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Cores-Bilbao, Esther; Camacho-Díaz, Mariló

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Article

Socio-Occupational Integration of Chinese Migrant Women in Andalusia Through Spanish Language Training

Esther Cores-Bilbao ^{1,*} and Mariló Camacho-Díaz ²

¹ Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Isabel I, Spain

² Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad de Huelva, Spain

* Corresponding author (esther.cores@ui1.es)

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Abstract

The present article explores the perceived role of work and proficiency in a second or additional language(s) among a group of Chinese migrant women learning Spanish in Andalusia. The enrolment of Chinese adult learners in language upgrading programmes in immersion contexts is relatively low, as Chinese expatriates tend to establish close-knit, socio-culturally elusive communities whose interactions with local residents are often limited to work-related purposes. The distinctiveness of this ethnographic work lies in its focus on women who, having resided in southern Spain for extended periods and aiming to emancipate themselves from male family referents, have only recently sought greater inclusion in Spanish society. Through in-depth interviews, these women's prospects for professional advancement and self-employment are also identified, albeit subsidiarily, among the reasons for pursuing higher levels of linguistic competence. The results point to a desire to develop higher levels of competence in linguistic, civic, and socio-cultural literacies to expand their social networks and engage more actively in the communities where they currently live. Avoiding vulnerability to potential deception in the workplace and administrative settings, coupled with the need to participate in better-informed decision-making at the personal level, is also highlighted as contributory factors to their willingness to pursue multiliteracies in linguistic, civic, and occupational areas. The conclusions point to a mismatch between the training aspirations of these women and the curricula of the courses available to them within a Chinese educational organisation, whose focus lies almost entirely on the development and reinforcement of linguistic skills.

Keywords

Chinese migrant women; linguistic inclusion; migrant women; multiliteracies; Spanish L2

Issue

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1. Introduction

In recent years, highly educated Chinese urban women are increasingly facing challenges in shaping and maintaining their self-identity. On the one hand, they are expected to adhere to traditional gender roles and family expectations, while on the other being encouraged to pursue studies and careers. Moreover, as they navigate multiple social, cultural, and economic spheres, they may encounter conflicting norms, values, and expectations that affect how they see themselves and their

place in the world, particularly in the professional arena (Sun, 2008).

These hurdles to work–life balance have been particularly notable among Chinese expatriate women living in traditional migrant-receiving countries, where marginalisation in the workplace, stigmatisation, and difficulty in landing white-collar jobs (Man & Preston, 1999) have been commonplace for decades. Having migrated abroad for personal reasons and not necessarily in search of better career opportunities, the prioritisation of the roles of spouse, mother, and homemaker

dependent on a male breadwinner (Chen, 2019) has led to significant obstacles in their search for a fulfilling career in their host countries, resulting in so-called downward occupational mobility or outright withdrawal from the paid labour market. There is consensus that this phenomenon of “feminisation” or “redomestication” is particularly prevalent among highly educated Chinese migrant women (Cooke, 2007), who often struggle to find employment commensurate with their qualifications and pre-migration work experience (Ho, 2006a).

On the other hand, the isolation of Chinese migrant women is exacerbated by their lack of adequate linguistic skills, particularly if access to language training is limited (Hsiao & Schmidt, 2015). Language barriers also represent a further constraint to labour market integration, owing to limited competence in the language skills needed to operate in the sectors for which these women are qualified, which in turn triggers a loss of self-esteem and a reassessment of their own identity (Chen, 2019). Moreover, these women also endure vulnerability to the more taxing aspects of diasporic existence, including forms of gender-based violence or socio-economic disadvantage (Migration Data Portal, n.d.). Similarly, a report by the Spanish General Union of Workers (UGT) highlights that migrant women are overrepresented in occupations with lower wages and may experience a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion (“UGT warns that migrant women,” 2023). Additionally, migrant women are subdued to gender obligations and the strains of family expectations. Although these factors have often-times been reported to cause social isolation beyond the domestic circle, they may also spur the willingness “to pursue strategies of self-determination and fulfilment both within and outside the family” (Lee et al., 2002, p. 616). Such aspiration would imply accessing opportunities and integrating into social spaces that require contextually relevant linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Even though the communicative processes in which newly arrived Chinese migrants in Spain participate and the relationships between language, identity, and social structures have been tentatively studied, research has been limited to the compulsory school-age population (Pérez-Milans, 2011). There has been no research on the adult Chinese community, especially the female population, who have acquired Spanish largely on their own initiative (Quiles Cabrera, 2020). To fill this lacuna, this article explores the post-migration biographical narratives of six Chinese migrant women holding higher education degrees who have either resorted to lower-paid positions abroad or opted to forgo their careers in support of their husbands’ professional pursuits. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, we draw on these participants’ perceptions of the factors that impede their social inclusion and professional fulfilment, namely language barriers, cultural differences, and the devaluation of their professional trajectories. We also address the impact that these personal experiences have had on these women’s identities and their long-term career

