

# The New Chinese Migrants in France

Carine Guerassimoff\*

## ABSTRACT

Like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, France is one of the major centres of Chinese migration in Europe. Chinese sojourners arrived in France at the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1911 census showed the presence of 238 Chinese in the country. From 1900 to World War I, this little community remained heterogeneous in its socio-economic and professional composition (Archaimbault, 1952). Changes in this community occurred during World War I when the lack of labourers led the French Government to recruit 140,000 Chinese workers (Wou, 1939). The 2,000 to 4,000 Chinese who remained in France after the war constituted the basis of a Chinese community in France. In the 1920s, they were joined by some 2,000 student labourers (Wang, 2001; Bailey, 1988). From the 1920s to the 1940s, Zhejiang immigration in France rose until World War II and the rise of the communist party in China stopped the movement. Yet, Chinese immigration did not cease. Migrants of Chinese origin arrived essentially from the old French Indochina (Viet Nam-Laos-Cambodia) (Le, 1995). Immigration from these countries increased in the 1970s when different conflicts occurred. From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, France also saw the arrival, albeit in smaller numbers, of Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan, family members of citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The new wave of Chinese migration from PRC started in the mid-1980s and grew steadily until now, with some peaks, e.g. in the mid-1990s.

Recent fieldwork in France approached this community, in particular, those living in France with a precarious administrative status (asylum seekers or clandestine migrants). In general, the situation of the population covered by this fieldwork was still precarious. Although the paper does not include other categories such as students, entrepreneurs, or researchers, it is nevertheless possible to gather some details on the basis of French official data and reports. The following sections deal with the growing Chinese presence in France, and their precarious status. Most recent research tends to show a diversified Chinese migrant population profile; it also shows that they are still primarily active in the French ethnic Chinese market. In the initial stages of migration, the Chinese migrants continue to maintain links with China and sometimes with Chinese communities in Europe.

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\*Associate Researcher, SEDET, University of Paris VII, Paris, France.

## INTRODUCTION

Like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, France is one of the major centres of Chinese migration in Europe. Chinese sojourners arrived in France at the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1911 census showed the presence of 238 Chinese in the country. From 1900 to the World War I, this little community remained heterogeneous in its socio-economic and professional composition (Archaimbault, 1952). One could find students, intellectuals, journalists, diplomats, traders, restaurant owners, chiropodists, and labourers who worked in silk manufacture in Dieppe and soya fabric in Paris (Live, 1991). Changes in this community occurred with World War I. The lack of labourers led the French Government to recruit 140,000 Chinese workers (Wou, 1939). The 2,000 to 4,000 Chinese who remained in France after the war constituted the basis of a Chinese community in France. In the 1920s, they were joined by some 2,000 student labourers (Wang, 2001; Bailey, 1988). Since the 1920s and until the 1940s, Zhejiang immigration in France rose. World War II and the rise of the communist party in China stopped the movement. Yet Chinese immigration did not cease. Migrants of Chinese origin arrived essentially from the old French Indochina (Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia) (Le, 1995). Immigration from these countries increased in the 1970s, when different conflicts occurred. At the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, France also saw the arrival, albeit in smaller numbers, of Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan, family members of citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The new wave of Chinese migration from PRC started in the mid-1980s and grew steadily up to now, with some peaks, e.g. in the mid-1990s.

Fieldwork has been conducted in France to approach this community<sup>1</sup>, in particular, those living in France with a precarious administrative status (asylum seekers or clandestine migrants). The fieldwork I participated in has been made possible by the French association, Association pour le soutien linguistique et culturel (ASLC), which caters administratively to the Chinese migrants, among others, by providing an administrative address for migrants, which is needed to claim asylum in France. A questionnaire was handed out to 1,000 Chinese migrants when they came to renew their administrative registration. The questionnaire contains socio-demographic details, means of migration and integration, and contacts with other details of the Chinese diaspora (Guerassimoff et al., 2001). Analysis of the information, together with official data, scholarly works, and reports provide a first general perception of these new migrants who arrived during the last five years in France. In general, the situation of the population covered by this fieldwork was still precarious. Although the presentation below does not include other categories such as students, entrepreneurs, or researchers, it is nevertheless possible to gather some details on the basis of French official data and reports. The following sections deal with the growing Chinese presence in France and their precarious status. Most recent research tends to show a diversified Chinese mi-

grant population profile that is still primarily active in the French ethnic Chinese market. In the initial stages of their migration, the Chinese migrants continued to maintain links with China and sometimes with Chinese communities in Europe.

