

“Generation Mei Ming”: Dual Identity Challenges for Chinese Adoptees in Spain

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Introduction

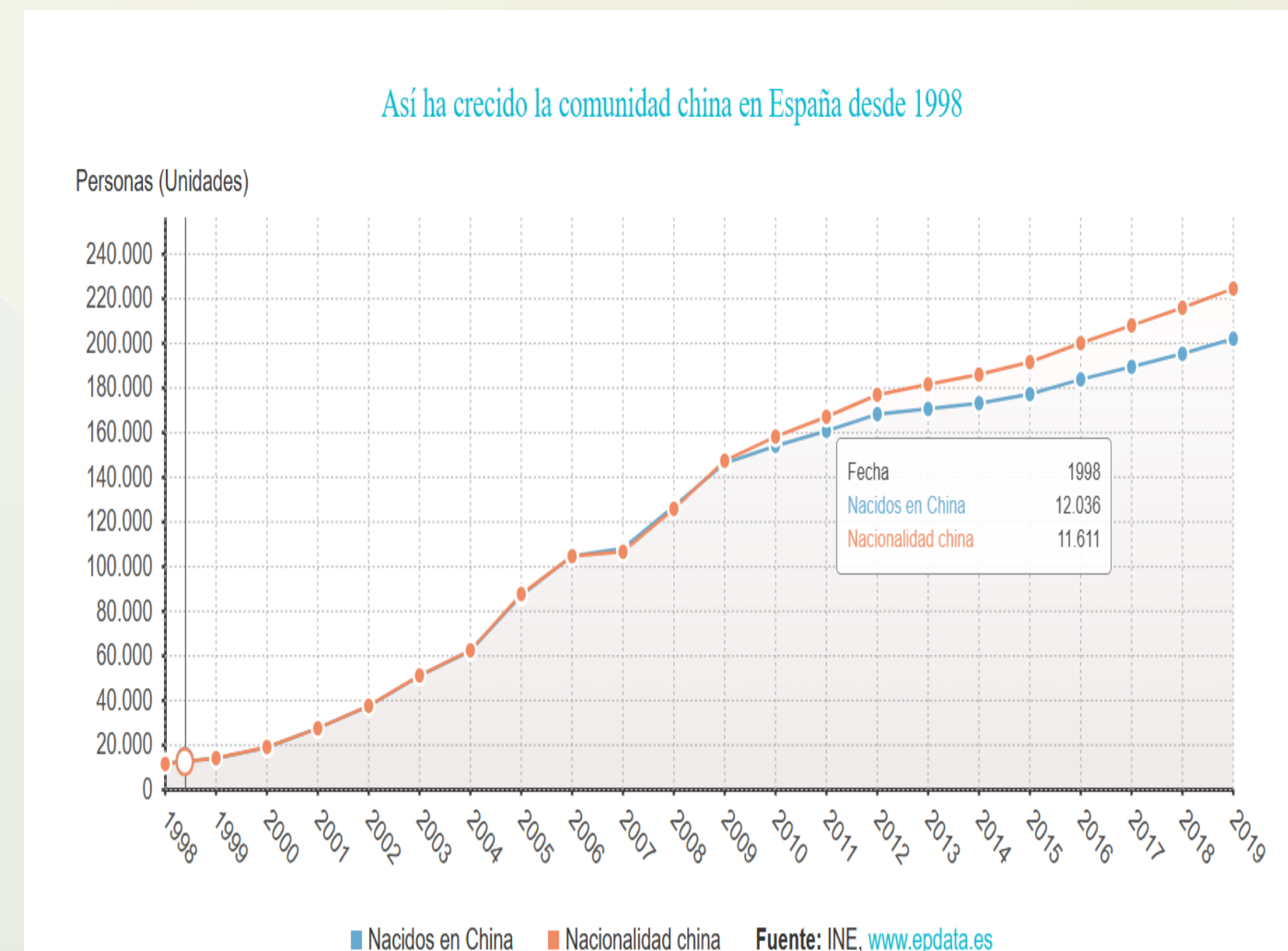
In 1995, a documentary film called “The Dying Rooms,” directed by British directors Brian Woods and Kate Blewett, was released to the public about the conditions in which Chinese children lived in at the adoption centers. China’s “One Child” Policy caused adoption centers to be completely filled, with some of the children dying of neglect and malnourishment. This documentary would later go on to cause over 17,000 Chinese female children to be adopted in Spain in years to come. The generation of adoptees in Spain were called “Generación Mei Ming,” also known as “Generation Mei Ming.” The documentary project of “Generación Mei Ming” was started by 5 adoptees who were seeking to share their stories.

