

## **THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN PORTUGAL: A TRANSNATIONAL PARADIPLOMATIC ECOSYSTEM IN SINO-PORTUGUESE RELATIONS**

**JOÃO SIMÕES**

[joaosimoes@cityu.edu.mo](mailto:joaosimoes@cityu.edu.mo)

Assistant Professor at City University of Macau (China). He holds a Ph.D. in Portuguese-speaking Countries Studies from the same university, a Master's degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Aveiro, Portugal, and a Bachelor's degree in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Lisbon, Portugal. Prior to his current role, he taught at Xi'an International Studies University, China. His current research focuses on Lusophony and the interactions between Portuguese-speaking countries and China, as well as energy geopolitics.  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1437-5527>

**ANDREIA SOFIA DA SILVA**

[andreiasofiasilva23@gmail.com](mailto:andreiasofiasilva23@gmail.com)

She holds a degree in Journalism from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Coimbra and a master's degree in Contemporary History from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Nova University of Lisbon (Portugal), where she is also pursuing her Ph.D. in the same field. She works as a journalist for the daily newspaper *Hoje Macau* as a Portugal correspondent and is the creator of the podcast *Macau na Bagagem*, a project focused on collecting testimonies about Macau and its experiences. Her academic research primarily centers on the 20th-century history of Macau, with a particular focus on the Estado Novo period. She is the author of the book *O Lápiz Vermelho - A Censura do Estado Novo à Imprensa de Macau*, which examines the role and operations of the Press Censorship Commission in Macau during the Estado Novo era, analyzing its impact on both Portuguese and Chinese newspapers.  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0791-2961>

### **Abstract**

This study examines the Chinese diaspora in Portugal as a multi-layered transnational paradiplomatic ecosystem shaping contemporary Sino-Portuguese relations, advancing beyond Bongardt and Neves (2007) and Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008)'s tripartite model of economic facilitation, network leverage, and cultural bridging. Through mixed-methods analysis (document review, and community member interviews). Findings reveal three post-pandemic evolutionary shifts: (1) economic diversification beyond traditional commerce into technology and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM); (2) institutional innovation through organizations like the Liga dos Chineses and Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, brokering subnational partnerships, leveraging Macao/Hengqin as strategic platforms for exchanges between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and pioneering initiatives like AI-driven TCM integration and Porto's trilingual school; and (3) platform amplification where state-created infrastructures enable trilateral ventures and diaspora capital circulation. Despite challenges - including bureaucratic inefficiencies, and generational engagement gaps - the community demonstrates adaptive resilience as architects of relational infrastructure, sustaining bilateral ties through economic, cultural, and institutional capital flows that redefine engagement beyond state-centric diplomacy.



### Keywords

Chinese community in Portugal, Sino-Portuguese relations, paradiplomacy, diaspora capital, Transnational entrepreneurship.

### Resumo

Este estudo analisa a diáspora chinesa em Portugal como um ecossistema paradiplomático transnacional e multiestratificado que molda as relações contemporâneas sino-portuguesas, ultrapassando o modelo tripartido proposto por Bongardt e Neves (2007) e Neves e Rocha-Trindade (2008), centrado na facilitação económica, na alavancagem de redes e na mediação cultural. A partir de uma metodologia mista (revisão documental e entrevistas a membros da comunidade), os resultados revelam três transformações evolutivas no período pós-pandémico: (1) diversificação económica para além do comércio tradicional, com expansão para os setores da tecnologia e da medicina tradicional chinesa (MTC); (2) inovação institucional através de organizações como a Liga dos Chineses em Portugal e a Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, que promovem parcerias subnacionais, utilizam Macau/Hengqin como plataformas estratégicas para as relações entre a China e os países de língua portuguesa, e impulsionam iniciativas pioneiras como a integração de MTC baseada em inteligência artificial e a criação da escola trilingue no Porto; e (3) amplificação através de plataformas estatais que possibilitam empreendimentos trilaterais e a circulação de capital diaspórico. Apesar de desafios persistentes - incluindo ineficiências burocráticas e lacunas de envolvimento intergeracional - a comunidade revela uma resiliência adaptativa enquanto arquiteta de infraestruturas relacionais, sustentando os laços bilaterais através de fluxos económicos, culturais e institucionais que reconfiguram o envolvimento sino-português para além da diplomacia centrada no Estado.

### Palavras-chave

Comunidade chinesa em Portugal, Relações sino-portuguesas, Paradiplomacia, Capital da diáspora, Empreendedorismo transnacional.

### How to cite this article

Simões, João & Silva, Andreia Sofia da (2026). The Chinese Diaspora in Portugal: A Transnational Paradiplomatic Ecosystem in Sino-Portuguese Relations. *Janus.net, e-journal of international relations*. Thematic Dossier - Portugal and China in International Relations: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Dynamics, VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD2, February 2026, pp. 99-125. <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.DT0126.5>

**Article submitted on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025 and accepted for publication on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2026.**





## **THE CHINESE DIASPORA IN PORTUGAL: A TRANSNATIONAL PARADIPLOMATIC ECOSYSTEM IN SINO-PORTUGUESE RELATIONS<sup>1</sup>**

**JOÃO SIMÕES**

**ANDREIA SOFIA DA SILVA**

### **Introduction**

The year 2019 marked a symbolic apex in diplomatic relations between Portugal and the People's Republic of China (PRC), commemorating four decades since the establishment of formal ties on February 8, 1979. This milestone triggered a series of high-profile events, including an official reception hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Lisbon (Diário do Povo Online, 2019) and an academic conference at the Museu do Oriente (Fundação Oriente, 2019), reflecting the depth of bilateral engagement. These celebrations honoured a relationship that emerged from decades of Cold War ambiguity, during which Macao - and its politically connected Chinese elite - served as a critical, albeit shadowed, conduit. As Alexandre (2023) notes, this group "maintained privileged relations with communist Chinese authorities while exerting significant influence within Portuguese administration in the enclave," laying the groundwork for future ties.

High-level exchanges underscore the relationship's strategic importance. President Xi Jinping's 2018 state visit to Portugal (Presidência da República Portuguesa, 2018) and the 2024 visit of Zhao Leji, Chairman of China's National People's Congress, who met with President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and Prime Minister Luís Montenegro (Observador, 2024), demonstrate sustained political commitment. Concurrently, China's economic footprint in Portugal evolved dramatically. While early Chinese immigration (post-1980s) gravitated toward small commerce, Portugal's Golden Visa program (ARI) catalysed a transformative wave of investment and diversified entrepreneurship, shifting community profiles from retailers to major investors in energy, finance, and technology.

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, exposed vulnerabilities. businesses with links to China, particularly wholesale hubs like Varziela in Vila do Conde, faced temporary closures and discrimination fuelled by the pandemic's origins in Wuhan. Consumer

---

<sup>1</sup> Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this study.



avoidance of Chinese-owned stores prompted Lisbon's municipality to launch anti-stigma campaigns (Observador, 2020). Yet, the most significant recent friction emerged in telecommunications security: Portugal's 2023 decision - guided by the Superior Council for Cyberspace Security (CSSC) - to exclude Huawei from its 5G infrastructure, citing "high risk" for non-EU/NATO suppliers (Público, 2023), drew sharp criticisms. Bernardo Mendia, Secretary-General of the Luso-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, condemned the move as capitulation to "foreign interests," arguing that it, without justification, undermined centuries of successful cooperation (Público, 2024). Chinese Ambassador Zhao Bentang echoed this, framing the exclusion as reflective of a "Cold War mentality" (Expresso, 2024).

Despite such tensions, economic collaboration has persisted in robust ways, as evidenced by China's €2 billion investment in CALB's lithium battery factory in Sines (Observador, 2025). In addition, the recent accelerated development of Macao as a strategic platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries - including the establishment and growth of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (GMDCZH) - has fundamentally reshaped the context.

Traditional scholarship on international relations, including studies of the bilateral relationship between Portugal and China, has often prioritized the actions of governments, official agreements, and high-level diplomacy as primary drivers shaping the relationship. This focus risks overlooking less visible yet no less significant contributions of non-state actors operating beneath and alongside formal state channels. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted ties binding China and Portugal, it is crucial to shift attention towards the enduring human connections fostered by the Chinese community in Portugal.