## THE CHINESE PRESENCE IN FRANCE

During the first half of the twentieth century the Chinese presence was erratic and subject to important variations. The 1921 census recorded 12,000 Chinese living in France. But by 1926 that number had fallen to 2,800. In 1931, 3,600 Chinese were counted, 2,700 in 1936, and 1,900 in 1946. In 1975, their number stood at 3,000, rising to 5,000 by 1982, and to 14,051 by 1990. The 1999 census counted 28,319 PRC citizens in France and 30,912 Chinese immigrants. The first category included Chinese with PRC citizenship and the second included PRC citizens and naturalized Chinese. In 1999, there were 8,575 French naturalized PRC Chinese living in France, increased from 4,004 at the time of the 1990 census. Between 1995 and 2001, the number of naturalized Chinese stood at 4,910. Data from the 1999 census show that the majority of the Chinese interviewed (except the 7,699 who did not reply to the questionnaire) arrived in France after 1988 (Table 1). However, the reality of the Chinese presence in France is not reflected in the census data. Thus, there is a large irregular Chinese presence in France. In fact, according to Chinese official data, in 1994 an estimated 128,000 migrants from south Zheijiang were living in France (Poisson, 1997).

TABLE 1

1999 CENSUS OF CHINESE LIVING IN FRANCE, BY DATE OF ENTRY

Date of entry	Number of persons	Percentage of total migrants
1900-1944	65	0.3
1945-1959	109	0.5
1960-1974	435	2.1
1975	73	0.4
1976	106	0.5
1977	101	0.5
1978	105	0.5
1979	171	0.8
1980	682	3.3
1981	199	1.0
1982	220	1.1
1983	525	2.5

TABLE 1 continued

Date of entry	Number of persons	Percentage of total migrants
1985	625	3.0
1986	536	2.6
1987	803	3.9
1988	602	2.9
1989	1,343	6.5
1990	1,519	7.4
1991	1,959	9.5
1992	1,817	8.8
1993	1,091	5.3
1994	1,379	6.7
1995	1,186	5.8
1996	1,211	5.9
1997	1,312	6.4
1998	1,501	7.3

Source: 1999 census data; Chatelain, 2002.

### Place of settlement in France

According to the 1999 census data, the majority of Chinese interviewed were settled in the Paris-Île de France region (25,524 Chinese immigrants versus 24,819 Chinese citizens). Two other settlement regions were in the south of France. Rhône Alpes was home to 1,075 Chinese immigrants (compared with 578 Chinese citizens) and the Provence Alpes-Côtes d'Azur region had 822 Chinese immigrants (compared to 447 Chinese citizens). Economic factors explain this geographical distribution. First, the main Chinese economic activities appear to be concentrated in the Paris-Île de France region. In the south of France with its strong tourism industry, the catering business also appears to attract a number of Chinese migrants. What were the reasons for the arrival of Chinese migrants in France in the 1990s?

### MIGRATION TO FRANCE

It seems that the majority of new Chinese migrants entered France with the necessary documents, some of which were forged. Students were among those most likely to have entered with false documents. Since 1997, the French Government has been trying to raise the number of foreign students in France by facilitating entry of foreign students, researchers, teachers, engineers, and busi-

ness people, in order to improve its international image, which was seriously damaged by the previous immigration policy. The necessary directives to facilitate the procedure were issued to all French consulates, and a special visa was introduced for that purpose.<sup>2</sup> China also benefited from this new policy. In 1997 the Guangzhou consulate reopened its visa office and a new French consulate was opened in Wuhan. Since then, the number of French visas delivered to Chinese citizens has steadily risen (Table 2). In March 2002, the official figure was 3,450 Chinese students (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2002).

TABLE 2  
SHORT AND LONG-TERM VISAS DELIVERED  
BY FRENCH CONSULATES IN CHINA, 1994-2000

Type of visa	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Temporary	88	50	153	268	314	473	391	1,687
-	18	44	26	27	55	67	91	328
Students	414	406	353	492	1,101	2,621	3,388	8,775
OMI	382	236	261	332	278	362	826	2,677
Other long-term stays	330	441	356	335	287	507	912	3,168
Transit	43,540	25,501	25,115	26,105	2,199	1,989	1,779	126,228
Ordinary	38,227	52,638	59,832	66,775	99,432	111,589	112,144	540,637
Circulation	720	341	269	337	955	973	1,195	4,790
French overseas territories (Dom-Toms)	161	176	251	256	332	427	356	1,959
Total	83,830	79,833	86,616	94,927	104,953	119,008	121,082	690,249

Source: MAE, Foreign Division.

Increasing numbers of Chinese migrants arrive and remain in France on the strength of a Schengen visa delivered by another Schengen state. According to our information, the most common states were Germany, Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. For example, many north-eastern Chinese had obtained a German professional visa before entering France. The group under review generally used air transport and arrived in France directly or with one stop-over.