The individuals travel back to China, thinking that they will be accepted into the culture, but unfortunately, that is not the response they receive. For this reason, the individuals struggle with dual identity, as well as exclusion in both Spanish and Chinese societies. The research explores identity crisis and Chinese communities in Spain from adoptees by studying documentaries, statistics, autobiographies, and media recorded by adoptees of the “Generation Mei Ming.”

What Started It All

“The Dying Rooms” is a documentary about Chinese orphanages, and how they treated the children, which many of were girls (Lauderdale Production, 1995). The babies were tied down with rope to their chairs, leaving the girls malnourished and neglected. In 1995, the documentary was released to showcase the world on how the children were living. After the documentary premiered, Spain was the 2nd leading country with the most international adoptions from China, the United States being the first (Espinet 2014). With Spain having so many international adoptions, the term “Generación Mei Ming,” or “Generation Mei Ming,” was coined. China has since denied having the orphanages in this state.

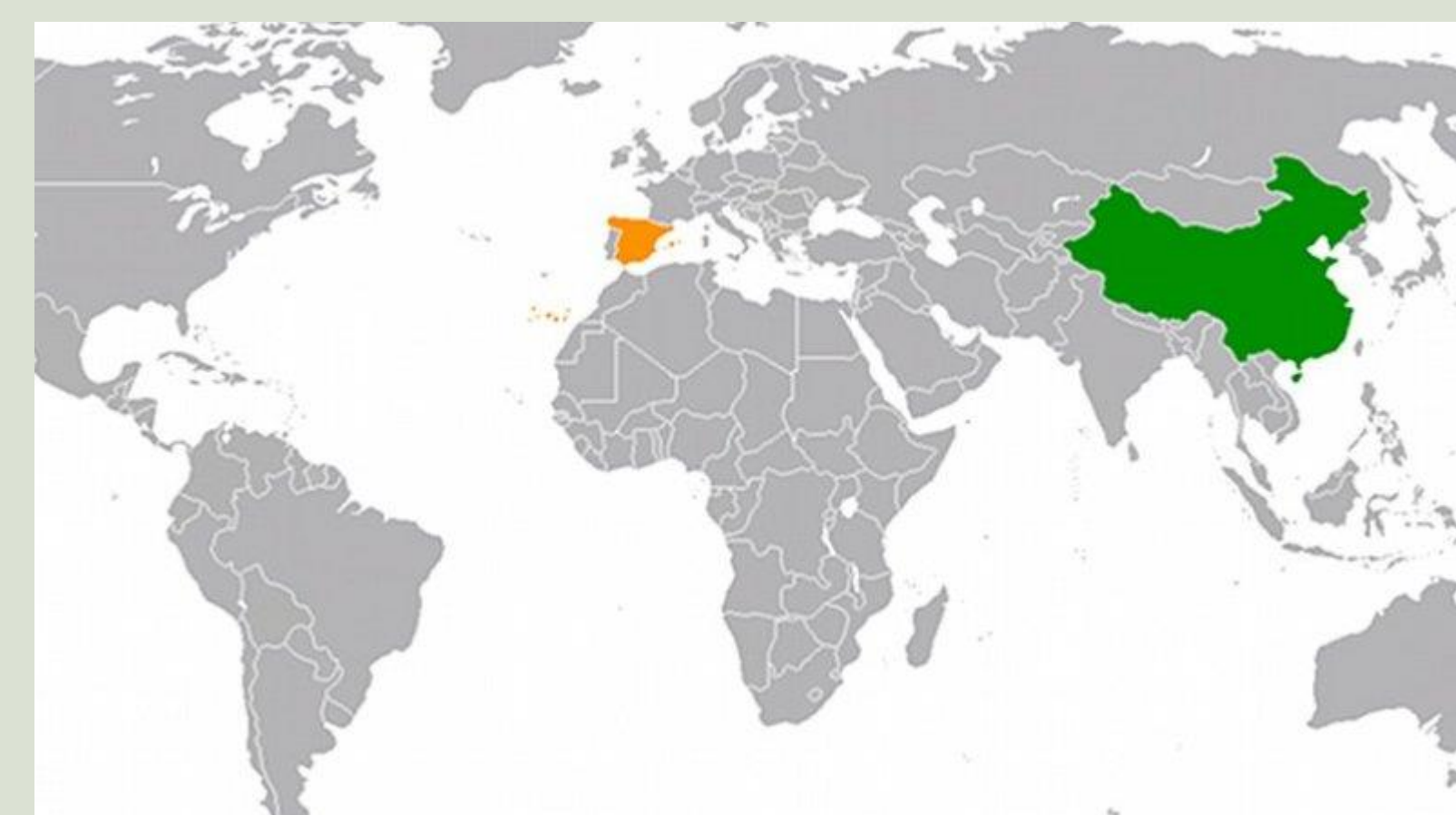
Chinese Population Growth since 1998



The chart above shows how the Chinese Community in Spain has grown from 1998. Approximately 12,050 people are of Chinese-born people, contributing to the growth of the Chinese population (EpData 2019). Over 18,000 children were adopted from China,

Political Role

One of the main reasons the orphanages were overfilled were because of China’s “One Child Policy.” To control the nation’s population and other political reasons, China only allowed for each couple to have one child. Since there was a preference in males over females, babies who were not born male were left outside of orphanages or in trash cans, left to die.



Map of Spain (Orange) and China (Green)

Challenges for Chinese Adoptees