prospects. Ultimately, we hope to stimulate a wider debate on the need for greater support and resources for this population by embracing pedagogical approaches that foster the emergence of a more equitable and inclusive global workforce.

In light of the above, this probing study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the current expectations of Chinese highly skilled migrant women for labour market inclusion, based on their trajectory in Spain?
2. What self-perceived training needs do the interviewees manifest to achieve social integration in the host communities?
3. To what extent is there a mismatch between the aspirations of these women and the curricula of the courses and self-study materials available to them?

In what follows, we will review some of the most relevant theoretical postulates in this research area, before delving into the empirical part of our research and the findings it has yielded.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1. Identity Renegotiation of Highly Skilled Chinese Migrant Women in Spain

Since the turn of the millennium, the Spanish government has sought to strengthen trade cooperation ties with China and to facilitate the social integration of the Chinese expatriate population in the country (Nieto, 2003). Such a process of psychological adaptation of Chinese expatriates to host societies has recently been described around three distinct milestones: crisis, self-adaptation, and self-growth (He et al., 2019). Throughout this continuum, migrants gradually begin to familiarise themselves with the host community and become acquainted with the myriad of stereotypes and prejudices about the Chinese that are generally held by the Spanish (Nieto, 2003), most of which they do not share and seek to dispel.

To this end, Chinese community associations in Spain promote the image of Chinese people and their cultural and economic activities, as well as bilateral bonds with China (Sáiz López, 2012). Concurrently, migrant life in Spain demands that the Chinese diaspora be aware of a variety of themes pertaining to this country, which has led to a recent upsurge of associations addressing them (Zigang, 2021). Yet, as opposed to the still more prevalent commercial and cultural representation objectives of Chinese community associations in general, women’s associations show a greater capacity for rapprochement and engagement with local institutions in charge of managing services such as education, health, and child and family welfare (Sáiz López, 2015), which testifies to their civic-mindedness.

He et al. (2019) argue that two post-migration processes of identity formation and reformulation take place: a struggle to preserve the homeland culture and identify with their motherland and a willingness to partake in day-to-day interactions with members of the receiving community at large. The interplay of these dynamics results in the process of acculturation, which in turn brings about effective integration into the host society provided there is a balance between attachment and commitment to home and foreign cultures, and to the pre- and post-migration sense of self. In this context, as van den Bergh and Du Plessis (2012) state, social support from peers is instrumental in the affirmation of role identity and in supporting women in reshaping their professional selves.

In the case of highly skilled women, the renegotiation of their post-migration gendered identities often entails a “de-skilling” or “feminisation” (Meares, 2010), a consequence of the trade-off of their own career prospects for the sake of their spouses’ professional advancement (Cooke, 2007), family building, and childcare. Previous research (van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012) has argued that the impact of migration on the life stages and work trajectories of professional women should be explored in more depth, as women’s career choices are far greater shaped by their evolving identities than are those of their male counterparts, generally implying that women “inevitably have to opt out of their existing careers in their home country and re-build careers in the host country” (p. 144).

In countries with extensive migrant-receiving tradition and supportive migration legislation, research has reported that Chinese women expatriates re-examine their own cultural values concerning the salience of professional careers, attaching value to alternative living choices, downplaying the significance of economic status, and carving out time to spend with loved ones, explore personal interests, and enhance the overall quality of their lives. However, these same studies argue that such a change in mindset may be prompted by the dire labour market predicament they face (Ho, 2006b). Moreover, job hunting is often limited to their immediate setting, as these women’s communicative competence in Spanish is insufficient to meet the requirements of highly qualified positions in the wider context.

