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Adaptation and Learning among Chinese Actors in Africa

Karsten GIESE

When we talk about "China in Africa", we should always remember to differentiate between the various actors and scales that are too often conflated and hidden behind such large and all-encompassing labels like "China" or "Africa". Common containers and the homogenizing of diversity seldom help to broaden our knowledge or deepen our understanding of the various phenomena which can be observed at the various scales of the multiple relationships that have evolved between this East Asian country and the African continent. Moreover, it is necessary to specify the point in time or particular period we are covering in our scholarly work and that from which we draw our conclusions. Quite a few of the publications addressing China–Africa relations have succumbed to broad generalizations, neglected diversity and specificity and overlooked the temporal dimension. The last couple of years, however, have seen the emergence of a growing body of well-informed case studies on the Chinese presence across the African continent that stress the particularity and the situatedness of Chinese–African encounters and interactions in Africa. We now can rely on thick descriptions of various Chinese actors' realities on the ground in Africa that more often than not defy and counter longstanding and still very common stereotypes, such as that of China's grand strategy in the scramble for Africa or of the generally exploitative and belligerent character of Chinese economic endeavours across the African continent.

The collection of articles in this issue reflects the efforts of the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* to serve as platform for original research within the emerging field of China–Africa studies. The articles presented here are closely linked to those published one year ago in issue 1/2014 and, together, the two issues represent the current state of this still-new area of empirical research. The contributions of the earlier collection clearly showed that in many ways the activities and practices of Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa do not differ from those of other local and foreign actors, that they usually benefit local populations or at least certain groups and strata thereof, and that relation-

ships of cooperation and conviviality have developed despite widespread mutual distrust.

The authors of the pieces in this issue, although not explicitly addressing the temporal dimension of the relationships between Chinese and African actors, focus on evolutionary processes of different scales and the various ways in which adaptation and learning processes unfold over time. In various ways, this issue counters the widespread perception that the Chinese populations that have relocated to various places across the African continent over the last 15 or so years are incapable of or unwilling to adapt to and integrate into their African host societies. Learning processes of Chinese actors at various scales – from individual enterprise to nation-states – is the overarching theme tackled by the authors who have contributed to this topical issue of the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*.

In her contribution, Katy Lam discusses groups of Chinese who have entered the African continent with long-term economic perspectives, which differentiates them from the large majority of Chinese traders who are ready to withdraw from their markets once sales and profits become unsatisfactory. Lam's work focuses on investors and introduces us to their efforts to adapt their strategies and practices to the local conditions of Ghana. By comparing entrepreneurs who are newly arrived with those who are established, she is able to demonstrate how Chinese businesspeople have been strategically engaging in relationships with a large variety of host-country institutional actors, business partners and employees, as well as with fellow Chinese, in order to build up and maintain localized social capital to the benefit of their economic interests. She also demonstrates that rising numbers of Chinese businesspeople in Ghana do not translate into ethnic community-building, solidarity or improved social status. Quite to the contrary, her paper reveals the gaps between newcomers and established actors when the latter distance themselves from the former for their "bad manners" and "poor quality", which they regard as the main cause of the unfavourable image of "the Chinese" in Africa and the resulting negative impact on their businesses. Newly arrived Chinese entrepreneurs, however, attribute their own economic difficulties to structural factors of the host country – namely, deficiencies of local institutions and populations. Lam thus demonstrates that the level of adaptation to the host country, the degree of integration and the ability to build up localized social capital strongly influ-

ences Chinese investors' perceptions of their host society. She also provides empirical evidence that – despite allegations to the contrary – Chinese are able and willing to adapt to and integrate into their African host societies for the benefit of their own economic endeavours and that the temporal dimension is of great importance for analysing Chinese–African interactions on the ground in Africa.

Romain Dittgen, in the issue's second article, also compares the practices of different Chinese groups and applies a geographical lens and spatial perspective to the analysis of Chinese practices in Africa. He is interested in the spatial forms and dynamics that have evolved and unfolded as the people behind two distinct economic pursuits – a state-owned Chinese oil firm in Chad versus commercial malls with private Chinese investors in Johannesburg, South Africa – have engaged with their host environments. Oil exploration is usually seen as an ideal type example of an economic activity that is cut off from the external social environment, whereas shopping malls and commercial centres, though also operating within clear-cut spatial enclosures, build on active and intense links with the social environment as embodied by customers. In his spatial analysis, Dittgen draws on the two theoretical concepts of liminality and heterotopias and examines the particular spatial practices that he interprets as products of a dynamic tension – inherent to the economic activities of the two Chinese entities under discussion – between a closing-off against and an opening up towards the host society in terms of level of interaction. Although the actors, economic fields and business models differ greatly between the two cases, each evinces the creation of a particular ambivalence between protecting an enclave and seeking active linkages with the local environment, caused by both purely spatial practices and economic strategies. Dittgen also stresses the importance of the temporal dimension and the process of adaptation and learning for the presence of Chinese economic actors in Africa. He emphasizes the transitional period of learning between launching the business and consolidating a local foothold, during which each of the two Chinese economic entities – different as they are – shows signs of behavioural change and adaptation regarding their businesses and their spatial practices.

Nigeria can be regarded as the African country with the broadest relationship with China, at least in numerical terms with regard to the number of Nigerians who have moved to China and the number of

Chinese who have chosen to undertake economic activities within
Nigeria. Nigerians in Guangzhou, for instance, form the largest Afri-
can community within Chinese territory. Similarly, Nigeria has at-
tracted the largest number of Chinese entrepreneurs of any African
state, although the country is regarded as highly problematic in terms
of business environment and personal safety. Probably no other Afri-
can country is so well represented within Chinese cyberspace. Inter-
net forums provide business information, personal accounts of experi-
ences in the country and advice on questions of everyday living,
among other topics. Allen Hai Xiao, in his contribution to this issue,
concentrates on the social realities of Chinese petty entrepreneurs,
who as transnational practitioners of globalization from below face
the various adversities inherent to the informality in which they oper-
ate. Xiao analyses the strategies these entrepreneurs employ to cope
with what he frames as everyday corruption by both state representa-
tives and ordinary people. Drawing on a wealth of qualitative data
collected through intense participant observation, the author de-
scribes the particular situation of individual vulnerability, which is in
part influenced by variations in state policies on the Nigerian side and
changing bilateral relations between China and Nigeria. For Xiao,
informality is the key to understanding both the vulnerabilities and
the counterstrategies of the informants of his ethnographic study.
The author also finds strong indicators here for processes of adapta-
tion to local conditions, although quite different from the processes
discussed in the previous two articles. Presenting in-depth insights
into the ways some Chinese entrepreneurs have made the provision
of visas and permits to their fellow countrymen a business model that
builds upon developing close links with corrupt host country officials,
the author argues that this form of documentation services, in the
absence of official channels, epitomizes the informal character of the
economic endeavours of many Chinese in Nigeria. This adaptation,
along with the lack of cohesion and solidarity among the Chinese
themselves, he further argues, results in self-interested individual
practices and behaviours and the strong tendency to strategize every
social interaction with both Nigerians and fellow Chinese. Only
through actively participating in and exchanging vital information via
online forums, Xiao concludes, are the Chinese petty entrepreneurs in
Nigeria able to develop a sense of community and strategies to cope
with macro-level political fluctuations that adversely affect them.

By contrast, in the next two articles we leave behind the micro level of the Chinese presence within various countries of the African continent and focus instead on international relations, as PRC and Taiwanese policies towards and diplomatic relations with the continent take centre stage. Richard Aidoo and Steve Hess highlight the Chinese self-proclaimed principle of non-interference, which has been well received across the African continent as an alternative to European and North American political principles in dealing with the Global South. Countering the Washington Consensus and related policies of conditional assistance, the Chinese stance on non-interference has been continuously criticized by Western states as opportunistic, serving Chinese self-interests and being an instrument for facilitating China's access to African resources and markets. In their article, Aidoo and Hess analyse and contrast the inconsistencies of Chinese policies towards Africa with the unchanged rhetoric of non-interference. They argue that deviations from the rhetoric in practical foreign relations with African countries should not simply be uncritically mistaken for inconsistency and opportunistic behaviour. On the contrary, they conclude that these observable deviations from official Chinese IR rhetoric should, rather, be interpreted as a learning process. "Non-interference 2.0", as the authors call it, is characterized by the growing sophistication of Chinese foreign policy makers who have demonstrated their ability to react to the changes that have taken place across the African continent since the early 2000s and to address the increasingly diversified political and economic landscape of Africa in varied and contextualized ways.

In the last contribution to this issue within the topical framework of Chinese–African relations, Timothy S. Rich and Vasabjit Banerjee focus on the development of diplomatic relations between various African countries and Taiwan. Based on qualitative and quantitative data, and coming from a long-term perspective, the authors demonstrate that Taiwan's diplomatic ties with African countries actually benefitted from the international setting and political rationales of the Cold War period. The authors further argue that since the end of the Cold War, de-ideologized economic interests rather than ideological struggles have become the decisive factor of Taiwan's striving for diplomatic recognition in Africa. Economic interests, Rich and Banerjee conclude, have incentivized most African states to establish or maintain diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

The victory of economic rationales, intertwined with China's economic rise and corresponding appeal to the leaders and populations of nations across Africa, has made Taiwan's diplomatic relations with the continent ever more precarious; Taiwan's prospects do not appear promising.

The current issue forms the second part of a large body of new scholarship on Chinese–African interactions on the ground across Africa as well as in China, of which the first part was presented by the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* in issue 1/2014, titled "Understanding Chinese–African Interactions in Africa". While these first two issues of a three-part series put the spotlight on the Chinese presence in Africa, the third and last issue, scheduled for publication by the end of 2015, will concentrate on the social realities of Africans as distinct "others" within urban Chinese society. The *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* has been a venue for the emerging scholarship on Sino-African relations since 2008, when the first topical issue, titled "China in Africa: Who Benefits?", was published. In addition to a second topical issue, "China's Evolving Africa Policy: The Limits of Socialization" (4/2011), which had a strong focus on interstate relations, the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* has tracked the development of this field by publishing research articles within various topical frameworks, such as Mathews and Yang's account of African actors in South China as stakeholders of "globalization from below" (2/2012), Hackenesch's comparison of China's and the EU's donor strategies vis-à-vis Ethiopia (1/2013) and Alves' comparative study of China's oil-backed loans to Angola and Brazil (1/2013). Since the full content of the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* has been freely available online since 2009, readers can find these contributions from back issues in the journal's archive at <www.CurrentChineseAffairs.org>.

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Chinese Adaptations: African Agency, Fragmented Community and Social Capital Creation in Ghana

Katy N. LAM

Abstract: Chinese migrant entrepreneurs in Ghana perceive themselves as vulnerable, as regularly they encounter problems and their businesses fail. The adaption experiences of Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa, especially non-traders, remain largely unstudied. By looking at the interactions of newly arrived and established Chinese migrants with institutional actors, partners, local employees and other Chinese in Ghana, this paper shows the multiple dimensions of how Chinese entrepreneurs' migration adaptation evolves, and how they create social capital to develop their businesses in Ghana. From the Chinese perspective, established entrepreneurs condemn the recent numerous "new" Chinese in Ghana as part of the root cause of problems, on account of their "poor quality and bad behaviour"; by comparison, the newly arrived Chinese attribute their challenges to deficiencies in the local people and institutions of the host country. The negative experiences of Chinese entrepreneurs in Ghana provide further evidence for, not only African, but also local Chinese agency from below, and suggest that the rising Chinese presence does not necessarily improve the social status of Chinese entrepreneurs or create a stronger, more unified Chinese community on the continent.

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Introduction

> One day a local teenage boy came to my shop and stole a suitcase.
> My local worker and I ran out and chased him. Finally, we caught
> him in the middle of the market. However, local people from the
> crowd came and surrounded us. They shouted at us and ques-
> tioned why we could treat a kid like that. The crowd accused my
> local worker because, as a Ghanaian, she was helping a Chinese
> but not her people. My worker then dragged me back to the shop.
> (Ms. Y., a Chinese suitcase trader in Makola Market, Accra, Ghana).