Moreover, dedicated scholarly research focusing explicitly on the role of the Chinese community in Portugal remains relatively scarce and outdated, often failing to capture their contemporary dynamism and multifaceted contributions. Seminal research by Bongardt and Neves (2007) and Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) demonstrates that the Chinese business community in Portugal is a significant, multi-faceted and dynamic actor that facilitates relations between China and Portugal through providing three critical functions: (1) facilitating trade and investment flows, (2) leveraging powerful networks for market advantage, and (3) providing vital institutional and cultural bridging. This multi-faceted role involves trade and economic facilitation through channelling exports and foreign direct investment, utilizing network dynamics (notably *guanxi*) to consolidate competitive positions within the European market, and engaging in institutional and cultural bridging, thereby significantly strengthening the economic and diplomatic ties between Portugal (and the European Union) and the People's Republic of China. However, those studies, dating from 2007 and 2008, now require updating to reflect the profound transformations of the last years.

Recent changes within the Chinese community itself, along with evolving strategies and influence of its representative institutions, rapid technological advancements and shifting global economic dynamics, have introduced new dimensions to diasporic engagement and influence. These developments create a need for contemporary research to re-



examine the role, strategies, and impact of the Chinese community in Portugal, providing an updated understanding of this essential actor in Sino-Portuguese relations.

This study seeks to address the following central question: How has the Chinese community in Portugal evolved and what roles does it play in shaping contemporary Sino-Portuguese relations, particularly in the post-pandemic era? To address this research gap, this study employs a multi-method approach. Building on a review of academic literature, it integrates critical analysis of official documents, to map the community's demographic evolution and institutional presence. This analysis is enriched by insights gathered through semi-structured interviews with relevant members of the Chinese community, including business leaders and association representatives, as well as scholars, capturing grounded perspectives on their evolving roles and strategies, to complement a document-based analysis. The interviews, conducted between February and July 2025, were carried out in Portuguese and later translated into English by the authors to ensure accessibility and accuracy.

This study is structured as follows: first, a conceptual approach to diaspora agency; second, an overview of the Chinese community in Portugal and its current composition; third, a detailed description and analysis of its principal contemporary roles in Sino-Portuguese relations; fourth, a presentation and discussion of key insights derived from the interviews; and finally, conclusions synthesizing the findings and discussing their implications for understanding diaspora diplomacy and bilateral ties.

### **Diaspora Agency: A Conceptual Approach**

Diasporas are increasingly recognized as influential agents in international relations. Far from being static entities, contemporary diasporas function as dynamic, multi-layered ecosystems that facilitate transnational engagement through entrepreneurial agency, institutional brokering, and the strategic use of geopolitical and economic platforms. In the analysis that follows, we will examine the multifaceted roles of diasporas, drawing on key concepts that underscore their impact across various dimensions.

At the micro-foundational level, diasporas demonstrate their agency through transnational entrepreneurship and network capital. Members of diasporas act as transnational entrepreneurs, leveraging their unique positionality to bridge societies and mobilize resources embedded within social networks (Brinkerhoff, 2016; Drori et al., 2009). Social capital, including culturally specific forms such as *guanxi* - relational networks rooted in reciprocity and trust - plays a critical role in enabling diaspora entrepreneurs to exploit structural opportunities, such as market gaps or policy incentives (Xin & Pearce, 1996). Portes (1998) defines social capital as resources embedded within social networks. This facilitates cross-border trade, investment flows, and market integration, underscoring their adaptability to shifting economic and policy landscapes (Drori et al., 2009).

At the meso-structural level, diasporas extend their influence through paradiplomacy and institutional brokering. Formal organizations within diasporas engage in paradiplomacy, conducting international activities that parallel or operate independently of central state



diplomacy (Kuznetsov, 2015; Lecours, 2008). Acting as institutional brokers (Saxenian, 2006), they mediate between home and host country actors, particularly at sub-national levels like municipalities and businesses. Through activities such as facilitating agreements, hosting delegations, and providing localized business intelligence, these organizations contribute to decentralized diplomacy that prioritizes tangible socio-economic outcomes (Brinkerhoff, 2016).

On the macro-structural level, diasporas amplify their impact through platform leverage and strategic intermediation. Contemporary diasporas strategically utilize institutional and spatial platforms - such as special economic zones, cultural hubs, chambers of commerce, and multi-lateral forums - to enhance their efficacy and reach (Gawer, 2014; McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017). By integrating into platform governance structures and leveraging associated resources and incentives, they create new pathways for trade, investment, knowledge transfer, and multi-lateral cooperation. These platforms, designed to reduce transaction costs and generate network effects, serve as critical amplifiers of diaspora influence.

Underlying all these dimensions is diaspora capital, a cross-cutting resource that encompasses the unique reservoir of social, cultural, linguistic, economic, and knowledge-based assets inherent to diasporas (Cohen, 2008; Elo & Riddle, 2016). This capital enables entrepreneurial ventures, legitimizes institutional brokering, facilitates cultural transmission, and enhances the effectiveness of platform engagement.

The multi-faceted roles of diasporas, as outlined above, operate as a multi-layered transnational para-diplomatic ecosystem. This conceptual framework finds concrete illustration in the specific context of Sino-Portuguese relations, where the Chinese diaspora in Portugal represents a significant case study of diaspora agency in action.

### **A Community in Change**

The Chinese community in Portugal exhibits distinct characteristics shaped by a significant, complex historical evolution that spanned centuries, as well as entrepreneurial dynamism and continued adaptation to policy and social contexts. While often associated with modern migratory waves, the community's presence traces back remarkably far. Documented encounters began as early as the 16th century, "when three Chinese were brought to Portugal as slaves," predating the Portuguese kingdom's prohibition on the trafficking of Chinese slaves in February 1624 (Li, 2019). Subsequent centuries witnessed more specialized, albeit still limited in number, arrivals, notably in the 19th century with individuals like Lau-a-Teng and Lau-a-Pen, interpreters and masters from Macao, who were brought to São Miguel Island in the Azores to teach tea cultivation techniques (Li, 2019). While these early presences were sporadic and often involuntary or tied to specific colonial projects, they form a foundational layer of historical contact.

However, substantial growth began in the 1980s. Such migration, originating particularly from regions such as Wenzhou and initially concentrating in urban centres like Lisbon, Faro, and Porto, were characterized predominantly by male economic migrants engaging



in entrepreneurship (Gaspar, 2017; Reis de Oliveira, 2003), often driven by aspirations for prosperity, social mobility, and to fulfil filial obligations (Rodrigues, 2018). Since then, however, the migrant communities have undergone significant transformation: they have dispersed geographically across Portugal; their origins have diversified to include for example Macao, Mozambique, and various regions of mainland China; and the proportion of female has increased (Gaspar, 2017; Bongardt & Neves, 2014). Their complexity continues to increase with the emergence of a 1.5 generation (those migrating as children/adolescents) and a second generation (Gaspar, 2018).

It may be challenging to census the Chinese community in Portugal, as many immigrants have acquired Portuguese nationality over the years and have ceased to appear in foreign population statistics, and this transition complicates the process of accurately measuring the diaspora, as recent data has shown: in 2023, Portugal hosted 1,044,238 legal foreign residents (9.8% of the total population), up 34% from 2022 (PORDATA, 2024b), an increasing trend that had begun in 2015. Within these foreign residents, holders of Chinese (PRC) nationality constituted 2.5% (approximately 26,100 individuals), well below figures pertaining to more dominant communities like that of the Brazilians (28.9%) (PORDATA, 2024b). In 2022, the PORDATA reported (via Eurostat and National Statistics Institute [INE] data) 798,480 foreign residents, among whom 3.3% were Chinese nationals (about 26,400 people) (PORDATA, 2024a). In comparison, the 2021 census on Chinese nationals (excluding naturalized citizens) showed only 14,109 individuals (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2021). This difference suggests that demographic assessment of the Chinese community in Portugal should be conducted with caution due to the significant presence and impact of not only migratory shifts but also naturalization: as noted by PORDATA (2024a), half a million foreigners acquired Portuguese nationality between 2008 and 2022; in addition, there is statistical underrepresentation of the community, compounded by individuals' intra-European mobility and generational integration (i.e., children born in Portugal to naturalized Chinese immigrants become Portuguese citizens by birth).

