

Why do Chinese migrants tend to be self-employed?

¿Por qué los migrantes chinos prefieren ser trabajadores autónomos?

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Abstract: Since the economic crisis, in Spain the number of immigrants is reducing year by year, however the statistical data shows that the number of Chinese immigrants is an exception. Besides the number, another phenomenon caused our attention as well, which is among Chinese immigrants, the percentage of being self-employed is apparently much higher than immigrants from other countries. Parting from these facts, in this article we try to find out how Chinese migrants in Spain could survive in economic crisis and what is their secret of success? To this end, on the base of anthropological theoretical frame of life-mode analysis and methodology of secondary data and field work, the main objectives of this research is about the reasons why Chinese immigrants tend to be self-employed and what support them to accept long working-days. The field work of interviews and case studies were carried out among Chinese immigrants in the city of Murcia, both Chinese self-employed and wage-earner.

Key words: Chinese immigrants; life-mode analysis; self-employed; wage-earner; family bonds.

Resumen: Desde que comenzó la crisis, el número de inmigrantes en España está cayendo año tras año. Sin embargo, los datos muestran que la inmigración china es una excepción. Amén de las cifras, también nos llamó la atención el hecho de que, por lo visto, entre la población inmigrante china el porcentaje de autónomos es mucho mayor comparado con los inmigrantes de otros países. Teniendo en cuenta estos hechos intentamos averiguar en este estudio cómo los inmigrantes chinos han podido sobrevivir durante la crisis económica, y cuál es el secreto de su éxito. Basándonos en el marco teórico antropológico del Análisis de los Modos de Vida, la metodología de datos secundarios y el trabajo de campo, el principal objetivo de este estudio es mostrar los motivos por los que los inmigrantes chinos tienden a ser autónomos y en qué se apoyan para aceptar jornadas laborales prolongadas. El trabajo de campo de las entrevistas y los estudios de caso se llevaron a cabo en la ciudad de Murcia, entre la población inmigrante china, tanto autónomos como asalariados.

Palabras clave: Inmigrantes chinos; análisis del modo de vida; autónomo; asalariado; lazos familiares.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Shing Sho and Xuiang Fui are a couple of Chinese migrants who came to Spain with their two children in 2010. With the help of their wider family they were able to establish a small retail-shop of Chinese products for every-day use. During the first years of the stay the children had to finish school. Since the family works together in the shop and has achieved to run the family-business in a way that guarantees its sustainability. In the local society, the family with its shop is perceived as belonging to it in a way— even if they as foreigners still are outsiders. This Chinese family is no exception. Chinese migration to Spain seems to be a success story, even in times of economic crisis and in spite of a certain ethnic isolation. Meanwhile the number of all other national groups of migrants has declined during the last decade, the group of Chinese immigrants is growing. More or less the half of them starts the adventure to become a self-employed and open a shop or a restaurant.

This article deals with these Asian migrants asking what are the singular cultural pattern of the Chinese immigrants, which allow them to survive in economically difficult times in an unknown and different socio-cultural environment. It presents some of the results of an ongoing research about Chinese migrants in Murcia. Due to the limited extension, it is impossible to take into account all the different aspects that influence on this topic, like the acquisition of language skills or understanding of the culture of the Spaniards. Therefore in this article we will limit to two crucial interlinked aspects related to this topic: the question why a high percentage of Chinese citizens become self-employed in Spain and the question, why Chinese self-employed shop-owners accept working-days which extend considerably the ones of most other social groups.

In order to be able to deal with these two questions, the article will start with a short overview about Chinese migration to Spain followed by a reflection on Life-Mode Analysis, which we perceive as a suitable theoretical tool for the understanding of the culture of self-employed. The third part of the article will deal with the question why Chinese migrants tend to establish their own business. The fourth part will then go in depth with the query why Chinese seem to accept more working-hours as it is common among employees in Spain.

2. CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN SPAIN

The history of Chinese migration to Spain is a recent one. There were only some few Chinese immigrants, which came to Spain in the first decades after the Second World War. This changed in the 1990s when an increasing number of Chinese migrated to Spain looking for opportunities. They mostly branched out into the restaurant business, and later into textiles and trade.