Chinese migrants often shared their negative experiences, difficulties
and even failures during the author's fieldwork in Ghana. Considering
themselves as "vulnerable", the Chinese migrants' perception of their
status in Ghana runs contrary to the widely publicized image of a
"powerful China in Africa", a representation common in internation-
al and African media reports and political discourse since the 2000s.

In the popular image, the "Chinese" on the African continent are
often presented as strong, monolithic actors, who are implicitly equal
to the Chinese state, whereas the "Africans" are undifferentiated and
regarded as victims, who are powerless in the encounter (Large 2007;
Strauss and Saavedra 2009). The analysis and images of China in Af-
rica projected in media reports and political discourse are consistently
homogeneous and simplistic (Mawdsley 2008: 518). Certain condem-
nations of Chinese behaviour in Africa are not accompanied by
proof; for example, rumours about China exporting convict labour to
developing countries, including Africa, were circulated extensively
and accepted as a fact without a single piece of evidence (Yan and
Sautman 2012).

The Western media's tendency to focus mainly on the negative
aspects of the Chinese in Africa contributes to the construction and
propagation of the "bad China" or "Fu Manchu" ("the amoral,
greedy and coldly indifferent Chinese" mirrored "the sometimes mis-
taken or frustrated but essentially well-intentioned West (Dr. Living-
stone) in Africa") image across the world (Mawdsley 2008: 523). The
"Chinese-ness" takes on a greater importance than the underlying,
larger problems reflected by the Chinese presence. Yan and Sautman
(2013) illustrate how labour conflicts in a Chinese-related mining
company in Zambia are reported and instrumentalized. It is the
"Chinese-ness" of the conflict that is often put in the spotlight and
adapted as appropriate for an "anti-Chinese" discourse by interna-

tional and Zambian media and politicians. The labour discontent in fact reflects a persistent socio-economic problem in the country that is historically rooted in the privatization process that took place under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s (Lee 2009: 649–650).

The dominant, "monolithic China" perspective overlooks the multiplicities of actors and the dynamics taking place in China–Africa encounters. Reacting to this overemphasis, numerous ethnographical studies published in recent years have helped to deconstruct this unitary image and provide multiple perspectives, ranging from labour relations, migration trajectories and socio-economic profiles of Chinese traders in African cities. (For example, but not exclusively: Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira 2008; Kernen and Vulliet 2008; Lee 2009; Dobler 2009; Sautman and Yan 2009; Haugen and Carling 2005; Park 2009.)

But only recently have several scholars explicitly highlighted the existence of the reverse dynamic: weak Chinese and strong Africans – for example, the Chinese as "vulnerable employers" (Giese and Thiel 2012), and "African agency" by African actors against the Chinese to "advance their own interests and aspirations" (Mohan and Lampert 2013: 109). According to the French sociologist Jean-François Bayart, Africans have always taken an active role when faced with external interference, such as during colonization and the imposition of the SAPs in the 1980s (Bayart 2000). Rubbers (2009), for example, illustrates how, even nowadays, the business success of European immigrant entrepreneurs is significantly subject to their relationships with local administrative actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Taking Ghana as the country focus, this paper[1] aims to provide further empirical evidence on the dynamics of Chinese adaption and local agency power in Africa. The author will first look into how negative experiences are generated through Chinese migrant entrepreneurs' interactions with the three types of Ghanaian actor that the Chinese encounter most frequently and that play an important role in

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their migrant life: institutional actors, business partners and employees.

Additionally, in the context of the substantial rise in Chinese migrant populations since 2000 (Ma Mung Kuang 2008: 645–647; Park 2009: 5), studies focusing on the internal dynamics among Chinese migrant populations remain limited, but provide some clues to suggest that the Chinese community is rather fragmented (Ho 2008; Giese 2013: 146). Dobler (2009) argued that the considerable increase in the number of Chinese traders in Namibia has led to social stratification among the Chinese migrants, especially between the established and the newly arrived. Furthermore, fierce competition among Chinese companies in some African countries is often reported (for example, Kernen and Vulliet 2008: 82; Haugen and Carling 2005: 631; Dobler 2009: 716; Giese and Thiel 2012: 4).

In Ghana, the Chinese migrants' sense of vulnerability does not correspond to the fact that ties between the Chinese and African governments have intensified and Chinese economic power on the continent has become more visible since the turn of the twenty-first century. Established Chinese entrepreneurs condemn the recent numerous "new" Chinese, whose "bad quality and behaviour" are part of the root causes of the problems; whereas, the newly arrived Chinese attribute their challenges to the deficiency of the local people and the institutions of the host country. These contrasting opinions suggest that the Chinese experience in Ghana is diverse and evolving, and that the community is fragmented and heterogeneous.

Along this vein, it will be argued that, in addition to the agency power exercised by Ghanaians, the Chinese also have to adjust to that exercised by "other Chinese" in Ghana. The substantial increase in the number of Chinese businessmen operating in similar business sectors in Ghana over the last decade and their diverse adaptation strategies could cause disturbances and conflicts among this group, as in other African countries.

The first Chinese settled in Ghana in the late 1950s; several decades of Chinese migration to Ghana will be useful in making comparisons and understanding how adaptation evolves and improves with time. The author will document the experiences of Chinese business people from diverse sectors, especially those "hidden" from the public scene, like Chinese manufacturers and entrepreneurs who do not own shops in the visible commodity market in Accra. Chinese entre-

preneurs running businesses outside markets in African capital cities still remain largely unstudied (Gu 2009). By recounting the experiences and strategies of established and newly arrived Chinese in dealing with the four types of local actor (Ghanaian institutional actors, business partners and employees, along with other Chinese), this paper aims to provide multiple Chinese perspectives from below on how local agency affects them, and what resources they create, and how, in order to respond to this agency during the different phases of their migration adaption process in Ghana.

Migration Adaptation and Social Capital

Regarding migration adaption and resources, theoretical considerations suggest that, right from the beginning of the migration adaptation process, a migrant has to deal with the question, consciously or not, of "how to acculturate" (Berry 1997: 9). A classic definition of acculturation refers to

> those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups (Berry 1997: 7).

At the beginning, acculturation can be a negative or even disruptive experience. Nevertheless, it usually leads to positive adaptation after some time. Integration is viewed as the most effective acculturation strategy for successful adaptation, for which "willingness for mutual accommodation" is a key feature of integration (Berry 1997: 24).

In international migration studies, social capital is one of the most studied adaptation resources, because of its potential to substitute other forms of capital: human capital (for example, education, skills, professional experience (Potocky-Tripodi 2004: 60)) and financial capital (how much one has in the bank account). Reviewing the numerous definitions of "social capital", Zhou and Lin (2005) concluded:

> Social capital is not lodged in the individual but in the structure of social organizations, patterns of social relations, or processes of interactions between individuals and organizations. That is, social capital does not consist of resources that are held by individuals or by groups but of processes of goal-directed social relations embedded in particular social structures (Zhou and Lin 2005: 261).

Social capital can be assessed, created and mobilized in social networks and relationships, and it enhances an individual's human capital to attain a better socio-economic status (Lin 1999). Therefore, for a migrant, whether his/ her network can create useful social capital plays an important role in migration adaptation (Portes 1998).

More and more international migration studies recognize that immigrants' original ethnic-minority communities in the host country and ethnic solidarity are important sources of social capital for positive migration experiences (Zhou and Bankston 1994; Zhou and Lin 2005). Increasingly, the conventional "best adaptation strategy" theory of assimilation "where the best adjusted are those who are most acculturated by abandoning their group membership" is contested (Zhou and Bankston 1994: 842; Alba and Nee 1997). Nevertheless, the surge of Chinese international migrants with heterogeneous socio-economic backgrounds (in terms of, for example, education, provincial origin or profession) in the last decade has resulted in various strategies and levels of ability to create resources for adaptation among Chinese migrants. The class segmentation in the Chinese migrant populations contributes to a fragmented community, which offers little solidarity to mobilize resources to defend itself collectively as an ethnic minority (Zhou and Lin 2005: 279–280).

Even though most international migration studies have investigated immigrants in developed countries, social capital theories have been applied widely in understanding diverse social relationships, not exclusively in the migration area (Portes 1998; Lin 1999). In addition, the majority of Chinese entrepreneurs moved to Ghana under their own initiative without any linkage to or support from the Chinese state. Therefore, it will be useful to check if and how these Chinese migrants create or mobilize social capital as a resource to enhance their adaption.

Methodology

The data used in this study was collected during two field research trips to Ghana between November 2009 and December 2010 with a total duration of six months, using semi-structured interviews and the participant observation method. Chinese private business in Africa is often taken as the visible Chinese shops concentrated in the commodity markets of numerous African capital cities. However, in the

course of the first field study, the author discovered that, although numerous Chinese shops are located in the Makola commodity market in Accra, a significant portion of Chinese entrepreneurs operates in other sectors and outside this visible spot. This matches the observations of Giese and Thiel (2012: 4) that there are approximately 147 Chinese trading companies operating in Ghana, which is approximately one-third of the total 500 Chinese companies registered in Ghana (Chinese Embassy in Ghana 2011). By participating in social events and visiting social venues that are popular among Chinese, the author was able to encounter these "invisible" Chinese from different sectors and social backgrounds.

   As part of the research, the author interviewed people from more than 80 Chinese companies in Ghana, with the length of interviews lasting from a couple of hours to several hours over the course of multiple sessions. Most interviews took place outside a formal interview setting. The author spent hours in their offices and shops to understand their everyday interactions with Ghanaians, and was invited to numerous dinners, during which the Chinese shared much of their business and living experiences, some of which were difficult to touch upon in a formal interview format. The interviewees became more frank and willing to share details of their personal experiences in casual chat, once they felt more socially familiar with the author. A significant part of the most interesting information was collected during these numerous dinners, chats in shops or houses or cars, in karaoke clubs and casinos and at sports venues. In addition, the author's experience as a voluntary interpreter (English and Mandarin) for several Chinese businessmen in their negotiations with local actors (partners, potential business partners and employees) provided more in-depth insight into the true nature of these interactions. Therefore, apart from semi-structured interviews, participant observation was an important investigative approach for this study.

Chinese Migration to Ghana

The "Established" Chinese

The first Chinese entrepreneurs in Ghana were Hong Kong industrialists who came to set up factories producing enamelware, textiles, tobacco, steel products, thong sandals and other products exclusively

for local and regional markets in the late 1950s (Anonymous 26 2009). In the 1980s, Taiwanese entrepreneurs started to arrive in Ghana and operate in the manufacturing and trading sectors (Anonymous 1 2010). At the same time, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) from the Chinese mainland started to seek international business opportunities during the 1980s. The first Chinese SOEs in Ghana were mainly businesses from the construction sector that had won development project contracts financed by Chinese cooperation programmes, or from international organizations and developed-nation cooperation programmes. Other Chinese SOEs active in light industries came to Ghana looking for export markets in the mid-1990s. Some of these SOEs left, but certain branch representatives decided to remain in Ghana and set up their own private businesses (Anonymous 2 2009; Anonymous 3 2010).

The Chinese community in Ghana perceives these businessmen and their Chinese employees from Hong Kong and Taiwan, together with the management staff and ex-representatives of Chinese SOEs, as being "established" and more successful. Until the late 1990s, the Chinese population in Ghana numbered around a couple of thousand (Anonymous 2 2009; Anonymous 3 2010).

The "New" Chinese

As in many other African countries, starting in the 2000s, numerous newly minted private entrepreneurs from China started arriving in Ghana, along with a few more representatives of Chinese state-owned construction and telecommunications enterprises. These new arrivals operated predominantly in the trade business and increasingly in other sectors like real estate, manufacturing, medical, advertisement printing, restaurants and hotels, gold-mining, farming and intermediary services. These "new" Chinese entrepreneurs and their Chinese employees outnumber the "old" Chinese population in Ghana and are much more visible, as many traders keep shop in the biggest commodity market in Accra, Makola Market.

The Chinese population in Ghana was estimated to range from less than 10,000 in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, as per several scholars (Sautman and Yan 2007; Ho 2008: 59–60; Giese and Thiel 2012: 3), to 20,000 in 2010, according to the Chinese Embassy in Ghana, which received the figure from the Ghanaian Immigration Department (Anonymous 25 2009; Anonymous 24 2010). The Em-

bassy alone cannot document the number of Chinese arrivals, as Chinese nationals are not obligated to report to the Embassy upon their arrival in Ghana. Several attempts at direct enquiry at the Immigration Department (Anonymous 27 2010), through interviews and official letters, did not yield a figure either. Even though department officials claimed that the relevant statistic did exist, they were not ready to communicate this with the wider public.