The migratory streams through which the Chinese community in Portugal undergoes significant diversification reflect evolving economic ties and educational opportunities. One of the notable streams has been university students, with many of whom arriving for short-term studies (typically one to two years) before returning to China seeking employment, while some choosing to remain in Portugal for work or postgraduate studies (Li, 2019). Another stream has been major Chinese investments in strategic Portuguese sectors - such as energy (e.g., State Grid Corporation of China) and finance (e.g., Fosun, Haitong) - that have been not only driving an influx of highly skilled technical professionals and executives, but also accelerating business development in Portugal. These professionals—some sojourning only briefly while others establishing longer-term residency—often arrive alone initially, but subsequently bringing their families over via family reunification. This pattern allows spouses to support business activities and children to access the Portuguese education system. These children who immigrate during their formative years (the so-called "1.5 generation") often exhibit "a higher level of education and better economic conditions" compared to earlier waves of migrants (Li,



2019). They therefore represent a significant evolution in the community's socioeconomic profile and integration trajectory.

A defining characteristic of the Chinese community in Portugal is the exceptionally high rate of entrepreneurship among Chinese immigrants in Portugal, the highest among all immigrant groups (Oliveira, 2010; Reis Oliveira, 2021). This entrepreneurial drive is attributed primarily to structural factors - notably access to capital, supportive legal and policy frameworks, and dense co-ethnic networks - rather than cultural factors alone (Reis de Oliveira, 2003; Reis Oliveira, 2021). Chinese business strategies rely heavily on *guanxi* (Personal networks), family labour, transnational connections linking Portugal to China and broader European markets, and sometimes engagement in the informal economy (Bongardt & Neves, 2007; Reis de Oliveira, 2003; Góis et al., 2005). Chinese entrepreneurs have proven highly adaptive and proficient at leveraging shifting opportunity structures within Portugal, and proactively engaging with the global economy, including China's "Go Global" policy (Oliveira, 2010; Bongardt & Neves, 2014; Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008).

Major policy shifts have reconfigured the community's profile. Changes to immigration laws following the 2008/09 economic crisis and the introduction of Portugal's Golden Visa program (ARI) have significantly altered migration patterns (Bongardt & Neves, 2014; Amante & Rodrigues, 2020; Santos et al., 2023). The Golden Visa, in particular, has attracted a new wave of affluent investors, distinct from earlier labour migrants. One study reported that 46.1% of Chinese residents in Lisbon hold ARI status or belong to ARI holder families (Amante & Rodrigues, 2020). This has led to increased internal heterogeneity, a dualistic community structure (contrasting small traditional businesses with large-scale investors), rising socio-economic inequality, greater internationalization, and potentially less community cohesion (Bongardt & Neves, 2014; Santos et al., 2023).

Choi Hin Man, a prominent businessman and president of the Luso-Chinese Merchants and Industrialists Association, highlighted the economic diversification beyond traditional sectors:

*The Chinese community in Portugal has diversified its economic activities over the years. Besides traditional sectors such as retail (convenience stores, restaurants, and import/export), there is growth in areas such as technology, tourism, real estate, and financial services (Personal communication, February 2025).*

This shift has been influenced by policy changes, particularly the Golden Visa program. Dinis Ka Chon Chan, a Macao-born legal expert and president of the Macao Students Association in Porto, noted that recent restrictions on Golden Visas (limiting real estate purchases in dense urban areas) have redirected investments to other regions or sectors, such as renewable energy, agriculture, and start-ups, but bureaucratic hurdles at the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA, a government body responsible for managing migration and asylum processes) have created uncertainty, leading some investors to choose other countries (Personal communication, February 2025).



Zheng Zhibin, director of the Chinese Community Support Centre in Lisbon, confirmed the emergence of new economic activities such as real estate agencies and construction, but highlighted those bureaucratic delays are a major deterrent for new migrants:

*I think it's more difficult to attract Chinese people to live here nowadays because the system at AIMA is very slow. Even for those who want to buy a house or invest in something, the process is extremely slow, and they can't get the [residence] card. Everything is very slow, and they can't handle their affairs, so they go to other countries and compare Portugal with other countries. If there are places where the system is faster and where buying or investing is more economical, the Chinese choose to go there, but they continue to invest here. Portugal functions as an intermediate zone because even if they want to go to other countries, it's not as easy to obtain nationality there. This is the same situation for Indians, Pakistanis, and Nepalese (Personal communication, February 2025).*

The community's structure has become more heterogeneous, with Wang Suoying, a prominent Chinese teacher who has been living in Portugal for several decades and is the president of the Portuguese Association of Friends of Chinese Culture, noting diversification in restaurant offerings (e.g., Korean and Japanese cuisine) and the rise of tech-related businesses:

*Many fruit shops and grocery stores have emerged. We have Korean and Japanese restaurants owned by Chinese people. There is diversification in the restaurant sector, as well as with grocery stores. Chinese companies have been established by emigrants, and currently, there are two main types: we have large investment companies like China Three Gorges, and other companies created by Chinese people who have ventured into other areas (Personal communication, February 2025).*

Y Ping Chow, president of the League of Chinese in Portugal and the Portugal-China SME Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the strategic push into technology and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which represents a new phase of economic activities:

*At the moment, we are trying to develop growth in the area of new technologies, because last year the Zhuhai Science and New Technologies Centre appointed our Chamber of Commerce [CCPC-PME] as its point of contact in Portugal. The idea is to develop activities in the field of technology and encourage Portuguese companies to invest in Zhuhai. In this sense, we are pursuing a new type of investment in the sciences and technology sector. Businesses in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) are also developing, and we will try to promote the idea of advancing TCM (Personal communication, February 2025).*



Integration challenges persist, particularly for new families. Helena Yuan Dong, founder of the CLAN Association for Youth Cultural and Educational Innovation, stressed language barriers and the struggle to maintain cultural identity associated with immigrants who are in the process of integrating into their new community: "We have to force [our children] to open their minds to learn a new language, which is difficult for us... We must maintain our nature" (Personal communication, February 2025). On the other hand, Maria Fernanda Ilhéu, president of the Friends of the New Silk Road Association and a professor with extensive experience in Macao, described the community as increasingly integrated yet maintaining its identity, and observes that the community "has modernized, gained value, and evolved towards other types of activities [...] the children born here are engineers, architects, lawyers, and doctors" (Personal communication, February 2025).

The outcome of such integration can be strongly influenced by age of arrival and proficiency of the Portuguese language - early arrival and language acquisition facilitate better educational outcomes, healthcare access, and social integration, while language barriers are a major obstacle in these areas and are linked to higher early school dropout rates (Gaspar, 2018; Aparício et al., 2023; Gaspar et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2007). The 1.5 generation generally integrates more successfully than their parents, though involvement in family businesses can hinder educational and social integration for younger members (Gaspar, 2018; Jin & Gómez-Pellón, 2023). In addition, co-ethnic networks are vital for economic integration, job acquisition, and social support, especially where language barriers persist but strong transnational ties are maintained (Oliveira, 2003a; Marques et al., 2005). Acculturation involves complex negotiations, with traditional beliefs and practices often persisting alongside adaptation, leading to intergenerational acculturation gaps and conflicts (Jin & Gómez-Pellón, 2023). This complexity is also reflected in areas like the ambivalent cultural identity expressed by subgroups like the Macanese diaspora (Gaspar et al., 2021).

The Chinese business community in Portugal plays a significant and multifaceted role in facilitating relations between China and Portugal, particularly within the context of economic globalization and EU-China ties. Seminal research by Bongardt and Neves (2007) and Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) provides a detailed analysis of this community's characteristics, dynamics, and strategic functions. A core function identified by both studies is trade and economic facilitation. Bongardt and Neves (2007) have documented the community's dominance within Portugal's service sector, especially in retail and wholesale trade, and found that the community acts as a key channel for Chinese exports into Portugal and, by extension, the broader European Union market (Bongardt & Neves, 2007). Moreover, the community serves as a conduit for foreign direct investment (FDI), channeling capital flows back to China (Bongardt & Neves, 2007). Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) corroborate this notion, emphasizing the community's position as catalysts for economic flows and as vital entry points for Chinese goods into the Portuguese market, as well as its role in mobilizing investment into China (Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008). Both studies concur that these economic activities are fundamental to strengthening bilateral economic relations between China and Portugal (Bongardt & Neves, 2007; Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008).



Central to the community's business operations are network dynamics. Bongardt and Neves (2007) highlight the critical importance of *guanxi* (personal and business relationship) networks. These intricate networks, extending within Europe, enable the community to leverage advantages of the European single market, consolidate their competitive position, and facilitate cross-border business activities (Bongardt & Neves, 2007). Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) similarly underscore the significance of these business networks, describing the community as a significant link bridging Portugal and China (Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008). Both studies emphasize that formal and informal networks are instrumental in supporting business operations and facilitating market integration (Bongardt & Neves, 2007; Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008).

