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Simeng Wang

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Chinese Migration to and within Europe: Continuity and Renewal in the Light of Demographic Factors and the Impact of Covid-19

An Introduction to the Special Issue

欧洲华人移民的延续与革新:人口效应和新冠 疫情的影响

特刊简述

Simeng Wang (王思萌)¹ | ORCID: 0000-0001-9708-8851

The French National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris, France

simeng.wang@cnrs.fr

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Abstract

Under the changing demographic effects of Chinese migratory waves in Europe and in the global context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese migratory patterns to Europe as well as the lives of migrants and their descendants in European countries have been renewed since the 2010s, both in material and symbolic or emotional ways. This special issue includes five articles shedding new light on the patterns of Chinese migration to Europe, and on the dynamics of their everyday lives in and beyond the European countries. As the special issue editor, I first argue that Chinese overseas, as an important part of global China, offer a privileged site of study for understanding Chinese society from inside and outside. Then, based on the literature review on Chinese migration to and within Europe from the 1980s to post-2020, I introduce specificities of contemporary

¹ Ph. D in Sociology, Permanent Research Fellow at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, affiliated to the CERMES3; fellow at the French Convergences Migrations; Coordinator of the multidisciplinary research network *Migration from East and Southeast Asia in France* (MAF).

Chinese migration to Europe and the Chinese presence in European countries, and highlight four main demographic features: the growth in the population of descendants, the aging of the first-generation migrants, the massive arrival of students and skilled migrants, and the feminization of migration. Thirdly, I provide an overview of the five articles included in this special issue. Finally, I conclude the introduction by underlying the contributions of this volume, the theoretical frameworks that they borrow and consolidate, and new avenues for research opened up by this special issue.

Keywords

Chinese migration to/in Europe – demographic factors – the Covid-19 pandemic – migrants and descendants – theoretical frameworks – new avenues for research

摘要

2010年代以来，在人口效应和新冠疫情的影响下，中国人移民欧洲的模式以及欧洲华人及其后裔的生活在物质层面和象征或情感层面都得到了更新。本特刊精选五篇论文，对中国人移民欧洲的模式以及他们的日常生活动态进行了新的阐释。作为特刊主编，我首先指出海外华人作为全球中国的重要组成部分，为我们从内部和外部分析中国社会提供了得天独厚的研究场所。其次，基于从20世纪80年代至2020年代研究欧洲华人移民的文献回顾，我介绍了当代中国赴欧移民的模式及其在欧洲国家的生存发展特征，并强调了四个主要的人口特征：华裔后代的成长、第一代移民的老龄化、学生移民和技术移民的大量增加、以及移民的女性化。然后，我概述了特刊收录的五篇文章。最后，我讨论了特刊的贡献，它所借鉴和巩固的理论框架，以及本刊为未来研究开辟的新途径。

关键词

欧洲华人移民 – 人口效应 – 新冠疫情 – 移民与后裔 – 理论框架 – 未来研究新途径

1 Introduction: Chinese Overseas as a Privileged Site of Study for Understanding China from Inside and Outside

Daniel was born in France to two Chinese parents from Zhejiang province who immigrated to Paris in the 1980s, after the opening-up of China. His parents succeeded in running a restaurant, after more than ten years working as

employees, initially as undocumented migrants, before obtaining legal status. In the early 2010s, Daniel was studying for a master's degree in international marketing at a university in Paris. During an interview,² Daniel blamed his parents for cutting off the transmission channels of Chinese language and culture; and expressed his incomprehension at the reason why his parents left China, while for young people of his generation, China is one of the professional dream destinations. Daniel's parents, on the other hand, in a separate interview, see emigration as the only way out of poverty in China. Their migration was indeed marked by sacrifice, suffering and sorrow. Meanwhile, they felt that their migration story was too ordinary to be told to Daniel, and not even worth telling.