Statistical data show that the phenomenon of Chinese migration in Spain has changed over the last 20 years. In accordance with the Annual Statistical Report of the Spanish Ministry for Interior Affairs in 1995 there were 9.158 Chinese citizens registered in Spain. In only five years the number triplicated up to 28.693 in 2000.¹ But this was only the beginning of an important rise. The data of Chinese immigrants in Spain offered by the National Statistical Agency (INE) show that in spite of the economic crisis, which started in 2008, in the year 2012 more than 177.000 Chinese citizens resided officially in Spain. However, this number did not include people from other overseas Chinese communities nor Spanish citizens of Chinese origin or descent, and unregistered Chinese immigrants in Spain were not counted either. In the year 2015, among non-EU countries, the Chinese immigrant community is just behind Morocco, to be the second largest migration country for Spain. The number has been kept growing all the time and in the year 2017, there are 207.593 Chinese immigrants living in Spain.² In the last years of economic crisis among the top ten largest immigrant communities in Spain, only the number of Chinese immigrants is increasing while the numbers of migrants from other countries is falling – as the table below shows.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Romania	897.203	870.258	797.054	751.208	715.136	684.532
Morocco	788.563	792.158	774.383	749.274	753.425	747.872
United Kingdom	397.892	385.179	300.286	282.120	253.928	236.669
China	177.001	181.701	186.031	191.341	199.661	207.593
Italy	191.901	192.431	180.999	179.129	181.848	189.005
Ecuador	308.174	263.498	218.883	176.247	158.070	141.582
Colombia	246.345	222.542	181.875	150.956	140.166	145.055
Bulgaria	176.411	168.997	151.579	141.880	133.427	126.997
Germany	196.878	181.900	140.511	130.505	118.979	110.378
Bolivia	186.018	173.702	150.703	126.001	115.165	102.236

Table 1: Variation of Foreign Population Resident in Spain, 2012-2017 (Jan.).

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Statistics of registered foreign population from 2012 to 2017.

- 1 Anuario Estadístico del Ministerio del Interior, Madrid, Ministerio del Interior, 1995 y 2000.
- 2 Data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).

The distribution of Chinese immigrants in Spain is unbalanced. Almost 65% of Chinese immigrants are residents of the province of Madrid, Catalonia and Valencia,³ so that Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia as top three biggest cities of Spain are homes to the largest Chinese communities. Andalusia, Canary Islands, the Region of Murcia and other provinces share the rests of the Chinese population. Diagram 1 shows the very unbalanced distribution of Chinese immigrants in the major provinces of Spain.

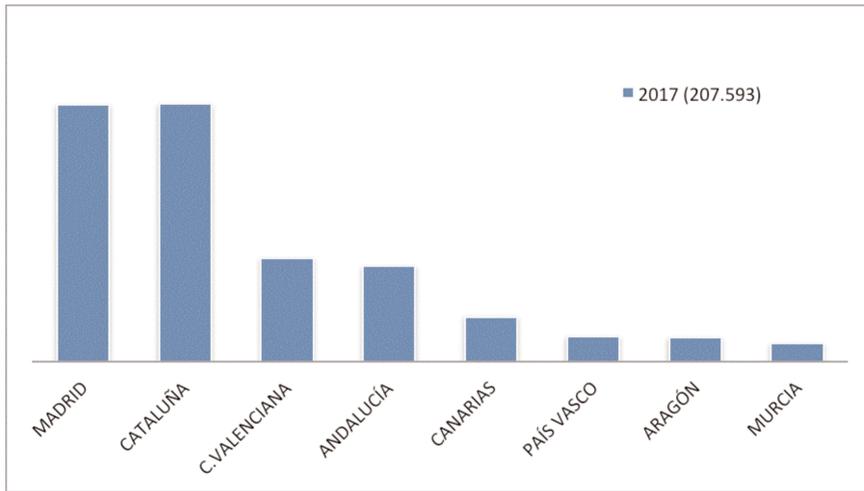


Diagram 1: The Distribution of Chinese Immigrants in Spain.