In terms of location, the businesses and housing residential accommodation of the Chinese is dispersed throughout in Accra and its neighbouring city of Tema, where most of the Chinese factories and the port for incoming containers are located. A handful of Chinese traders, construction companies and Chinese restaurants and hotels are based in Kumasi, an ancient royal city in central Ghana.

Adaptation to Ghanaian Institutional Actors

Mohan and Lampert (2013) highlight that African actors within and beyond the state level are able to exert agency power in order to advance individual interests. Elsewhere in Africa, officials have been reported as asking for personal favours from the Chinese (Haugen and Carling 2005: 656). Compared to the past, in recent years the Chinese in Ghana are increasingly finding themselves targets of extortion by Ghanaian officials. As a result, Chinese businesspeople in Ghana do regularly give "tips" (小费, *xiaofei*, extra money) to officials, either upon "request" from the latter or pro-actively as an incentive for officials to bypass red tape. Recent arrivals to Ghana reported that they were surprised by the levels of corruption relating to everyday micro-administrative procedures, something they said they experienced less and less over the years in China.

The Newly Arrived Chinese and Everyday Administration

The tightening of visa restrictions is an instrument for controlling, or demonstrating the African government's control over, the Chinese presence. Dobler (2008) illustrates how, in Namibia, the issuance of working permits for Chinese nationals was restricted following a growing negative debate on China in the media. Tang (2010: 364) also reported that complex visa and work permit procedures were a gen-

eral problem that made it harder to engage Chinese staff to work in Angola and in the DRC. In Ghana, visa applications depend on the changing political atmosphere and public debate, as well as immigrants' personal networks. Chinese companies reported, for example, that their visa applications were suspended or took much longer to process during the period surrounding the Ghanaian presidential election at the end of 2008. In early 2009, Chinese traders in Makola Market were the subject of a high-profile visa inspection by the police. Ms. Y., who had come to Ghana the year before, was one of the Chinese traders affected by the clampdown. She said:

> The police came to the market and caught a dozen Chinese, including myself, as they suspected that we did not have visas and all the necessary documents for our business. Without being given a chance to explain, we were taken to the police station. The Chinese Embassy sent someone to the police. That person [from the Chinese Embassy] read a text to us in *English* about what the Embassy and we could do. But we didn't understand a word. Someone among us understood some English and translated to us afterwards. The Embassy person then left without really helping us. In the end, as in fact we had all the necessary documents and we found a solution ourselves, we were released after eight hours (Anonymous 4 2009).

The "solution" undoubtedly involved the transfer of money. Active members of a Chinese association proposed the organization of a strike to protest against what they considered "unfair treatment of the Chinese", but the Chinese Embassy "discouraged" them after learning about it (Anonymous 5 2009). This is one example where the new Chinese entrepreneurs say they have found the Chinese Embassy unhelpful when they have problems. Without adequate local knowledge and networks, the new Chinese feel obliged to pay a "tip" in order to "oil the wheels" of daily administration.

Obtaining a visa is also subject to personal networks and individual strategies, both of which are areas in which inexperienced Chinese migrants are less resourceful. When unable to apply for a visa successfully by themselves or simply to save themselves the effort, many Chinese will resort to an agent, either Chinese or Ghanaian. This strategy is practical for those unfamiliar with local procedures and language; however, they may easily fall foul of procedures. For instance, Mr. M., a factory owner, was subject to a visa check by immigration officials while his passport was with an agent for a visa

extension. Although Mr. M. did not have a receipt issued by the Immigration Department to prove that his passport had been sent for a visa application, it did not cost him much to resolve the situation,

> Those officials did not want to listen to our explanation. They just wanted money. In the end, we gave them 20 cedi [approximately 15 USD] and they left (Anonymous 6 2010).

For Mr. K. and his Chinese colleagues in their curtain shop, it was much more expensive to send the officials away: At first, they tried to apply for their working visas directly through the Immigration Department, but their request was declined. So they asked an agent to apply on their behalf. In the meantime, immigration officials came to check their visa while their application was still being processed through the agent. Because they did not have a work visa to show, they were brought to the police station and fined 2,000 GHS [1500 USD] per person.

> In the end, we negotiated to 1,000 cedi [approximately 700 USD] per person. […] The officials even sent their wives to choose curtains at our shop […] perhaps it was part of the remaining fine (Anonymous 7 2010).

By contrast, Mr. C., who works in the gold-mining business, considered the fine to be money well spent, as long as the visa was forthcoming. He attributes his smooth visa applications to his good relationship with the immigration officials, a relationship that is maintained by paying substantial fines and giving presents regularly:

> Recently, we needed to get visas for eight people. My friend in Immigration told me that it was somewhat difficult to process all of them together these days and proposed to do two first. Several days later, he told me that all eight visas had been done. This friend just called me saying that he wanted a new mobile phone. I said no problem. I will keep my promise and give him one in two days (Anonymous 8 2010).

Similarly, with regard to tax declarations, established Chinese companies hire their own Ghanaian auditors to deal with officials directly, whereas new and small-scale businesses tend to negotiate by themselves. The tax amount is sometimes not related to business volume, but rather to how businessmen negotiate with officials. Mr. H., a shoe trader, was negotiating with an official from the Tax Bureau about the amount of a fine for non-declared business profits when the au-

thor visited his shop one day. His partner took me out of the shop and said,

> If there are other people around, the official will be afraid of being recorded. […] The Tax Bureau doesn't provide a payment receipt for fines. The fine amount can be negotiated. It can be 10,000 even if the tax you have to pay is 3,000. But the official will say an amount of 30,000 at the beginning so you have to negotiate (Anonymous 9 2010).

Chinese entrepreneurs frequently have to deal with local officials in relation to administrative procedures. Because of language barriers, unfamiliarity with their rights and the local regulations, or simply for convenience, the newly arrived Chinese, in particular, find themselves in a difficult position to negotiate or decline if a handy shortcut is offered. They feel that they cannot easily alter the practice of extortion. They either consider it a local custom because "here people [from the government] like tips" (also known as "fines", where Ghanaian officials are concerned) or react with what they regard as pragmatism to "buy" convenience, even if they believe that they have not violated any laws. Thus, they respond positively to officials' solicitation of additional fees or even voluntarily propose to pay extra in order to get their administration done quickly or to get rid of an immediate annoyance.

Political Protection for Established Chinese

Well-established Chinese entrepreneurs in Ghana have their "friends" in different essential departments (like customs and immigration) and encounter fewer of the above problems. Mr. E., a Chinese manufacturer who has been living in Ghana for over 30 years, was even offered Ghanaian citizenship, but he declined, as his five-year, renewable residential visa was sufficient for him (Anonymous 10 2010). Likewise, Mr. Z., who recently came to join his relatives who have been in Ghana for a long time, successfully obtained his visa through formal and proper procedures, without paying anything extra.

As the government of Ghana keeps rotating between the two dominant political groups (the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party), established Chinese consider it important to have connections with people in both parties. "We do not get involved in politics, but we need to verify the information we hear

from the media", said one of the most successful Chinese entrepreneurs (Anonymous 11 2010). When these established Chinese entrepreneurs encounter a problem, they will seek help from their powerful "friends" rather than, as commonly assumed, from the Chinese Embassy. For instance, Mr. R., the factory owner, told how his government friends helped to prevent his factory from being closed by another official:

> One day, an inspector from the Standards Board came to examine my products and did not accept my explanation [of why products were not identical in weight]. He said, "I don't care, and I have the right to close your factory." Then, I invited him for dinner and apologized. He still didn't change his mind and wanted to disqualify my products. Then, I told him, "Let me see your power. But I doubt that you have the power to close my factory." Afterwards, I wrote a letter to the Ministry of Trade to complain. An official later told me, "He (the person from the Standards Board) won't bother you again." […] I know many people in the government (Anonymous 12 2010).

These Chinese businessmen, who enjoy political protection, have been living in Ghana for more than ten to twenty years and they usually speak fluent English. They have spent time and possess the capacity to understand how local business functions and power groups interact. These Chinese entrepreneurs can eventually negotiate their place and develop strategic friendships with the local elite.

Despite having a useful local network, however, the established Chinese are finding that their previous social status as privileged "foreigner" is now being threatened. They attribute the cause of their social degradation to the behaviour of "new Chinese of bad quality", who make the whole Chinese community the collective target of "law enforcement" and extortion.

> The newly arrived Chinese don't behave well. They have low levels of education, don't understand the rules and don't speak English. They believe that problems can be solved if they pay *xiaofei* [tips]. This encourages government officials to ask for *xiaofei* from the Chinese all the time and they don't respect the Chinese anymore (Anonymous 2 2009).

Such discourse on the "new and bad Chinese" is now prevalent among the Chinese in Ghana. The old days when the Chinese were a

privileged ethnic minority in Ghanaian society are gone. A veteran Chinese migrant to Ghana had this to say:

> In the 1970s, when there were shortages of supply in Ghana, people had to queue to buy food. When a Ghanaian saw a Chinese, they would let the Chinese pass to buy first. At that time, Chinese business was very successful and rich.

He continued:

> Before, at a road checkpoint, when the police saw a Chinese, they saluted us. And now, they just ask for money. […] Now, at around 9 o'clock every night, the police set up barricades on the road to casinos. The main purpose is to stop Chinese cars [as many Chinese go to casinos at night]. Some Chinese don't understand English and usually give tips to the police in order to pass [even if they don't have any problem]. They encourage local officials to continue this kind of bad habit with the Chinese (Anonymous 13 2009).

By agreeing to local officials' demands for cash payments or bribes, the Chinese migrants are taking part in further enforcing the agency of the institutional actors in Ghana and are inadvertently stimulating their appetite for bribes. As one Chinese put it:

> Before, 1 cedi was sufficient. But some Chinese started to pay more and more to get things done. Now 100 cedi [as "tips"] is not even enough (Anonymous 3 2010).

It becomes a vicious cycle.

Adaptation to Business Partners

Typical Failures among New Chinese Entrepreneurs

Business failure among Chinese entrepreneurs is claimed to be common. A rough estimate by the Chinese themselves revealed that approximately half of Chinese businesses fail. Failure related to Ghanaian partners or customers is not rare. The experience of Mr. F., a Chinese trader in bed materials, is typical among new Chinese entrepreneurs.

The general pattern is that local partners buy a small amount from a Chinese trader and pay immediately. After doing this several times, the Ghanaian partners/ traders successfully build up trust

among the Chinese. The Chinese start to consider these local partners to be people within their circle, in which people are bound by mutual trust and support. The next time the Ghanaian partners come, they buy a large amount on credit. Since there is "mutual trust", the Chinese traders allow their local partners to take the merchandise without paying right away. Afterwards, it is often very difficult to get payment back. Mr. F. came to Ghana a few years ago and spent the second half of his stay reclaiming debt payments from his local partners who were his retail vendors. He spent every day calling his partners, going to their shops to check if they were there. When he managed to find them in their shop and talked to them, his partners would usually promise that they would pay in a few days. However, several days later, the partners were out of contact again for some time. The next time that Mr. F. managed to talk to them again, they promised a new payment deadline. The pattern of hide-and-seek and promising to pay repeated many times. In the end, Mr. F. finally sought help from the police (and he also paid "tips" to the police in the hope that this would motivate them to take action faster). However, nothing changed. Mr. F. then employed a lawyer to file his case at the local court, hoping that legal action would achieve a better result (Anonymous 14 2010).

Others who suffered from similar problems gave up their claim in the very early phase. They took it as a "lesson fee" and learned to become much more careful with local partners. Many Chinese entrepreneurs consider Mr. F.'s efforts to be useless, because they do not believe that they will be paid even if they take legal action. Their reasoning is that either the court will show more sympathy to the poorer (that is, the local) side in its decision because "Chinese are white, so they are richer", or, that even if the Chinese wins the case, whether or not the local partners are able to pay will remain uncertain, based on the experience of those who went through similar court procedures. For many Chinese entrepreneurs, legal action is lengthy; time and effort are better saved for other business. Mr. F. is considered a rather "less pragmatic" businessman. The "loss of face" due to his failure to get his debtors to pay was too much to handle, especially in relation to his business partners in China. Nonetheless, he returned to China in the end and left the court case for a Chinese friend to follow up on.