Thirty years have passed between the generation of Daniel's parents and his own. In these decades, China's rise has occurred firstly on the economic front, for the country is at the center of international trade and globalization; and progressively China has also positioned itself as an importer of norms, values, and knowledge. As Wang Yiwei (王义桅) notes, due to its economic rise at the beginning of the twenty-first century, China is undergoing the "stage of a transition from a simple 'made in China' brand to a 'created in China' concept" (Wang 2008: 271). The socio-historical and economic-geopolitical transformations at the macro-social level have undoubtedly had an impact on the individual lives of overseas Chinese: there are important discrepancies in the imaginary and understanding of China between generations. Young people like Daniel do not understand why their parents wanted to leave China, in miserable, even undocumented travel conditions, living in precariousness in France for years, to finally reach a social position as members of the small middle class, with economic resources certainly, but without legitimate cultural capital, according to the dominant norms of French society. Meanwhile, Daniel's French peers are learning Chinese and aspiring to professional opportunities in China in the 2000s. Daniel feels confused about his origin and is concerned about the identity-searching. Moreover, in his own country, France, Daniel is racialized daily as "Chinese" because of his physical appearance, even though he doesn't speak Chinese well and knows little about China. Daniel suffers from everyday racialization and social stigma due to his ethno-racial labelling in French society, but also as a result of the incomprehension of inter-generational (non-)transmissions in his family.

Regardless of the destination country, the phenomenon of Chinese overseas reflects on the history of China as well as the specific contexts of the receiving country (Wang 2006). The most intimate and emotional individual

² Carried out in the context of an ethnographic survey (see Wang 2021).

lives of Chinese overseas are connected to, and traversed by, contemporary Chinese history and the macro-social contexts of emigration and immigration (Sayad 1977). The case of Daniel and his family illustrates the extent to which Chinese overseas are indicators of China's global rise. And various research questions highlighted by this case have been explored by scholars (see below) over the past two decades: intergenerational transmission and parenting; identity formation of descendants, social mobility in migration, racialization and stereotyping. Indeed, Chinese overseas reflect on China's image within geopolitical stakes. The everyday lives of Chinese overseas are never dissociated from the imaginary and social representations of their country of origin. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the preexisting Sinophobia and China-bashing. As Covid-19 was first detected in Wuhan, people perceived as "Chinese" (and more broadly "Asian") were associated with the virus and consequently suffered from discrimination and racism.

More than indicators of China's global rise and reflectors of China's image in global settings, Chinese overseas are also actors in the implementation of the China's foreign policy. Beyond its image as factory of the world, China is trying to become a new exporter of norms and values at the international level. This ambition is particularly evident in its relations with developed countries, which until now have held a dominant position in the cultural and scientific fields. Even before Covid-19, Chinese medicine was emerging as a diplomatic instrument of influence, for the international recognition of Chinese knowledge and the promotion of State interests. Depending on the country of destination, there are different ways in which Chinese medicine is promoted by the Chinese government. In African countries, the export of Chinese medical standards and practices has been supported by the growing presence of Chinese medical experts, a phenomenon that dates back to the sending of the first Chinese medical teams in 1963 (A. Li 2009). Closely linked to China's development aid policy, the export of Chinese medicine to Africa mobilizes the full range of public policy instruments (including diasporic policies) and aims to reorganize African health systems, which are considered to be in a permanent state of crisis (Hsu 2008; Kernén 2007). While in European countries, the value of Chinese medicine is defended as an alternative and complementary practice (Zhan 2009), a holistic medicine that opens up to less technical forms of listening and intervention in order to respond to the criticism of biomedicine and the crisis of clinical expertise. To this end, the Chinese state has placed a new emphasis on the role of the Chinese diaspora, especially health workers of Chinese origin, Chinese traders and various associations active in the cultural, educational, and economic sectors in developed countries (Wang 2019a). Indeed, the relationship between Chinese overseas and the Chinese state

evolves over time (Thunø 2017). It shows how individuals from different social backgrounds are reassessing their relationships with China and renewing the ways in which they navigate between their country of origin and the country where they live.

To summarize the main idea of this introduction, Chinese overseas are the interface between inside and outside China. Studying international migration from China is a heuristic way to study the profound changes taking place within China, but also the roles and places that China occupies in the international arena and the exchanges that China maintains with other countries. As an important part of global China, the Chinese in diaspora and overseas offer a privileged site of study for understanding Chinese society from inside and outside.