Beyond economics, both studies recognize the community's function in institutional and cultural bridging. While Bongardt and Neves (2007) acknowledge this bridging role, Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) provide a more explicit analysis of its institutional and cultural dimensions. They describe the community as acting as "institutional brokers" and agents of "para-diplomacy" (decentralized diplomacy) for Chinese provincial and local governments, facilitating sub-national connections (Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008). Additionally, the community serves as a source of valuable "economic intelligence," providing insights on business opportunities, market characteristics, and local business culture to Chinese authorities (Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008). Both studies also note the community's contribution to cultural transmission, aiding in the dissemination of Chinese culture within Portugal (Bongardt & Neves, 2007; Neves & Rocha-Trindade, 2008).

In sum, previous research by Bongardt and Neves (2007) and Neves and Rocha-Trindade (2008) demonstrates that the Chinese business community in Portugal is a dynamic actor that facilitates trade and investment flows, leverages powerful networks for market advantage, and performs vital institutional and cultural bridging functions, significantly strengthening the economic and diplomatic ties between Portugal (and the EU) and China.

### **Institutional Framework**

The preceding analysis of the Chinese community's historical trajectory and contemporary profile underscores not only its demographic and socioeconomic transformation but also its increasing complexity and scope of activity. This evolution has facilitated the development of more structured mechanisms for collective action and representation. Consequently, the community's agency as a diplomatic actor, operating independently or alongside state channels - often termed *para-diplomacy* - is significantly mediated through its formal institutions.

This section therefore examines the institutional framework, focusing specifically on the Liga dos Chineses em Portugal (LCP), the Câmara de Comércio e Indústria Luso-Chinesa para Pequenas e Médias Empresas (CCPC-PME), and the Portugal-Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHKCCI). It analyzes how these key organizations translate



the community's evolving presence and capabilities into concrete para-diplomatic activities, influencing the dynamics of Sino-Portuguese relations.

The Liga dos Chineses em Portugal is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that represents the Chinese community residing in Portugal. Established on June 20, 1991 and officially founded in 1997, its primary mission is to promote the integration of the Chinese community into Portuguese society while fostering dialogue and cultural exchange between the two communities. As a recognized representative at the High Commission for Migration, the Liga plays a vital role in strengthening bilateral relations between Portugal and China. It facilitates business opportunities, supports the internationalization of Portuguese companies entering the Chinese market, and serves as an intermediary in commercial partnerships. Additionally, the Liga organizes cultural events such as Chinese New Year celebrations, and collaborates with municipalities to establish partnerships that highlight Chinese traditions in Portugal. Through its extensive network, the organization continues to build bridges between the two nations, ensuring cultural dissemination, business collaboration, and community integration.

The Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China Pequenas e Médias Empresas (CCPC-PME) is a specialized bilateral trade association dedicated to fostering and supporting commercial relations specifically between Portuguese and Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Headquartered in Lisbon, its core mission is to act as a vital bridge, facilitating market entry, promoting networking opportunities, and providing tailored services to help SMEs from both Portugal and China navigate the complexities of cross-border trade. The chamber offers practical support such as market intelligence, business matchmaking, trade missions, and advisory services, all aimed at creating mutually beneficial partnerships and enhancing the visibility and success of its SME members within the dynamic Portugal-China economic corridor. It serves as a crucial platform for smaller businesses seeking to engage effectively in this important bilateral relationship.

Maria Fernanda Ilhéu emphasized these associations' function as cultural and economic bridges and not political propaganda: "What these associations do [is] nothing political: they organize parties, lunches, dinners, and receive people from China"; they serve as "emissaries" for Chinese provincial authorities, helping organize visits and promote economic opportunities (Personal communication, February 2025). Y Ping Chow reinforced this non-ideological stance: "We do not do propaganda for Beijing. What we want is to promote Chinese culture and develop relations with China" (Personal communication, February 2025). In this regard, Choi Hin Man observes: "The Chinese community plays an indirect diplomatic role, facilitating dialogue between the two countries" (Personal communication, February 2025). Rather than engaging in ideological advocacy, the community focuses on creating opportunities for cooperation. The associations also provide vital support for cultural events and business networking. Wang Suoying added that the associations distribute gifts from Chinese provincial governments during festivals and help coordinate visits by Chinese delegations, which focus on economic promotion rather than political messaging (Personal communication, February 2025).



The para-diplomatic activities of the Liga dos Chineses em Portugal and CCPC-PME involve extensive subnational cooperation, as evidenced by these key initiatives:

1. **Municipal cooperation agreements:** CCPC-PME facilitated the signing of a memorandum of understanding for friendly cooperation between Nan'an, Fujian (China) and Maia (Portugal). This agreement aims to strengthen economic, trade, and cultural ties, leveraging Maia's strategic position as a gateway to Europe. The ceremony involved municipal officials and association representatives (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
2. **Provincial delegation exchanges:** A delegation from Hunan Province (China) visited Portugal, on invitation by the Liga dos Chineses, to study the diaspora and promote economic cooperation. This included meetings with diaspora associations, visits to Chinese businesses in Vila do Conde, and support for establishing a Hunan Natives Association in Portugal (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). Similarly, a delegation from Henan Province (China) visited the CCPC-PME and met with Vila Nova de Gaia officials to discuss cooperation in trade, culture, agriculture, and tourism (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
3. **City-specific industrial and tech partnerships:** An official delegation from Zhongshan (China) visited Alenquer Municipality and signed a cooperation protocol with CCPC-PME (represented by Y Ping Chow) and Zhongshan's Science and Technology Department. This focused on bio-pharmaceuticals and health industries (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2025b). In addition, Changchun (China), a major industrial hub, visited Porto and signed a cooperation agreement with the Instituto Superior de Engenharia do Porto (ISEP), which focuses on automotive innovation (especially EVs) and cultural exchanges like *wushu* promotion (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
4. **Business association linkages:** CCPC-PME met with the Wuxi SME Association (China) to explore new international cooperation paradigms, emphasizing technological innovation, renewable energy, and finance (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2025b). They also visited Tianjin to discuss cold chain logistics projects and mineral imports (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021), and explored energy storage opportunities in Xiamen (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
5. **Platform development in strategic zones:** CCPC-PME played a key role in delegations visiting the GMDCZH, promoting its role as a platform for CPLP countries. This included meetings with the Macao Chief Executive and signing agreements to establish representative offices like the Centro de Cooperação e Intercâmbio de Ciência e Tecnologia China-PLP Delegação no Porto (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021; Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
6. **Cultural and creative city diplomacy:** CCPC-PME hosted a delegation from Yangzhou (China), a UNESCO Creative City (Gastronomy), during the UCCN Annual Conference in Braga, discussing cultural exchange and investment opportunities (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).



7. Institutional partnerships: CCPC-PME signed a cooperation agreement with the Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Porto (ESHT) to facilitate market entry for CPLP products in Hengqin/Macao/China and support Macao's tourism hub development (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). They also established the Associação de Cooperação Amigável para PME in Qinhuangdao, Hebei (China) to support SME internationalization (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).
8. Political/diplomatic support: The Liga dos Chineses em Portugal actively engages in supporting the political-diplomatic positions of the People's Republic of China and its Special Administrative Regions, demonstrating its role as a key representative body for the diaspora. This involvement includes organizing events addressing core national interests such as Taiwan policy and Macao's governance. In 2022, the League coordinated a significant protest outside the U.S. Embassy in Lisbon opposing then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan. During this event, League President Y Ping Chow articulated its purpose to *Hoje Macau*: "We just want to show Americans it's not worth provoking war in the Pacific because we Chinese are a peaceful people, and this is how we want to solve problems" (*Hoje Macau*, 2022). Furthermore, the League has publicly endorsed political processes within Macao, notably backing Ho Iat Seng's 2019 candidacy for Chief Executive. Chow emphasized this support, stating: "The Chinese League, as most members are from Zhejiang, gives its support and would like to promote his [Ho Iat Seng's] visit to the country. His election can benefit relations between the Government and Chinese residents in Portugal, and can also bring great benefits to the community" (*Hoje Macau*, 2019). These actions highlight the League's function in mobilizing overseas Chinese support for Beijing's strategic objectives and regional leadership aligned with its interests.