Thus, a very common alternative to waged labour within the Chinese community is self-employment or family entrepreneurship. The intricate relationship between Chinese expatriates’ prevailing labour market niche, level of educational development, family structure, self-realisation, and cultural integration in Spain has recently garnered some interest. For instance, second-generation Chinese youth in Spain have been found to harbour considerably lower educational aspirations and performance than young people of other cultural backgrounds. Faced with school and employment discrimination inflicted on ethnic minorities but succeeding economically in small business ownership, Yiu (2013) argues

that the Chinese in Spain have modulated their academic ambition as a means of strategic adaptation. This self-limitation would be passed on from Chinese migrant parents to their offspring (Yiu, 2013). On these premises, in Southern Europe, and singularly so in the Spanish context, Chinese familism, understood as the social system in which norms, ideals, and values revolve around family well-being, gives rise to the extended family being heavily involved in the professional activity of both permanent migrants and newcomers (Sáiz López, 2012). While this system ensures welfare at the group level, it also often forces women with higher education to surrender their potential professional status and join the workforce of small enterprises for which no university qualification is required (Sáiz López, 2015).

In contrast, a counter-cultural movement led by Chinese expatriate women has recently been identified, consisting of a post-migration vindication of homemaking, which enables them to distance themselves from the hegemonic stance in China, where domesticity is generally devalued (Huang, 2020). Such a shift would merit further fieldwork to ascertain the extent to which it is a generalised trend or context-specific.

2.2. Spanish Language as a Vector of Integration

At present, there seems to be general agreement that proficiency in the language of the host country is one of the steppingstones to successful integration, representing a major tool for enhancing migrants’ sense of agency and stimulating social interaction and participation (Pulinx & Van Avermaet, 2017). Yet despite its relevance for migrants’ incorporation into the labour market and their socio-cultural insertion, formal language learning curricula envisaged by educational authorities of receiving countries fail to offer work-related linguistic pathways aligned to highly skilled migrants’ pre-migration qualifications and expertise. In effect, training courses made available to migrants tend to feature rigid programmes based on functional language literacy, rote procedures, and standardisation in lieu of fostering equity and cultural integration (Kiss & Mizusawa, 2018) or emulating natural processes where the acquisition of the target language is driven by social immersion (Quiles Cabrera, 2020).

Furthermore, current language education models prepare migrants to assume low-paid, menial jobs that have so far “de-skilled a number of well-educated/experienced professionals” (Otomo, 2020, p. 363). In the case of migrant women, North (2017) raises a strong objection to such training programmes, deeming it necessary to move beyond existing models and integrate different forms of learning, so that instruction may become both functional and empowering.

It is, therefore, crucial to integrate sociopragmatic skills in language classrooms to equip migrants for dealing competently with social interactions in the country of residence, as well as for being able to match their

conduct to the requirements and specific characteristics of the workplace, following the preferences of prospective employers (Holmes & Riddiford, 2011). In this sense, the role of the local language in terms of social mobility and its bearing in the expression of skilled women's identity (van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012) is increasingly acknowledged.

Limited research has looked at the influence of host country language proficiency on intercultural adaptation and workplace and non-workplace adjustment in Chinese cultural contexts. Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016) highlight that country language competency has manifold implications for interaction, social affirmation, and expatriates' work and non-work adjustment in mainland China. In a similar light, Pérez-Milans (2011) concluded that the macro-social processes that affect the integration of Chinese migrants in the Spanish context are reproduced and legitimised through everyday practice in institutional spaces, whereby the cultural decapitalisation of the Chinese and the hindered access to occupational and academic Spanish language education afford them fewer opportunities to participate in complex interactions.

