging.

Qingtianese people are still willing to "leave the country" and "go abroad" (出国) but just for a short time and for travel. Mobility towards Spain is involving a shift from economic migration intentions to the sphere of leisure and travelling among middle-class families; a new mobility that is intimately related to transnational kinship and the previous migration flows. Following the virtual diaries in Weixin "social walls" of Qingtianese non-migrants travelling throughout different countries where they visit relatives and friends, we can see how, similarly than in the beginning of migration flows, the meaningful space for this new physical mobilities is Europe as a whole rather than concrete countries or localities.

Besides that, whereas parents are still willing to send their children abroad as it happened two decades ago, the objectives have changed and study is their main target of this migration. Therefore, we can conclude that in these emerging new movements towards Spain - encompassing the relationship between migration, tourism and international study - there is a relevant convergence between physical and social mobility.

8.2 Heterogeneity of mobilities and transnational practices towards China.

The examination of transnational practices and international mobility between China and Spain has revealed a high heterogenic nature of Chinese people in Spain and a wide diversity - in the extent, modes and aims - of their transnational practices, links and mobility patterns towards China. Throughout the dissertation we have seen how Qingtianese migrants' involvement with the transnational practices by means of virtual, object-mediated and physical transnational practices are differently shaped according to migrants' generation and class.

This study has revealed the importance of generational shift in the research of transnational practices and mobilities. This element is central for the study of continuities and changes in both extremes of the transnational practices. Whereas locally raised young Qingtianese do not have the same perception, aims, and wills towards Europe in comparison to their parents and grandparents, the same happens within migrants' descendants locally raised in Spain.

Apart from the differences related to the generational gap, a continuum exists and migrants' descendants' realities cannot be understood as a completely separate phenomenon.

This study has demonstrated that the high heterogeneity of migrants' descendants experiences of mobility throughout their diverse socialization process – from which the denomination of 1.5 and second-generation arose – plays a central role in shaping the different modes, extents, and aims of their transitional connections and physical mobility towards China. In fact, the analysis of migrants' descendants' heterogeneity of trajectories bring me to conclude that this group includes a highly diverse senses of identities that are strongly related to socialization processes and backgrounds, rather than to ethnic characteristics leading to an essentialization conception of cultures and individuals.

This study also has demonstrate that different nature and degrees of transnational practices – across class and generation – are triggered up mainly by productive and reproductive spheres and are aimed to shorten physical distance among relatives located in distant geographical localities, as well as to improve people's life conditions and to achieve an upward social mobility. Thus, not all the Chinese people in Spain or other European countries undertake regular transnational practices but this situation is mainly related to the migrants that still have strong effective and kinship-based connections in China.

Whereas the transnationalization of the family structure throughout the localization of different phases and/or element of the productive and reproductive spheres are a common feature among Chinese in Spain, it is also true to say that chain migration has brought also the migration and densification, in one or more countries, of whole families and lineages. In these cases the transnational connections and links with China are much less relevant.

Nevertheless, for those people living in Spain while maintaining a strong relation with China and Qingtian throughout kinship ties (either ascendants or descendants) or for economic business, as well as for those who are less involved in transnational practices, migration implies a socio-cultural negotiation process highly situated that imply the emergences of multiple identities and sense of belongings. Chinese emphasize identities and use of multiple socio-cultural remittances, according to the places where they are localized. People living within a scheme of physical mobility are involved in a continuous process of socio-cultural negotiation framed by their relationship with social actors with different experiences of mobility.

This study has demonstrated that the socio-cultural process of negotiation and the multiple identities emerge especially during migrants' visits to Qingtian. Thus, even

if nowadays liquidity and virtuality stand as new tools and spaces of social interactions – and they have indeed changed the contemporary mobile life that frames the daily landscapes of thousand of people -, this research have revealed the relevance of physically *being there*, wherever this *there* might be Spain, China or other localities involved in transnational mobility.

“Virtual visits” are crucial in nowadays transnationalism but, regardless how well connected migrants might from be the distance, “being there matters”. The fact of *being there* and interacting *in-person* with the different localities and people that conforms the mobility life is relevant. It is throughout the physical presence of migrants back to China - or the physical presence of non-migrants in the localities where their relatives life abroad - that the ideological and representative values of migration, identity and return are questioned. In relation to migrants’ identities, the interplay between *homes* (as places of belonging) and *houses* (as material containers of symbolical and pragmatic values) underscore the emergence of multiple identities and evidence how transnational involvement with the society of origin does not imply a weak attachment and sense of belonging in the place and society of residency.

Reflecting about the relationship between migrants and the localities that integrated their itineraries Jacobs underlines the relevance of material houses as a way to map migrants’ paths:

“Migration involves a complex system of inhabitations that incorporate architectures as various as the ancestral home, the departure lounge, the vehicle of passage, the temporary shelter and the new house. As such, architecture is always being called upon to structure the spatiality of a mobile world” (Jacobs 2004:167).