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Statistical of registered Chinese population distributed in Spain for 2017 (January).

All these data describe the general migratory context, and it is evident that the community of Chinese immigrants in Spain can be characterised by its permanent growth even in times of crisis. The fact, that Chinese immigrants are in a considerably higher percentage working as self-employed may be one of the reasons for this development. Therefore, it seems to be useful to have a more detailed view on the cultural pattern of Chinese immigrants related to self-employment. In order to be able to analyse these cultural pattern it might be convenient to first have a look on the theoretical tools we are using to analyse Chinese self-employed: the concept of the *life-mode of self-employed* developed in *Life-Mode Analysis*.

3 Data from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE).

3. THE LIFE-MODE OF SELF-EMPLOYED WITHIN SIMPLE COMMODITY PRODUCTION

In order to understand the pattern of self-employed we suppose it useful to operate with the anthropological approach of *Life-Mode Analysis*. This theory, which was developed mostly in Scandinavia during the last decades, is conceived as a development of the scientific elements of Marxist theoretical thinking and especially the concept *mode of production* and *social formation* (understood as the societal complex of coexisting modes of production).⁴ In this concrete case it is especially the concept of *Simple Commodity Production* and the related notion of the *Life-Mode of Self-Employed*, which allows to work out an understanding of this group of migrants.⁵ In the last years there have been carried out various studies in Spain using this concept, especially in the field of agriculture and fishery.⁶ As we are going to show, it works as efficient tool to understand Chinese immigrants' work and further life in an anthropological perspective.

A first and crucial feature of self-employed is that they are their own employer. They work for themselves instead of working for others, realizing income throughout offering commodities, services or doing business. Salvador Cayuela describes these characteristics as following:

«In simple commodity production, self-employed workers own their means of production, which makes them very resilient to market fluctuations. [...] in this mode of production, the self-employed producer performs various functions

4 Most important introductions to Life-Mode Theory are: HØJRUP, Thomas: *State, Culture and Life-Modes*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. SCHRIEWER, Klaus: *Die strukturelle Lebensformanalyse*, Marburg: AVK, 1993.

5 CAYUELA SÁNCHEZ, Salvador, SCHRIEWER, Klaus: «La cultura de los 'trabajadores' autónomos», *Sociología del trabajo*, 90, primavera de 2017, pp. 27-46. A detailed analysis of this mode of production and life-mode applied to the case of fishery: MONRAD HANSEN, Kirsten: «La producción mercantil simple y el modo de vida del trabajador autónomo. Una cultura de importancia para la industria pesquera costera», in K. Schriewer & T. Højrup, *European Fisheries at a Tipping-Point/La Pesca Europea ante un cambio irreversible*, Murcia: Editum, 2012, pp. 135-171.

6 CAYUELA SÁNCHEZ, Salvador: «Estrategias de supervivencia y modo de vida de autónomo. Un análisis socio-antropológico sobre tres casos en la agricultura murciana», *Gazeta de Antropología*, 29, 2013. LÓPEZ MARTÍNEZ, Gabriel: «"Europe's Whims". The Disappearance of Mediterranean Fisheries? / "Los caprichos de Europa". ¿La desaparición de la pesca en el Mediterráneo?», in K. Schriewer & T. Højrup, *European Fisheries...*, 2012, pp. 507-553.

–accounting, sales, etc.– [...] Finally, simple commodity production mode has a high degree of malleability, which allows for competition with capitalist business».⁷

Cayuela states here that the fact, that self-employed are the owners of their own enterprises, provides them with certain durability in the competition with capitalist companies. But why should that be so?

As far as we can see, there are two arguments for this hypothesis. The first is, that they don't have to buy the work, which is used in the process of production. They introduce it and can expand it in the needed extension without any extra cost. However, this requires a certain perception of work, a specific working-culture which is not based on a notion of work as an inevitable evil but as something positive. The second argument is, that private and enterprise economy are not separated. That makes possible to contribute to the survival of the own enterprise by reducing the private consumption over a time.