Recently, attempts have been made to develop teaching models and materials at various Spanish proficiency levels and to measure the effectiveness of an eclectic methodology for the development of Chinese learners' communicative language competence in an immersion context (García Viudez et al., 2016). These new approaches are primarily conceived to enhance the spoken communicative effectiveness of Chinese workers in Spanish, although they generally overlook other areas necessary for the inclusion of trainees in terms of civic and socio-cultural literacy. In this context, civic competence should be understood as Spanish learners' understanding of ways to effectively engage with and initiate change in their host community and the wider society. It therefore follows that Spanish L2 methodologies for migrants must encompass more than merely linguistic instruction if they are to be fully integrated into Spanish society (Chao & Mavrou, 2021). Opposing the conventional view, however, a counterargument hints at possible resistance from the Chinese community in Spain to their female nationals' mastery of the local language. Beyond its impact on access to paid employment outside the family-owned business, or to participation in grassroots associations and other civic initiatives, acquiring higher competence in Spanish could threaten intergenerational and gender relations within the Chinese community, as it would bring young women closer to the norms, functioning and social values of the Spanish culture (Sáiz López, 2015).

2.3. A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies for Further Social and Labour Inclusion

Nearly 30 years ago, Cazden et al. (1996), also referred to as the New London Group, brought together emerg-

ing trends in foreign and second language teaching, primarily based on mediated communication, to enable migrants to embark on "full and equal social participation" (p. 60) in host societies. Broadly operationalised, (multi)literacy is a key element in enabling migrants to identify as full members of the receiving society and to avoid discrimination.

According to the ensuing *pedagogy of multiliteracies*, such integration cannot be realised as long as language learners remain subordinated to teacher-led classroom practices focused primarily on the development of purely functional communication. In a recent systematic review, seven subsets of literacies traceable to this approach were classified, namely cultural, digital, socio-affective, civic, linguistic, visual, and occupational (Cores-Bilbao, 2022), thereby catering to a whole range of possible training requirements.

Today, advocates of the same postulates call for critical and social engagement of language teachers, who must use multimodal meaning-making to make their learners effective users of non-native languages (Kiss & Mizusawa, 2018). Against this conceptual backdrop, linguistic literacy, alongside and in conjunction with the development of other literacies and modes of communication, should underlie all innovative educational approaches to foreign language learning (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020). Thus, consolidating literacy-related content within the teaching of Spanish L2 for migrants is deemed essential (Chao & Mavrou, 2021). In addition, this approach enables teachers to "tailor learning to the specific experiences of the communities they are working with, taking into account linguistic and cultural pluralism" (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020, p. 15), fulfilling the educational aspirations of adult learners. Consequently, by embracing the teaching of Spanish as an L2 through a multiliteracies approach, Chinese migrants can be supported to shape their "desires to affect change in their own lives, within their communities, or to advocate as active citizens on a broader societal level" (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020, p. 16).

In the same vein, Dolzhich and Dmitrichenkova (2019) equate multimodality in the foreign language classroom to the merging of two or more modes of communication, such as visual, gestural, or spatial, to deliver meaning. As such, the multimodal approach would prepare learners for uncertainty, equipping them to handle unpredictable events and complex sources of information, providing meaningful and culturally contextualised learning opportunities, as well as eliciting a sense of belonging. As Holloway and Gouthro (2020) posit, in keeping with the ethos of multiliteracies pedagogy, teaching must be concerned with embedding multimodality, cultural plurality, technology, and zeal for social justice into language education, which is innately socially constructed, power-charged, and shaped by context.

However, despite the many advantages of this approach for adult educators to consider, the

multiliteracies paradigm and multimodal instruction seem not to be permeating the current day-to-day practice of adult education and the training of target groups who could benefit most from greater social inclusion (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020). In this sense, the present article endorses the advancement of an inclusive occupational multiliteracies (Cores-Bilbao, 2022) framework, which brings together the development of job-related skills and the multiliteracies approach to overcome the downward occupational mobility of migrants, as it might be well suited to address the training needs and expectations of Chinese professional migrant women in Spain, strengthen their sense of self-worth and underpin their future career paths in the long term.

3. Methodology

3.1. Goals

The purpose of this article is to explore the perceived role of work and Spanish language proficiency among highly skilled Chinese migrant women. In their quest for greater social inclusion, these women have embarked on learning or perfecting Spanish, as well as passing it on to more recent migrants.