The "International" Local Partners of Established Chinese

Having local partners as retailers is necessary, as foreigners can operate only at the wholesale scale in Ghana. Those who largely avoid the debt problem outlined above do so by getting their clients to pay in advance before they deliver the order. This has been common practice, particularly in the manufacturing sector; however, the status quo is now changing, and experienced Chinese entrepreneurs blame this on the newcomers, who are reluctant to impose strict payment rules in order to attract more business clients by offering payment flexibility. Consequently, this is forcing other competitors to do the same. Therefore, many Chinese companies report having clients' payments due for long periods of time, but they are not in a position to change the situation and often just have to go along with this.

Despite such problems, there are advantages in forming partnerships with local businessmen. When selecting a local partner to invest and run a business with, experienced Chinese entrepreneurs tend to choose those who are "international". In the case of Mr. J., he chose a Ghanaian partner who is also the director of a multinational company in West Africa to join his two high-end Chinese restaurant businesses. His reason for getting a privileged Ghanaian was important: "I need protection. But I don't want to be involved in politics. My Ghanaian partner knows many people in the country" (Anonymous 15 2010).

Furthermore, Ghanaians of foreign origin are also preferable. An established Chinese opened a furniture shop with an Indian:

> The advantage of cooperating with an Indian is that when we sign a contract with locals, it is my Indian partner who represents the company. He has Ghanaian nationality; his house and family are here. People don't worry that he will run away (Anonymous 3 2010).

This highlights how forming local partnerships is essential for Chinese businesses, though trust-building between partners is a challenge. Chinese entrepreneurs have to rely on the local elite to reinforce their position, and those Ghanaians of foreign origin – for instance, Indians or Lebanese – are considered a good alternative, as they share a similar background as ethnic minorities, but possess a broader and better local network.

Adaptation to Ghanaian Employees

Management Problems: Whose Problems?

The author's fieldwork in Ghana shows that Chinese companies tend to hire locals and that the percentage of human resource localization is high, especially in large- and medium-sized Chinese companies. Nevertheless, managing staff of a different ethnic origin is a real challenge.

According to experienced Chinese businessmen, staff mismanagement is another major reason for business failure among Chinese entrepreneurs. Many new Chinese entrepreneurs come from family-run, small-scale businesses themselves, and usually only have a very basic understanding of English. Furthermore, they do not have proper management experience and consequently tend to encounter more cultural challenges when handling local staff. They usually apply what they believe to be workable conditions, but often their local workers remain "lazy", "unfaithful" and "untrustworthy". The newly arrived Chinese businessmen attribute these "characteristics" to "cultural" differences and put them down as the root causes of management problems. For inexperienced Chinese, the solution is to frequently replace their "unsatisfactory" local workers. For example, since opening her business, one new Chinese restaurant owner could not retain her staff for more than one month. The last time that the author visited her restaurant there were no waiting staff at all. "It is difficult to get workers. They work two days, have some money in their pockets and then don't come back again", said the owner. However, the recruitment difficulties may have been due to reasons other than the financial one she offered. On one occasion when the author was at the restaurant, she saw the boss trying to explain to her only remaining waitress how to provide good customer service. She was trying to communicate primarily in Mandarin Chinese, with only some simple English words appearing from time to time such as "you", "this", "boss" and "no good", with plenty of gesticulating. The waitress was responding to her in English. On following their conversation, it became clear that neither of them understood anything the other was saying. The Chinese owner became very frustrated and angry, as she had explained so many times, but the waitress seemed unable to remember. The waitress almost burst into tears, saying that she wished

her boss would be more patient. She told the author that she did not know what to do as she did not understand a word her boss had said (Anonymous 16 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

As local employees are always found to be unsatisfactory, small Chinese entrepreneurs in Ghana tend to be reluctant to provide a written employment contract or payslips. "Unjustified and frequent absence" or "the locals often do not show up for work a few days after receiving their salary" are among the most common justifications for this. Faced with such a "casual" working attitude from the local employees, a contract seems redundant because sometimes after just two days, the worker may not show up again or is fired. However, such shortcuts around local employment laws can be turned around and used as evidence against the Chinese employers. Chinese bosses may dismiss workers if the latter are found to have been stealing from the company. The dismissed local employees often report or threaten to report to the police the fact that the Chinese employers have violated labour laws by not providing a working contract, and demand compensation. In such cases, the Chinese entrepreneurs are usually furious because they believe that they treat their workers well (for instance, by always giving them gifts) and they believe there are grounds for dismissal if the worker concerned has been found to be stealing. The Chinese entrepreneurs usually end up giving money to the worker or to the police to avoid conflict, as they do not want to make trouble because they do not believe that they are able to defend themselves within the local legal system.

Localizing Management and Motivating Strategies

Established Chinese entrepreneurs believe that the Chinese should take the blame for management problems:

> First, the Chinese look down on the locals. Second, the Chinese consider that the locals to be thieves. In fact, you just need a system of supervision to control it. Third, the Chinese believe that if they treat the locals well, for instance by giving them gifts, the locals should be grateful and work harder, but the locals don't keep this in mind. For them, we, the whites, ought to give them, the blacks, presents (Anonymous 11 2010).

More experienced Chinese companies usually have a higher proportion of Ghanaian staff and some even have Ghanaians at the man-

agement level. The owners of these companies consider it to be more practical to have Ghanaians execute certain tasks rather than Chinese, particularly when dealing with local partners, employees and clients. Having locals communicate with locals can ease the problem of language barriers and, thus, the lack of understanding of the local culture and mentality that most Chinese encounter. It is also a response to political pressure to hire locals: the Ghanaian authorities have tightened the controls on the issuance of working visas, and it either takes too long or is too expensive to get Chinese staff onboard.

For instance, Mr. L., a trader of construction materials, is keen to apply a strategy of "locals managing locals" and believes that money buys quality and good service:

> Our company has been going in the direction of localizing the management level. The Chinese think that the quality of locals is bad. But […] we pay a salary of 400 to 500 cedi [approximately 350 USD] a month and we can hire local staff with university qualifications and work experience, who are capable of management. […] Like next week, we are going to attend a meeting with some local parties. We are going to bring local staff with us to explain things because locals tend to trust locals more (Anonymous 17 2010).

In addition, the experienced Chinese businesspeople have created strategies for motivating their workers and "buying" their loyalty by learning through everyday interactions with them. To make sure that their workers show up for work, a Chinese factory owner developed the following bonus scheme:

> The full attendance bonus is 17 cedi. In a month, if a worker is absent for a day, the bonus will be halved. If a worker is absent for two days or more, they won't receive that bonus at all. This is an effective method of ensuring work attendance (Anonymous 18 2010).

Another Chinese businessman believes that the salary level has to be set in a Ghanaian style to "give hope" or an incentive for local staff to work hard:

> The Chinese are more pragmatic. If they think a job is worth 3,000 bucks a month, they will accept it and not expect a salary rise anytime soon. But in Ghana it is different; you should not offer 3,000 bucks right away at the beginning. You should give less, but hint to your local workers that the salary may be raised some-

time later. You have to give hope to them and they are motivated
(Anonymous 19 2010).

The Chinese also seek to manage their local staff in a paternalistic
way, such as by providing credits to employees to purchase a vehicle
or to build a house, and agreeing to receive repayments through de-
ducting fixed amounts from workers' salaries each month. Apart
from salaries, Chinese employers sometimes show consideration of
their local workers' financial burden by providing other basic necessi-
ties such as cooking oil, flour, washing powder and other items that
may have become unaffordable due to inflation.

Furthermore, to avoid Ghanaian staff borrowing money too of-
ten and not coming to work after receiving their salary, Mr. T., the
head of a family-run farming and supermarket business, adopted a
pocket money approach:

> The locals don't have the notion of saving. They spend as much as
> they get immediately and they will borrow money from you. What
> I do is, if the salary of my workers is 5 cedi a day, I give them 1.5
> cedi every day. I give the other 3.5 per day in the middle of the
> week [or every 15 days], so that they always have something in
> their pocket (Anonymous 20 2010).

In addition, Mr. T. and his family members talk to their workers regu-
larly to make sure that their private life is also going well:

> If something happens within their family, we let them take some
> days off to go home. If it's something small that can be solved
> with money, we will also give them 10 cedi to get it solved. […]
> [I]f they work well, we praise them. You have to let the locals
> know that you treat them well and you are nice to them (Anonym-
> ous 20 2010).

The language barrier is the main cause of work tensions between the
Chinese and their Ghanaian staff. Mr. T.'s company gives classes in
Mandarin Chinese and Chinese working culture to its Ghanaian
workers. As a result, communications in the shop are all done in Chi-
nese. The Ghanaian workers speak at least some basic Mandarin,
especially those phrases related to supermarket operations such as
"two dollars per kilo", "no eggs today, but we will have them tomor-
row" and "it is very fresh". The Chinese owners and staff speak
much more politely and patiently than when they have to express

themselves in broken English. The work atmosphere is much more relaxed than in other Chinese shops.

In reality, some established Chinese entrepreneurs have developed a very close relationship and strong mutual trust with their long-term, loyal local staff. To honour their service, some Chinese bosses may offer these members of staff trips to China. One Chinese manufacturer sent his local manager to China immediately for a medical operation once he learnt of the latter's heart problem. This kind of treatment is also useful to demonstrate to the other staff that loyalty is recognized and rewarded.

Other Chinese

Competitors

The Chinese in Ghana criticize the fact that there is no spirit of solidarity within their own community. The lack of Chinese community belongingness is echoed throughout the continent (Haugen and Carling 2005: 655; Dobler 2009: 716). Fierce competition among the compatriots, especially the newly arrived, is a factor behind this phenomenon. The Chinese may not know many other foreigners in Ghana, but they maintain that other nationals are much more united than the Chinese, for instance, on price:

> If the Lebanese or Indians sell the same kind of products, they will agree to set the same selling price and stick to it in order to ensure fair competition. But for the Chinese, it is the contrary. If a Chinese sells a glass at 10 cedi, another Chinese will immediately make it 9 cedi. Then, another Chinese will put it at 8 cedi. In such a case, the profit margin shrinks. How can we survive? (Anonymous 14 2010).

The Chinese even attribute the lack of unity to the absence of religion: "The Chinese don't have a (common) religion. But Arabic people are religious. When there is problem, the religious chief will come to mediate and people will listen to him" (Anonymous 14 2010). Though they are not aware that the Lebanese in Ghana may not all share the same religion, the Chinese argument is that, without religion, the Chinese put profit before all other values. In addition, the Lebanese in Ghana may not be an accurate reference point as their presence in West Africa dates back to the early European coloniza-

tion period (Morrill 1962). The intra- and inter-ethnic dynamics and evolution of Lebanese migrants to Africa are sited in a different historical and political context and they have undergone a more prolonged migration process than the majority of the Chinese, who have less than ten years' experience in Ghana.

To protect their businesses, certain Chinese do not socialize with other Chinese, particularly those in the same business sector. Many Chinese companies dissuade their staff from socializing with their competitors' employees. Some Chinese shops do not permit other Chinese to enter; some even put up a sign reading "Chinese don't enter". A shoe trader provides his justification for this: commercial espionage. One interviewee had this to say in regards to espionage:

> There was a time when one particular Chinese man came to our shop every day. It seemed that he was bored and just wanted to chat with someone. In fact, he paid attention to what kind of shoes were popular among our clients when they came to purchase. Sometime after, he went back to China and ordered the popular shoes from the factory, which happened to be the one I have a share of (Anonymous 9 2010).

Several times, different Chinese shop owners showed the author around Makola Market in Accra to indicate where the Chinese shops were. They just pointed to the shops from afar and told the author to enter alone next time, as it was inconvenient for them to visit.

