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Immigrants' Entrepreneurial Opportunities: The Case of the Chinese in Portugal

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**Immigrants' Entrepreneurial
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The Case of the Chinese in Portugal**

Catarina Reis Oliveira
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Immigrants' Entrepreneurial Opportunities: The Case of the Chinese in Portugal

Summary

Why do some foreign nationalities seem to have entrepreneurial initiatives and others don't? Why do certain foreign communities tend to build an ethnic economy, and others melt in the economy of the reception country? The analysis made so far of the modes of incorporation of the different Chinese immigrant communities in Portugal allowed to evidence that, unlike what some authors defend, it is not only the cultural factors that channel immigrants into certain segments of the labour market. Several structural factors associated to these immigrants' arrival should be considered: the immigration policy of the host society; the reasons that generated the migratory flow; the existence of a co-ethnic community in the country and its economic incorporation; the operation of social networks; the possibility to acquire capital among the community (informal resources); and the potential market of the host society. Furthermore, in Portugal, as in Southern Europe, the informal economy can be an opportunity to self-employment - not so easy in North European countries where institutional control is stronger and competition is higher.

Keywords: Immigrants, Entrepreneurship, Structural opportunities, Ethnic resources

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IMMIGRANTS' ENTREPRENEURIAL OPPORTUNITIES: THE CASE OF CHINESE IN PORTUGAL¹

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Contemporary immigration flows evidence a diversified occupational incorporation. In several host societies large concentrations of immigrant entrepreneurial activities exist² (Portes, 1999: 77). Alternative theories on economic progress of immigrants have been developed. Researchers like Portes, Light, Bonacich, Waldinger and Rath study immigrants' entrepreneurial activities giving way to new alternative perspectives on immigration.

Portugal is no exception. As in other receiving countries, immigrant minorities are more likely to be self-employed than natives. However some groups are more likely to become entrepreneurs than others. Chinese do not stand out in this respect in relation to other foreigners with residence permits, but they are more likely to be independent workers than the majority of non-European foreigners.

During the last twenty years Asians had the highest growth rates (730%) of foreigners with legal residence in Portugal³, outnumbering, also, natives on entrepreneurial activity rates.

Only Africans have no correlation with these findings. This group, the largest foreign group in Portugal, has a majority of wage earners and salaried employees in civil construction and cleanings.

In this context which factors explain the tendency of some immigrants to work on their own account? Would cultural factors explain the concentration of some ethnic groups on entrepreneurial activities, when abroad, and not others?

Cultural factors can be an important explanation⁴. As found by Weber, protestant values are congenial with starting entrepreneurial initiatives. However, we believe that in some cases these cultural factors can be in fact community opportunities that give specific resources to individual groups.

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² "In certain branches foreigners have benefited relatively more than nationals from employment creation, for example, in the hotel and restaurant sector of all economies considered except those of France and Holland. Except in the Netherlands, this is also the case in the business services and real estate" (SOPEMI, 1998:37-38).

³ In 1980 Asians immigrants represented 1,75% of foreign population with legal residence in Portugal, and in 2000 there were 4,2%.

⁴ For more see 'OECD jobs strategy' 1998:12-13.

In immigration analysis that can prove to be true if we consider the informal advantages that usually foreigners' groups benefit from being close groups. As A. Portes demonstrated, on 'enclave' studies, immigrants can have a much more successful economic integration if they stay together (speaking the same language, having the same cultural references), instead of being dispersed in host societies. The existence of a co-ethnic group in a host society can represent an easier way to get in, and integrate into an economic activity abroad.

Nevertheless, the analysis of different OECD countries showed that immigrants aren't distributed in the same way as natives. Rather, they are concentrated in certain activities that vary from country to country (SOPEMI, 1995:40).

The specific context of the receiving country (e.g. immigration history, governmental legislation on foreigner access to labour market) can explain some of the differences. However, the specific context cannot be the only explanation, since as several researchers found the same immigrant group shows common entrepreneurial activities in different host societies. This is the Chinese case across the world, namely, in the ethnic restaurant sector.

But does the Portuguese economic structure of opportunities force a specific economic adaptation of Chinese immigrants? Or is it that the formation of an ethnic enclave, traditionally built by Chinese immigrants entrepreneurs abroad (e.g. New York Chinatown - Zhou 1992), is context independent?

We believe that to understand the main characteristics of Chinese immigrants mode of incorporation in Portugal, both in its similar and different tendencies with other host societies, we must consider the institutional framework⁵; the reasons that generated the migratory flow, which are linked to the history of the co-ethnic community in the country and its economic incorporation; the operation of social networks in the host society and throughout different countries, whether or not it is possible to raise capital from within the ethnic community; and the extent to which the host society market is truly open⁶. And that is to say that opportunities connected with immigrants co-ethnic resources (as Portes suggests in the 'enclave model') and with structural factors of the host society must also be considered.

With that goal in mind we surveyed two hundred and fifty Chinese entrepreneurs residing in the country⁷. All the interviews (30) and questionnaires (224) were undertaken with a translator, mandarin speaker, although the majority of the interviewees had as their native language variants of Zhejiang dialect.

1. Entrepreneurial initiatives: the theoretical context

Why do some ethnic groups display more entrepreneurial initiatives than others? Why does one group build an ethnic economy while another melts into the host economy? Cultural theories explain the entrepreneurial initiative as a specific historical inheritance (Eisenstadt, 1991); on the other hand,

⁵ Related to the different forms of state organisation, namely through their welfare states – neo-American and Continental Europe models – as Kloosterman (2000) put it. Giving rise to distinct state policies and distinct institutional frameworks, they are particularly important to explaining immigrants' entrepreneurial initiatives.

⁶ "The heterogeneous character both of the foreigner presence in various economic sectors and of their share of total employment is the product of a number of factors the importance of which vary from country to country, the most significant generally the country's migration history. Other factors include, most notably, the functioning of the productive apparatus, the legislation governing the access of foreigners to the labour market, and the working conditions and wages on offer in each sector" (SOPEMI 1998:33).

⁷ The data presented in this article result from a national survey and several fieldwork interviews undertaken in Portugal, on a SociNova project about immigrant entrepreneurs. The sample was built on a complementary process of snowball and Chinese Associations lists.

sociologists try to find an explanation in the ethnic group's characteristics and nature of the host society (Light and Bonacich 1988, Portes 1999 and Rath 2000).