3.2. Participants' Profile

The cohort of interviewees is composed of 6 research subjects, but we believe it to be a sufficiently significant sample given its very specific profile. The targeted nature of this article, centred around Chinese migrant women with higher education degrees, with long-term residence in southern Spain, and who have studied or are currently studying Spanish, has led to a purposive sampling process (Schreier, 2018), based on our specific aims and objectives and on the availability and willingness of the subjects to be interviewed. Thematically and methodologically akin studies (Cooke, 2007; Hsiao & Schmidt, 2015; van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012) rely, in turn, on comparably sized cohorts.

The age range of the interviewees oscillates between 30–40 (four subjects) and 50–60 (two subjects).

The Spanish language learning trajectories of the participants can be categorised as follows:

1. Four subjects sought formally structured instruction. They enrolled in a language school in Seville and, having completed a beginners' course, they are gradually progressing to attain an intermediate level.
2. Two subjects had begun their language learning process independently and have subsequently further developed their communicative skills in an immersion context.

Table 1 outlines the professional and academic backgrounds of all research subjects. Among the university degrees completed in China, the two most popular are economics (S3 and S5) and English (S1 and S2), followed by technology (S4) and accounting (S6). As for their professional careers in China after university, they entered the banking, press, education, and interpreting sectors.

All the interviewees relocated directly to Spain from China, except in the case of one participant who had previously spent an interim period in Ireland. Among the reasons given for these migrations, four respondents mentioned marriage and one alluded to family reunification, as her sibling was already residing in Spain. Only one respondent transferred solely for her own professional advancement.

As Table 2 shows, there does not seem to be a clear correlation between respondents' length of residence in Spain and their willingness to learn Spanish. Several respondents lived in Spain for years before becoming interested in learning Spanish (S1, S3, S4, and S5), while others started learning Spanish independently very shortly after settling in Spain or even before migrating (S2 and S6).

3.3. Procedure

The participants were recruited by a fellow researcher and collaborator of the authors, a Chinese teacher of Spanish at a private language school in Seville. She played a critical role in the success of the empirical phase of the

Table 1. Professional profile of the interviewees.

Example	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Field of studies	English	English	Economics	Technology	Economics	Accounting
Pre-migration employment	Newspaper clerk	University faculty	Bank clerk	Technology teacher	Interpreter	n/a
Employment in Spain	Chinese tutor	Headteacher	Shopkeeper	Chinese tutor	Headteacher	Clerk
Length of time living in Spain (in years)	10	4	14	4	30	9
Length of time working in Spain (in years)	7	4	12	4	26	7

Table 2. Spanish language trajectory of the interviewees.

Example	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Years elapsed prior to taking up Spanish	9	–	12	2	4	–
Years spent learning Spanish	1	4	2	2	26	9
Reasons for delaying learning Spanish	Lack of access	–	Work and Childcare	Covid	Apathy	–
Place of formal Spanish instruction	PCS *	PCS	PCS	PCS	–	–
Source of independent Spanish learning	None	Books	Books	Books, videos	Books, TV	TV, social circle
Pre-migration Spanish language training	6 months	–	–	–	–	1 year
Current CEFR level of Spanish	B1	B1	B1	B1	B2	A2+

Notes: * Private Chinese school in Seville; CEFR levels refer to the Spanish language courses that the respondents are enrolled in.

study, acting as face-to-face liaison for the interviewees and providing Spanish language support in cases where interpreting was necessary, thus ensuring the participants' linguistic confidence. The working language during the interviews was Spanish.

All eligible subjects known to the recruiter (10 in number) were invited to participate in in-depth interviews, with six women finally agreeing to recount their migratory trajectory and the motives behind their efforts to acquire or build upon their Spanish.

3.4. Data analysis

The preliminary screening of the participants' responses yielded 43 valid thematic categorizations. The six transcripts, totalling 107 pages, were subjected to further textual analysis by both authors. To ensure inter-rater reliability they independently categorised the content of the transcripts, and then compared and pooled their analysis, cross-examining and recoding the fragments where there had been discrepancies.