Despite the similarities between Chinese overseas settled in Europe and those elsewhere, contemporary Chinese migration to Europe and their presence in European countries represent some specificities. Their history is shorter than that of migrants to Southeast Asia and America (Chang 2019; Lockard 2013). In the European continent, the demographic effects of Chinese migration have led to the emergence, later than in North America, of new social practices – economic, cultural and political – a large part of which are being taken up by young generations. At the same time, the BRI (“Belt and Road Initiative”) launched by Xi Jinping has significantly changed the geopolitical stakes between China and Europe by approaching the latter through “various large-scale infrastructure projects” (Thunø and Li 2020).

2 Chinese Migration to and within Europe from the 1980s to Post-2020: Between Continuity and Renewal

Since the Reform and Opening-up of the PRC, there has been a continuous evolution of migratory flows, motivations, destinations and patterns from China to the European continent. Benton (2011) points out that since the 1980s there have been four main trends in the changes of the Chinese presence in Europe: new Chinese migration to Russia and Eastern Europe; new Chinese migration to Southern Europe; human trafficking; the experience of Europeans of Chinese descent. Later in the 1990s, the first edited volume dedicated to the Chinese in Europe was published under the co-editorship of Benton and Pieke (1998). It includes pioneering research on the Chinese in Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain. The country studies address valuable cross-cutting issues such as identity formation, integration, migratory networks and migration patterns.

After 2001, global capitalism and globalization entered a new era, marked by the PRC's entry into the WTO (World Trade Organization). The Chinese migratory flows to Europe intensified, with the boom in the import-export economic sector. In 2003, a special issue of *International Migration*, edited by Laczko (2003), renewed the understanding of migration between China and Europe: besides insightful country-based analysis carried out in France, Germany, Spain, Denmark, and five Eastern European countries, the perspective of the sending country – emigration from China – was also included. In the early 2000s, the transnational perspective emerged as a privileged theoretical paradigm in the study of Chinese migrants in Europe. The edited volume by Pieke, Nyíri, Thunø and Ceccagno (2004) focused on Fujianese in Europe and their transnational networks and activities. Through ethnographic work carried out in and about transnational social space, the book suggests “analyzing Chinese migratory flows in terms of migration systems and migration configurations” (Pieke, Nyíri, Thunø and Ceccagno 2004: 20). In the same vein, by paying attention to Chinese migrants' global networks and ramified connections with countries of residence, Thunø (2007) argued Chinese migration studies should be “no longer confined to closed enclaves such as Chinatowns or secluded mines and plantations” (Thunø 2007:23). The edited volume in French by Roulleau-Berger (2008) provided empirical case studies in Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, Italy, Spain and France, shedding light on Chinese migration and work in Europe in the early 2000s.

The 2008 Beijing Olympic opened avenues for foreign investment in China and changed China's international image. China's global rise has slowed the migration of unskilled Chinese workers to Europe, who were mostly rural residents from Zhejiang and Fujian provinces attracted by economic opportunities within ethnic niches or enclaves such as catering, trade and manufacturing in Europe (Beltrán Antolín 2005; Ceccagno 2017; Cologna 2005; Ma Mung 1992). Meanwhile, migration from China to Europe has diversified in terms of education levels, social class backgrounds, and the geographic origins of Chinese migrants. More and more students, highly skilled migrants and investors belonging to the Chinese urban middle and upper classes, have chosen to migrate to Europe, for higher education and social purposes (Kardaszewicz 2019; Lan 2019; Leung 2017) but also for lifestyle reasons (Beck and Nyíri 2022). All these changes in the Chinese presence (Latham and Wu 2013; M. Li 2019) have led to urban transformation in European cities (Hatziprokopiou and Montagna 2012). In the decade 2010–2020, three collective publications shed new light on these renewed dynamics and patterns of Chinese migration to Europe. Baldassar, Johanson, McAuliffe and Bressan (2015) examine the phenomenon mainly through the case of Prato and other Italian cities, but also through studies in