Traitors

This self-alienation among the Chinese comes not only from the fierce competition between Chinese businesses, but also from the circulation of "Chinese-cheating-other-Chinese" stories. Whenever they mentioned their experience of being cheated by other Chinese, the victim was far more outraged than if it had been Ghanaians cheating the Chinese. "To be cheated by Africans is ok, what they want is just money. But to be cheated by another Chinese, ha! That is terrible" (Anonymous 21 2010). It seems as if the Chinese are emotionally more sensitive to being cheated by other Chinese, even if the amount concerned is insignificant or trivial compared to their business volume. The Chinese in Ghana find it more acceptable to face cheating or business barriers caused by locals; they attribute this to their Chinese identity, their unfamiliarity with local practices and

weak local networks. By contrast, they see cheating by other Chinese as a much more dangerous problem or cycle:

> Some Chinese whose businesses failed or who lost all their money turn to cheating other new Chinese. Because the Chinese know the Chinese better, so they can cheat the new ones even more thoroughly (Anonymous 21 2010).

Mr. G., who has been living in Ghana for over 15 years, illustrates how Chinese interaction with the Chinese community evolves over time:

> Usually a newly arrived Chinese is passionate about getting to know lots of other compatriots. But after some time, he realizes what the real dynamic is among the Chinese, he becomes more discrete, keeps a very low profile and does not socialize much with others. Then after many years, that Chinese [person] will reappear to socialize in the Chinese community. This is because, after many years, he knows now who is trustworthy and not harmful to him (Anonymous 3 2010).

Following this logic, factory owner and trader Mr. M. is in the second phase of keeping a very low profile away from other Chinese. He has been a victim of cheating by other Chinese:

> My Chinese partner ran away with all the money and he even wanted to kidnap me. He hired a few people to come to the company to beat me. Luckily someone was able to call the police in time (Anonymous 6 2010).

Now, the only social venue he visits is the Chinese church where he believes only people with a "good heart" will go, and he cooperates only with a well-connected Ghanaian partner.

Chinese Associations and the Chinese Embassy

Despite the relatively hostile atmosphere, the Chinese still socialize in different subgroups. For example, there are three Chinese business associations in Ghana. Although the three associations claim to serve everyone in the Chinese community, the active members of each association share similar socio-economic and professional backgrounds. Each association also tries to maintain a close relationship with the Chinese Embassy and fights for its recognition as "the" Chinese association. In contrast, some Chinese are reluctant to par-

ticipate in the associations and consider them to cater more for mi-
nority interests than for the whole migrant Chinese population.

    Apart from these "official" associations, there are rumours that
"other" Chinese associations exist to cheat other Chinese. One of
these stories relates to a building with a huge signboard reading:
"Ghana Chinese Commodities Wholesale Town" that is located in a
busy part of Makola Market. Although there are dozens of Chinese
shops that happen to run their businesses around that building, the
Chinese wholesale town does not exist and was part of an elaborate
scam to defraud Chinese investors. In the mid-2000s, a certain Chi-
nese businessman in Ghana lured investors in China to a business fair
to be held in Ghana under the auspices of the Zhejiang Business
Association. In fact, no such association exists. He told them that the
fair would be a good opportunity to start a business in Ghana and
that they could set up shops in the market afterwards. To make the
scam seem more realistic, the Chinese organizer erected the sign ad-
vertising the wholesale town and things looked serious. Investors
shipped containers of merchandise and wired money for customs
clearance (the tariff for clearance can be as high as 100 per cent of the
cost of merchandise) and other "administration fees". But in the end,
the Chinese organizer disappeared with all the money. After hearing
about scams like this, the Chinese are, understandably, quite sceptical
about small Chinese associations in Ghana, and this explains why the
bona fide Chinese associations try to seek official recognition from the
Chinese Embassy.

Marriage with Ghanaians: A Springboard for Adaptation, or Isolation from Other Chinese?

Even though marriage between Chinese and Ghanaians is still rarely
heard of, a few cases do exist. Mr. N. has lived in Ghana for only a
few years, but has successfully developed his business in the proper-
ty/ real estate sector, an area that even experienced Chinese entre-
preneurs consider extremely tricky and difficult to handle because of
the issues of bank credit and land ownership, according to Chinese
who are interested in the sector. Mr. N.'s success is down to the fact
that he is married to the daughter of a Ghanaian tribal chief. Further-
more, his wife and several of her family members work in the bank-
ing sector. Thus, Mr. N. is in the fortunate position of being able to
offer help to Chinese entrepreneurs from his province of origin, Fu-

jian, if they encounter difficulties relating to the acquisition of land to build a factory. After providing assistance in this way, Mr. N. has been befriended by some Chinese businesspeople (Anonymous 22 2010).

Relationships between a Chinese man and a Ghanaian woman in the form of marriage are rare. Most intimate relationships remain casual and/or extra-marital and secret as, generally speaking, Ghanaian–Chinese relationships remain unaccepted in the Chinese community. Those entrepreneurs like Mr. N., who have Ghanaian wives, socialize only with a few Chinese and are not active in the Chinese community.

Marriage between Chinese women and Ghanaian men of Lebanese or Indian origin is more frequent. This type of marriage is beneficial to the Chinese side because it helps them to obtain residential rights and business advantages, as Lebanese and Indian men in Ghana are usually considered well settled and of higher socio-economic status. The Chinese in Ghana accept this form of marriage more readily than a marriage with an ordinary Ghanaian, which they consider to be marrying down, regardless of the social background of the Chinese wife.

One of the reasons that Chinese–Ghanaian marriages are far less accepted is that there are often cautionary tales of marriage break-ups circulating within the Chinese community, usually with the Chinese wife eventually being abandoned by her Ghanaian husband. Ms. Q. is one such example. Nevertheless, she has now managed to begin a new life and has set up a consultancy firm to help Chinese companies establish themselves in Ghana. Her business is based on her competitive edge: fluency in the main local language, Twi, and a thorough understanding of the local culture and business mentality through her experience from the (failed) marriage. Ms. Q. was not willing to speak about her experience during the several meetings the author had with her. Her story was revealed to the author by a Chinese language teacher, someone outside the Chinese entrepreneur community, to whom Ms. Q. had once opened up to in a moment of emotional difficulty (Anonymous 23 2010).

As the Chinese community discriminates against unions between Chinese women and local men, Chinese wives do not generally get much support when marital problems occur. One day, the author received a call for help from a newly arrived Chinese woman who had

just moved to Ghana with her Ghanaian husband. She suspected that her Ghanaian husband intended to keep for himself all the business capital, part of which had been contributed by her family, and also the merchandise for their trade business. He also did not want to return her passport. This call for help was surprising, as the author had only happened to talk briefly to the woman once before. This suggests that the woman did not feel she had any other solution but to ask a researcher, one temporarily staying in the country, for help.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown the multiple dimensions of how Chinese entrepreneurs struggle, compromise and use diverse strategies to negotiate their social place and sustain their business when faced with different local actors in Ghana. The negative experiences of the immigrant Chinese provide further evidence of African and local Chinese agency in these China–Africa encounters. The Chinese in Ghana are definitely aware of such agency, yet their ability to negotiate their way successfully is not homogeneous. Disparities are especially remarkable between new and established Chinese migrant entrepreneurs, whose different experiences with local actors suggest several things:

First, some of the negative experiences of the new Chinese in Ghana are normal from a migration perspective, as migration adaptation improves with time. Entrepreneurial migration by the Chinese in Africa has been an emerging and accelerating phenomenon only since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Such migration is still rather "temporary" and "experimental" in nature, and is similar to the experience of Chinese migrant entrepreneurs to non-traditional migration destinations like Central and Eastern Europe since the 1990s (Nyíri 2003; Moore and Tubilewicz 2001). The migrants tend to first explore the host country before deciding whether to stay. The temporary nature of this exploration can lead to short-sighted adaptation strategies (like offering bribes) that may result in an undesired long-term vicious cycle. Chinese adaptation strategies have undergone many trials and errors; problems and failures are part of the results. Nevertheless, the acculturation process usually leads to a positive adaptation after some time.

Chinese adaption in Ghana proves that, even though coming from a country with better economic conditions, migrants have to acculturate and ideally to integrate and fit in, rather than expecting the adjustment to be only on the side of the host society – that is, expecting the local hosts to adjust to the incomers' presence. The better-adapted Chinese entrepreneurs show a greater effort to integrate into the local culture for mutual benefit. For instance, in employer–employee relations, they are more likely to behave as "responsible elders" and to show care (though sometimes paternalistically) towards their employees, and to fulfil the traditional role of a boss as expected by young Ghanaians (Giese 2013: 147).

As many Chinese entrepreneurs move to Ghana on their own initiatives and resources alone, one should not put down their success or resilience in an unfamiliar environment to support from the Chinese government, which is often non-existent. Chinese migrants who are unable to adapt regularly experience failure in the new environment, and if these failures are greater than their capacity to recover, they have to return home just like any other migrant in a similar situation. The adjustment strategies adopted by migrant Chinese entrepreneurs are individualistic, though sometimes similar to one another, and subject to their own knowledge and resources. The more successful Chinese in Ghana are generally more experienced in the country, better educated, and have fewer language barriers than the less successful ones, who tend to be newcomers. It is thus easier for them to understand local customs and to build business and protection networks that create social capital for negotiating a better place in their chosen environment.

Second, the Chinese community in Ghana does not provide positive social capital for successful adaptation to its new members, unlike ethnic minority communities in industrialized countries. As a relatively disparate ethnic minority in Ghana, the Chinese community tends to be fragmented and hostile, and far from being able to provide collective support; sometimes even the opposite is true, with some members even aggravating the Ghanaian agency that the Chinese have to encounter. Business competition between Chinese entrepreneur migrants is a major alienating factor among the population. Certain Chinese entrepreneurs in Ghana purposely distance themselves from other Chinese, especially those who might jeopardize their business, or simply because they feel ambivalent towards

their compatriots because they do not see that the Chinese communi-
ty has any useful resources to offer.

Against the backdrop of a fragmented Chinese community with
weak solidarity, new Chinese entrepreneurs cannot obtain sufficient
social capital from the community to help them with their initial adap-
tation. Their sense of vulnerability is further intensified by the lack of
available resources for support. Similarly, marrying a local Ghanaian
citizen is like abandoning group membership, since this is less accept-
ed, or even frowned upon, by other Chinese, making it even more
difficult to count on support from the Chinese community in times
of difficulty. Without the support of a resourceful ethnic minority
community, the more established Chinese migrants have built up and
rely on their own local social networks, which provide essential re-
sources to help them to adapt and offer assistance when they face
challenges. These entrepreneurs deliberately maintain mutually bene-
ficial relationships with those local actors who can provide them pol-
itical and administrative protection, both of which are the "scarcest
resource(s)" as Dobler (2009: 710) puts it in his observation of Chi-
nese traders in Namibia.

Third, the contrast between the binary image of the strong Chi-
nese and the defenceless African in the international and African
media's perception, and the reality of Chinese adaptation and local
agency in Ghana illustrated above, demonstrates how the public de-
bate surrounding the China–Africa relationship is influenced more
heavily by the dominant political and media discourses, rather than
derived from observations of the real dynamics on the ground. In
reality, the rising Chinese presence and the demonstration of China's
economic power in Africa does not necessarily improve the social
status of Chinese migrants on the African continent (*Huanqiu News*
2012). From the Chinese perspective, those with the shortest migrant
experience attribute their adaptation challenges to the deficiency of
the local people and the institutions of the host country. Whereas,
established entrepreneurs consider their privileged social status in
Africa to be threatened by the arrival of numerous "new" Chinese,
whose "bad behaviour" is condemned as the root cause of the in-
creased solicitation of bribes by local officials and the generally disre-
spectful attitude of Ghanaians towards Chinese.

The discourse of the established migrants referring to the newer
migrants as poorly behaved has mostly been applied to differentiate

between "rural migrants" and the urban middle class, and quite commonly as a way for members of the middle class to distinguish their social position from the rural blue collar (Anagnost 2004: 190). Such social differentiation is also apparent in other overseas Chinese communities, as illustrated by Zhou and Lin (2005) in their research in New York City. The socio-economic profile of the Chinese moving to Ghana and Africa in general is increasingly diverse, as in their migration elsewhere in the world. The class question will continue to play a more significant role in investigating the intra- and inter-ethnic dynamics of Chinese migration in the future.