Table 3 presents the topical categories which display the highest number of co-occurrences among the responses of the different interviewees. As can be observed, the concerns most frequently voiced in the different interviews spun around three key domains: labour market prospects, Spanish language learning, and personal life.

Table 3. Topics emerging from the interviews.

Example	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Downward occupational mobility	•		•	•	•	
Experience in different types of learning approach	•	•	•	•	•	•
Female "redomestication"	•		•	•	•	•
Rootedness in Spain	•		•	•	•	•
Turning point in Spanish language learning	•	•	•	•	•	•
Workplace Spanish language needs		•	•		•	•

4. Findings

4.1. Bleak Job Prospects in Skills-Appropriate Positions

Overall, the women display an attitude of acceptance in the face of the realisation that they will not be able to perform the professions for which they were trained in China: "I have been living in Spain for 14 years. I stayed at home for the first two years, but when my child started pre-school, I started working at my husband's bazaar. In China, I used to work at a bank" (S3).

The main reasons given for this career disruption refer to the self-perceived lack of linguistic competence for specific professional purposes (S1, S4) and the bureaucratic impediments to receiving a full-time job offer stemming from their resident status and the hurdles encountered in the accreditation and professional homologation systems.

Among the employment options available, online (S4), part-time and weekend positions (S1, S5, S6) are the most consistently reported. In some cases, adaptable working hours or suitability for work-life conciliation are cited as the reason for accepting their current positions:

I studied accounting in China. When I first arrived in Spain, I spent two years at home, without a job....Later, I got a position as a tutor, but I can't work long hours because I need to take care of my

family. It's a flexible job. I take care of administrative duties. (S6)

With the exception of S2, the interviewees unanimously subordinate their professional practice to the collective well-being of the members of the nuclear family residing in Spain, while occasionally alluding to their filial duties towards the elderly relatives who have remained in their homeland (S6). Accordingly, few women fathom aspiring to job opportunities that make them feel professionally fulfilled or entertain thoughts of launching or revamping their own business, typically within the retail sector (S3, S4).

The interviewee with the most protean profile in the group initially experienced isolation from co-workers due to an inability to communicate adequately. The same interviewee recounts episodes of discrimination at work, having experienced different operating conditions to those of her Spanish counterparts:

I have lived in Spain and worked as a cultural advisor for almost 4 years, but I do not have a permanent card [to enter the building]; every day I have to request it. But my local colleagues do have the card. (S2)

The hypothetical option of returning to China, where job opportunities would be more in line with their qualifications, seems to have been considered in some cases in the initial stages of the residency (S5) but is currently ruled out. The reasons for this dismissal usually refer to a disengagement with the culture of origin and a lack of professional updating, as the Chinese context is perceived as rapidly evolving and technologically more advanced than that of Spain.

4.2. Social Integration Indicators in the Immediate Environment

Despite some reservations, a crisis phase in the post-migration psychological adaptation process is often voiced. Albeit sparse, references to the present longing for the family that remains in China are also made (S1).

References to social integration are clustered around the nuclear family, regardless of their provenance. In cases where the spouse is Spanish, the network of people with whom the interviewees socialise on a regular basis is wider:

Here, my husband's family treats me like a daughter, just like my Chinese family. They are very open to a new culture, so I'm delighted. There are always a lot of birthdays and celebrations, so I speak [in Spanish] a lot. (S6)

Allusion to leisure activities and participation in socialising events outside the core group is scarce. Friendships are also of relative importance, especially when they arise from contacts made in the children's environment:

[My husband] has friendly colleagues, all Spaniards; so, at New Year's Eve, we went out together....There are times when we celebrate the children's birthdays and we meet in the park. Also, at soccer games every Saturday morning, we are always there with the other parents watching the game. (S3)

It is precisely in their role as mothers that these women perceive shortcomings in their skills, manifesting difficulties in navigating communicative situations with the teaching staff who educate their children, and entrusting the husband, generally more proficient in Spanish, to liaise with them (S1, S3). Nonetheless, their digital competence presently enables them to bridge communication gaps and, in some cases, has empowered them to attend teacher meetings: "Now, I'm in contact with the other mothers from my children's school via WhatsApp in Spanish, through the mothers' group. I also go to school to talk to my children's teachers" (S6).