In the past it was believed that jobs in co-ethnic firms were equivalent to the inferior segment of the external labour market, which lessened the chances of future mobility. However, more recent research shows that this is not the case. Employment inside the ethnic enclave may be the best way of gaining access to supervisory positions and leadership and for acquiring businesses. Studies show that the education acquired in the origin abroad can be better rewarded in ethnic firms than in the outside market and that work experience gained in firms ran by people of the same nationality is the key to establishing independent business (Portes, 1999: 93, OECD 1998:19).

It is our goal to analyse the existence of a structure of opportunities, or several structural resources (inner-group and out-group, in the host society) that influence immigrants' integration to the labour market of host societies. Jointly, as Portes and Rumbaut (2001:48-49) discuss, "governmental, societal and communal comprise the model of incorporation of a particular immigrant group. These modes condition the extent to which immigrant human capital can be brought into play to promote successful economic and social adaptation".

However, as Kloosterman and Rath (2001) discuss, to consider an opportunity structure does not mean assuming the existence of a transparent market where all available activities are underlined or that their are stable. On the contrary, it is fundamental to take in consideration the time and place of analysis. The history of the immigrant community in a specific host society, and the evolution of immigration policy in the receiving context have a central role.

On the other hand, it does not mean either, the existence of an objective and exclusive economic rational' behaviour of immigrant entrepreneurs. In fact, as A. Etzioni (1988) put it, rationality in economic behaviour does not mean independence of all privileged relations, solidarity links, or specific community resources.

Ethnic resources are, in some cases, misunderstood as cultural conditions, or 'habits of the heart', that influence the development and growth of entrepreneurial activities. This is the Chinese case. In a weberian logic, they are "highly dependent on traditional authority and entrepreneurial culture for direction in life. Four major imprints of China's culture and history are: the importance attached by Confucian culture to the family; a strong tendency to promote the collective or the group; a deep respect for age, hierarchy, and authority; and the importance placed on reputation achieved, hard work and successful enterprise." (Zapalska and Edwards 2001:289). But can these cultural conditions be seen as structural opportunities abroad?

As several researchers described (Light, Bonacich, Waldinger, Portes, Rath), family resources - workers and capital to invest - can represent an immigrant competitive structure to participate in the host society market. On the other hand, inside the co-ethnic group ethnic entrepreneurs supply the business (workers speaking the same language, goods, and even capital).

That is why the presence of an entrepreneurial group among the first "cohort" of immigrants can help explaining the community's economic performance (as Portes 1999 argues). The first generation of immigrants, by using the networks that support the migratory waves, influences the incorporation of subsequent generations. As Portes (1999: 93) argues the education acquired at the origin is better rewarded in the community, i.e. in ethnic companies, than in the external economy. It can also, under certain circumstances, serve as a privileged instrument to the group's integration into the national economy.

However immigrant networks that support informal practices can also inhibit immigrants' incorporation into the wider labour market. Networks operated by immigrants from Cape Verde channel Cape Verdean labour into low-status, low-paid market niches like construction and cleaning. In the Chinese and Indian cases, however, they have had a positive effect, particularly in relation to creating employment inside the community and providing access to loans as venture capital.

According to Rex (1988), “as an individual rises in the social ladder he becomes less ethnic”. However, do immigrants in Portugal have reasonable prospects in the national market if they ignore the openings that their own ethnic community provides – for example, the possibility of speaking one’s own language, various forms of help and protection, the availability of loans, and the chance to save quickly and get a quick return on investment?

This ability to draw on the inner ethnic resources, in order to achieve success in economic competition, can be influenced by the context of the host society (as Portes suggests). Does a different receiving context make the entrepreneurial initiatives of immigrant group different?

To answer this question it is important to analyse the policy relative to immigrants residing in Portugal, the geo-strategic position of the country (particularly its relation with the European Union), and the structure of the Portuguese labour market.

As Rath and Kloosterman (2000:660) discuss, barriers to entry for setting-up business can influence specific segments of the opportunity structure. So it is particularly important to consider how competitors (natives, co-ethnics or other immigrant groups) are positioned in the market.

In order to survive in the host society market, immigrant entrepreneurs, sometimes, have adopted informal strategies. They thus guaranty high profits, and low prices. As Portes explains, an informal activity can be “a survival mechanism in response to insufficient modern job creation, informal enterprise represents the irruption of real market forces in an economy straitjacketed by state regulation” (Portes, 1994:427).

But how can immigrants’ strategies be affected by the specific Portuguese context, where native entrepreneurs also use informal strategies to succeed? Does this specific context influence entrepreneurial initiatives of immigrants, making them different from co-ethnics’ experiences in other host societies?

2. Does Portugal impinge a specific context?

Large-scale immigration into Portugal and elsewhere in Southern Europe is relatively recent, and only dates back to the late 1970s. As King (2000: 8) points out, a combination of structural and situational factors explains the rapid development of immigration into Southern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s. First, the strict policing measures in traditional immigration destinies (such as France and West Germany) make it easier to immigrants enters in South European countries. The geographic position of these countries (particularly Italy and Greece) even opens the possibility to clandestine arrival. On the other hand, because of South European countries traditional dependence on tourism, the entry of visitors from all parts of the world has been facilitated⁸. Finally, the end of the colonial historic period conditioned immigration flows from ex-colonies to former metropole. (King et al.2000:8-9).

If between 1975 and 1980, in spite of the high unemployment levels, immigration in Portugal was made of the great " boom " of arrivals from the former colonies; starting in the 80s, the immigrants' growth (in particular illegal) was associated to the opportunities generated in some market segments (civil construction). During the 1990’s, a process of economic liberalisation (as a consequence of Portuguese entrance to European Union in 1986), which produced "the development of certain strategies aimed at increasing the flexibility of the labour market” (Baganha et al. 1998:150), led to a new upsurge in immigrant labour recruitment.

Asian and South American arrivals, particularly after 1980s, started to spread foreigners’ profiles. Most of the research on labour immigration to Portugal notes that Asians usual by reveal an aptitude for trade and enterprise, whereas most Africans take up employment in low-status sectors of

⁸ This is the case of the majority of Chinese entrepreneurs contacted. 37,5 % of those immigrants arrived in Portugal with a tourist visa, a legal entrance that became in some cases an illegal overstay (see **table 2**).

the labour market (mainly in construction and cleaning) (França,1992; Malheiros,1996; Baganha et al., 1998; Ferreira and Rato, 2000) (see **table 1**). I found little to contradict these findings. However, I did detect a certain degree of diversity within Chinese immigrants (Oliveira 2000).

In this sense, what host context did those immigrants find in the first place? Did immigrants find a similar receiving context experienced in the North European countries?