Chinese migrants leave China legally or illegally. Most often their first destination is some eastern European country, where they obtain travel documents (e.g.

Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary). They proceed from there to France or other EU destination countries. Those who leave China without proper travel documents often arrive in Europe via a circuitous route, which can take several months through, e.g. Russia, Eastern Europe, and Austria/Italy; Nanning, Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam; Turkey and Greece; or African and Arab states.

### **Sojourn in France**

Information on the stay of Chinese migrants in France was largely obtained from the Office des Migrations Internationales (OMI) and the French Office for Asylum Seekers (OFPRA). OMI data show that between 1990 and 1999 only some 3,692 Chinese migrants arrived in France to settle. This modest number corresponds with the general absence of any tradition of Chinese labour migration to France. Most (2,690) were skilled professionals and were able to obtain residence status after they arrived in France.

A considerable proportion of the Chinese migrants living in France entered through the family reunification channel. Between 1990 and 1999, the arrival of 5,601 Chinese migrants was recorded under that heading. From among the 2,697 migrants joining their spouses living in France, 78 per cent were women. This category is nearly evenly divided between Chinese citizens established in France (1,472) and French citizens (1,225).

Another important group includes Chinese migrants whose status was regularized through an amnesty proclaimed in 1997. Between 1997 and 2001, 7,674 Chinese migrants benefited from that amnesty (Haut Conseil à l'intégration, 2001), accounting for 10 per cent of all regularized migrants and representing the third-largest group after Algerians and Moroccans. Considerations such as social and family ties established in France are taken into account, and more recently, regular entry into France has been added as a further condition.

A new regularization campaign was launched by the current French Government in October 2002 (date for the filing of requests), subject to a case-by-case examination. Many Chinese are applying, testifying to the presence of large numbers of irregular Chinese migrants in France.

Temporary migration by Chinese nationals is based on a one-year residence permit, which may be renewed if the initial purpose of entry remains valid. This includes the smallest number of Chinese migrants in France (1,076 between 1990 and 1999), mainly researchers or trainees. With 5,151, students made up the largest group of Chinese migrants during the period 1990-1999, of whom

59 per cent were women. The largest category of Chinese migrants is made up of asylum seekers, with 19,603 asylum claims recorded between 1990 and 1999. In 1999, 5,169 asylum claims were submitted of which 743 were actually granted asylum (OFPRA, 2002).

### **The impact of French immigration laws on Chinese migration**

As in other European states, French immigration policy seeks to minimize permanent settlement (GISTI, 2000) with permanent and labour migration being strictly controlled since the 1980s. At the same time, the policy also aimed at ensuring the protection of the rights and well being of migrants already in France. That may be one reason why family reunification constitutes the principal legal entry channel for migrants into France, despite the introduction of otherwise more restrictive measures. Chinese migrants have also benefited from that possibility.

While exercising stricter control over migration in general, the French authorities have introduced certain measures to facilitate the temporary entry into France for students, business people, and researchers.

On the other hand, issuing tourist visas has become more restrictive and subject to certain conditions, such as a letter of invitation by a bona fide resident in France, specifying name, address, profession, as well as the arrival and departure dates of the Chinese guest. Registration with the municipal council or the police is required in the case where the host is a French citizen, alternatively, the foreign host has to provide evidence of a valid residence permit.

However, even if these preliminary conditions are complied with, there is no assurance that the visitors actually leave at the end of their visa entitlement. In fact, some of them stay and subsequently apply for asylum, which entitles them to temporary stay and some welfare benefits while their claim is being processed. They are also not confined to a designated residence and are free to move, contrary to the practice in some other EU countries. The possibility of appealing against the asylum decision is also used to extend the stay in France.

In response, French authorities have introduced measures to speed up the processing of asylum applications and make the asylum channel a less attractive option to gain entry and residence in France. Thus, the determination procedure has been reduced from one year to between one and two months and asylum applicants are systematically interviewed by an OFPRA official. This procedure also serves to justify the rejection of an asylum claim as being well founded to the Refugee Commission, the body responsible to hear appeals. In fact, since then the number of asylum applications submitted by Chinese has dropped considerably, but it is too early to conclude that the two are linked.

If their asylum claim is rejected, many Chinese migrants go underground to avoid being expelled. However, very little information on the expulsion of illegal migrants, including Chinese, is available from French authorities. The only information available is on voluntary departures, realized with the assistance of OMI. The numbers are very low, e.g. only 400 or less annually. Between 1991 and 1999, only 179 Chinese rejected asylum seekers left France with the assistance of OMI (OMI, 1990-2000). As the expulsion of illegal migrants is subject to human rights considerations, the foreign parents of a child born in France may not be expelled, a situation which has benefited quite a number of Chinese illegal migrants (GISTI, 2000), although less so since the delays for the refugee determination procedure and any appeals have been strictly limited.