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Contents

The Chinese Presence in Africa: A Learning Process

Of Other Spaces? Hybrid Forms of Chinese Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa

Romain DITTGEN

Abstract: Chinese economic activities in Africa have gained increased visibility in parallel to the recent acceleration of Sino-African relations. This paper, which is framed from a geographical perspective that is often absent or neglected in studies covering China–Africa, focuses on the spatial forms and dynamics. It depicts the way in which two contrasting Chinese economic entities – a state-owned company in Chad and privately owned commercial malls in Johannesburg, South Africa – engage with their respective host environments. While drawing on concepts of "liminality" as well as "heterotopias", I argue that the modalities of the Chinese footprint are characterised both by closure and interaction, creating a dynamic tension that produces its own set of unique practices. This ambivalence between enclave and active linkages with host societies is not only perceivable from a spatial point of view, but also emerges with regard to economic strategies. In the midst of a transitional period, along with a launching and a consolidating phase, the Chinese economic entities in both case studies show signs of change in terms of behaviour and territorial foothold.

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Introduction

The image of Africa has been dominated recently by two conflicting views. On the one hand, Western media coverage has increasingly depicted the continent "as the next frontier for economic growth" (Polgreen 2012). This is not only imputable to apprehension about diminishing resources but also to an expanding offer of opportunities. On the other hand, doing business in Africa is still perceived as a risky endeavour. In effect, the continent has generally been characterised by a series of on-going lacks, failures, problems and crises (Ferguson 2006: 8). Most international stakeholders who are considering investing in this region usually discern between a "useful" and a "useless" Africa (Reno 1999: 35; Herbst 2000: 90). As a result, foreign involvement has remained predominantly selective – both geographically and economically – as well as concentrated in capital-intensive areas (Ferguson 2005: 379).

Since the turn of the century, the sudden rise of emerging powers and their growing involvement in Africa has introduced new possibilities. By investing large sums and taking an interest in a wide range of areas, the Chinese presence appears to have had the greatest impact and visibility. Even so, the twofold perception of the continent, split between opportunities and risks, raises similar questions about the conduct of Chinese actors in unfamiliar African contexts.

Adopting a geographical perspective, this paper[1] focuses specifically on the spatial forms and dynamics of Chinese economic ventures in sub-Saharan Africa. It explores two contrasting case studies that mirror the predominant features of the Chinese economic foothold in Africa; namely, extractive and commercial activities. One case

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study is set in Chad and examines China National Petroleum Corporation's (CNPC) recent engagement in the Chadian oil sector. The other deals with the rapid and on-going expansion of Chinese wholesale and distribution centres in Johannesburg, South Africa. Based on these empirical examples, the paper depicts the way in which different Chinese entities (specifically, a state-owned oil company and privately owned malls) relate to their respective host environments. Despite evident contrasts in terms of motivations, configuration and available resources between these two economic structures, they both display similarities with regard to their process of settlement and spatial footprint. From the outside, Chinese activities on the continent are often portrayed as disconnected or "disembedded" (Giddens 1990), not only physically but also metaphorically, and seen as reproducing the same pattern of spatial engagement as other foreign investors. However, I argue that both of the selected case studies are simultaneously characterised by closure and interaction. This paper borrows from Foucault's concept of "heterotopias" (1984) and Anzaldúa's interpretation of "liminality" (1987, 2002) in order to grasp these hybrid spatial dynamics and to obtain a better understanding of how Chinese activities associate with their host economy.

Although the Chinese presence has gradually become a tangible part of the economic landscape in Africa, many questions regarding long-term developments remain open. The selected Chinese economic entities are currently in transition, set between a launching and a consolidating phase, and have consequently shown signs of change in terms of their behaviour. Therefore, settling in challenging African contexts raises questions about the level of resilience of Chinese actors and the degree of influence that the host environment holds over the organisation and the structuring of activities. In other words, it is interesting to see the extent to which both Chinese operations are "anchored [or embedded] in particular territories or places" (Hess 2004: 177).

The data for this study was collected during several field-research trips. In Chad, fieldwork took place during the construction phase (between June and September 2010) and shortly after the inauguration of the refinery in late June (in September 2011). Most of the information was gathered through interviews with government representatives (Chadian, Chinese and French), managers and engineers at CNPC and ExxonMobil, members of civil society and residents bor-

dering the different production units. In Johannesburg, fieldwork took place at the end of 2009 and 2010, as well as (more briefly) in mid-2012 and 2013. Since each Chinese commercial centre is composed of different layers, it was necessary to talk to owners, promoters, shareholders, management boards, shopkeepers, employees and various customers. Most of the interviews were conducted in five selected structures: *China City*, *China Mart*, *China Mall*, *Dragon City* and *China Cash & Carry*, formerly known as *Afrifocus Centre*.

The paper begins by outlining the theoretical foreground for understanding hybrid forms of Chinese engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. The remaining sections illustrate these dynamics through the analysis of two empirical case studies. First, I detail the setting-up of both selected Chinese activities as well as their spatial configuration, characterised by visible enclave features. The next section, which is centred on the role and economic impact of these selected Chinese activities, reveals the existence of strong linkages with the host economy. Finally, the last sub-section adopts a more prospective approach and analyses the extent to which the conduct of Chinese activities in their receiving environment is influenced by evolving economic realities.

Dialogues across Space

This paper deals with Chinese "spatiality" in two complex African contexts.

Among other meanings, this notion alludes to the "spatial dimension of (inter)action by agents within a given society", making it possible to "think about spatiality as a way through which people relate to the world" (Lévy and Lussault 2003: 867). Only a few researchers have specifically examined this aspect of the Chinese presence in Africa. If, in Western media as well as in scholarly work, Chinese activities are often depicted as being disconnected or maintaining very limited links with the host environment, this subject has only rarely been theorised. Some scholars have used the image of "enclaves" or "enclosure" to describe the form of settlement or the lack of interactions between Chinese and African actors, but it has mostly been done from a sociological or economic perspective (e.g., Lee 2009; Park 2010a; Dittgen and Large 2012; Mohan 2013), without necessarily grappling directly with the spatial dimension.

Given the variety of meanings surrounding the term "enclave", a definition seems necessary. In this paper, the term refers to the "isolation of one space in relation to others" (Lévy and Lussault 2003: 309), "displaying distinctive economic, social and cultural attributes from its surroundings" (Gregory et al. 2010: 191). It also "contains the idea of a key and of closure" (Brunet, Ferras, and Hervé 1992), aiming to "maintain a protective envelope" and to "regulate the contact with the outside in the form of a communication channel" (Donner 2011: 8–9). Similar to Mohan's (2013) recent paper, I do "not dispute the existence of Chinese enclaves" on the African continent and corroborate his assessment on "avoiding static readings of space" (Mohan 2013: 1268). However, while his paper deals mostly with various forms of capital and labour relations, the present study focuses on the unfolding of Chinese businesses on the ground. As developed hereinafter, I argue that the selected Chinese activities are closely related to their respective domestic economy to which they are linked by flows of various kinds. In other words, they oscillate between an isolated enclave and a connected economic "graft". The latter notion was first employed in botany, describing a process during which plant material from two different plants fuses. In medicine, the term refers to any tissue or organ for implantation or transplantation. By analogy, the term has been used widely, namely in political sciences, as a tool to question the mechanisms of State creation and formation in Africa and in Asia (e.g., Bayart 1996; Badie 2000), as well as in geography to analyse the ties between a "grafted body" (most commonly with regard to extractive activities) and the "receiving tissue"; that is, the host economy (Magrin and van Vliet 2005; Magrin 2011).

The resulting dynamic tension between enclave and active linkages of Chinese activities with host societies translates into a state of hybridity and in-betweenness. It raises questions about the nature of Chinese endeavours and their spatial dynamics, both in real and metaphorical terms. In this regard, Foucault's (1984) concept of "heterotopias", which he defined as "places [...] outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location" (Foucault 1984: 4), is helpful for interrogating and characterizing the forms of Chinese spatial engagement in various African contexts. Among other principles,

heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. […] To get in, one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures (Foucault 1984: 7).

Furthermore, they are seen as having "a function in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault 1984: 8). To some extent, these principles are also applicable to Chinese activities in both case studies. Additionally, Gloria Anzaldúa's interpretation of "liminality" (or, as she put it, "tierra entre medio"), offers a useful lens through which to understand "the transformations [which] occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (Anzaldúa 2002: 1). In reference to the South African context, scholars have previously highlighted the "in-betweenness and [the] struggle with notions of belonging" (Park 2010b: 472, 2012) of Chinese migrants, "inhabiting a liminal space between acceptance and rejection" (Accone and Harris 2008: 203). However, in comparison to the predominantly sociological approach of these studies, liminality in this paper is grasped from both a spatial and an economic angle. Accordingly, the notion of hybrid spatiality is used to highlight the ambivalence between the protective envelope and the taking root of both case studies in their respective host environments.

As both Chinese activities are far from static, change is inevitable, which makes it essential to adopt a long-term approach. According to Harvey (2006), "it is impossible to disentangle space from time" and "[one needs] to focus on the relationality of space-time rather than of space in isolation" (Harvey 2006: 123). While it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw any lasting conclusions due to the recent strengthening of Chinese economic foothold in Africa, it is possible to witness on-going processes as they unfold. This is particularly interesting during the early stages where difficulties seem to be more salient and require swift responses. Consequently, analysing the launching phase has been insightful for understanding how attitudes of various Chinese actors evolve over time.

One of the main features shaping current Chinese economic presence in Africa is imputable to its relatively late development compared to other foreign economic actors. While the influx of foreign capital has remained limited and largely concentrated in spatially segregated extractive enclaves, there is a common Western perception

that the "useful bits" have – for the most part – already been seized (Ferguson 2006: 38–40). Following this view, Chinese economic agents have been compelled to find – or, rather, to negotiate – a place among a competitive collection of other foreign players. While trying to grasp missed opportunities on the continent (as well as create new ones), Chinese operators, both public and private, are (mostly) entering unknown host environments that are often perceived as risky.

Venturing into Unfamiliar Territory

Regardless of the status of economic operators, three main motivations for investing abroad are to seek resources, foreign markets or efficiency (Dunning and Lundan 2008). The Chinese "turn" to Africa is mainly fuelled by the first two of these motivations. While CNPC's objective in Chad is to secure continuous access to oil, the shopping malls in Johannesburg aim to maximise their accessibility and visibility in order to reach a large customer base. At the same time, Chinese economic operators must take into account the geographical and political realities of their host environments, which makes it crucial to acknowledge and understand the spatial configuration.

The Chinese oil company in the Chad case study has had to deal with the challenge of operating in a land-locked state. The production zone is situated in an enclosed area with very little pre-existent transport connection to other parts of the country. To allow the kick-off of the project, known as Rônier, the Chinese investors needed to carry out a number of preliminary works. This multi-faceted investment is structured around a 311-kilometre pipeline connecting the oilfields, situated in the Bongor Basin in Eastern-central Chad, to a refinery in Djarmaya, some 40 kilometres north of the capital, N'Djamena (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012: 125). The cost of the entire project was set at one billion USD, half of which was allocated for developing the oilfields and linked transport infrastructure, and the other half for building the refinery. Construction works of the oil field surface facilities and the pipeline, launched in 2007, were completed in just four years and the valves were opened in March 2011, followed in late June of that year by the inauguration of the connected refinery. The Chinese project represents the third phase of Chad's oil history, following an episode of failed attempts (from 1973 to 2000) and the carrying out of the Doba project since 2000, located in

the Southern part and operated by a consortium led by the major US ExxonMobil (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012: 121). In comparison to the latter – which had a daily production of about 122,500 barrels in 2010 (Esso 2011: 1) – the scope of the Rônier project remains limited, with 20,000 barrels per day during the first phase and a possible increase to 60,000 barrels during a second phase. As a result, the project has attracted little interest among Western contenders.