As showed in **table 3**, the South European countries have a *labour market structure different from the North European countries*. If in the first group we observe high rates of self-employment (all superior to 20% of the total civilian employment), on the North, the percent of employees and persons working on own account, are decreasing and never goes beyond 15%. On the other hand a relatively *large informal economy* and a fragile welfare provision, characterise the Southern countries.

As several researchers found in different contexts (Portes 1994, Kloosterman, Leun and Rath 1999), one of the main advantages of immigrant business is the use of several informal strategies related to their economic activities. But would it be an important ethnic opportunity if the native entrepreneurs would benefit from it in a similar way?

In Portugal, as in other South European countries, the informal sector is very significant, related with small and family firms (Guerreiro 1996, Cardoso et al. 1990: 32-80, Lisboa 1998:399). In this sense, Chinese entrepreneurs, as national entrepreneurs, have found underground opportunities. So do immigrant entrepreneurs, in Portugal, have to look for other kind of advantages, or structural opportunities, to be more competitive or improve the chances on entrepreneurial performance?

How would this specific labour market structure affect the entrepreneurial activities of immigrants? Would less self-employment activities of the labour market host society increase entrepreneurial opportunities of immigrants?

Wherever in the USA, Chinese entrepreneurs invested in a variety of entrepreneurial sectors, e.g. ethnic activities (such as Chinese restaurants), and other businesses, such as tourist stores (where tourists can buy small yellow cabs, liberty states, etc.) or laundries; in Portugal there is a concentration in activities with ethnic roots. In the beginning as street vendors (of Chinese silk ties), and gradually as restaurant owners.

Recently Chinese entrepreneurs also started investing in cloth stores. As it was observed, the majority of Chinese entrepreneurs who are in the sector are originally from Wenzhou, a textile industrial city in the Zhejiang Province. The origin supplies this small business with competitive prices.

Although a *weak formal (or governmental) control of the host state* can still be used as an advantage, the host society can also adopt restrictive measures to protect native entrepreneurs.

Portuguese policies do not set up formal barriers to the labour market and to immigrants' investments. The law recognises equal rights to national and foreign citizens with legal residence in Portugal. Any worker, independently of his nationality, benefits from welfare and other rights.

Until 1998, foreign workers weren't allowed to work in companies with less than five workers, what in fact difficult them to work in the majority of the small firms, of the family or of the co-ethnic group. That can be one part of the explanation to the scarce immigrant entrepreneurial initiatives until very recently (Marques et al. 2001).

Another important aspect is the possibility to acquire capital to set up a business, out of co-ethnic resources. In Portugal, few immigrant entrepreneurs not having Portuguese nationality have access to bank loans. In this sense the majority of foreigners, to whom bank loans were refused in Portuguese banks, are strictly dependent on social networks, savings or loans from banks in the country of origin, which reduce the range of entrepreneurial options.

From the 224 Chinese entrepreneurs surveyed, only fifteen had access to loans of Portuguese banks, and four in Chinese banks. The majority used co-ethnic resources to develop the

entrepreneurial activity: 136 entrepreneurs used family capital and 74 asked friends help. 124 Chinese entrepreneurs used their own savings.

Recently it was approved in the Portuguese Ministry Council (Law-decree nº4/2001) that work visas will be passed considering the needs of the labour market, the companies' needs. Consequently, every year a report from the national public office for employment with the available jobs is presented to the public.

Would this impede foreigner companies to recruit co-ethnic workers? Or would that in fact increase illegal immigration?

Being still a very recent measure, it isn't clear how immigrants perceive the estimations of foreigner workers needs. Nevertheless several Chinese entrepreneurs contacted declared that they usually look for co-ethnic workers in Spain or other European countries, when there are no available workers in Portugal. Can this mean an increase in illegal flows if necessary⁹?

In analysing the receiving context, it is also important to consider the *public opinion* of the host society, and the positive or negative representations about immigrants' groups. The positive discrimination, less common, can be related to a certain group that have privileged recruiting. On the other hand, certain groups can reveal a negative discrimination by being confined to servile works of low remuneration, which contributes to the confinement of the group to the segment of low wages of the labour market (Portes, 1999:90).

Light (in Portes, 1999:82) justifies Chinese entrepreneurial initiative with the social disadvantages that recent immigrants had to deal with in host societies. On the survey undertaken, entrepreneurs were therefor asked if they felt any kind of discrimination on the Portuguese labour market. The majority (91%) said no: they were not victim or felt any kind of discrimination on the labour market. That does not mean that there is not economic discrimination in Portugal lato sensu because, in fact, a majority of Chinese workers do not apply to wage labour. However it is important to take that in account because discrimination was not pointed out as the reason to start an entrepreneurial activity in the first place as some authors point out in other countries¹⁰.

In the Portuguese case it is also crucial to consider *European Union participation*. In the Chinese immigration routes to Portugal is significant a migratory experience in other European countries (see **table 6**). In fact Portugal is not necessarily chosen as a final country of destination. Their arrival to Portugal was determined by several reasons, such as family reunion, market opportunities in an European 'Chinese market' saturation, 'regularisation periods' (Marques, Oliveira and Dias 2002).

In this context we believe that the recent increasing flow of Chinese immigrants to Portugal, since the 1980s, can be explained by mobility facilities in Europe, by regularisation processes in Southern European countries, and by market opportunities of the common economic space¹¹. It's our goal to discuss the impact of those structural factors in the entrepreneurial activities, usually linked to Chinese immigrants, in Portugal.

Concretely the '*free circulation of people*' in Europe, has allowed a market enlargement which immigrants, entrepreneurs and workers, use to increase the success of their immigration experience. Survival of small businesses (such as restaurants, clothing stores, etc.) depends on the provisioning of goods and labour force, which relies on frequent contact with the place of origin, China, and with

⁹ In 2001 there were 1906 Chinese with a labour contract on restaurant and hotel sector, and 904 on commerce, waiting to acquire a permanent authorisation.

¹⁰ According to Light (in Portes 1999: 82), Chinese have a high propensity for developing self-employment, mainly because they suffered discrimination and even direct persecution in the first decades of the twentieth century.

¹¹ In 2000 a report of the national public office for employment publicised the labour shortages, which are concentrated in the construction, restaurants, hotels and retail commerce sectors. These are exactly the same sectors where immigrant entrepreneurs invest (Marques, Oliveira and Dias 2002).

other Chinese receiving societies. These strategies illustrate the new alternative form of immigrant economic adaptation that Portes et al (2001b) observed on ‘transnational entrepreneurs’ (Gonçalves 2001).