The absence of a re-admission agreement with the country of origin remains the main obstacle to the expulsion of an irregular migrant from France – as is the case with China. If personal documents have been destroyed or are withheld by the migrant and the purported country of origin fails to recognize the migrant as its national, expulsion becomes impossible.

Despite the recent, though short-lived, success by the far-right party in France, the general public does not appear to favour a drastic tightening of immigration laws or expulsion measures. Since the recent change of government, no further changes to the immigration law seem to be envisaged, and current initiatives seem for the time being limited to the closure of the Sangatte camp.

## PROFILE OF THE NEW CHINESE MIGRANTS

### **Region of origin**

Fieldwork carried out in the home communities of migrants offers more information on their social and economic background, and reveals greater diversification than official data, which generally fail to distinguish between the various provincial and cultural origins. Thus, Zhejiang remains the principal area of origin, but others are also gaining in importance. From the 573 migrants in our group who came from Zhejiang (out of a total of 947), most had their origins in Rui'an, followed by Wenzhou (36%), Qingtian (15%), and Wencheng and Yongjia districts.

The second major group of PRC migrants, who arrived in the mid-1990s, are from north-eastern China (the Dongbei). Out of our group 286 of the 947, were from Liaoning, Shandong, Heilongjiang, and Jilin, with main cities of origin being Qingdao, Yantai, Shenyang, and Fushun. Many migrants also arrive from Shanghai and Tianjin (65 and 29 respectively). Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, and Guangxi



are also becoming important departure points to France. In contrast to the United Kingdom, the Fujianese community was not numerous in France until the beginning of 2002 (only 19 from our group). This may be caused by various factors. First, there is no Fujianese community already established in France (absence of network and economic opportunity). Second, the economic competition with the Zhejiang migrants was perhaps greater than in the United Kingdom (Pieke, 2002). However, since the end of 2001 there have been more arrivals of Fujianese to the Paris region. While some of them arrived directly from China, many seem to come from the United Kingdom.

### **Sex, age, marital status**

In the 1990s, migration involving Chinese women became more important than migration by men. This was also borne out by our sample, where out of 947 persons interviewed, 536 were women and 451 men. Statistical data other than from OFPRA also confirmed this trend. In 1999, Chinese women made up 51 per cent of all Chinese asylum seekers (OFPRA, 2000). The 1999 census data also show a greater presence of women (16,655 Chinese immigrants versus 14,641 PRC citizens) than men (14,277 Chinese immigrants versus 13,678 PRC citizens) as shown in Table 3. The trend seems to originate with north-eastern Chinese. In our sample, women made up 72 per cent of the respondents from Liaoning, 60 per cent from Shandong and 65 per cent from Heilongjian. Women accounted for a similar large share among migrants from Zhejiang. The proportionate overrepresentation of women also held for migrants from Zhejiang. Men outnumbered women among only Fujian migrants.

Our sample also revealed a relative aging of the migration population. Migrants between the ages of 30 and 39 made up the largest group (44%), followed by those aged 20 to 29 (29%), only slightly more than those aged 40 to 50 (28%). Overall, the number of migrants older than 40 years is growing. As referred to earlier, here the migrants from the north-east of China seem to be setting the trend. As migrants are generally older, the student cohort is setting an opposite trend and is definitely becoming younger.

During the last three years, a growing proportion of Chinese migrants arriving in France were aged 18 or younger. In 2001, the Centre de formation et d'information pour la scolarisation des enfants des migrants (CEFISEM, Information and Training Centre for the Education of Migrant Children) in Paris educated 589 Chinese minors at secondary school level, accounting for 32 per cent of the total (Chatelain, 2002). The figures of the 1999 census in Table 3 confirm this trend.

Regarding the marital status of Chinese migrants, 703 were married before they left China, 221 were single, and 57 were divorced. Ninety per cent (759) had children, most of whom had remained in China.