Onshore oil investments in Africa tend to be avoided, as they are commonly assimilated with high risk-taking. Most oil companies favour offshore operations, due to the relatively low probability that their activities will be affected by political instability in the host country. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, Chad accommodates two onshore projects, the first of which has been part of a specific setting. The Doba project benefited from substantial support from the World Bank and was predicted to help alleviate poverty and provide social services. Its implementation required a major investment, including a 1,070-kilometre Chad–Cameroon pipeline (Doba-Kribi) to an offshore terminal in the Gulf of Guinea (Magrin and van Vliet 2005). ExxonMobil, a global conglomerate with huge amounts of liquid capital at its disposal, would have been readily able to provide the necessary funds. According to the general manager of Exxon-Chad, it was the initial financial involvement and guarantees provided by the bank that finally convinced the company to take the risk of investing in Chad (Miller 2010). However, following a dispute with the Chadian government over the use of oil revenues, the World Bank withdrew from the project in 2008. Compared to the strategies of a Western multinational, CNPC is usually portrayed as less profit-orientated and less sensitive towards the political evolutions of the host society. As a state-owned enterprise, the company's actions are not only warranted but also partly shaped by the Chinese government. Therefore, CNPC's establishment in Chad is mostly conditioned by two factors: the urgency of getting access to natural resources, and the lack of international experience within a context of late arrival. Since most of the more accessible offshore sites are already occupied and also due to insufficient technical skills in the field of deep-water operations, China's first oil company must include the land sites (even the small-scaled ones) in order to multiply its options for oil investment in Africa.

As for the Johannesburg case, the diversity of the Chinese presence, manifested by several waves of migration (Huynh, Park, and Chen 2010) and sectors of activity, can also be observed via its spatial footprint. Among other components, the agglomeration encloses two Chinatowns, a few neighbourhoods with a noticeable proportion of Chinese residents, firms of variable sizes, as well as numerous distribution centres (Harrison, Moyo, and Yang 2012). The location of the latter is determined, to a certain extent, by the configuration of the post-apartheid city. Johannesburg is often compared to Los Angeles because the two cities have a similar urban sprawl and a dense network of highways and roads. These characteristics, combined with the significant expansion of the city, have increased the use of motorised travel. Furthermore, with rapidly increasing crime rates in the city centre during the mid-1990s, vital businesses fled the downtown CBD, and with it went capital. The majority of these financial and commercial activities have swiftly moved towards the city's northern suburbs, amplifying the already deeply enrooted urban fragmentation and pattern of a highly decentralised city (Guillaume 2001: 300–301). These factors have also played an essential role in the emplacement of most of the Chinese commercial centres, which are largely assimilated with cheap products.

The first one of these malls, *China City*, was opened in 1995 and located close to downtown. A Chinese businessman from Hong Kong purchased an existing building as well as a nearby office tower across from Ellis Park for a low price, converted them into shopping facilities and started renting out retail space to Chinese merchants. After slow beginnings, the site experienced a gradual increase in both customers and profits, persuading the Chinese owner to build an extension in 2004 (Anonymous 1 2010). The success of this first development led to other initiatives at the turn of the century. The lack of available locations and, primarily the negative image of the inner city, persuaded potential developers to move elsewhere. Consequently, most of the more recent and dynamic Chinese wholesale and distribution centres – such as *China Mart*, *China Mall* and *Dragon City* – are located either in Fordsburg (west of downtown) or on the southern outskirts of the city centre in Crown Mines (Dittgen 2011: 9; Harrison, Moyo, and Yang 2012: 919). Today, this vast area, which was once a mining dump, is predominantly dedicated to wholesale trading and well serviced by the road and highway network. Located

between two low-income consumer basins (the city centre and the South-Western part of town), this area offers the type of accessibility and visibility that Chinese economic operators have been looking for. Prior to the development of such commercial entities, Chinese merchants were mostly scattered all over town. With hundreds of shops collected together inside one shopping mall, and thanks to links to nearby warehouses, they benefit from economies of scale and can organise themselves more effectively.

With regard to economic and development indicators, Chad and South Africa show very distinctive features. While the former remains at the very bottom of the usual indices of "human development", the latter, portrayed as Africa's powerhouse, is much more attractive, business-wise. Nonetheless, despite distinct development trajectories, both countries are often considered – although in different ways – to be risky investment destinations. On one hand, Chad has experienced recurring phases of civil unrest and political instability (Magrin 2008; Debos 2011). On the other hand, crime (either perceived or real) has led to Johannesburg being commonly considered a dangerous place to work and live (Guillaume 2004). As a result, Chinese activities in both case studies tend to adopt an enclave approach. Overall, this form of engagement aims to simplify their insertion, create favourable conditions on site and regulate their activities' contact with the host environment.

The prevailing combination between oil and secured enclaves in Africa results from the highly strategic nature of this business. For onshore sites, such as in Chad, where it is not possible to entirely isolate operations from the host territory, oil companies aim to "make onshore production as 'offshore-like' as possible" (Ferguson 2006: 203). While extractive companies are "walled [and fenced] off" (Ferguson 2006: 203) from their immediate surroundings, both literally and figuratively (Donner 2011), these companies benefit from a global network and are fully connected with their headquarters, other multinationals, subcontractors, as well as the country's ruling class. If both oil investments in Chad follow a similar pattern, the Chinese project distinguishes itself in certain ways. Compared to the fully private investment of Doba, Rônier includes the Chadian state as a directly involved stakeholder. Although the Chinese have advanced the entire amount, China Exim Bank has granted a loan to the Chadian side to allow and promote its participation in this venture. Via its

national oil company Société des hydrocarbures du Tchad (SHT), N'Djamena became a 40 per cent shareholder of the Société de Raffinage de N'Djamena (SRN) (with the remaining 60 per cent going to CNPC), which was created specifically to manage the refinery (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012: 123). Another difference between the two oil projects stems from the political context. While the launch of the Doba project occurred during an agitated period and was set in what was at the time a sensitive region, the Rônier oil fields are located in a sparsely populated region and have not yet been confronted with issues of local conflict and instability. Nonetheless, due to the domestic-production component, the refinery, which is located near the capital, stands out as a highly strategic infrastructure and could easily be targeted in the case of a conflict.

Figure 1: Entrance Gate of *China Mart*

Source: Romain Dittgen, Johannesburg, November 2010.

In addition to purely business-orientated reasons, the clustering of Chinese merchants inside distribution centres in Johannesburg is also related to security matters. The recent development of Chinese wholesale activities in and around town has undergone several phases. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the first wholesalers – from mainland China – operated directly from warehouses situated in industrial zones in Isando, Kempton Park (near the International airport) or Selby (Southern outskirts of town), and were also spread out in the city centre (downtown CBD, Hillbrow). Although lucrative, this individual organisation involved some important risks due to the deterioration of security during the mid-1990s. Frequent armed rob-

beries and high crime rates have gradually driven Chinese merchants to operate from within secured and supervised premises (see Figure 2). Today, most of these malls employ private security firms, are equipped with CCTV cameras, and some of the newer constructions even offer on-site accommodation (Dittgen 2011: 9).

Figure 2: A Chinese Mall Surrounded by Walls and Electrified Fences
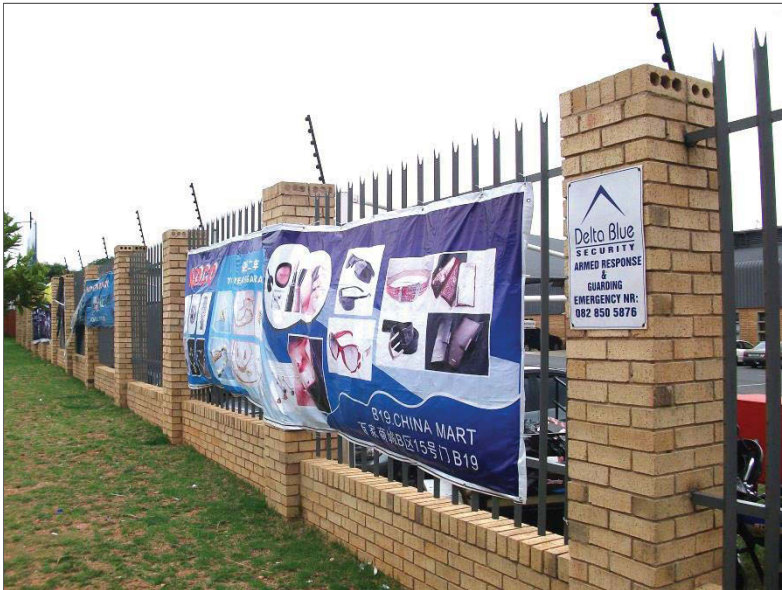
Source: Romain Dittgen, Johannesburg, November 2010.

In both case studies, the objective is to make the profitability/risk ratio bearable by using various safety precautions. The establishment of a physical barrier is the most visible part of this desire for separation, and is materialised through the erection of fences, walls and barbed wire, "designed as filters" (Magrin 2011: 231). Furthermore, these various sites are protected by mobile and fixed personnel: mainly military forces in Chad (at least for the refinery) and private security companies in Johannesburg (see Figure 3). Depending on the nature of the activity, objectives diverge and result in different degrees of closure. The "immunization" (Donner 2011) of oil sites aims to protect the site against potential dangers from the "outside", with

access being restricted to authorised personnel. The paved road that leads to the refinery in Djarmaya is monitored by the Chadian military, which is positioned in a fixed tent behind the workers (see Figure 4) and controls access to the site. In Johannesburg, the majority of distribution centres are surrounded by walls and fences (often electrified) (see Figure 2). In addition, some of the developments resort to more or less rigorous checks of the passing customers at the entrance/boom gate (see Figure 1). While access control usually comes down to a furtive glance, guards do sometimes check the content of the bags of non-motorised customers. These security measures are not only intended to reassure the Chinese shopkeepers, but also the customer-base of these commercial structures. However, as Goss argued, the perception and image of security are often more important than their actual content (Goss 1993: 27).

Figure 3: A Security Guard at China Discount Shopping Centre

Source: Romain Dittgen, Johannesburg, November 2013.

Figure 4: Workers Leaving the Refinery in Djarmaya

Source: Romain Dittgen, Djarmaya, September 2011.

Nevertheless, the concentration within protected structures is far from being a Chinese singularity. In effect, the spatial configuration of the Rônier project in Chad refers to a standard procedure in the oil industry and the structure of the Chinese malls reflects a frequent setting for doing business in Johannesburg. If there is a novelty, it stems from the function and role of these activities. In effect, despite leaving the impression of a disconnected or "other" space, both case studies are closely related to the domestic economy to which they are linked by multiple flows.

Towards New Spaces of Interaction

In Chad and in Johannesburg, the selected Chinese activities were able to establish themselves in market niches and have, in their own ways, created new economic possibilities in their respective host environments. By expanding the supply of oil in Chad and commercial goods in South Africa, they have turned into central places of interest for various local players and stakeholders.

Despite having produced oil since 2003, the lack of a national processing unit has kept Chad entirely dependent on imports of refined products. The energy burden has played a very important part in limiting the country's development. Due to its land-locked position, inconsistent supply from Nigeria, and management problems in the energy sector, electricity prices in Chad are among the highest in the world. Additionally, beyond N'Djamena, only a handful of cities have regular access to electricity (Magrin and Maoundonodji 2012: 138).

Given this difficult context, China's interest in Chad's oil has been considered as a boon. Because Chinese public extractive projects in Africa tend to be structured as "package deals", Chadian authorities appealed to CNPC's willingness to adopt a more inclusive approach and include the refinery. The centrepiece of the Chinese investment has a maximum production capacity of 40,000 barrels a day, although it has only been processing half this amount (or even less) during the first phase of the project (Moctar 2011; Boukar 2011). The crude supplies a central power plant that produces 40 megawatts (MW). The refinery uses half the amount of the energy to function; the other half goes to Chad's national electricity company. President Idriss Déby publicly forecast Chad's – or at least N'Djamena's – energy independence, but the 20 MW that this power plant provides is far from sufficient to address the country's energy shortage; the capital alone already consumes 100 MW (Magrin 2011: 389). Even so, this investment will help alleviate a saturated network, at least until long-er-term solutions are found.

Between the resumption of diplomatic ties in 2006 (from August 1997 to August 2006, N'Djamena officially recognised Taibei) and the beginning of oil production in 2011, China's role in Chad has evolved rapidly. The initial turn to China arose from a short-term tactical imperative in the context of several interlocking conflicts in the greater Chad–Darfur region, including a proxy war between Chad and Sudan (Behrends 2008: 41). Gradually, however, Chinese projects have become more important and central in Déby's political and economic agenda, and are even incorporated in the longer-term poli-tics of his regime. During the presidential campaign leading up to elections in April 2011, Déby portrayed himself as Chad's social ar-chitect-in-chief and promised to deliver a range of development pro-jects in order to enhance the legitimacy of his rule (Dittgen and Large 2012: 8). From a Chadian viewpoint, one of the main challenges is to mitigate the negative impacts of being a land-locked (and marginal-ised) country. In this regard, Chinese investments, above all the Rônier project, are believed to play an important part.