The personal approach of respondents to Spanish culture has begun only recently, following a turning point in their lives. The pre-relocation information was very limited or erroneous, especially regarding the possibilities of carrying out daily activities while communicating in English. The contrast with the lived reality, especially during the first months of their settlement, is a cause for considerable confusion.

The conceptualisation of Spanish culture is often clichéd, focusing on an unnuanced understanding of elements such as gastronomy (1), flamenco (S2), and living a quiet life (S1, S4) as a *bon vivant* (S3, S4). Inferences about cultural disparities or culture shock are scarce and generally linked to communicative barriers: "There are many Spaniards that say that the Chinese are very serious and quiet, but that's because we can't speak good Spanish" (S3). Among the cross-cultural divide perceived by the interviewees, workers' attitude towards work stands out: "Most of the Chinese come to Spain to work. They live to work but the Spaniards work to live" (S5).

Where the length of permanence in Spain has been more prolonged, the interviewees express more overtly a double attachment to their pre- and post-migration identities: "Now, I am a Sevillian. I have been living here longer than in China. I think I'm quite integrated. I have many Spanish friends and we talk very often. I also have very kind neighbours who are like family" (S5).

In terms of the support of local Chinese associations, only one interviewee vindicates their significance in the adjustment of newly arrived migrants to the new socio-cultural context, as she herself volunteers her time to this end:

I help in associations. Right now, there are two Chinese associations in Seville. They always call me to request my help. I help those who need an interpreter. I used to go to educational centres like schools, to help Chinese families who do not understand much Spanish. (S5)

Finally, the crucial importance of speaking Spanish to be able to interact socially with others effectively is recurrently pointed out:

I had been living in Spain for more than eight years, but I didn't learn Spanish. I only talked with the neighbours on the streets, but I had problems. At that time, I didn't have many Spanish friends, but after learning Spanish, and knowing more and more words, I have more Spanish friends here. (S1)

4.3. Educational Voids Concerning Comprehensive Skills Acquisition for Inclusion

Despite overtly pursuing the aim of social and labour integration in Spain, respondents unanimously prefer to be taught Spanish by teachers of their own nationality who follow a traditional approach.

However, once they had acquired the basics of Spanish, they also manifested a novel interest in finding schools with local teachers to refine their language skills:

I had a lot of dreams that I was going to learn to speak Spanish, but I didn't learn. After living in Spain for 14 years my Spanish is still terrible. I started learning Spanish only two years ago. I enrolled in the school with Chinese teachers, twice a week. But I also want to practice in the normal class so I can learn to speak better. In one or two years, I am going to enrol in a Spanish school. (S3)

Furthermore, looking back many of the participants conclude that their lack of language proficiency in Spanish has prevented them from achieving a greater sense of integration, or has postponed it over time. Such situations of socio-cultural isolation have been particularly reinforced when the women initially harboured an attitude of rejection towards acquiring the local language (S5) or anticipated a considerably shorter permanence in Spain than it ultimately turned out to be.

In other cases, either inadequate pre-migration Spanish instruction or the lack of access to post-migration language training delayed integration is reflected upon:

In Shanghai, I studied Spanish for six months before living here. But when I first arrived, I couldn't speak any Spanish. And the teachers in the village couldn't speak English or Chinese, so we couldn't communicate. For nine years I sought opportunities to study Spanish but there are no Chinese teaching schools near my house. (S1)

Two-thirds of the participants are following or have completed formal Spanish language training courses. In contrast, the entire cohort uses a variety of means to supplement their learning, including local media and television,

the internet, and the mentoring of their children, who attend school in Spain.

There seems to be little awareness of the relevance of civic engagement and there is a reliance on close relatives to carry out bureaucratic procedures: "At first, my sister helped me to do paperwork in the City Hall. But now, it's my daughter, as she can speak good Spanish" (S4). Similarly, these women's sense of agency falters when it comes to carrying out less frequent private operations (S6), such as bank formalities (S3), or interacting with their driving instructor (S1), despite which no planning on the part of the course providers to equip participants with skills in the labour, cultural or social spheres is identified.