The specific work-culture related to the first argument can be explained by a comparison with the life-mode of wage-earners: The life of employed people is based on the division of the day into *working time* and *free time*. As working time is sold to an employer and the wage-earner has to do the work his company assigns to him or her, it is directed by others. Therefore *non-work* can be perceived as free time, which is –as its denomination says– the opposite to the other directed time. Consequently, this free time constitutes the proper aim in the life-mode of wage-earners. *Life-Mode Analysis* works with the hypothesis that the life-mode of self-employed does not contain a corresponding concept of *work* as opposed to *non-work*. This life-mode does not have any concept of work opposed to free time, since these are fused into a single concept of *activity* as Højrup argues.⁸

The concept *activity* is closely related to the fact that the self-employed are working for themselves and that they therefore carry out independent work in the sense that it is the proper self-employed who organizes and assigns the work to himself. To be the *own boss* is the essential idea in this life-mode; being responsible for the own company, the income and the future strategy. Self-employed people can decide what they are going to do,

7 CAYUELA SÁNCHEZ, Salvador: «A new economic anthropology for the study of complex societies: application of life-mode analysis to smallholder agriculture», in K. Schriewer & S. Cayuela (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives. Tools for the Analysis of the European Societies/Perspectivas antropológicas. Herramientas para el análisis de las sociedades europeas*, Murcia, Münster y New York: Editum & Waxmann, 2014, pp. 324-367, p. 340.

8 HØJRUP, Thomas: *State, Culture and Life-Modes*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, pp.127.

and how they are going to do, most importantly, they have the right to decide about their work and their enterprise. Carrying out free, independent work can never happen to its opposite side, waged work, which means there is no inherent right to decide, because it is work for others and instructed by others.

As many of the self-employed have had the experience in their life to work as wage-earner and also observe how wage-earners live, they develop their own understanding about this life mode. They see differences from wage-earners in two aspects: On the one hand, they know that wage-earners have a fix working time, normally 8 hours a day, and after working time, it's free time which contrasts to work time, and it is free for them to arrange. From the point of view of self-employed, work of wage-earners is like lost time. It is meaningless in the sense that it is other-directed, not promoting neither commitment nor responsibility. Therefore it is opposed to the concept of activity we can find among self-employed. On the other hand they know, that wage-earners are contracted, which means that they need to work, and also they need to be put to work. They work for an income, therefore to them work is just a mean but not their end. They work for living better, trying to get more free time and enough income to support their enjoyment during their free time.

Life of self-employed is different, because the independent work is directly related with the responsibility for the well-doing of the enterprise. As Cayuela says: «Su éxito como autónomo dependerá de su capacidad para conservar vivo su negocio, entendido como su propia forma de vida».⁹

It is a crucial aspect of this Life-Mode that the self-employed permanently look for the best strategy to survive as self-employed. Moreover, there are different ways to choose, gambling with overall-costs (including maintaining of family) and unit costs.¹⁰ How they can do that is different in every branch and every case. Chinese self-employed have to choose for example if they rent a small or a big salesroom with the related effect on fix costs, or they can buy smaller or bigger numbers of one and the same product, with the related effects on unit costs.

9 CAYUELA SÁNCHEZ, Salvador: «A new economic anthropology for the study of complex societies: application of life-mode analysis to smallholder agriculture», in K. Schriewer & S. Cayuela (eds.), *Anthropological Perspectives...*, 2014, pp. 324-367, p. 340.

10 HØJRUP, Thomas & SCHRIEWER, Klaus (eds.): *European Fisheries...*, 2012.

These are some basic notions related to the concept *Life-Mode of Self-Employed*. Its application to the specific conditions in different branches in specific social, political and economic situations make possible to work out the cultural pattern of the self-employed in the concrete case. The following example of Chinese migrants in Spain will give a first glimpse of it.