France and the UK. In 2020, a special issue co-edited by Thunø and Li provided an interesting analysis of new Chinese diasporic formations in Europe through demographic, socio-economic and political changes of increasingly circular and transitory Chinese migration to Europe. In the book co-edited by Liu and Wang (2020), which covered Germany, France, the UK and Russia, most of the authors are or have themselves been Chinese migrants in Europe. Their migratory experiences offer, in an original way, both insider and outsider perspective on Chinese diaspora studies.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on the orientation of recent work in migration studies and more generally on the study of the transnational circulation of populations, goods and ideas. In many European countries, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the everyday practices of Chinese overseas by stopping mass-scale international travel and shaping transnational mobilities between China and Europe (Wang 2023). For example, Chinese people in Europe have maintained links with China in other ways, mainly through social media and digital technology and acts of transnational solidarity (care circuits, collecting and sending medical equipment, etc.) (Leung 2022). And Chinese entrepreneurs in different sectors in France have had to rethink their business models (Wang and Chen 2021). The relationship between individuals and the Chinese state has changed significantly (Ceccagno and Thunø 2022).

Covid-19 also exacerbated pre-existing anti-Asian racism and hostility toward both China and overseas Chinese. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of work on anti-Asian racism had been done in North America, whereas in Europe, few works directly mobilize the notion of “racism” and related theories. Scholars rather inscribe their analysis in other theoretical frameworks such as “ethnic enclave” (Lem 2010), “anti-Chinese sentiments” (Dyatlov 2012), “formation of citizenship” (Lem 2013), and so on. During the Covid-19 pandemic, anti-Asian racism became a global phenomenon around the world, due to the racialization of the disease (Li and Nicholson 2021). Since 2020, many empirical studies on anti-Asian racism have been conducted in Europe: Italy (Krause and Li 2022), Portugal (França, Gaspar and Mathias 2022), Spain (Guo et al. 2020), France (Wang et al. 2021) ... These new expressions of racism activated long-standing stigmas against Chinese people rooted in colonial and postcolonial history (Live 2021). The proliferation of hate acts against Chinese and Asians and the racialization of the disease during the pandemic accelerated awareness of racism among Chinese overseas and led to new collective actions against racism, discrimination and stereotypes (Wang and Madrisotti 2021). In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic played a catalytic role not only in the production of anti-Asian racist acts in Western countries, but also in raising awareness among Chinese overseas, in particular in Europe.

Indeed, a research theme that emerged in the 2010s has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic: citizen identification, racial socialization and politicization of Chinese migrants and their descendants. Interestingly, descendants are much more likely than first-generation migrants to report experiencing racism and discrimination (Wang et al. 2022). The social differentiation in terms of subjective experiences of racism and discrimination (according to the migratory generation and to age in the case of France) has led to different ways of expressing and voicing them. Many skilled migrants have been confronting for the first time during Covid-19 a racism they did not know nor expect. Some express the racism they have experienced or witnessed in a descriptive rather than analytical register. The enunciation of racism is limited to the time of the pandemic. Compared to migrants, descendants demonstrate a greater familiarity with the phenomenon of anti-Asian racism. However, the Covid-19 pandemic made anti-Asian racism more visible and prompted more descendants to react. In Europe, the actions carried out by Chinese people to express the differential treatment they experience are no longer limited to demonstrations in public spaces to denounce insecurity (Tran and Chuang 2020), but include calls for testimonies, recourse to rights and legal instruments, with a high level of digital tool use such as WeChat (Wang 2022a). In France, the central role of WeChat in citizen identity formation and, more broadly, in collective action and mobilization among the Chinese population is evident. On the one hand, WeChat served as a tool of dissimulation and ethnic grouping during the demonstrations organized in 2016 and 2017 and during Covid-19. On the other hand, WeChat offers a social scene for different subgroups of Chinese living in France to perform class belonging and social distinction.

Besides the pandemic and its impact on the renewal of Chinese migration to and within Europe, another influencing factor is the demographic effects, which are characterized by four main features: the growth in the population of descendants, the aging of first-generation migrants, the massive arrival of students and skilled migrants, and the feminization of migration.