These activities demonstrate that the Liga dos Chineses and CCPC-PME serve as crucial intermediaries, facilitating direct engagement between Chinese provinces/municipalities and Portuguese subnational entities. Their focus spans economic cooperation (e.g., industrial parks, electric vehicles, health technology, energy storage), trade promotion, cultural exchange, and educational partnerships. While these para-diplomatic efforts significantly strengthen the people-to-people and economic ties underpinning Portugal-China relations, political advocacy appears notably sporadic and non-prioritized within their agendas. As noted by Maria Fernanda Ilhéu (Personal communication, February 2023), both organizations remain predominantly oriented toward economic cooperation objectives.

Ilhéu emphasizes that the political stance of Portuguese businesspeople or associations is largely irrelevant to the Chinese when doing business: "For the Chinese, culture isn't politics. It's the way the rules of coexistence are navigated. If you tell me that some associations might have someone involved in politics behind the scenes, yes. But what these associations do has nothing political about it: they organize parties, lunches, dinners, welcome people coming from China to Portugal." She further clarifies:



*There might be an idea that the Chinese want us to be communists, but to begin with, they themselves aren't communists anymore. They respect the Chinese Communist Party, which is completely different from being communist. Secondly, they couldn't care less about what we Portuguese are politically. I've told them many times that I am a member of the PSD [Social Democratic Party] and have nothing to do with communism. I've said this directly to several people. They react the same way; this information means nothing to them. What matters is the relationship with me, what we agree on, and what we are going to do. In their country, they want to belong to the party to succeed in life. Here, they are very far from promoting communism.*

While the LCP and CCPC-PME exemplify the community's established institutional agency within Portugal, a significant evolution in its bridging function has emerged in recent years, driven by political and economic shifts at the macro-level. This evolution centres on strategically leveraging Macao's unique historical and institutional position and the accelerated development of the GMDCZH as platforms to facilitate Sino-Portuguese relations. This new role is fundamentally a result of China's intensified focus on integrating Macao into its national development strategy - particularly the Greater Bay Area initiative and Macao's positioning as a Commercial and Trade Cooperation Service Platform between China and Portuguese-speaking countries - alongside the creation of the Hengqin zone in 2021 to foster deeper economic integration and diversification. Consequently, the next section examines how the Chinese community in Portugal, often working through or alongside its institutions, actively utilizes these specialized platforms to create novel pathways for trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement between Portugal and China.

Another entity emerging in Portugal-China economic relations is the Portugal-Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHKCCI). Established in 2019, this private non-profit organization facilitates bilateral trade, business relations, and cultural-academic exchanges between Portugal and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (PHKCCI, n.d.). It has actively promoted high-level meetings between Hong Kong executives and Portuguese entrepreneurs, exemplified by its July 3, 2025 Lisbon summit co-organized with the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Brussels, Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Office, and Hong Kong SAR government. The event featured Winnie Ho (Hong Kong Secretary for Housing) and Maisie Chan (Commissioner for Greater Bay Area Development). As co-founder Bernardo Mendia emphasized, the summit aimed at "building stronger connections between Portugal and Hong Kong" and showcasing the "immense potential for international collaboration" in the Greater Bay Area (Personal communication, July 2025).

Hong Kong has strategically engaged Portugal to advance its economic agenda, including Innovation Secretary Sun Dong's March 2025 visit to "explore business opportunities" through meetings with Portuguese political, business, and technology leaders (Hoje Macau, 2025a). This follows earlier diplomatic efforts like the June 2024 appeal by Hong Kong's Secretary for Financial Services to remove Hong Kong from the EU tax haven list,



citing compliance with European guidelines (Público, 2024).

Beyond the entities mentioned above, it is important to note other associations founded by the Chinese community in Portugal that also engage in organizing economic cooperation events. Examples include the Associação de Comerciantes e Industriais Luso-Chinesa em Portugal (Luso-Chinese Association of Merchants and Industrialists in Portugal) and the Associação de Empresas Chinesas em Portugal (Association of Chinese Companies in Portugal). The Associação de Sociedades Chinesas em Portugal (Association of Chinese Societies in Portugal) was also founded in 2016 (Forum Macao, 2016).

The year 2025 was marked, moreover, by the organization of a large-scale commercial event in Lisbon on September 19th, which brought 22 Chinese companies to the Portuguese capital. The initiative, held at the Lisbon Congress Centre, was organized by some entities mentioned in this study and aimed to “present Macao’s business environment and the advantages of the service platform” for commercial cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries. The session also served to analyze “Portugal’s investment and business environment” (Hoje Macau, 2025b).

Returning to the testimony of Maria Fernanda Ilhéu, the economist noted that as early as 2023, there were already more associations due to the growth of the Chinese community in Portugal. She also observed entities linked to sectors less typical in Portugal-China relations, such as tourism:

*Yes [there are more associations], but that’s normal, because there are also more Chinese people. It’s understood that people should associate for various reasons. [...] This community’s mindset is well-intentioned, and its role is cultural and economic. I mentioned the lady [Lily Yang, CEO of GREATOPUS International Travel Service] who organized the president of Dalian’s trip to Portugal. She is a businesswoman who even goes unnoticed in Portugal, but runs a large tourism company. She brings Chinese tourists to Portugal from various parts of the world - Singapore, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, and also from mainland China. She lives in Portugal (Personal communication, February 2025).*

### **Leveraging Macao, Hengqin and the Lusophone Space**

Macao’s historical function as a Lusophone bridge is formally recognized under China’s “one country, two systems” framework. As President of CCPC-PME Y Ping Chow acknowledged: “Macao has done a good job in these relations” (Observador, 2023). However, Chow critically noted that the outcomes have fallen short of the potential: “Although Forum Macao was created [...] in my opinion, much more could be done” (Observador, 2023). This assessment underscores the need for enhanced implementation of Macao’s diplomatic mandate.

Hengqin complements Macao by providing physical space and policy frameworks for commercial and technological collaboration. The strategic use of Macao and GMDCZH has enhanced the diaspora’s role in Sino-Portuguese relations. In 2024, CCPC-PME was formally designated a “Global Investment Partner” by the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth



Cooperation Zone in Hengqin (CCPC-PME, 2024e). This role involves promoting Hengqin's institutional advantages to attract foreign investment in technology, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), and cultural tourism (CCPC-PME, 2024e). Chow positions Hengqin most crucially as "the gateway for companies from Portuguese-speaking countries" in China, a role that capitalizes on its integration with the Greater Bay Area market (CCPC-PME, 2024g).

#### Collaborative Mechanisms

1. Tech innovation: A September 2024 agreement established a Hengqin liaison office between CCPC-PME and the China-Portuguese Speaking Countries Sci-Tech Exchange Center, formalized during the Guangzhou-Zhuhai-Macao Innovation Corridor roundtable (CCPC-PME, 2024f). This facilitates scientific exchange, talent development, and industrial application across Lusophone markets.
2. Digital talent: CCPC-PME brokered a tripartite agreement (April 2024) between Macao University of Science and Technology's Faculty of Humanities and Arts, Portugal's Yacooba Labs, and itself to export Portuguese digital talent (Web3, blockchain, gaming) to Asian markets (CCPC-PME, 2024h).
3. SME integration: CCPC-PME established seven consultancies in Hengqin representing CPLP nations (e.g., Brazil, Angola) to guide businesses entering China while aiding Chinese enterprises in Lusophone markets (CCPC-PME, 2024g).

CCPC-PME explicitly connects these hubs: It serves as a "link between Portuguese-speaking countries through Portugal, to connect with Macao and even with mainland China" (Silva, 2023). Policy tailwinds, like Hengqin's 25 measures supporting CPLP cooperation (e.g., tax incentives, innovation funding), further enable this ecosystem (CCPC-PME, 2024c). The focus sectors include TCM - where Chow envisions integrated management platforms linking Portuguese clinics with Hengqin institutions - and tech-driven exhibitions (CCPC-PME, 2024g).

In sum, Macao provides cultural and diplomatic capital, while Hengqin offers scalable economic infrastructure. Chinese community institutions like CCPC-PME operationalize this synergy, transforming geographic advantages into tangible scientific, entrepreneurial, and investment cooperation between Portugal, China, and the broader Lusophone world.

Y Ping Chow has spearheaded initiatives to establish trilateral commercial structures. A key development was the formal creation of the first Portugal-Guinea-Bissau-China chamber of commerce in Lisbon on April 14, 2023 (Silva, 2023). Chow views Portugal as a strategic platform for expanding these connections, explicitly stating the ambition to create similar chambers with other Portuguese-speaking countries: "Beyond Guinea-Bissau, the goal is to 'try to create Portugal-Angola-China and so on'" (Silva, 2023). He emphasized the CCPC-PME's unique position to leverage existing relationships, noting that Lusophone African countries "have a good relationship with China" and that the chamber could "link between Portuguese-speaking countries through Portugal, to connect with Macao and even with mainland China" (Silva, 2023). While acknowledging Macao's



official role in engaging the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), Chow suggested that diaspora-led initiatives could enhance outcomes beyond current frameworks like Forum Macao.