4. WHY CHINESE IMMIGRANTS TEND TO BE SELF-EMPLOYED

The group of Chinese immigrants stands out by a high level of self-employed, compared to other national groups of immigrants. According to the document *Membership in Social Security System*¹¹ from April 2017 there are at all re 97.685 registered Chinese people working officially in Spain. Less than the half (46.259) are wage-earners and some few work in special contracts in agriculture, households or on the sea. This means that more than the half of the Chinese registered in the Social Security are self-employed. The document speaks of no less than 51.426 Chinese nationals, registered as self-employed.

These Chinese self-employed are more than a third of all self-employed migrants from non-EU countries. The national group with the second number in self-employed are the Moroccans (18.646), but compared with the total number of registered Moroccans (231.120) in Social Security less than 10% of them drive their own business. Among Pakistani and Argentinian migrants the rate of self-employed is about 25% and in all other registered groups it is significantly lower. Therefore, it can be stated that the Chinese with 50% self-employed stick out with a real outstanding rate compared to all the other national group of migrants from non-EU countries.

Considering these statistical data it is not surprising that one of the core questions for the understanding of Chinese migration is, why these Asian immigrants tend to establish their own enterprises and how they do that.

The reasons for Chinese immigrants to become self-employed people are from both structural factors related to the political and economic conditions and cultural factors in China and in Spain, so it is indicated to have a look on these four aspects.

The structural factors regarding the homeland, China, can be explained partly by the transformations the country experienced in the last decades. Since the leader Deng Xiaoping started the economic transformation in 1979 and

11 *Afiliación de extranjeros a la Seguridad Social*, abril 2017, Madrid: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social, p. 14.

especially after the economic reform from 1992,¹² many business opportunities came up in the new Socialist Market Economy. Chinese people were not limited their minds in being wage-earners, they realized that being entrepreneur or self-employed in many cases could bring them more income, more liberty in work, responsibility for their own activities. All this made them deduce that being entrepreneur or self-employed would make their life better.

The statistical data from the State Administration for Industry and Commerce of the People's Republic of China show that the number of self-employed has been growing all the time since the economic reform. According to the official data, until the year 2016, in China there are 55 million registered self-employed and nearly 20 million private companies.¹³

Regarding the cultural pattern in China, the Amway Global Entrepreneurship Report¹⁴ from 2016 may be of interest.¹⁵ This document, which is only available in Mandarin, shows that in China more than 86% of interviewees have a positive attitude towards entrepreneurship.¹⁶ This percentage is considerably higher than the global average which is about 77%. According to the report, take care of both family and career, enjoy life, realize self-worth and reach personal achievements as well as obtaining extra income are the main reasons for Chinese entrepreneurs to start-up.

The statistical data of self-employed in China and the Amway Report confirm the image that among Chinese people, diligence is in general considered as a good virtue to follow. May be that this is influenced by the Confucian doctrine which teaches to fully realize one's self-worth. Therefore being diligent and assiduous is perceived as a part of a good and respectable life –which can be interpreted as a parallel cultural pattern to the protestant ethics.¹⁷ In China less industrious people are disregarded, the common opinion is that people need to work hard and to be assiduous.

12 HARROLD, Peter & LALL, Rajiv: «China: Reform and Development 1992-93», *World Bank Discussion Paper*, Washington: World Bank, 1993.

13 ZHOU, Ke: *The Number of Self-Employed National Wide Has Reached More Than 55 Millions*, Xinhua News Agency, 2016.05.12 <http://www.gov.cn/shuju/2016-05/12/content_5072736.htm>.

14 The Amway Company collaborated with Technical University of Munich (Technische Universität München) commissioned GfK to investigate the global entrepreneurship.

15 <<http://www.amway.com.cn/news/activity/201612/201612.html>>.

16 We suppose that the report does not limit to entrepreneurs in the sense of capitalists but think that it also includes self-employed.

17 ZHANG SC, LIU WQ & LIU XL: «Investigating the Relationship Between Protestant Work Ethic and Confucian Dynamism: An Empirical Test in Mainland China», *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2012, 106 (2) pp. 243-252.