2.1 *Grown-Up Descendants*

Compared to other migration waves in Europe (i.e., from former colonies – Africa or South America to European countries, or within Europe, such as from Portugal or Italy to France), Chinese migration waves are a relatively recent phenomenon. However, they have recently become more significant. There are now different generations within the social group of “Chinese people in Europe,” and their grown-up descendants, gathered in associations, are playing an increasingly central and active role in bringing Chinese communities to the forefront of society in European host countries (Gomez and Benton 2015).

This has led to the emergence of creative projects for a better “social representation of Chinese people” implemented by descendants of Chinese origin: for example, trained for transnationalism (Nyíri 2015), they hardly try to change the image of the Chinese business inherited from their parents in Italy (Merchionne and Liu 2016), Spain (Masdeu Torruella 2020) and France, as well as in China (Wang 2019b). Grown up and more mature, descendants have also changed the social construction of Chineseness by drawing on popular culture (Yeh 2014) and raising awareness of the racism and discrimination against Chinese and, more broadly, Asians in Europe. Militant initiatives have increased both offline, such as demonstrations and legal action, and online: social media, blogs, and Internet chat groups (Parker and Song 2007).

In addition, an increasing number of empirical studies focus on intergenerational relations in Chinese families in Europe (Fresnoza-Flot and Wang 2021; Lamas-Abraira 2021; Wu and del Rey Poveda 2022), on the identity formation of Chinese descendants (Beck 2016; Marsden 2015; Raffaetà, Baldassar and Harris 2015; Robles-Llana 2018; Wei 2010) and on the experiences and trajectories of social mobility of children of Chinese origin in Western European societies (Wang 2021).

2.2 *Aging of First-Generation Migrants*

At the same time as their descendants grew up, the first-generation migrants aged. In several European countries (notably France, Spain and Italy), despite differences in the timing of migration, the majority of these first-generation migrants are composed of unskilled economic migrants from Zhejiang and Fujian provinces. The aging of these Chinese migrants who are mostly unskilled and not always able to speak the local language in the host country, challenges policy makers, social workers and researchers to think about the future of social support and care provision for these elderly Chinese (Lamas-Abraira 2019; Lane, Tribe and Hui 2011; S. Liu 2020; Lui 2021; Wang and Schwartz 2016) in synergy with civil society actors (Wang, Schwartz and Lui 2022).

2.3 *Massive Arrival of Students and Skilled Migrants*

Chinese student mobility to Europe has boomed since the early 2000s (Li 2020; Tu and Nehring 2020; Xiang 2016). In France, China is the second sending country of foreign students, after Morocco, and the massive arrival of students and skilled Chinese emigrants marks the fourth wave of Chinese migration to France (Wang, 2020). After graduation, many students decide to stay in Europe, for professional or family reasons. The settlement of skilled migrants is changing the landscape of Chinese people in Europe. Firstly, more

and more skilled Chinese migrants entered the European mainstream labor market. They might work beyond the Chinese ethnic economic niches (such as catering, import-export sectors). Secondly, more and more skilled Chinese migrants are building their family within or beyond the Chinese networks. A series of social practices are being renewed on European soil, such as housing and real estate investment: skilled migrants often rent or buy their houses in neighborhoods other than the so-called Wenzhounese communities or in the classic “Chinatowns”. Another example is healthcare seeking. In France, Chinese skilled migrants have a different relationship from unskilled migrants with French public facilities, as illustrated by skilled Chinese women’s perinatal practices, including *yuesao* hiring (Wang 2022b). We could also mention the case of children’s educational practices and Chinese linguistic and cultural transmission (Guo 2014; Bofulin 2017).

2.4 *Feminization of Chinese Migration*

This point is partly related to other demographic factors discussed earlier. For example, the majority of Chinese students in France are female (Li and Wang 2021); and there are more Chinese women in racially mixed romantic relationships than Chinese men, both among precarious migrants (Lévy and Lieber 2011) and among skilled migrants (Wang 2017a). This feminization of Chinese migration has led to many emerging gendered phenomena in European countries: maternity leave and child delivery among Chinese women (see section above); power relations in mixed couples in Switzerland (Chen 2022) and Spain (Masdeu Torruella and Sáiz López 2017); feminized capitalism, care and emotional work such as *daigou* (Yu 2017; Wang 2017b). Taken together, the above circumstances show the extent to which gender relations, social class, generational effects and ethnic relations operate in an intersectional way as producers of social norms in the context of international migration and participate in the resocialization processes of international migrants.