Several social and political initiatives, such as access to European citizenship (from one of the European Union countries) or regularisation periods, can also explain recent immigrant flows into the European Union.

The *acquisition of Portuguese citizenship* by the Chinese population is particularly significant (see **table 4**). Nevertheless the majority of these foreigner citizens declared having residence in the Asian continent in the request juncture, unlike the remaining foreigners, who resided mainly in Portugal or in another European country (Oliveira et al. 1999). Between 1985 and 1996, according to the Conservatory of Central Registers, 5 853 of the 19,753 foreigners that acquired Portuguese nationality were Chinese. Of these, 5,415 were residents in Macao and only 152 lived in Portugal (Oliveira et al, 1999).

The signing of the transition Declaration between Portugal and China on Macao in March 26, 1987, and the early experience on Hong Kong transition, led several Chinese to acquire Portuguese nationality (C. Oliveira et al 1999). This phenomenon peaked in 1992. Marriage was one way of acquiring Portuguese citizenship. The establishment on March 31, 1993, of a new juridical regime in Macao¹² (to apply as from 1999) and changes in the Portuguese law on citizenship in 1994¹³ were the two main reasons for the slowing down in the rate of Chinese naturalisation by marriage.

Chinese who acquired Portuguese nationality had lived for at least 10 years in Macao or arrived in Portugal from a former Portuguese colony (especially Mozambique).

- “Didn’t you have problems after the independence of Mozambique?”

- “No because my father already had Portuguese citizenship, because that was that Government’s power before April 25th, is it not? Mozambique. They sent a registered letter giving to my father the Portuguese citizenship, it was in Américo Tomás’s juncture”. [Chinese man originally from Guangdong, and with Portuguese nationality acquired in Mozambique, interviewed November 26, 1999]

These cases are not comparable with the naturalisations obtained by marriage with a national because one of its request is speaking Portuguese, which is one of the most difficult problem that Chinese immigrant residents in Portugal have.

“My parents came here [to Portugal] (...) but later they returned [to China], they were here two months but later they returned (...) because they don’t know how to speak, they don’t speak anything, they don’t know anything, I needed to leave, go to work, and they were here isolated. But this happens with almost all the Chinese (...) and there are several difficulties for Chinese to live here... that is essential to enter in the other areas” [Director of a Chinese newspaper distributed in Portugal (Jornal Sino), natural from Nanjing, arrived in Portugal in 1986, interviewed July, 1999]

In both cases, the data reveal the importance of Macao as a way out for many Chinese (C. Oliveira et al 1999).

As it can be seen in **table 5** it was during the first two *Extraordinary Regularisation periods*, that Chinese entrepreneurs arrived in Portugal. During the first one (between 1992 and 1993), Chinese made 1,352 of the 39,166 applications; in 1996 from the 31,117 applications, 1,608 were Chinese. In is group, only 508 were granted permission to stay (Ferreira and Rato, 2000: 89). This means that apart from illegal Chinese immigrants who did not apply, others among those excluded may have stayed on illegally. In the recent regularisation process, started in January 2001 and until March of

¹² A.S. Carlos 1999: 168.

¹³ Oliveira, C. et al, 1999.

2002, there were 3,838 illegal Chinese who acquired authorisation to stay, from a total of 147,515 foreigners.

3. Co-ethnic resources: the Chinese in Portugal

Not only the host society context can be used as an opportunity, but the social and reciprocity networks generated among immigrants are another fundamental resource.

Like in other host societies, Chinese entrepreneurs, in Portugal, are mainly dependent on *family labour and co-ethnic workers*. The majority (68,8%) of Chinese entrepreneurs surveyed, before starting their own business, got a job in Portugal through co-ethnic contacts (friends or relatives). And 48,7% of them declared to prefer recruiting co-ethnic workers (but 22,3% refused to answer the question).

The lack of fluency in Portuguese and ‘trust in workers’ are the main reason to that dependency. 84,4 % declared not speaking Portuguese as one of the main difficulties upon arrival. And 36,2% declares to maintain the problem.

The recruitment of co-ethnic labour, usually immigrants who speak the same dialect, helps to create a paternalistic relationship between workers and employers. This relationship forces employees to obedience and inhibits the emergence of class-consciousness. If the workers are not only co-ethnics but also illegal, they are even more likely to work longer hours than the Portuguese law allows¹⁴.

So the presence of Chinese communities in Portugal and elsewhere can influence the integration of newcomers, especially if they are depending on social networks and if they have difficulties in speaking the host society language¹⁵; but also immigrants’ economic performance, that are dependent on newcomers. In this context it is important to consider the existence and the role of an organised *co-ethnic community or no co-ethnic group* in the host society (Portes 1999).

Records show that the Chinese were already present in Portugal in small communities as early as the middle of the twentieth century, but it was not until the 1980s that they started to immigrate in larger numbers. Therefore there were few studies on Chinese immigration until fairly recently.¹⁶

Portugal now has at least four different Chinese communities. Those are: 1) the Chinese immigrants born in mainland China (a majority from Zhejiang); 2) the Chinese born in Macao, who are widely dispersed and, for the most part, married to native Portuguese; 3) the students (most of whom come for limited periods of time); and 4) ethnic Chinese from former Portuguese colonies, especially Mozambique – who generally speak better Portuguese than Mandarin.

Therefore Chinese in Portugal are a heterogeneous group: a community in construction as opposed to a disparate collection of diverse groups of Chinese origin; a group of legal immigrants as opposed to the so-called illegal; a highly skilled group of students and scholars as opposed to the group of entrepreneurs, frequently unskilled; a population of ethnic Chinese having a Western life-style, the so-called twice migrants (from Mozambique and elsewhere); and finally, another group that remains relatively closed and culturally oriented towards China.

Besides from this diversity there is a relatively recent growth of this foreigner population. Many observers have predicted that the retrocession of Hong Kong in 1997 and of Macao in 1999 would have a big impact on Chinese migration to Britain (which was prepared to accept up to 250,000 from

¹⁴ M. J. L. Ramos 1999: 178,179.

¹⁵ “More common (...) is the arrival of immigrants into places where a community of their conationals already exists. Such communities can cushion the impact of a foreign culture and provide assistance for finding jobs. Help with immediate living needs, such as housing, places to shop, and schools for the children, also flow through these co-ethnic networks” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:48).