Therefore, it is no surprise that China is known for its specific work-ethics. Several scholars confirm that work traditionally is related to positive connotations in Chinese culture. This perception is prevalent already in traditional rural societies, as R. David Arkush states in his analysis of proverbs of the agricultural environment. The positive value of work is expressed in proverbs like «If man works hard the land will not be lazy».¹⁸ This labour-ethics from times before the civil war were adopted to new conditions in times of socialism. As Madsen already confirms, the traditional Chinese values regarding work were not banished in socialist society but on the contrary reaffirmed in the different political context.¹⁹

In this regard the considerations of Stevan Harrell are especially illuminating, even if they already were written in 1984,²⁰ when the profound economic transformation carried out by Deng Xiaoping just had started. Harrell points out that the omnipresent stereotype of hard working Chinese is depending on a series of different conditions. According to his hypothesis, it was developed in a society based already for a long time on social mobility, which made possible that one and the related family could climb up or descend in social hierarchy.

This means that Chinese diligence is not a primordial attribute of Chinese people but a cultural pattern depending on a society that demanded commitment and offered possibilities. Harrell corroborates this idea with the observation that in big Chinese enterprises with wage-earners the attitude of hard working is not prevalent. Taking this into account, he states that: «Chinese will work hard when they see possible long-term benefits, in terms of improved material conditions and/or security, for a group with which they identify».²¹

This statement invites to differentiate two aspects: on the one hand the long term search for benefit and relatively security and on the other hand a certain altruism in favour of the group, which since long times is the family.

18 ARKUSH, R. David: «If Man Works Hard the Land Will Not Be Lazy»: Entrepreneurial Values in North Chinese Peasant Proverbs», *Modern China*, 10, n. 4, 1984, pp. 461-479.

19 MADSEN, R. P.: «The Maoist ethic and the moral basis of political activism in rural China», in R. W. Wilson et al. (eds.), *Moral Behavior in Chinese Society*, New York: Praeger, 1981.

20 HARRELL, Stevan: «Why Do the Chinese Work So Hard? Reflections on an Entrepreneurial Ethic», *Modern China*, 11, 1985, pp. 203-226, p. 217.

21 Ibidem.

On the one hand, the group, Chinese people identify with, is first of all the family. The Chinese family concept perceives family as the proper unit; while the individual is secondary. Chinese who live with this idea of family do not only work for the well of themselves but especially for the family and next generation. In order to fulfil this aim, they keep working hard all the time even though they already had a satisfied life. Also this feature is affirmed by Harrell:

«In no Chinese society do individuals work primarily for individual benefit. The group, of course, that has been the intended beneficiary of the entrepreneurial strategies throughout most of Chinese history has been the *jia*, or economic family, or in the very long run the collectivity of one's *jia* mates and all their potential descendants».²²

On the other hand, Harrell interprets the pursuit of (material) security as a strategy based on hard labour, on activities of investment, study and even diversification of holding. Harrell assumes that Chinese people have developed an «entrepreneurial spirit» and seems to think on those capitalists who establish big companies. One can ask, if this «entrepreneurial spirit» should be understood in a wider sense, including the culture of self-employed which actually is the relevant for the majority of Chinese people. Investment in a larger scale and diversification of holdings seems to be a topic for a limited group, meanwhile the majority of people deals with more modest issues. Therefore we propose not to be that ambitious and relate the main aspects Harrell links to an «entrepreneurial spirit», like hard working and family ties, first of all with the culture of self-employed. Perhaps some of these self-employed will have the opportunity during their life to transform themselves in entrepreneurs with far-reaching possibilities, but the many of them do not. Nevertheless this transformation of some few indicates that there is a proximity between self-employed and entrepreneurs which is also interesting from a theoretical perspective.

If we interpret the different characteristics Harrell mentions as belonging to the culture of self-employed, we can deduce how hard work fits in as a crucial aspect in the culture of self-employed. Due to the fact, that work is the most important mean for self-employed in order to be competitive, working hard is meaningful and enables in a certain degree to build up what Harrell calls the «hedged and defences against loss».²³ In this sense, the Chinese culture fits perfectly with the possibilities in the world of self-employed.