TABLE 3  
CHINESE IMMIGRANTS AND OTHER FOREIGNERS,  
BY AGE AND SEX (1999 CENSUS)

Age	Immigrants			Foreigners		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
0-4	112	51	61	1,597	857	740
5-9	226	134	92	1,236	634	602
10-14	1,216	688	528	1,743	1,014	729
15-19	2,088	1,036	1,052	2,110	1,041	1,069
20-24	2,743	1,259	1,484	2,499	1,126	1,373
25-29	3,792	1,483	2,309	3,388	1,354	2,034
30-34	4,396	1,832	2,564	3,788	1,625	2,163
35-39	4,993	2,293	2,700	4,046	1,940	2,106
40-44	3,513	1,737	1,776	2,881	1,475	1,406
45-49	2,368	1,201	1,167	1,836	979	857
50-54	1,304	678	626	962	491	471
55-59	701	397	304	490	298	192
60-64	722	340	382	496	245	251
65-69	595	299	296	422	200	222
70-74	546	221	325	281	144	137
75-79	647	261	386	255	111	144
80-84	458	180	278	166	78	88
85 or older	512	187	325	123	66	57
Total	30,932	14,277	16,555	28,319	13,678	14,641

Source: 1999 census data; Chatelian, 2002.

### Socio-professional status in China

Our fieldwork revealed a growing diversification among socio-professional categories. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs, artisans, and traders are still the most important and normally arrive from Zhejiang (322 in our sample). For many of them, mobility is a necessary way of life (Zhang, 2001), but increasingly fierce economic competition also explains this trend. Workers are the second-largest group and are predominantly from Zhejiang. In China, they worked mainly in the garment industry, on construction sites, or in restaurants; in France they normally find jobs in those same sectors. The third-largest group is made up of salespeople or employees, and the fourth-largest group of people had no regular activity in China or were students or housewives. Most of the migrants in the last two

categories came from Zhejiang and north-east China. Their arrival corresponds to an ethnic economic niche demand in France and is fuelled by their own desire for better opportunities to improve their living standards, which were not available to them in China.

Company staff and executives accounted for 15 per cent of our sample group. They had been active in public-sector companies in northern China, and were either facing lay-offs or had already been dismissed. Although many of them had previously been well qualified, their qualifications were no longer considered sufficient in the new Chinese economy or they were deemed to be too old for retraining. Faced with this situation, migration abroad seemed the only choice available to find a job and earn a better wage. A smaller group included nurses, teachers (primary and secondary), engineers, doctors, and artists.

### **Economic activities in France**

People who arrived recently from China (ordinary migrants, students) mainly find jobs in the ethnic Chinese niche economy. Chinese companies in France form an economic system characterized by the strong links they maintain with each other and the ethnic Chinese character in their mutual relations, but also a certain degree of autonomy. However, even though their supply to the economy in general is growing, actual demand is not holding pace.

There are three main types of Chinese-run companies:

- Activities catering to the French market in general,
- Service activities, and
- Activities directed to the ethnic market.

The first and oldest category is essentially involved in the catering trade and the leather-making industry, the latter being oriented to non-Chinese customers. This traditional activity is diminishing, especially in Paris. During the 1990s, there was a certain diversification in these activities. For instance, catering expanded to include fast-food and take-away outlets, as well as stores selling exotic products. Other companies also developed, such as cobblers, locksmiths, and laundromats. Although these activities are chiefly directed to ethnic customers, the general demand for such products is growing. The diversification is also reflected in the legal structure of the companies. If earlier, small companies and SARL (companies with limited responsibility) were the norm, in the 1990s much larger companies appeared (e.g. the Mandarin restaurant chain which owns about 20 restaurants in Paris, or a supermarket chain belonging to the Paris-Store company).

The second category is largely comprised of service companies such as consulting firms, business lawyers, home furnishings and decoration consultants, etc. It

includes some very large companies like the Tang Brothers and the Paris-Store One, next to numerous small, family-run enterprises, many working from home.

The last category only caters to Chinese customers and is extremely diverse. It not only includes catering and grocery stores, but also the provision of cultural goods, such as theatre, movies, video shops, travel agencies, photo shops, companies specializing in religious ceremonies (marriage and death), driving schools, beauty parlours, home helpers and nannies, and so forth.

Among our sample group, 38 per cent were employed in the garment industry, 26 per cent in catering, 15 per cent as nannies, and 9 per cent in the building industry. Furthermore, 617 participants had bosses who were from Zhejiang and 155 had bosses with Teochew origins (Cambodian Chinese), while some of them worked in the garment industry owned by Turkish nationals.

The ethnic market is an attractive migration factor offering the migrants an economic “niche”. Chinese enterprises are well known to offer jobs only to their fellows, outside recruitment is rare. This organization is necessary because their activities require a high degree of flexibility, adaptation, and turnover. That is why it offers migrants in a precarious position the possibility to find this kind of job. As for the Chinese migrants themselves, they wish to maintain themselves in this ethnic market for several reasons. First of all, it solves the problem of having to communicate in a foreign language, which is of great help, at least in the early stages. Secondly, it appears that the ethnic market provides the possibility of social mobility. It offers social networks of solidarity, which do not exist outside and which may be useful in the future to open their own businesses (Guerassimoff and Wang, 2001). To judge from the high number of new company creations, this is an important consideration, and the goal among some of the new generation of entrepreneurs the creation of transnational business activities, including China. To realize that goal, two approaches are followed: profits made abroad are reinvested in China (e.g. in family businesses or larger projects) or profits generated in China are used to open businesses in France. The second approach is to act as an intermediary for a French enterprise wishing to enter the Chinese market. These commercial relations are an indication of the global linkages between Chinese worldwide.