¹⁶ See the studies co-ordinated by Ana Amaro and João de Pina Cabral.

its former colony) and Portugal (which might receive up to 100,000 from Macao). (Trollet, 1994: 64). Is Portugal about to become an important new destination of Chinese immigrants? And would that affect immigrant entrepreneurial activities of Chinese residents in Portugal?

The group aged 25 to 45 years (roughly, the active population) makes up the majority of the Chinese population in Portugal. It is predominantly male. This pattern is typical of most migrant populations: the men leave first, to explore opportunities and set up businesses, and the family follows behind once the conditions are set for them to come.

Statistical data show that students and retired people have started to grow (at a higher rate than the total number of workers between 1988 and 1998), ten years after the beginning of the first important wave of Chinese immigration to Portugal. So, if we consider a relation between this phenomenon and family reunion, would it mean that Chinese immigrants are increasing their own integration? And does it mean that they are starting a direct immigration flow to Portugal, based on family networks?

'Social networks' influence the choice of immigration destiny in several cases (as a pull factor, Smith, 1997: 13). The majority of the surveyed entrepreneurs gave family reasons to come to Portugal (41,5%). In this context it is understandable that a large group of Chinese immigrants came directly from China (see **table 6**).

But social networks can also be important in other aspects: several Chinese associations are now flourishing and a Chinese newspaper has been established. (The newspaper is published and distributed in Portugal; Chinese entrepreneurs use it to advertise their businesses and job openings)¹⁷.

Most Chinese immigrants live in Lisbon (see **table 7**). In the course of time, however, they have spread across the whole country (see rates of change in other districts between 1980 and 1999). Yet they maintain a strong link to urban centres (a trend also observed among Chinese immigrants in the rest of Europe and in the United States)¹⁸.

The presence of relatively large clusters of Chinese immigrants in Faro and Oporto (both with fairly large concentrations of immigrants in general) began in 1990. Employment and business opportunities in Algarve, a tourist area, tend to be greater in the summer. So Chinese businesses tend to evidence the same patterns of Portuguese behaviour: many restaurant owners move during the summer to tourist areas. The geographical distribution of Chinese with a resident status matches that of the entrepreneurial units studied by Teixeira (1998).

Unlike the case of Chinese in Southeast Asia and North America, Chinese in Portugal have not formed Chinatowns, although they do sometimes concentrate in specific residential areas. The area defined by Mouraria, in the centre of Lisbon, has the largest Chinese concentration. However, it has also large concentrations of other trading communities (including Indians and Africans)¹⁹.

In fact as data show, Chinese entrepreneurs in Portugal, as they increase in numbers and in self-employment activities, tend to be even more dispersed along the country, looking for places where there are few Chinese, which means more market opportunities and less competition.

Most Chinese immigrant firms are small or medium sized (Teixeira 1998: 151) and organised by members of one family. There is almost a logical sequence of events in the structuring of an independent business. First, the father migrates and works as hard as he can to save money to buy a ticket for his wife; then, husband and wife both work, to buy a ticket for the children; finally, all work together to consolidate a family business²⁰. If an outsider participates, family members occupy the firms commanding positions. In this way, the youngest generations' future business is guaranteed. The

¹⁷ See F. L. Costa 2002

¹⁸ For more see Benton and Pieke 1998.

¹⁹ For more see Gonçalves, 2001

²⁰ Chan and Chiang, 1994: 96. This is also the story we got in several interviews.

experience and knowledge acquired in the family business is a legacy put to use in building up new businesses.

But, as Ching-Hmang (1995: 243) argues, children of the first generation of immigrants are more open to Western influences and can combine both “ancestral” and Western influences: they selectively preserve Confucian values while at the same time taking advantage of their knowledge of the Portuguese society. They pick up the best of both worlds²¹.

On the other hand, if in the beginning a Chinese entrepreneur evaluated the opportunity to open an ethnic restaurant, the Chinese restaurants that follow are not necessarily following the same rational economic behaviour (as Shumpeter would put it) to develop the business. They can just follow others’ paths, considering what other co-ethnics gained with the same activity. Our survey illustrates this trend²²: the majority of Chinese entrepreneurs chose self-employment because they wanted to have a better life (103 from 224) or wanted to be independent (64 from 224); but also because of family pressures (60).

The capital support can influence the decision. Capital is, in most of the cases, acquired as a result of family savings or in the form of co-ethnics’ or friends’ loans. The loans are free of interest, which nurtures a sense of reciprocity in the community. When agreements are disregarded, the person(s) is(are) excluded from the community. Such exclusion can be fatal in business terms (as some Chinese entrepreneurs explained)

Nevertheless, the statistics show that Chinese with Portuguese residence permits have greater activity rates than most other nationalities (National Statistic Institute - INE, Demographic Statistics of 1998). These activity rates can probably be explained by the community’s relative youth (see **table 8**).

Differences between the percentage of self-employed and wage workers are important in analysing the degree of entrepreneurial initiative among immigrants, since the rate of self-employment is important as an indicator of economic self-confidence besides being a potential way of social mobility (Portes, 1999: 77).

In Portugal most Chinese engage in entrepreneurial occupations because of their ignorance of the Portuguese language and laws. They therefore seek self-employment even if implies illegality. This population is likely to work in occupations other than those they followed in China, and to try acquiring new skills.

“I acquired the visa in 1991 (...) before leaving China I went for thirteen months to the gastronomy schools. To work in the kitchen (...) I knew I couldn’t teach in the school, it has to be in a restaurant. Chinese who go out of the country always work in hotels or restaurants. Outside it is very easy to obtain employment in this area (...) Always work in the kitchen and learn some language, Portuguese language, comes to work out, I served at the tables. Then a person helped to give another step and I opened a restaurant. Our business begins in Guangdong, restaurant Guangdong [the father-in-law’s restaurant], father-in-law helped us” [Teacher of Mathematics in China, today owner of a restaurant near Lisbon].

Why change occupations abroad? According to the interviewee the professional skill acquired in China are not recognised in Portugal, especially given his lack of Portuguese proficiency. It may also be because it is easier to join an activity that has already been developed by one’s co-ethnics overseas.

²¹ The Chinese born in Mozambique are the exception (see Tomé, 1994: 14). Their high degree of dispersion and their fluent command of Portuguese have contributed to their atomisation within Portuguese society. However, now that the ethnic Chinese economy has taken off, the Mozambican Chinese have begun to resume contact with other ethnic Chinese, mainly by offering them professional services.

²² Chinese entrepreneurs could chose more than one condition (and maximal three) to have an entrepreneurial activity. So the figures give us the total persons who chose each possibility of answer.