22 Ibidem.

23 Ibidem, p. 216.

The strong family bonds, mentioned by various authors, are another pattern, which matches perfectly with the culture of self-employed. It is not only the idea that it is meaningful to build a seminal project for the family and the perception that the individuals are of a limited importance in the context of the family as a whole that fosters the common project of a family enterprise. Also the fact, that all family-members can contribute to the project without the necessity to calculate a fix salary produces a strength for the family-project.

Besides these factors regarding conditions and culture in China, the investigation also shows that in Spain there exist objective advantages for them to be self-employed and disadvantages to be wage-earners in some extent. On the one hand, it is difficult for Chinese immigrants to become wage-earners for Spanish companies. Due to their language limitation, caused by their belonging to a completely different lingual family and different cultural background, only a few of them find work in local companies. Most of Chinese migrant wage-earners have no choice but to work for Chinese self-employed people. However in many cases, they are not willing to work for Chinese self-employed people because they normally have to work harder or longer with less income and without insurance.

The development of Chinese manufacture industry and the distribution of *made in China* products provide Chinese immigrants with the special opportunity to become distributors of Chinese products all over the world. This factor is considered as a very important advantage for Chinese immigrants comparing to immigrants from other countries. This fact is all the more important since there is a strong demand of Chinese products on the Spanish market.

Another factor is that it is not that difficult for immigrants to become a self-employed in Spain. Even if Spaniards have to cope with less bureaucratic hurdles, it is still relatively realistic for foreigners to settle down as a self-employed. Following the law Real Decreto 557/2011 the immigrants need a resident card with permission to be self-employed to establish their own business.

In the context of these promoting objective conditions, the cultural pattern of Chinese immigrants can unfold. This idea stands out in a field note of an interviewee in Murcia who commented:

«It's always better to have your own business than working for others, you are free when you are working for yourself, you can have better income and most importantly you can stay with your family even when you are working».²⁴

24 Interview of hundred-peseta shop owner in Murcia, SE 008, 45 years old.

This short sequence of an interview contains three different arguments which turn up among Chinese immigrants frequently. The first one deals with the concept of freedom which is linked with the work in the own enterprise and the fact that there is no superior who designs your work. The second argument is related to the economic possibilities. It describes the circumstance that there is no profit for an exterior owner of the company, but all earned money (except taxes) is for the own enterprise. The third idea mentioned in the sequence and perceived as an advantage is that a self-employed can involve the family in the work. This inclusion makes it possible for the family to stay together, it does not provoke costs and, above all, it generates a common family-project. It seems that this combination of different factors promotes that Chinese immigrants tend to accept the adventure to be self-employed.

The idea of an own business, which is widespread among Chinese immigrants, is embedded in a culture of mutual support among Chinese overseas immigrants. This idea of a certain solidarity is an observation which was made by Lin Qiyan already in 1992. She states that entrepreneurial spirit and mutual help and assistance are the two most important cultural influences for overseas Chinese immigrants to create their own career.²⁵

This help from other Chinese is especially important regarding the economic part of the founding of a business. The necessary capital is a precondition that is required by Spanish law. However, where does the capital of Chinese immigrants come from? In most of the singular cases studied, the capital comes from other members of the own family and another part from personal savings which may be a result of an employment as wage-earner. This constellation reaffirms the strong family bond and network which provides Chinese immigrants. Therefore, to become a self-employed small business owner is perceived as the most ideal option among Chinese immigrants.

5. WHY CHINESE SELF-EMPLOYED IMMIGRANTS WORK LONGER?

In Spain it is very common that people who talk about self-employed Chinese business, generate spontaneously association that Chinese immigrants work day and night. So did a Spanish interviewee when he commented that he could see the Chinese self-employed owners of a store near to his flat working all the time:

25 LIN, Qiyan: «The Overseas Chinese Business Culture», *Academic Monthly*, 1992, pp.19-21.

«I see them working before I get to work and see them working after I finish my work, sometimes when I go out at night, I still see them working. To me it's almost 24 hours service».²⁶

Even if this citation may overdraw the real situation, still it is certain that Chinese self-employed in Spain generally spend many hours a day at their working place. Our observations show that their working-day is significantly longer than it is common for other social groups in the country.