The perspective from Lusophone partners underscores the initiative's value. Carlos Ramos, chairman of the installation committee for the new China-Portugal-Guinea-Bissau chamber, described it as "an excellent initiative" for leveraging CPLP connections to boost private sector engagement (Silva, 2023). He highlighted Guinea-Bissau's development needs and export potential (e.g., cashew nuts), stressing that "What we need to give the country a greater boost is this connection with Chinese and Portuguese companies, so that we can elevate ourselves and acquire the 'know-how'" (Silva, 2023). This illustrates how the Chinese community's institutional efforts address concrete economic demands while strengthening multilateral ties.

Building on the analysis of institutional para-diplomacy and strategic platform leverage, the following section demonstrates concrete applications of the Chinese diaspora's bridging role within two rapidly evolving and strategically significant sectors: healthcare and education. Focusing on traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and education, it examines how diaspora institutions, exemplified by the Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME (CCPC-PME), actively facilitate their integration, development, and modernization within Portugal.

### **Pioneering New Frontiers: Wellness, Knowledge and Media**

CCPC-PME has been instrumental in advancing the integration of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) into the Portuguese context through strategic partnerships and institutional support. A significant milestone was the inauguration of the Plataforma Hospital Medicina China (Chinese Medicine Hospital Platform) in Porto on February 15, 2025. This innovative project aims to consolidate TCM within the Portuguese healthcare system. Crucially, CCPC-PME is a founding member of this platform (Hospital Medicina China, 2025). The platform represents a major step in integrating millennia-old health practices into Portugal, promising lasting community benefits and opening new avenues for Sino-Portuguese collaboration in health and wellness (Hospital Medicina China, 2025; Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). Institutional backing, highlighted by a message of support from the rector of the Wuhan University of Chinese Medicine, underscores the transnational academic and professional networks facilitating this integration (Hospital Medicina China, 2025).

Building on this foundation, CCPC-PME actively facilitated technological innovation in TCM. On March 7, 2025, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed in Porto between Chi-násio—Hospital Medicina China (the Porto-based TCM research, diagnosis, and treatment platform) and China Hengqin Herbizon Health Technology (a company founded by a research team from the Macao University of Science and Technology). This signing occurred with the collaboration of CCPC-PME (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021), and the agreement establishes a basis for cooperation in introducing an innovative, artificial intelligence-based technology for TCM into Portugal and Europe.



The primary objective is to enable the implementation of the Herbizon Traditional Chinese Medicine Robot, which aims to modernize TCM practices (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). This partnership, fostered with CCPC-PME's involvement, signifies a substantial advancement in merging technological innovation with traditional knowledge. It actively promotes the evolution and modernization of TCM within the European framework, positioning Portugal as a potential leader in this integration (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021).

Complementing its role in advancing TCM, the Chinese diaspora in Portugal also plays a crucial part in fostering deeper bilateral relations through strategic investments in education and human capital development. A significant manifestation of this commitment occurred on June 16, 2025, in northern Portugal. Facilitated by local Chinese community associations and prominently amplified by CCPC-PME, this development underscores the diaspora's institutional capacity to mobilize resources and CCPC-PME's dual function as both a key communicator and enabler of impactful community initiatives. In a move described as historic by CCPC-PME (2025b), the Chinese community resident in northern Portugal formally assumed control of the Fundação Luso Internacional para a Educação e Cultura na Zona Norte (Luso International Foundation for Education and Culture in the Northern Zone). This transition involved the election of a new management group led by local Chinese associations, with Y Ping Chow elected as President of the board of directors (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). The new leadership immediately announced a major initiative - the launch of an international trilingual school (Portuguese, English, and Mandarin) to be established in Porto. This educational project is a direct response to the growing demand for multilingual education within the community and the wider region. Its core objectives, as reported by CCPC-PME (2021), are to:

1. Enhance educational quality through a rigorous international curriculum;
2. Strengthen cultural identity, particularly for young Luso-Chinese individuals, by formally integrating Mandarin and Chinese cultural elements;
3. Promote the integration of Luso-Chinese youth into Portuguese society while maintaining their heritage.

The project enjoys broad-based support, encompassing local community leaders, the Confucius Institute at the University of Aveiro, and several Chinese language schools (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). This network of support underscores the project's significance and roots in the collaborative efforts between the diaspora community and established educational and cultural institutions fostering China-Portugal links. The new leadership of the Foundation has committed itself to reinforcing service to the community specifically through the pillars of education, culture, and civic participation (Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME, 2021). The establishment of the trilingual school represents a concrete manifestation of this commitment.



China's growing investment footprint in Portugal extends beyond traditional sectors into the media, serving strategic soft power objectives. This engagement manifests through three key initiatives:

- **Community-centric media:** The 2019 launch of Ni Hao Portugal—a Lisbon-based multimedia platform co-founded by Y Ping Chow (President of the Chinese League in Portugal) and journalist Rogério Bueno de Matos—aimed to dismantle stereotypes about Portugal's Chinese community. As Matos stated, "Starting from the idea that we like what we know and distrust what we don't know, I saw an editorial opportunity and social need to introduce the Chinese community to the Portuguese" (Hoje Macau, 2019). The project combined a digital portal with television programming focused on business, cultural exchange, and diaspora life, seeking to foster mutual understanding within Portugal before expanding to other Lusophone markets.
- **Local media acquisition:** Earlier Chinese entry into Portuguese media began with the 2015 acquisition of Iris FM (a regional radio station in Samora Correia) by entrepreneur Liang Zhan. This purchase, initially met with community concerns about relocation to Lisbon, evolved into a platform amplifying China-Portugal narratives. Iris FM now features contents such as 30 representatives of Chinese-language media from 18 countries going on a Tibet reporting tour, where they witness the remarkable achievements of the new era on the snow-covered plateau and record vivid practices of rural revitalization (Iris FM, 2025).
- **Institutional platform building:** The most significant development emerged in May 2025 when Guangdong's state-backed Nanfang Media Group (owner of GD Today and Iris FM) launched the "Greater Bay Area Chinese-Portuguese Media Content Platform" in Lisbon. This initiative explicitly seeks to "reinforce media cooperation and facilitate cultural content exchange between China and Portuguese-speaking countries" while leveraging AI for digital dissemination (Hoje Macau, 2025a). Nanfang Media Group chairman Liu Qiyu framed it as enhancing "civilizational dialogue," which coincides with the 500th anniversary of China-Europe diplomatic relations and the 20th year of China-Portugal strategic partnership.

These investments reveal an evolution from *community representation* (Ni Hao Portugal) to *narrative influence* (Iris FM) and finally *institutional bridge-building* (Nanfang's platform). Together, they seem to reflect a calibrated approach to shaping Portugal's media landscape through cultural diplomacy and strategic content partnerships.

### **Eyes on the Future: Pathways and Challenges**

Economic diversification remains central to the diaspora's future strategy. Y Ping Chow outlines ambitious plans to establish startup investment funds and technology collaboration platforms, emphasizing that "[they] are creating a fund to support tech ventures and developing new scientific partnerships" (Personal communication, February 2025). The community's role as mediators remains indispensable. Dinis Ka Chon Chan highlights Portugal's strategic importance: "What makes Portugal attractive to China is



the political perspective... Portugal is seen as a friendly country or good mediator” (Personal communication, February 2025). Maria Fernanda Ilhéu echoes this: “Portugal is seen as a friendly country or good mediator, and it is interesting for China.”

Despite progress, challenges remain. Language barriers and bureaucratic inefficiencies hinder integration. As Dinis Chan observes, “Those who already have the Golden Visa remain in Portugal, but [...] they do not speak the language. They are people who need a lot of security, and making a high-risk investment is not an option for them” (Personal communication, February 2025). He also notes bureaucratic delays: “The slowness of the processes creates difficulties for people who want to come to Portugal (...) many lose confidence in the system” (Personal communication, February 2025). Additionally, Y Ping Chow expresses concern about generational engagement: “The second generation or third [generation] no longer participates as much in the work of Chinese associations. Perhaps because they are too integrated into the Portuguese community” (Personal communication, February 2025).