Finally, in spite of the lack of data concerning Chinese unemployment, it seems that immigrants get jobs as soon as they arrive in Portugal²³. The labour shortage in the ethnic economy means that even illegal immigrants find work quickly.

It is interesting to note the fast growth in the number of Chinese employers and self-employed (see **table 9**), especially if we consider the tendency of Chinese immigrants to create their own businesses after an initial period of working for someone else (in most cases a co-ethnic). After 1998, the number of wage earners increased probably, due to changes in the Portuguese labour law and to the large demand for labour (many Chinese entrepreneurs complained about the shortage of Chinese labour)²⁴.

Through the survey, it was possible to detect that the majority (60,3%) of Chinese entrepreneurs in Portugal had only one or two jobs before starting their own business, and even 25,9% started an entrepreneurial activity as soon as they arrived to Portugal. Would this mean a clear intention to start an entrepreneurial activity in Portugal since the beginning or is this a common pattern with other countries?

“Chinese immigrants work a lot and they have great entrepreneurial initiative, but this is the behaviour in diaspora, because in China it is not like this (...) in China the system doesn't allow private initiatives. In China everything is submitted to the government. This doesn't mean that in some cities some private initiatives do not appear. Now a certain change is beginning there, but it is not easy (...). In China, we didn't speak about Macao and Hong Kong, there are two different regions that have nothing in common with China. That's why it is said that in China there is a regime with two systems” [Man of Chinese background, natural from Mozambique].

The emergence of an elite among first generation immigrants apparently allows for the formation of an ethnic market and thus the broader community's survival, including that of new arrivals. This process results in the formation and maintenance of an ethnic economy.

The economic strategy adopted by Chinese coming from Mozambique (or from other Portuguese ex-colonies), immigrants twice²⁵, is very curious. This group arrived before the significant wave of Chinese from mainland China, of the 80s. And if most Chinese immigrants are in the services and trade sectors, the Chinese from former Portuguese colonies are mainly skilled and employed within a differentiated market²⁶ (See A. Teixeira 1997), and most of them arrived before.

However after the arrival of Chinese from mainland China, it seems to appear an market opportunity, which those immigrants (already with Portuguese nationality) did not lose. Because of their proficiency in Mandarin and Portuguese, they have diverse patterns of employment. Some join the mainstream economy (while often at the same time working on an informal basis for other Chinese or acting as a bridge); others, with Portuguese partners, have a more diversified clientele (including both Portuguese and Chinese)²⁷.

²³ No Chinese entrepreneur chose the difficulty in finding a job (or even unemployment) in Portugal as a reason to start her/his own entrepreneurial activity.

²⁴ Exploratory interviews show that many entrepreneurs contact Chinese wage labourers in Spain.

²⁵ The years in Mozambique were a period of transition towards Portuguese society for the Chinese, especially in terms of adaptation to Portugal's language and laws and its economic practices. If the disintegration of the Chinese community in Mozambique favoured its eventual assimilation to Portuguese society, unlike in Africa where it developed an enclave model, its integration would seem to be limited to the most superficial spheres. Chinese immigrants from Africa do not seem to value political participation to anywhere near the same extent as they value economic activity, and their civic participation is limited to maintaining a certain degree of contact with their own place of origin and with other local Chinese communities. The private sphere remains dominant, whether culturally, socially, politically or economically. This would seem to be true regardless of length of residence in Portugal.

²⁶ Those immigrants tend to be well qualified and to speak fluent Portuguese, so all sorts of jobs were open to them. Today, they work as bank employees, engineers, doctors, and professionals, as well as in a number of other fields (Tomé 1994:14).

²⁷ This dispersal largely ruled out associations and led to a loss of Chinese identity, especially on the part of the younger generation. The population became westernised and the ancestral culture was relegated to the private sphere (Costa 1998:327).

In other words, the use of Chinese social networks, in this case allowed them to define an ethnic niche (as Waldinger suggests). Mainland Chinese immigrants in this case, become customers of ethnic resources, trusting on those co-ethnic with a Portuguese nationality.

“The immigrants (...) arrive in a foreign country, they have to learn the language, and they have to learn the culture of the foreign country and fight to win. I admire them a lot, because this Chinese community [from Continental China] is here for half dozen years, not including those who are already here for fifteen or sixteen years already have a life. These are the real fighters. They work; they are diligent, because they had more difficulties than we [the Chinese from Portuguese former colonies]. Because we already came with the advantage of knowing the Portuguese, they don't. They started from zero, have only minimum support, and are also beginning their life” [woman with Chinese origin, born in Mozambique, partner in a travel Agency of another Portuguese citizen]

4. The rise of a spatially unbound Chinese economic enclave?

This case study is important to highlight that immigrants also contribute to the definition of the host society market opportunities. The Chinese case brings to light the ability of immigrant entrepreneurs to draw on the inner group resources, transforming them into opportunities to their economic success. And so cultural factors that drive immigrants into certain segments of the labour market are not to be understood as a need of network or psychological protection, rather as a rational economic opportunity creation strategy in itself.

Ethnic resources can explain why, in several destinies, Chinese perform entrepreneurial initiatives adapting their initiatives to specific host contexts.

As Portes suggests (1999:58), the formation of an ‘ethnic enclave’ depends on a substantial number of immigrants, on existing first ‘cohorts’ with entrepreneurial experience; available capital to invest; and a stock of ethnic workers.

In Portugal the heterogeneity on the first cohorts of Chinese immigrants to the country lead to different economic strategies, although they all took advantage of co-ethnic resources. As in other host societies, they evidence some degree of closures in their co-ethnic group. As in other Chinese enclaves, ethnic resources feed a central structural opportunity to succeed abroad: co-ethnic suppliers and workers allow entrepreneurs to came out competitive advantages. And ethnic and family loans give the possibility to invest.

However Portugal specific structural opportunities, affect the formation of an enclave. The Chinese population is still very recent and small when compared with other countries. Nevertheless, the specific Portuguese context shows that Chinese entrepreneurs use the opportunity of the free circulation in the European market to compensate for the shortcomings.

On the other hand, if enclaves in USA started with ethnic customers, in Portugal, the Chinese investment and the growth of an ethnic economy was always very dependent on the opening to out-group customers.

In other words, Chinese immigrants in Portugal searched for the host society opportunities, combining local, regional, European and transnational connections, drawing on the inner-group resources. During the last twenty years Chinese entrepreneurs have spread throughout the country and have been developing new ethnic strategies – revitalising shopping streets, with new products and new marketing strategies; opening up trade links with co-ethnic entrepreneurs, residing in other host societies (mainly in Europe). These strategies illustrate the new alternative form of immigrant economic adaptation that Portes et al (2001b) called ‘transnational entrepreneurs’. In this case showing how immigrants take advantage of the opportunities related with Portugal participation in a single space as the European Union.