One of the challenges that Chinese Adoptees face is dual identity. School property is one of the main target centers for Chinese Adoptees. In Spain, children of Chinese origin said that they experienced more bullying and hardships than children from Spain (Ahad & Ortega 2021). Because the Chinese population in Spain has been growing for the past 30 years, adoptees are wanting to know more about their origin. In the study conducted by Ahad & Ortega in 2021, they mention that the adoptees are becoming more interested in Chinese news, culture, and politics. They mention that the children feel as if they do not belong in either culture and society.

The girls from “Generación Mei Ming” discuss their dual identities in a documentary. Irene, the oldest of the girls, mentions how in the street of Spain, they often yell at her the word “china,” meaning a Chinese female (Donovan 2017.) This is one of the many names that these children are called on the streets.

Although in classrooms, the children are not mocked just by names. They are mocked for their physical appearance, even though the Chinese children make up most of the diversity in classrooms Spain (Villa et al., 2015). A student reported that while she spoke the language (Spanish) in classroom settings, she felt like she did not belong in that setting because she did not look like the rest of the children in the classroom (Juárez Turégano 2021).

Testimony

The main testimonial witness for the project of “Generacion Mei Ming” was Irene, as mentioned previously. This is what she had to say about her thoughts on her adoption:

“We think about our origins and why we were abandoned... and these are questions that people who are not adopted do not think about” (Hiero 2014).

Another adoptee in the documentary is 17-year-old Marina.

This is what she had to say about her life growing up as an adoptee in Spain:

“From China I have the eyes, but not the language. From Spain I have the language, but not the physical appearance, so I am strange in all parts” (Hiero 2014).

Conclusion

“Generación Mei Ming” continues to be researched as the children continue to grow. Since the adoptions of the girls, the “One Child Policy” has changed to “Two Child Policy,” with preference of female babies. The girls continue to showcase their everyday life, and trying to spread awareness in how adoption still impacts their life as they continue to age.

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