5. Conclusions

In this article, highly qualified Chinese women's perceptions of the factors that impede their professional realisation in Spain have been explored, including language barriers, cultural differences, and labour discrimination. The impact that such personal experiences have had on these women's identities, sense of self-worth, and their long-term career prospects have similarly been addressed.

As for the first research question, concerning the interviewees' current expectations of inclusion in the labour market, while career progression and the possibility of self-employment were reported among the underlying goals motivating the pursuit of higher levels of language proficiency, they were not paramount.

The results obtained seem to mirror the two prevailing stances found in the literature (Cooke, 2007; Ho, 2006a; Meares, 2010; van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012), as we have identified dual career orientations held by similar-sized groups: (a) that of women with protean profiles, one of whom embarked on migration exclusively for professional advancement, while two others would like to upgrade professionally after having temporarily shelved their careers; and (b) that of women embracing their post-migration status, in which domesticity and family care, coupled with lower workloads and greater shift flexibility, have reshaped their occupational identities. For this latter group, the turning point that prompted the learning of Spanish primarily stemmed from the wish to partake in the schooling environment of their children, or from the desire to achieve greater inclusion in Spanish society.

With regards to the second research question, regarding respondents' training needs, the results indicate their willingness to reach higher levels of competence in terms of linguistic as well as civic and socio-cultural literacy, enlarge their social networks, become more actively involved in their communities, and make better-informed decisions at the personal level. This conclusion would seem to corroborate the empowering and emancipatory vision held by Lee et al. (2002) and depart from the hypothesis held by Huang (2020), an

alleged Chinese women's reclamation of housewifery as a means of distancing themselves from their motherland. Nevertheless, despite having lived and operated in Spain for years, and as a consequence of not having previously sought further Spanish language training, most of these women are lacking the entrepreneurial agency to pursue professional advancement in the Spanish labour market.

During the dialogic process of the in-depth interviews, these highly qualified Chinese women displayed a personal commitment to self-improvement, regarding increased language literacy as the means to meet their self-perceived training needs in Spain, but also discerning their lacunae in terms of civic and occupational literacies. Thus, it could be inferred that the interviewees' sense of self and their post-migration identities would be enriched by achieving higher levels of the said literacies, which would propel them to transcend the boundaries of their native cultural context. Hence, the reflections voiced by these women are in line with the proposed methodological shift towards the pedagogy of multiliteracies, as an alternative to the more conventional Spanish L2 training given to them.

As for the third research question, related to the language course curricula, the evidence reveals a clear misalignment of the educational aspirations of migrant Chinese women and the training programmes at their disposal within Chinese educational organisations in Spain. Nevertheless, they are preferred by the interviewees because of the familiarity and sense of security provided by the Chinese instructors.

In this sense, the traditionalist nature of language teaching in Chinese schools, even those overseas, is accentuated by their unfamiliarity with the pedagogical foundations of the multiliteracies approach and the benefits it holds for adult migrant learners in immersion contexts (Holloway & Gouthro, 2020). By training their faculty in integrative multiliteracies approaches, targeting competence development in the linguistic, civic, and social spheres, talented professional women would have the opportunity to realise their full potential outside the confines of the migrant family unit.

6. Limitations of the Study

The generalisability of the present study results is constrained by the limited sample size, hence additional research to substantiate the conclusions reached would be necessary. Thus, the purpose of this article is to initiate a discussion on the didactic approaches that could favour the social and labour market inclusion of highly skilled Chinese immigrant women.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Esther Cores-Bilbao holds a PhD in educational sciences by the University of Huelva and currently works as an assistant professor at University Isabel I, where she teaches in master's degree programmes. She is a member of the ReALL research group led by Professor M. C. Fonseca-Mora. She is also an assistant editor of the *European Journal of Language Policy*. Her research interests include foreign language teaching, group identity, democratic values development, and the pedagogy of multiliteracies.



Mariló Camacho-Díaz is a doctoral student in languages and cultures from the University of Huelva, and a professor at the Faculty of Aeronautics and Space of the Polytechnic University of Madrid. She participates in linguistic projects as a researcher and a member of COIDESO and the ReALL group. Her lines of research focus on metaphorical awareness and metaphorical competence in ESP.