To sum up, all these recent trends since the 2010s – demographic factors as well as the Covid-19 pandemic – have impacted Chinese migratory patterns to Europe and also the lives of migrants and their descendants, both in material and symbolic or emotional ways. New avenues for research on the Chinese in Europe have opened up emerging phenomena in different aspects of social life in European countries, in the transnational space, and also in China.

Before presenting each contribution to this special issue, I will mention another recent feature of the academic study of Chinese in Europe, more or less similar to that found on other continents: the increasing proportion of scholars of Chinese origin who are themselves first-generation migrants or descendants living in European countries. This specific position of fieldwork

researcher offers an original perspective that combines the insider's point of view (as "affected" by his or her migratory status or family history) and that of the outsider (as a researcher who objectifies his or her relationship to the studied population and key question) points of view. In this special issue, three authors are experiencing their lives as migrants in European countries. And as a mirror effect, it is worth mentioning that several authors of European background have spent long periods in China.

3 The Special Issue at a Glance

Most of the contributions to this special issue were first presented and discussed at the 4th Cerpe (China-Europe Research Platform on Chinese Migration to and Beyond Europe)³ workshop "Chinese migrations in Europe: between continuity and renewal,"⁴ held in Paris in November 2021, and at the webinar "Chinese Migrations in Europe in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic" organized by the MigraChiCovid research project⁵ ("Chinese migration in France facing the Covid-19 pandemic") in June 2021. The five papers cover the nation-based analysis conducted in France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, and provide a new understanding of the recent evolution of Chinese society and European societies over the last decade.

Ponce and Chen's paper focuses on an understudied social group: gay Chinese migrants. By cross-checking the data gathered in two independent ethnographic studies conducted in Belgium and France, the authors analyze the aspirations of these gay Chinese migrants, which include their relationships to traditional family configurations, their imaginaries of Belgium and France, their desire to achieve homosexual and romantic relationship goals, and their search for class, educational, national and ethnic belonging. This cross-national comparative study includes a reflection on the methodological and epistemological reflexivity of ethnographers as part of the field: the authors deliver reflections not only on their Chinese origin (one as a fourth-generation descendant and another as a student migrant) but also on their gay identity.

3 The established research platform aims to promote and foster comparative studies, data collection and incorporate Chinese migration studies into mainstream migration literature (see <https://projects.au.dk/cerpe/>).

4 <https://4th-cerpe-paris.sciencesconf.org/>.

5 <https://www.migrations-asiatiques-en-france.cnrs.fr/projet-migrachicovid/resume-scientifique-du-projet-migrachicovid>.

Gaspar and Mathias's article investigates the role of a non-hegemonic language in the transnational mobility of Chinese students in Portuguese-speaking countries and territories (Portugal, Macao, Angola, and Brazil). Based on 23 in-depth interviews with Chinese students, the authors argue that the perception of Portuguese language learning and practice in Lusophone higher education institutions represents a decisive trigger for the decision to study abroad, and it is considered by the interviewees as a strategy to acquire linguistic capital – in a non-dominant language – in order to build a competitive professional future. The authors call for the inclusion of “language acquisition and proficiency” as a structuring dimension in the analysis of transnational student decision-making regarding mobility.

In dialogue with the previous paper, Astarita's article discusses through the case of Chinese students in France the extent to which and the circumstances under which experience of an international education and regular exposure to an alternative educational, social, and work environment could provide – though not always – students with opportunities to broaden and deepen their views and perceptions of the world, to convert mobility capital into a source of economic opportunities while treading professional paths, and to use the cultural capital gained from the experience of international education to increase their employability in the global labor market. The paper highlights the scientific interest in studying the experiences of international students in non-Anglophone countries; in other words, in the non-hegemonic language-dominated societies such as France and Portugal.