This research has shown that migrants’ mobilities cannot be grasped in the linear perspective underlined by Jacobs, and how these architectures – from the buildings with a use value to the symbolical representation of belonging by means of houses or large candles - play a key role simultaneously, covering the different layers and localizations of home for mobile citizens or migrants. As one of the informants expressed when considering her return: “Qingtian is my first hometown, but after such a long time Spain is my second hometown.” The circular housing process is a manifestation of migrants’ circular itineraries that does not stop upon return.

8.3 Return Mobilities patterns: Why moving on by going back?

The discussion between Chinese local researches in a conference I attended in Wenzhou²⁰⁰ illustrates the weakness of traditional concepts and tools to grasp the

²⁰⁰ 3rd Wenzhou Diaspora and 5th Chinese in Prato Symposium, 17- 18 October 2012, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou. China.

strategies, flexibility and mobile life of Chinese people engaged in international migration. In the discussion about *qiaoxiang* areas, a debate started about the variables to identify who are the "returnee" using the traditional concept of *guiguo huaqiao* which is intimately related with the notion of return as a permanent and settled movement. "Are they the one's that are going back and forth? Might be the individuals who opened business in China but still travel to their country of migration might be considered returnee? What about the one's that have changed their nationality but they reside in China?". These were some of the main questions that researchers addressed and argued. Finally, they seem to agree that only those who have "permanently" settled down in China again, meaning that they have let their foreign country resident permit to expire, could be considered returnee.

Clearly, as we have seen throughout the research, this official criterion is not fitting the research agenda and the empirical reality we have in front of us anymore. If it were like this there would not be that much "returnee" in Qingtian as most of those migrants going back to China keep the official permits that will allow them to go on potential further movement. Moreover, if we identify the place where migrants are located and residing according to their official status, the shops, streets and houses in Qingtian will be for sure emptier given that a substantial number of people in Qingtian hold European foreign residences permits even if they have just been there for short periods of time.

This study as shown how migrants strongly display their transnationalism in terms of embodied mobility and here is where return migration practices emerge as the most physical and embodied transnational practices within a range of different nature mobilities. We have seen how physical mobility patterns of Chinese people from Spain to China embrace different reasons, modes and timing, and deal with people from different generations and in different stages of life (young, middle-aged and retired, as well as first generation migrants and their descendants).

It seems clear that for migrants' descendants moving to China is more a migration movement than a return experience and that their trajectories are open to further changes. However, the latter is also true for first-generation migrants. Although, spatially speaking, migrants are going back to a country that they know and where they have previously lived, socially speaking, they are continuing to change and move forward in productive activities, social and personal conditions and daily realities. Most of the interviewees and people I have met and talked to who have made the move towards China after living in Spain for several years, do it as a way to move forward rather than as a step back, or to close a trajectory. Across all the typologies and modes of physical mobility from Spain to China that we have analyzed, two common elements arose: present-day return migration is intertwined with other transnational practices and it involves a way to *move on by going back*

That is to say that nowadays return migration practices, diverse as they might be, do not refer to a final movement after "temporary mobility" but involve ongoing moves that can produce different forms of dwelling of varying duration of time in the place

of origin. Even though the return may be perpetuated over time, return is not merely a *move back* and a conclusion of mobility. And because it is a practice through which bodies move towards the place where they came from, it is related to and integrated in the notion and term of "return", but, as we have seen, not necessarily as the only possible return movement.

Four main elements explain why present-day return mobility patterns involve a *move on* rather than a simple movement of *being back*.

First, migrants move back to China to continue with their life project due to different professional, emotional or family-related issues. Here, movement is something more than a space-based phenomenon, but involves a social transformation. These different movements towards China are part of a pragmatic choice that might involve a movement back to China or a re-migration and settlement in another country. Moreover, reverse flows are not only limited to Qingtian, but also expand and embrace different localities where migrants have never lived before. As we have seen throughout these processes and modes, physical and social mobility conflate.

Secondly, although "returnees" are regularly located in China, their transnational practices do not cease but they continue to have a highly mobile life through invisible, object-mediated and embodied transnational practices with the places they have lived in before. As much as in the first generation migrants in Spain, when families returning to China with Spanish locally raise children those transnational practices are stressed. And this factor leads to the third.

Returning to China does not mean going back to one's only home, and there is not only one possible return. Moving one's functional house, one's everyday physically localized activities, and face-to-face (non-virtual) relationships to China also implies physically moving away from other places, localities and communities that also encompass their identity and sense of home.

And finally I argue that return is a way of *moving on* because the concatenated sequences of movements and dwellings can continue, and this motion – the return to China - is not always the last physical movement of one's migration trajectory. After going back to China, even those "returnees" that have a more settled return, might continue to move on by returning to Spain or moving to another place. Nevertheless, even if they do not physically move again to live in another place and they stay in China, they continue their life of mobility through the diverse nature of transnational practices that link them with the places they have lived in before.

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