These concerns align with findings from Li’s (2019) survey of 43 Chinese immigrants in Portugal, predominantly from Zhejiang (76.74%), with 48.84% arriving between ages 13–17 (1.5-generation). The study reveals paradoxical identity patterns:

- Limited cultural knowledge: 81.4% reported only “knowing a little” about Chinese history and traditions, while just 13.95% claimed deep cultural understanding, leading to the conclusion that “most respondents lack comprehensive knowledge of Chinese culture” (Li, 2019, p. 34).
- Strong cultural affiliation: Despite knowledge gaps, 72.09% identified “more” with Chinese culture, and 60.47% primarily socialized with Chinese friends (vs. 32.56% with multicultural friend groups).

The study attributes this to parental emphasis on cultural education, noting that “the vast majority of 1.5-generation immigrants still maintain a Chinese cultural identity” while pursuing integration into Portuguese society (Li, 2019, p. 37). However, their cultural connection often remains superficial - maintained through contact with relatives in China, Chinese media consumption, and ethnic social circles - with most retaining “the same level of knowledge about Chinese culture they had when they immigrated” (Li, 2019, p. 41). This creates identity ambiguities, where some “remain confused about their cultural identity,” while only a minority fully adopts a Portuguese identity.

Collectively navigating historical transitions, socioeconomic integration challenges, and evolving geopolitical dynamics, the Chinese community in Portugal demonstrates remarkable resilience and adaptability. As Maria Fernanda Ilhéu concludes, “The community has a very positive energy” (Personal communication, February 2025). Their ability to navigate challenges while fostering economic and cultural ties positions them as a vital asset in Sino-Portuguese relations.



## Conclusion

This study set out to answer the central research question: How has the Chinese community in Portugal evolved, and what roles does it play in shaping contemporary Sino-Portuguese relations, particularly in the post-pandemic era? The findings reveal a community transformed from historical intermediaries into a sophisticated, multi-layered transnational para-diplomatic ecosystem. This ecosystem operates through three interconnected dimensions, validating the proposed conceptual framework of diaspora agency:

1. **Foundation:** Individual transnational entrepreneurs remain at the core of this ecosystem, leveraging *guanxi* (relational networks) and transnational ties to facilitate trade, investment, and market integration. Their adaptability, particularly in response to shifting global economic conditions, underscores their foundational role in Sino-Portuguese relations.
2. **Structure:** Institutions such as the Liga dos Chineses em Portugal (LCP), the Câmara de Comércio Portugal-China PME (CCPC-PME) and the Portugal–Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHKCCI) normalize the diaspora’s agency as para-diplomatic brokers. These organizations mediate between Portuguese and Chinese stakeholders, creating frameworks for cooperation through trade missions, municipal agreements, and cultural exchanges.
3. **Amplification:** The community strategically leverages state-created platforms such as Macao’s Lusophone bridge and the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. These state-backed platforms amplify the diaspora’s reach, reduce friction in international collaborations, and foster new pathways for trilateral partnerships, including initiatives in technology, traditional Chinese medicine, among others.

At the heart of this ecosystem lies diaspora capital, a resource that drives critical flows across multiple domains:

- **Economic:** Investments in technology and startups.
- **Knowledge:** AI-driven innovations in traditional Chinese medicine and other sectors.
- **Cultural:** Trilingual education initiatives aimed at preserving heritage and fostering integration.
- **Institutional:** Subnational agreements and collaborations that strengthen bilateral ties.

In the post-pandemic era, the Chinese community in Portugal has not only demonstrated resilience but has adapted to new realities with innovative economic activities, sophisticated initiatives, and dynamic forms of relationship-building. More than resilient intermediaries, the Chinese community has emerged as architects of relational infrastructure—building bridges where formal diplomacy faces headwinds, creating new spaces where the two countries converge through entrepreneurship rather than



diplomatic channels, and proving that diaspora capital can transform geographic proximity into geopolitical agency. In an era of strategic competition, this self-reinforcing ecosystem offers a template for how transnational communities sustain cooperation beneath - and beyond - the state.

This same dynamism and adaptability to new social and economic realities are confirmed by economist Maria Fernanda Ilhéu (Personal communication, February 2023), who observed: "The Chinese community, in general, has a positive characteristic: the speed with which it adjusts to the surrounding environment. If the rules of the game change, they don't dwell on rules that no longer exist; they look at what they can do with them."

## References

- Alexandre, Valentim (2023). *No fio da navalha - Portugal e a Defesa do Império (1961: Abril a Novembro)*. Temas e Debates
- Amante, M. F., & Rodrigues, I. (2020). Mobility regimes and the crisis: the changing face of Chinese migration due to the Portuguese golden visa policy. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 47(17), 4081–4099. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2020.1752640>
- Aparício, S. L., Duarte, I., Castro, L., & Nunes, R. (2023). Equity in the Access of Chinese Immigrants to Healthcare Services in Portugal. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(3), 2442. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032442>
- Bongardt, A., & Neves, M. S. (2007). The Role of Overseas Chinese in Europe in Making China Global: The Case of Portugal (No. 44). Departamento de Economia, Gestão e Engenharia Industrial, Universidade de Aveiro.
- Bongardt, A., & Santos Neves, M. (2014). The Chinese business community at a crossroads between crisis response and China's assertive global strategy: The case of Portugal (MPC Research Report No. 2014/02). Migration Policy Centre. <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/33142>
- Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2019). Diasporas and Public Diplomacy: Distinctions and Future Prospects. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 14(1–2), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191x-14101015>
- Brinkerhoff, J. M. (2016). *Institutional reform and diaspora entrepreneurs: The in-between advantage*. Oxford University Press.
- Câmara de Comércio Portugal–China PME. (2021, June 9). CCPC-PME vai assinar protocolo de cooperação com a Câmara de Comércio Angola–China [Press release]. Fórum de Macau. Retrieved from [https://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/pt/economic\\_trade/view/4048](https://www.forumchinapl.org.mo/pt/economic_trade/view/4048)
- Cohen, R. (2008). *Global diasporas: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Diário do Povo Online. (2019, February 20). *Embaixada da China em Portugal realiza recepção para marcar 40 anos de laços diplomáticos*. Retrieved from



<https://portuguese.people.com.cn/n3/2019/0220/c309813-9548049.html>

Drori, I., Honig, B., & Wright, M. (2009). Transnational entrepreneurship: An emergent field of study. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 33(5), 1001–1022. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2009.00332.x>

Elo, M., & Riddle, L. (Eds.). (2016). *Diaspora Business*. BRILL. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9781848884038>

Expresso. (2024, February 10). *Embaixador chinês defende Huawei em Portugal e rejeita “mentalidade de Guerra Fria”*. Retrieved from <https://expresso.pt/internacional/2024-02-10-Embaixador-chines-defende-Huawei-em-Portugal-e-rejeita-mentalidade-de-Guerra-Fria-c71900f8>

Fundação Oriente. (2019, February 8). *Quarenta Anos de Relações Diplomáticas Portugal-China*. Retrieved from <https://www.agendalx.pt/events/event/quarenta-anos-de-relacoes-diplomaticas-portugal-china/>

Gaspar, S. (2017). Chinese Migration to Portugal: Trends and Perspectives (葡萄牙中国移民的趋势和前景). *Journal of Chinese Overseas*, 13(1), 48-69. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17932548-12341343>

Gaspar, S. (2018). Percursos migratórios e trajetórias de vida de descendentes de imigrantes chineses. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, 87. <https://doi.org/10.7458/spp20188710485>

Gaspar, S., Carvalho, H., & Seabra, T. (2021). Academic Performance of Chinese Students in Portugal. In *The Presence of China and the Chinese Diaspora in Portugal and Portuguese-Speaking Territories* (pp. 39–53). BRILL. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004473195\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004473195_004)

Gawer, A. (Ed.). (2014). *Platforms, markets and innovation*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Góis, P., Marques, J. C., & Oliveira, C. (2005). Dévoilement des liens transnationaux des migrants chinois au Portugal.