If Covid-19 is present in each of the three articles above, it plays a more central role in the paper co-authored by Lamas-Abraira and Colombo Vilarrasa, which examines the organization and conceptualization of the Chinese New Year Festival (CNYF) in Barcelona during the Covid-19 pandemic (more precisely, the 2021 online edition), as well as how people participated in the festivities. Using a mixed-method approach with qualitative and quantitative data, this paper points out that the transition of CNYF to the status of a virtual event led to changes in its format, content, goals, actors, and scope, as well as in the social meanings and imaginaries of the event. As the scope expanded from local scale to global setting, live webinars with economic objectives (regarding tourism, entrepreneurship, investment, and education) were introduced as core activities in the 2021 CNYF, and various individuals and institutions from China participated. The authors highlight the key role of digital tools – such as WeChat – in the creating and maintaining of migrants' transnational ties. The paper has also shown the participation of Chinese descendants in the festival and their agency.

The last article in this special issue is dedicated to descendants. Santarromana and Wang analyze the political engagement and professionalization of French youth of Chinese origin through a case study of the Association of Young Chinese in France (*Association des Jeunes Chinois de France*, AJCF), which serves as a springboard for political professionalization. Drawing on two qualitative studies conducted with elected officials and association leaders of Chinese origin in the Paris region between 2020 and 2022, the authors argue that the raising awareness of anti-Asian racism – accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic – is a key factor in the political socialization and engagement of French Chinese youth. And the fact of being a leading member of the AJCF allows the individual to build a social network among political actors. Moreover, the acquired political capital is one of the catalysts for being identified and recruited by political authorities at the local level, on the road to developing an electoral career.

4 Conclusion

In the global context renewed by the Covid-19 pandemic and under the changing demographic factors of Chinese migratory waves in Europe, this special issue aims to shed new light on the patterns of Chinese migration to Europe, and on the dynamics of their everyday lives in and beyond the European countries. All articles are based on empirical data collected wholly or partially after 2020. The authors integrate their reflections on the impact of Covid-19 around the key questions they investigate, and, in a few cases, also on the production of research during the pandemic.

Another original contribution made by this special issue, focusing on Europe as a destination and a living continent, is the proposal of an alternative reading of Chinese overseas to that in the Anglophone receiving countries, especially North America. For example, both the article by Gaspar and Mathias and the contribution by Astarita highlight the unique patterns of Chinese student mobility to countries where non-hegemonic languages are spoken. Drawing on the literature on the political participation of ethno-racial minorities in France, as well as on the political careers of Chinese overseas, especially in the US, the article by Santarromana and Wang underlines the specificity of the French context (the republican model of integration and secularism) that leads to the peculiar process of the awareness-raising about anti-Asian racism, and the specific path of political professionalization taken by descendants of Chinese origin in France.

In terms of the theoretical frameworks, the contributions included in this special issue demonstrate the relevance of the following four approaches: first, critical race theory, which allows one to examine Chinese migration phenomena in terms of the racially diverse power relationships and of the political, legal and geopolitical stakes on different scales; second, intersectionality, which should be applied in a broader perspective of race-gender-class, by integrating other social relations such as migratory generation, sexuality, age, and regional origin within China (notably, urban vs. rural area). Third, the need to articulate different analytical scales, at micro, meso and macro levels, or, put differently, the individual, organizational and societal levels; and finally, the importance of studying both the country of origin and the country of residence, as well as the transnational space that connects the two.

As future perspectives, we can only encourage further cross-national comparative studies. As Ponce and Chen's paper illustrates, Belgium and France have different national realities, but gay Chinese migrants living in these two countries share similarities. Moreover, future work on the virtual lives of Chinese overseas and their transnational ties through digital tools is highly anticipated. The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly intensified this digital trend, as shown in the article by Lamas-Abraira and Colombo Vilarrasa. *In fine*, this special issue, which studies only four European countries (France, Belgium, Spain and Portugal), inevitably leaves blind spots in the study of other geographical areas of Europe. The scientific knowledge built up by this special issue must therefore be complemented by other publications covering a wider range of European countries.

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