In Mouraria, an old rundown neighbourhood near the historical centre of Lisbon, Chinese invested in supermarkets and stores, building their own structural opportunities in a local market.

Today this local market is starting to supply other Chinese entrepreneurs from the Spanish border, thus diversifying the inner-group economy (for more see Gonçalves 2001).

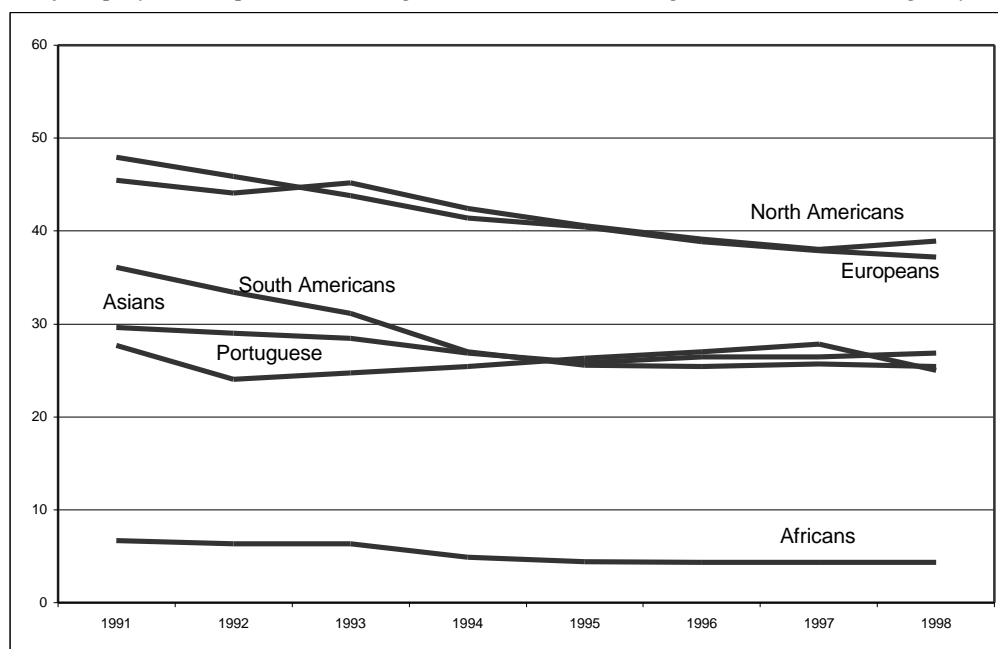
On the other hand, in a different way from other host societies (e.g. USA), Chinese did not find discrimination or a specific housing policy, which could influence on a spatial concentration. In a different way, Chinese immigrants in Portugal are spread throughout the country. In this context if no major concentration of immigrants appears, would it mean that no Chinese economic enclave, as Portes put it, is found in Portugal? We believe that more important than to consider the physical borders of Portes' model, which is linked to a specific urban context of the USA, one should highlight the ability of Chinese entrepreneurs to draw on the inner resources of the ethnic group in order to achieve success in economic competition (as Portes also suggests). A spatial concentration of the co-ethnic group would, therefore, not be a necessary condition of the model.

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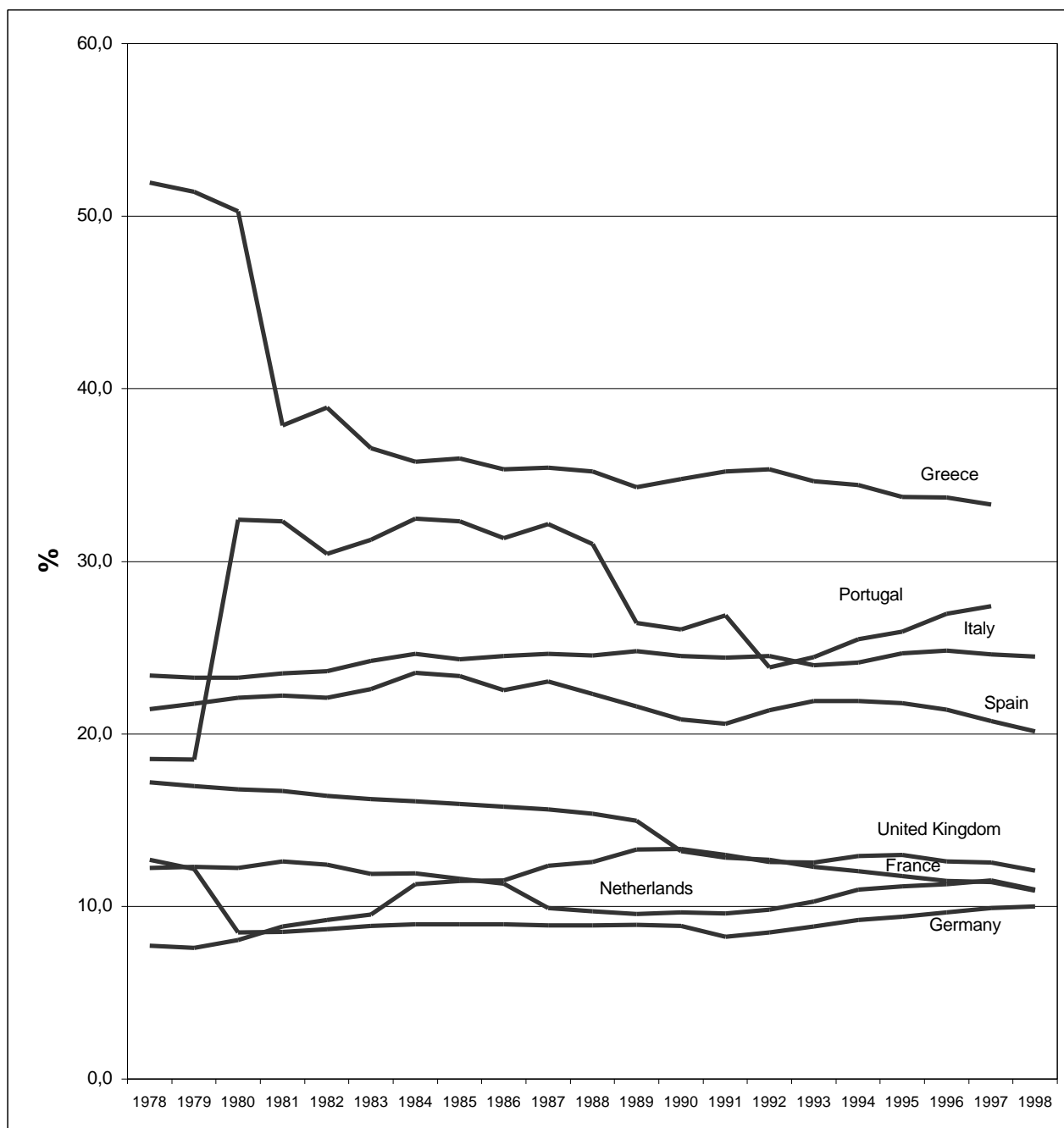
Table 1: *Percent of Employers and persons working on own account with legal residence in Portugal by region of origin*