Seen from the perspective of Life-Mode Analysis, this pattern is directly linked with the crucial characteristics of the life-mode of self-employed that work (in the pure version) is not bought on the labour market but introduced by the self-employed him- or herself. This means at the same time, that work is a mean without fix costs, which the self-employed has at his/her command. Cayuela Sánchez and Schriewer describe this feature in the following way: «La fuerza de trabajo no se compra y no tiene por ello un valor de cambio y de uso; constituye tan sólo el límite superior de la producción».²⁷

The elevation of work is so to say the mean a self-employed has at his disposal to better the competitiveness of his/her enterprise without generating extra costs. Perhaps the Chinese immigrants in Spain represent an extreme interpretation of the use of this mean, when they consider that it is meaningful to stay in their store during long opening-hours from the morning to the late night. The prolonged opening-hours seems to fit perfectly with the temporal structure of everyday life in Spain. Using more time on work is therefore a reasonable way for Chinese self-employed in order to increase their earnings and thereby augment the possibilities to maintain their business. To extend opening-hours of a shop and to be more available compared with the competition –both other small retail shops and warehouses– is an efficient strategy for self-employed. Therefore it is not surprising that it has become a common pattern among immigrant self-employed shop-owners.

To this respect Aldrich commented: «Self-exploitation is a critical ethnic strategy for personal survival precisely because one can hardly do without it».²⁸ One can question if the Chinese migrants would perceive the long working days as self-exploitation. From a theoretical point of view, which

26 Field work diary: Spanish interviewee -1.

27 CAYUELA SÁNCHEZ, Salvador, SCHRIEWER, Klaus: «La cultura de los “trabajadores” autónomos», *Sociología del trabajo*, 90, primavera de 2017, pp. 27-46.

28 ALDRICH, H.; CATER, J; JONES, T, et al. (1981): «Business Development and Self Segregation: Asian Enterprise in Three British Cities», in: PEACH, C.; ROBINSON, V. & SMITH, S. (eds.): *Ethnic Segregation in Cities*, London: Croom Helm, 1981, pp. 170-190.

avoids to part from an ethical perspective, it is difficult to argue that the work in the own company can be considered as self-exploitation. Economic circumstances may provoke that self-employed have to invest a lot of time in order to survive, but this is not self-exploitation. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is an «ethnic strategy» based on an expanded use of time in order to be competitive and made possible by a specific type of family-support. Chinese immigrants are not the only ones who apply this strategy. It is also extended among for example Pakistan people.

Another promoting aspect of this strategy is, that most of Chinese stores are family-based and driven in common by the family-members. This means that the family-members can be with their family most of the time while they are working in the store.

Chinese immigrants understand that the existence as self-employed shop-owner, that this possibility to be *free*, has its price. This may be one of the prior reasons that they perceive their daily work in a positive way, enjoying their free and independent work. Thus even they work longer than wage-earners, they could or they are willing to accept it.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Chinese immigrants in Spain constitute the only group which has been growing also during the current economic crisis. This surprising development may be related with the fact that it is, without any doubt, the collective among non-EU immigrants with the highest rate of self-employed. In this article we tried to present some arguments which explain this cultural pattern and economic strategy.

Referring to our on going empirical study about Chinese self-employed immigrants we could propose to analyse the case of Chinese self-employed with the approach about the *Life-Mode of Self-Employed* which was developed in the frame of the *Life-Mode Analysis*. This theory contextualizes the reason why self-employed store-owners work longer than wage-earners. The basic reason is related with the missing distinction between *working time* and *free time* among self-employed and their concept of *activity* and *independent work*.

This general frame of the *Life-Mode of Self-Employed* to accept long working days is strengthened by a pattern that characterises Chinese culture in general. One the one hand the concept of work which characterises the socially mobile Chinese society and on the other hand the strong idea of family bonds.

As a result, the phenomenon of long working hours among Chinese self-employed is influenced by multiple aspects especially the fact that the use of work is the most important mean for Self-employed. The general Chinese culture, types of stores and demands of clients are further aspects to take into account.

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