## CONTACTS WITH OTHERS NODES OF THE CHINESE DIASPORA

In this final section the close links maintained by migrants with their *Qiaoxiang* (region of origin) and with other new Chinese communities in Europe will be examined. Such links are based primarily on family ties and other social networks that create, but are also a result of, migration strategies, and form a closely knit and dynamic migration system between China and European destinations.

## Circular migration movements between China and France

The new Chinese migration flows to France are still part of the so-called chain migration, supported by the existence of a network. While it concerns mainly Zhejiang migrants, some *Dongbei* also follow that pattern. Our sample group confirms the existence of networks, as 546 of 947 respondents had a contact in France before leaving China. The availability of such contacts is already the first step in the decision to migrate as they provide valuable information, along with money and other material help needed to migrate. Family networks are of considerable support to new migrants, providing accommodation and contacts to secure employment. For migrants with a family network extending beyond France, the choice to come to France was influenced by other factors as well, such as the ease of claiming asylum, relatively better living and working conditions compared to e.g. Italy or Spain. However, this positive image no longer holds and today the situation is reversed with more opportunities available in Italy and Spain than in France.

On their arrival in France, the migrants maintain close links with China, where most of them have close family members, such as spouses (47% on our sample) and children (90%), as well as their parents and other siblings. However, such links are also dictated by the often very high debt many migrants incur before leaving China, in particular for irregular migrants who are then at the mercy of the “snakeheads” or smugglers. The great majority of our sample group had borrowed money to be able to leave China. Besides using their own savings, many are able to borrow money from their families and can avoid professional money lenders and usurers. Financial obligations are often interlinked with a moral one, for instance, when children have been left in the care of family members in China. Once migrants in France have been successful in obtaining a residence permit, they in turn contribute to the maintenance of the migration network, as when they return to their towns and villages and their success and relative wealth induces others to try to do likewise. Their communities encourage this by showing them as an example and an object of pride to their fellow countrymen and often welcome them into *Huaqiao* associations to honour them. Such private and public measures are an integral part of a return policy encouraged since the late 1970s (Guerassimoff, 1997). Naturally, such networks also serve as a conduit for financial flows between the Chinese migrant diaspora and China. The remittances sent back to China by migrants in France mainly served to repay the debt (of our respondents 652 sent money to China, of whom 526 did so to repay their debt), but they also serve to cover the family’s daily expenses and to take care of the children. Various means are used to transfer money back to China. Most often this occurs informally through friends or channels offered by their employers. To send money through postal services or bank transfer, the migrant has to have a residence permit. Together with such money flows, there is also a lively exchange

of goods, mainly from China to France, such as clothes, medicines, foodstuffs and cigarettes, which are less expensive in China than in France and therefore help the migrant to save money.

Finally, there is an important flow of information between each side. Easy means of communication (phone) allow migrants to keep close contacts with their family at home, bridging the distance and maintaining family links. The information transmitted does not always correspond to the reality in France. Often they keep the difficulty of their situation to themselves, both to avoid losing face if things have not turned out as well as hoped, and to keep their families from worrying. To tell the truth about their situation would be an admission of failure and cause them shame, particularly if they had borrowed a lot of money to leave China. Some, however, paint a more realistic picture of life in France and advise their families and friends not to migrate. This is difficult for them, especially when others return and demonstrate their success and wealth. Having been witness to such, at times ostentatious, displays of wealth, the migrants' families do not believe in their difficulties, which causes more tensions and worry.

Information networks are also an important relay to exchange information regarding opportunities, to ask for jobs, or to solicit letters of invitation to help others to go abroad. They inform people back home about new immigration regulations, regularization programmes and amnesties in certain countries, and of possible job opportunities (Hassoun, 1989; Guerassimoff, 2003).