SOURCE: *Estatísticas Demográficas e Estatísticas do Emprego*, INE

Table 2: *Immigration status in the moment of entrance in Portugal*

<i>Immigration status</i>	<i>Number of Chinese</i>	<i>%</i>
Tourist Visa	84	37,5
Residence Visa	48	21,4
Work Visa	36	16,1
Portuguese nationality	8	3,6
Study Visa	2	0,9
Illegal status	7	3,1
Other Visa	1	0,4
No answers	38	17,0
Total	224	100

SOURCE: Questionnaire applied to a sample of immigrant entrepreneurs (September 2001 to April 2002)

Table 3: Percent of Employers and persons working on own account²⁸

SOURCE: *Labour force Statistics 1978-1998*, OCDE, 1999 Edition.

²⁸ The percent was calculated relating to total of civilian employment.

Table 4: Naturalization rates²⁹ by marriage between 1985 and 1996

<i>Year</i>	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	<i>Average</i>
Angola	2,3	1,6	0,3	1,7	0,9	0,7	0,9	1,2	1,0	1,0	0,5	0,4	1,0
Cape Verde	0,4	0,4	0,0	0,5	0,4	0,5	0,5	0,6	0,6	0,9	0,5	0,4	0,5
Guinea	0,7	0,3	0,1	0,5	0,5	0,9	0,4	0,7	0,9	0,6	0,3	0,2	0,5
Mozambique	6,1	5,3	1,1	4,8	2,8	2,0	2,1	1,8	1,4	1,4	0,8	0,8	2,5
S. Tomé	1,0	0,8	0,2	1,0	0,7	0,6	1,2	0,8	0,9	1,0	0,9	0,5	0,8
Brazil	1,7	1,2	0,3	1,4	1,2	1,2	1,6	2,0	1,6	2,6	1,5	1,5	1,5
India	6,2	7,8	1,2	6,0	4,9	6,3	4,5	*	4,5	4,1	1,7	1,7	4,4
China				15,5	72,1	13,9	15,3	*	8,3	12,8	6,7	7,8	19,1
Total	2,0	1,1	0,2	1,6	3,0	1,2	1,5	2,0	1,1	1,6	0,9	0,9	1,4

*In 1992 only data for Asia are available

SOURCE: C. Oliveira et al 1999

Table 5: Chinese immigration routes to Portugal

<i>Year of arrival</i>	<i>Routes</i>	Air	Railroad	Highway	Several routes	Born in Portugal	No answers	Total
Before 1986		40				1		41
[1987-1991]		37	3					40
[1992-1996]		85	9	9	1		1	105
[1997-2001]		33	1	2	1		1	38
Total		195	13	11	2	1	2	224

SOURCE: Questionnaire applied to a sample of immigrant entrepreneurs (September 2001 to April 2002)

Table 6: Migratory experience before arrival in Portugal

<i>Countries of passage</i>	<i>Number of Chinese</i>
Directly to Portugal	126
European countries	80
Spain	36
France	17
Netherlands	14
Belgium	5
Germany	5
Luxembourg	1
Austria	1
Italy	1
Other countries	11
	No answer
	7
Total	224

SOURCE: Questionnaire applied to a sample of immigrant entrepreneurs (September 2001 to April 2002)

²⁹ Rates of Naturalization = number of naturalizations / number of resident foreigners with the same nationality x 100 (C. Oliveira et al. 1999).

Table 7: *Geographic Distribution of Chinese immigrants having residence authorisation in Portugal*

Year Districts:	Number of Chinese				Rates of change		
	1985	1990	1995	2000	1985-1990 (%)	1990-1995(%)	1995-2000(%)
Aveiro	7	37	88	157	428,6	137,8	78,4
Braga	6	13	58	94	116,7	346,2	62,1
Coimbra	7	40	95	119	471,4	137,5	25,3
Faro	13	67	184	275	415,4	174,6	49,5
Lisbon	690	907	1436	1912	31,4	58,3	33,1
Oporto	42	116	231	382	176,2	99,1	65,4
Setubal	5	10	36	132	100,0	260,0	266,7
Others	15	42	74	207	180,0	76,2	179,7
Total	785	1232	2202	3278	56,9	78,7	48,9

SOURCE: Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras do Ministério da Administração Interna (Foreign and Borders Services of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)

Table 8: *Activity rates and occupational status of immigrants in 1998*

Origin	Activity rates (%)	Self-employed (%)	Wage workers (%)
Europe	53,6	33,6	66,1
PSAC	54,7	3,1	96,8
Angola	50,8	4,2	95,7
Cape Verde	56,0	1,1	98,8
Guinea	63,3	4,0	95,8
Mozambique	44	14,2	85,8
S. Tomé	44,8	7,2	92,5
Other African countries	53,1	30,2	69,6
North America	43,6	38,9	57,6
Canada	34,6	11,4	88,6
EUA	45,2	43,3	52,6
South and Central America	47,5	25,4	74,3
Brazil	50,8	26,3	73,4
Asia and Oceania	51,5	26,9	72,9
China	57,3	11,2	88,8
Citizens without homeland	54,8	31,0	69,0
Total	52,3	12,1	87,5

SOURCE: Ferreira and Rato, 2000:9

Table 9: *Occupational Status of Chinese having a residence permit in Portugal*

	Year	1990	1991	1992	1996	1997	1998	2000
<i>Occupational Status</i>								
Employers		75	92	99	123	122	122	184
Independent Workers					19	23	24	45
Employees		720	749	796	1167	1148	1154	1319
Total		795	841	895	1309	1293	1300	1548

SOURCE: Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras do Ministério da Administração Interna (Foreign and Borders Services of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)

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