Hoje Macau. (2019, May 20). *Y Ping Chow diz que comunidade chinesa em Portugal apoia candidatura de Ho Iat Seng*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2019/05/20/y-ping-chow-diz-que-comunidade-chinesa-em-portugal-apoia-candidatura-de-ho-iat-seng/>

Hoje Macau. (2025, March 2). *Hong Kong | Secretário para a Inovação procura negócios em Portugal*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2025/03/02/hong-kong-secretario-para-a-inovacao-procura-negocios-em-portugal/>

Hoje Macau. (2019, September 3). *Média | Projecto “Ni Hao Portugal” quer dar a conhecer comunidade chinesa*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2019/09/03/media-projecto-ni-hao-portugal-quer-dar-a-conhecer-comunidade-chinesa/>

Hoje Macau. (2022, August 24). *Taiwan | Centenas protestaram em Lisboa contra visita de Nancy Pelosi*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2022/08/24/taiwan-centenas-protestaram-em-lisboa-contra-visita-de-nancy-pelosi/>



Hoje Macau. (2025a, May 26). *Nanfang Media | Grupo de Guangdong cria plataforma com Portugal*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2025/05/26/nanfang-media-grupo-de-guangdong-cria-plataforma-com-portugal/>

Hoje Macau. (2025b, August 21). *Cooperação: Lisboa acolhe evento com 22 empresas chinesas*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2025/08/21/cooperacao-lisboa-acolhe-evento-com-22-empresas-chinas/>

Hospital Medicina Chinesa. (2025, February 16). *Plataforma Hospital Medicina Chinesa - Inauguração* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/0N2BwyFwSnc?si=Il6MtDhTFqWdsc2>

Instituto Nacional de Estatística. (2021). *População residente (N.º) por Local de residência (NUTS - 2013), Sexo, Grupo etário e Nacionalidade*. Retrieved from <https://tabulador.ine.pt/indicador/?id=0011628>

Iris FM. (2025, July 31). *Terminou a visita de Mídias Chinesas Globais ao Tibete*. Retrieved from <https://irisfm.pt/noticias/mundo/terminou-a-visita-de-midias-chinas-globais-ao-tibete/>

Jin, Y., & Gómez-Pellón, E. (2023). *Aculturación y relaciones intergeneracionales: estudio de casos en las familias de inmigrantes chinos en Portugal*. *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, 102. <https://doi.org/10.7458/spp202310227098>

Kuznetsov, A. S. (2015). *Theory and practice of paradiplomacy: Subnational governments in international affairs*. Routledge.

Lecours, A. (2008). *Political issues of paradiplomacy: Lessons from the developed world*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

Li, Danhui. (2019). *A identidade cultural da geração 1.5 dos imigrantes chineses em Lisboa*. Dissertação de mestrado. Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa. Disponível em <https://repositorio.ulisboa.pt/handle/10451/37639>

McIntyre, D. P., & Srinivasan, A. (2017). *Networks, platforms, and strategy: Emerging views and next steps*. *Strategic Management Journal*, 38(1), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2596>

Neves, M. S., & Rocha-Trindade, M. B. (2008). *Diasporas and globalisation—The Chinese business community in Portugal and the integration of China into the world economy*. *Migrações Journal*, 3, 156-180.

Nunes, M. F. (2011). *A «viagem» de sucesso de Tsou Poe Tsing*. *Imagens da Cultura/Cultura das Imagens ICCI* 1, 45-62.

Observador. (2023, April 13). *Liga dos Chineses em Portugal quer câmaras de comércio com a Lusofonia e revela que China reúne-se com Taiwan facilmente*. Retrieved from <https://observador.pt/2023/04/13/liga-dos-chineses-em-portugal-quer-camaras-de-comercio-com-a-lusofonia-e-revela-que-china-reune-se-com-taiwan-facilmente/>

Observador. (2020, February 27). *CML “solidária” com a comunidade chinesa promove ação em lojas e restaurantes afetados pelas quebras nas vendas*. Retrieved from



<https://observador.pt/2020/02/27/cml-solidaria-com-a-comunidade-chinesa-promove-acao-em-lojas-e-restaurantes-afetados-pelas-quebras-nas-vendas/>

Observador. (2024, November 21). *Presidente do órgão legislativo máximo da China inicia em Portugal périplo a Europa*. Retrieved from <https://observador.pt/2024/11/21/presidente-do-orgao-legislativo-maximo-da-china-inicia-em-portugal-periplo-a-europa/>

Observador. (2025, February 24). *Fábrica de baterias de lítio da CALB em Sines pode receber até 350 milhões de apoios públicos*. Retrieved from <https://observador.pt/2025/02/24/fabrica-de-baterias-de-litio-da-calb-em-sines-pode-receber-ate-350-milhoes-de-apoios-publicos/>

O Mirante. (2015, July 23). *Rádio de Samora Correia comprada por chinês pode estar a caminho de Lisboa*. <https://omirante.pt/semanario/2015-07-23/sociedade/2015-07-22-radio-de-samora-correia-comprada-por-chines-pode-estar-a-caminho-de-lisboa>

Oliveira, C. R. (2010). *La actividad empresarial china en Portugal: ¿ Estrategias étnicas tradicionales?*. *Revista CIDOB d'afers internacionals*, pp. 223–242.

Oliveira, A. L., Faneca, R. M., & Ferreira, T. (2007). *A minha pátria (não) é a língua portuguesa representações de aprendentes ucranianos, chineses e cabo-verdianos*. In IX Congreso internacional galego-portugués de psicopedagogía (p. 177). Universidade da Coruña.

PORDATA. (2024a). *No âmbito do Dia Internacional dos Migrantes: Pordata divulga retrato da população estrangeira e dos fluxos migratórios em Portugal* [Comunicado de imprensa]. Retrieved from [https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-07/f\\_2023\\_12\\_12\\_pr\\_dia\\_internacional\\_dos\\_migrantes\\_vf.pdf](https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-07/f_2023_12_12_pr_dia_internacional_dos_migrantes_vf.pdf)

PORDATA. (2024b). *Barómetro da Imigração: O que pensam e sentem os residentes em Portugal sobre a imigração e os imigrantes?* [Comunicado de imprensa]. Retrieved from [https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-12/pr\\_barometro\\_imigracao\\_vf.pdf](https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-12/pr_barometro_imigracao_vf.pdf)

Portes, A. (1998). *Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1>

Presidência da República Portuguesa. (2018, December 4). *Presidente da República Popular da China iniciou Visita de Estado a Portugal*. Retrieved from <https://www.presidencia.pt/atualidade/toda-a-atualidade/2018/12/presidente-da-republica-popular-da-china-iniciou-visita-de-estado-a-portugal/>

Público. (2023, June 2). *Europeus e norte-americanos fornecem 5G português, com China sob suspeita*. Retrieved from <https://www.publico.pt/2023/06/02/economia/noticia/europeus-norteamericanos-fornecem-5g-portugues-china-suspeita-2051967>

Público. (2024, May 22). *Portugal-China. Queremos colocar séculos de sucesso em causa, sem motivo?* Retrieved from <https://www.publico.pt/2024/05/22/opiniao/opiniao/portugalchina-queremos-colocar-seculos-sucesso-causa-motivo-2091374>



Público. (2024, June 7). *Hong Kong pede a Portugal para sair da lista de paraísos fiscais*. Retrieved from <https://www.publico.pt/2024/06/07/economia/noticia/hong-kong-pede-portugal-sair-lista-paraisos-fiscais-2093321>

Reis de Oliveira, C. (2003). Immigrants' Entrepreneurial Opportunities: The Case of the Chinese in Portugal. SSRN Electronic Journal. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.464682>

Reis Oliveira, C. (2021). Chinese Entrepreneurship in Portugal. In *The Presence of China and the Chinese Diaspora in Portugal and Portuguese-Speaking Territories* (pp. 69–90). BRILL. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004473195\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004473195_006)

Rodrigues, I. (2018). Migration and Social Aspirations: Chinese Cosmopolitanism in Wenzhou Region (China). *Urban Science*, 2(2), 32. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci2020032>

Santos, T. R., Castro, P., & Andreouli, E. (2023). Golden Visas and everyday citizenship: views of the new Chinese migration in Portugal. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(10), 2067–2088. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2172352>

Saxenian, A. (2006). *The new argonauts: Regional advantage in a global economy*. Harvard University Press.

Silva, A. S. (2023, Abril 14). Liga dos Chineses em Portugal quer câmaras de comércio com a lusofonia. *Hoje Macau*. Retrieved from <https://hojemacau.com.mo/2023/04/14/liga-dos-chineses-em-portugal-quer-camaras-de-comercio-com-a-lusofonia/>

Xin, K. R., & Pearce, J. L. (1996). Guanxi: Connections as substitutes for formal institutional support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6), 1641–1658. <https://doi.org/10.2307/257072>