Such interlinkages between the new migrant and the home community in China are often referred to as characteristic of a first migration system. This initial stage is then often superseded by a secondary migration system between France and other European countries

### **Circular migration between China and Europe**

Our fieldwork revealed the linkages existing between Chinese migrants in France and those living in other European countries, often referred to as "interpolarity", defined as "information and emotional links entertained by members of different poles of the migratory space belonging to a particular group" (Ma Mung, 2001). Those poles were built all along the twentieth century. Members of the Chinese community in Italy and Spain had earlier lived in France or in the Netherlands, for example. As new economic opportunities appeared, Chinese migrants moved to other European countries, contributing to the creation of a European network. As new Chinese migrants arrive they use these old links and add new ones, reinforcing the linkages among close family members and the community back home. The 181 respondents in our sample group mentioned at least one contact in at least one other European country. Such contacts are primarily made up of family

members (sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins) and friends. Most of the Chinese migrants who have such European contacts also had a previous contact person in France. Most of them belong to the Zhejiang group, in particular from Rui'an. Their contacts are located primarily in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, although Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Hungary, and Russia were also mentioned. This European network is also characterized to some extent by "seasonal" migration. During a certain period of the year, associations dealing with Chinese migrants in Paris note the arrival of Chinese from other European states. However, they tend to disappear again after a few months.

The migration project of some Chinese migrants includes the European Schengen space. Some migrants first work in France to repay their debt because France presents better working conditions, but then move on to join a family member living in Italy or in Spain, where they then wait until they obtain a resident permit. There are also some Chinese minors living in France whose parents are working in Italy or Spain with one of their family members looking after them in France. The French school system for foreigners is apparently attracting the arrival of minors, as it is said to be better developed than, for instance, those in Italy or Spain. Others present themselves as unaccompanied minors and, in fact, they become so to obtain the necessary status, which until recently was not difficult in France. Chinese migrants, like others, perceive the Schengen space as a source of economic and administrative opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

During the last 20 years, France has seen two main waves of new Chinese migration. The first wave, the Zhejiang migration, was part of a traditional migration network. The second wave, composed of the north-eastern Chinese migration, is part of a new network. The future will show if the second will be as important as the first. Under French immigration laws the status of many migrants remains precarious. Despite this situation, most, perhaps the majority, remain in expectation of a better future and for some, that dream actually comes true. They open shops or restaurants and some become important business people, allowing them to realize the goals set in the first migration project, and using their example to encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

## NOTES

1. The major sources of fieldwork data referred to this paper are from Guerassimoff and Wang, which was completed in December 2001.
2. According to the 1997 Weil report, immigration was to occupy a central place in French international policy and to be more dynamic and welcome business people and students, scientists, and artists to place France again at the centre of intellectual and economic exchange (Angelier, 2001).

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## APPENDIX 1

## VISA CATEGORIES DELIVERED BY FRENCH CONSULATES IN CHINA

Visa category	Description
Transit visa	Short-term visa on ordinary passport, allowing a maximum stay of five days inside the Schengen space, for a final destination outside the Schengen area.
Ordinary visa	Short-term visa on ordinary passport, allowing a maximum stay of 90 days inside the Schengen space. The maximum validity of the visa is six months.
Circulation visa	Short-term visa on ordinary passport, allowing a cumulated maximum stay of 90 days in any six-month period. The passport must be valid for between one to five years.
Dom-Tom visa	Short-term visa on ordinary passport. A French visa delivered to enter one or more overseas territories of the French Republic, but which is not valid for entry into the Schengen Space.
Temporary visa	Long-term visa on ordinary passport allowing a three to six-month stay in France, not renewable. Exemption from residence permit.
Scholarized minors visa	Long-term visa on ordinary passport, valid for 11 months (academic year) with the obligation to return home during the summer holidays.
Student visa	Long-term visa on ordinary passport, allowing a temporary stay to study at a French educational institution.
OMI visa	Long-term visa on ordinary passport, covering OMI assisted migrants (labourers, seasonal workers, family regrouping).
Other	Long-term visa on ordinary passport.

## LES NOUVEAUX IMMIGRES CHINOIS EN FRANCE

A l'instar du Royaume-Uni et des Pays-Bas, la France est l'un des principaux pôles de l'immigration chinoise en Europe. Les immigrants chinois ont commencé à arriver en France au début du vingtième siècle, et, lors du recensement de 1911, on a pu en dénombrier 238. Entre 1900 et la première guerre mondiale, cette petite communauté est restée hétérogène dans sa composition socio-économique et professionnelle (Archaimbault, 1952). Les changements ont commencé à se produire au cours de la première guerre mondiale, lorsque le manque de main-d'œuvre a conduit le Gouvernement français à recruter 140.000 travailleurs chinois (Wou, 1939). Les quelque 2.000 à 4.000 Chinois qui sont restés en France au lendemain de la guerre ont constitué le fondement de la communauté chinoise en France. Dans les années 20, ils ont été rejoints par quelque 2.000 travailleurs-étudiants (Wang, 1986; Bailey, 1988). Des années 20 aux années 40, l'immigration au départ de Zhejiang en France n'a cessé d'augmenter jusqu'à la deuxième guerre mondiale, et ce mouvement n'a été interrompu que par la montée du parti communiste en Chine. Cependant, l'immigration chinoise n'a pas pris fin pour autant. Les migrants d'origine chinoise arrivaient essentiellement de l'ancienne Indochine française (Viet Nam – Laos – Cambodge) (Le, 1995). L'immigration en provenance de ces pays s'est intensifiée dans les années 70, avec la survenance de différents conflits. Depuis la fin des années 70 jusqu'au début des années 80, la France a également vu arriver sur son territoire, en nombres restreints cependant, des ressortissants chinois de Hong Kong et de Taïwan ayant des liens familiaux avec des citoyens de la République populaire de Chine. La nouvelle vague d'immigration chinoise en provenance de la RPC a débuté au milieu des années 80 et n'a cessé de croître depuis lors, avec quelques pics, notamment au milieu des années 90.

Un travail de terrain a récemment été effectué en France pour approcher cette communauté, et en particulier ceux de ses membres se trouvant dans une situation administrative précaire (demandeurs d'asile ou immigrants clandestins). De manière générale, la situation de la population ayant fait l'objet de ce travail de terrain restait précaire. Même si l'article qui suit ne s'intéresse pas à d'autres catégories telles que les étudiants, les entrepreneurs ou les chercheurs, il est néanmoins possible de recueillir un certain nombre de détails les concernant sur la base des données et des rapports officiels français. Les chapitres qui suivent traitent de la présence chinoise croissante en France et du statut précaire de cette population. Les recherches les plus récentes tendent à montrer un profil diversifié de la population chinoise immigrée; elle montre également que les membres de cette population continuent pour l'essentiel d'exercer une activité sur le marché du travail qu'occupe la communauté de souche chinoise. Dans les années qui suivent leur arrivée en France, les immigrants chinois maintiennent des liens avec la Chine et parfois avec la communauté chinoise en Europe.

## LOS NUEVOS MIGRANTES CHINOS EN FRANCIA

Al igual que en el Reino Unido y los Países Bajos, Francia es uno de los principales centros de emigración china en Europa. Los chinos llegaron a Francia a principios del siglo XX y en el censo de 1911 ya se contabilizaban 238 chinos en el país. Entre 1900 y la Primera Guerra Mundial, esta pequeña comunidad, siguió siendo heterogénea en su composición socioeconómica y profesional (Archaimbault, 1952). Los cambios en esa comunidad se registraron durante la Primera Guerra Mundial cuando la falta de trabajadores condujo al Gobierno de Francia a contratar a 140.000 trabajadores chinos (Wou, 1939). Los 2.000 a 4.000 chinos que permanecieron en Francia después de la guerra constituyeron la base de una comunidad china en Francia. En los años veinte, llegaron unos 2.000 estudiantes trabajadores (Wang, 1986; Bailey, 1988). Entre los años veinte y cuarenta, la inmigración de Zhejiang en Francia aumentó hasta la Segunda Guerra Mundial cuando el surgimiento del partido comunista en China puso fin a este movimiento. Sin embargo, la inmigración china no cesó. Los migrantes de origen chino provenían principalmente de la antigua Indochina francesa (Viet Nam – Laos – Camboya) (Le, 1995). La inmigración desde estos países aumentó en los años setenta a raíz de distintos conflictos. Desde finales de los años setenta hasta principios de los ochenta, Francia también fue testigo de la llegada de pequeños números de chinos provenientes de Hong Kong y Taiwan, familiares de ciudadanos de la República Popular de China. Las nuevas oleadas de inmigración china desde la República Popular de China se iniciaron a mediados de los años ochenta y han aumentado constantemente, habiendo alcanzado un máximo, por ejemplo, a mediados de los años noventa.

Recientemente se han realizado estudios en el terreno en Francia sobre esta comunidad, particularmente aquellos que viven en Francia en situación administrativa precaria (solicitantes de asilo o inmigrantes clandestinos). Por lo general, la situación de la población abarcada en este estudio seguía siendo precaria. Si bien el artículo no incluye otras categorías tales como estudiantes, empresarios o investigadores, es posible acopiar algunos detalles sobre la base de los datos e informes oficiales franceses. Las siguientes partes de este artículo encaran la creciente presencia de chinos en Francia y su situación precaria. Las tendencias más recientes muestran una población de migrantes chinos diversificada, y también muestran que siguen siendo principalmente activos en el mercado chino étnico francés. En las etapas iniciales de su inmigración, estos migrantes chinos siguen manteniendo lazos con China y a veces con las comunidades chinas del resto de Europa.