As a neuralgic centre, the refinery in Djarmaya constitutes the bedrock for further activities, suggesting that the oil sector can form the foundation for an expansive, more diverse Chinese business pres-ence. Following CNPC's oil engagement, Chad and China have agreed to develop an industrial park. The project, implemented by a

Chinese company (Soluxe International), will cover an area of 25 square kilometres close to the refinery. This future industrial complex will not only be in charge of transforming several by-products from the refinery (including various plastic goods, polypropylene fibre and natural gas bottling factories), but will also host companies providing a wide range of activities such as solar energy, drinking water and electric bicycles. Although applications to launch activities within the park are not restricted, as of 2011 only Chinese companies had committed to developing operations (Wei 2011).

Additional initiatives can also be seen in the area of transport infrastructure. Having access to cheaper fuel (thanks to the refinery), the Chadian government signed an agreement in April 2011 worth 919 million USD with China CAMC Engineering Co. Ltd (a subsidiary of China National Machinery Industry Corporation) to build a new international airport in Djarmaya. This site, which is expected to accommodate approximately one million passengers a year and will be connected to N'Djamena by highway, was also included in the project. For the Chadian authorities, the objective is to turn N'Djamena into a regional transit hub, similar to those in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Douala (Cameroon). Simultaneously, another transport project aims to link Cameroon, Chad and Sudan via an extensive rail network. In March 2011, the Chadian minister of transport signed a contract worth 7.5 billion USD with China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) for the construction of a 1344-kilometre-long railway (*Reuters* 2011).

Compared to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the commercial offer in South Africa – primarily in Johannesburg – is rich and diverse. Nonetheless, South Africa ranks among the most unequal countries, with a wide gap between its first and second economies (Devey, Skinner, and Imraan 2006: 112–113). This dualistic reality is also reflected in the commercial offer, which favoured the setting up of Chinese malls within a neglected gap. With more than half of the country's population living below the poverty line, most commercialised products are still out of reach. Consequently, the opening and gradual development of Chinese malls in the economic capital has helped expand not only the offer but also the accessibility to affordable goods, mostly in clothing and daily consumer products. If the Chinese distribution centres are not the only ethnic-based shopping malls in Johannesburg, the specificity of the Chinese ver-

sions comes from the scope of the phenomenon, translating into a rapidly increasing number of centres in recent years and large-scale marketing. Several Chinese shopkeepers have stated that the market demand in South Africa during the mid-1990s was significant, allowing them to trade products at very competitive prices (Anonymous 2 2010). Most of the stores sell clothing, but the range of goods has gradually widened and now includes items such as electronic equipment and furniture. As to the Chinese merchants who are operating inside these commercial establishments, the lion's share of their turnover comes from wholesale. Nonetheless, they often combine bulk and retail sale.

The Chinese distribution centres in Johannesburg are places of intense flows of people and merchandise. The customer base is very diverse, made up not only of end-consumers, but also, and primarily, by different types of economic operators. For most distribution centres, hawkers, brokers, retailers and intermediate wholesalers, aiming to stock up, form the majority of shoppers on weekdays, whereas "leisure shopping" prevails on weekends. Given the lack of sufficient means (or desire) to go directly to China, or in the absence of local contacts, Chinese malls in Johannesburg have become major "resource spaces" (Pliez 2007: 12) for various economic operators. Because these commercial establishments offer a wide range of products at affordable prices, sold in varying quantities, they are at the interface of production units in China and the South African market. At the same time, they foster, albeit indirectly, different dynamics of resale, involving a growing number of secondary actors who operate in different sites and at various scales.

The catalytic effects of the Chinese malls first materialise at the local level. There is a high concentration of commercial activity in the eastern part of the city centre; several sections of streets display more or less permanent stalls selling clothes that are "Made in China". Many of these African micro-retailers (both local and from other countries) have limited means, but have been able to start their small business by directly sourcing from Chinese distribution centres. In parallel, a large number of Ethiopian entrepreneurs have opened shops around Jeppe Street in an area referred to as the "Ethiopian Quarter". Often combining the functions of retailer and wholesaler (similar to the Chinese, but on a smaller scale), these Ethiopians are closely connected with the Chinese distribution centres in terms of

supply of their goods (Zack 2014). Other related local dynamics are more dispersed. Throughout Johannesburg, street hawkers tend to sell different objects – ranging from phone chargers and bags, to jewellery, clothes or other small accessories – to drivers who stop at red lights or are stuck in traffic jams along the city's major roads. In addition, a number of shop-owners – South African, African, Chinese and other immigrant groups – purchase their stock from the Chinese malls. They target customers with limited purchasing power and their shops are often scattered in lower or lower-middle income neighbourhoods.

Simultaneously, the customer catchment area of the Chinese distribution centres far exceeds the local scale. Many buyers who shop inside these malls come from other provinces, notably the North West, Limpopo, the Free State and Mpumalanga, as can be seen through the registration plates of the vehicles parked outside. This regional clientele is mainly made up of South African, other African, and Chinese shopkeepers. Two studies, one by Laribee in a small town in the Western Cape and one by Park and Chen in 14 small towns in the Free State, have shown that many Chinese shopkeepers regularly drive up to Johannesburg to get their supplies at these malls (Laribee 2008: 362; Park and Chen 2009: 35). As the main commercial outlet of affordable goods in Southern Africa, the attraction stretches even beyond the national borders. Within the sample of surveyed Chinese merchants, many indicated that a portion (sometimes significant) of their customer base comes from neighbouring countries (Anonymous 2 2010), including Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi (among the most cited), Zambia, Swaziland and Lesotho, as well as (less commonly) the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Seychelles. The commercial hub function of these malls on an international scale also stems from Johannesburg's advantageous geographical position, benefiting from a good road connection with the other countries in the region.

In both case studies, the strong domestic component characterizing the studied activities has introduced a new set of possibilities for additional activities. Nevertheless, it remains extremely difficult to assess their impact and determine whether these Chinese economic "grafts" are sufficiently embedded to function as "turning points" (Abbott 2001: 240–260), enabling structural changes in the host economies. In Johannesburg, the Chinese malls not only provide an

indirect access to the Chinese market, but have also generated or at least enhanced cash flow as well as work opportunities for secondary economic operators in a context of limited purchasing power and massive underemployment. Nevertheless, because the malls are (mostly) confined to importing goods from China, they have not yet initiated any fundamental transformations. In Chad, the potential for change seems higher. By pursuing the integration of the Chadian upstream and downstream oil industry, CNPC's engagement has added a completely new dimension. If the Rônier project has given rise to connected investments, past experiences call for caution, as some of the planned – often ambitious – initiatives have never gone beyond the state of announcement. Therefore, much depends on the political context and how the Chadian central authorities, as a stake-holder, will manage the Chinese oil project.

At the same time, the host environment is not a passive recipient. As stated by Giese, "increasing integration within the world system can never be regarded as a one-way street and involves impacting and being impacted simultaneously" (Giese 2013: 3). Consequently, whether in the case of CNPC in Chad or the commercial malls in Johannesburg, the foothold and viability of activities seem to be largely conditioned by their ability to quickly react (and adapt) to challenges within their respective host environments. If the launch of both Chinese ventures has been facilitated by a niche approach, the continuity of operations is far from being guaranteed. The final section will therefore consider the spatial-temporal context and analyse the evolutions of the selected Chinese activities.

Definitely, Maybe

Any economic activity involves a certain degree of risk-taking, which is calculated and included within an overall strategy (Bost 2003: 199). Entering a third country and engaging in a certain sector of activity requires an assessment of the pros and cons, a decision that varies depending on the level of acceptability of the interested parties. To Western players, Africa has for a long time been considered a risky investment destination; however, Chinese economic agents have mostly seen the continent as a market with lower entry barriers. Initially, these Chinese agents thought that either maintaining good links with the host government (for large companies) or fading into the

woodwork (for small-scale entrepreneurs) would be sufficient to avert or at least minimise most of the financial and operational risks.

In practice, Chinese actors in Africa have not always grasped the magnitude of challenges that accompany the unfolding of their activities. During a first phase, risk assessment was merely seen as a formality rather than a prerequisite serving as an investment arbitration (*Africa-Asia Confidential* 2013: 1–3). This situation has gradually changed as Chinese actors have become increasingly aware of the need to incorporate this aspect into their management practices to ensure the sustainability of their activities. In effect, the frequent recourse to intermediate and somehow less strategically salient undertakings has also resulted in greater sensitivity in terms of profitability. While the functioning of both of the selected Chinese activities is simultaneously affected by operational, physical and reputational risks, the following focuses only on the operational risks, in order to highlight a gradual shift in priorities or behaviour.

In Chad, one of the main challenges for CNPC has been evolving around a price dispute with the Chadian state. Despite the high expectations placed on the Rônier project, there have been tensions ever since the refinery was inaugurated. Chinese and Chadian protagonists, embodied by the CNPC on one side and Chad's Ministry of Oil and Energy on the other, disagreed about the way this project should be managed and operated. The main impediment came from the difficulty of finding a compromise between a market price, allowing the CNPC to pay off its investment, and a "social" price enabling the Chadian government to carry out its objectives (Dittgen and Large 2012: 16). The latter derives from President Déby's desire to accomplish a set of social promises, one of which consists of providing more affordable petroleum prices. At the opening ceremony, and apparently without any prior consultation (Moctar 2011; Wei 2011), the Chadian president announced a transitional price of refined products for a period of three months. Initially, the Chinese oil company decided to keep a low profile regarding Déby's ostentatious statement of holding one of the cheapest petrol prices in the region. Nonetheless, this temporary price was considered unreasonable, as the refinery had already undergone heavy losses and could not continue to operate normally. Having advanced the entire amount of required funds as a loan, mostly via the China Exim Bank, CNPC obviously aims to recover its investment through the sale of petroleum prod-

ucts. As the deadline approached without any significant progress regarding the establishment of a new price, the Chinese company decided to take action and put the refining process on hold. By the end of September 2011, both sides claimed that negotiations to resolve the dispute were progressing; however, difficulties continued amidst mutual recrimination. Following the pressure caused by this temporary shutdown, new rates were finally introduced in October 2011.

Far from being resolved, this first conflicting episode was followed by further obstacles. The negotiation eventually led to a substantial price increase of petroleum products; for some it almost doubled, much to the surprise of the Chadian population. Local NGOs expressed their regret that CNPC intended to obtain an immediate return on its investment and rapidly maximise its profits, on the grounds that Chad remained a politically unstable country and that recovering funds could be a difficult task. According to civil society, the Chadian government had turned its back on its pledge to provide an affordable source of energy. As one of the few international partners willing to invest extensively in Chad, the risk of falling out with China over a simple price disagreement seemed too great. Consequently, it is even more surprising that Idriss Déby revealed yet another downwards revision of rates in November 2011. This change of mind can be directly related to prior reactions by the Chadian civil society (Cefod 2011). These on-going price debates led to a second shut down of the Djarmaya refinery in January 2012. In the process, Déby fired the ministers in charge of planning and of oil, expelled the Chinese plant's director and announced the reopening of the site for the following month (*Africa-Asia Confidential* 2012: 6).

Apart from highlighting continuous uncertainty regarding the nature of oil management, this extended period of bargaining in Chad has also revealed a less visible side of CNPC. To date, the state-owned company has mostly been seen, understood and portrayed as a direct extension of the Chinese state. As a flagship of the Chinese economy, CNPC enjoys considerable support from the central authorities. This translates into easy access to abundant sources of financing at affordable costs and incentives to finance long-term engagements, which are often unprofitable in the short run (Soares de Oliveira 2008: 98). From the outside, therefore, the latter are often perceived as not attaching the same degree of importance to immedi-

ate returns as private OECD firms. Nonetheless, this perspective of public investments, where the quest for immediate economic gains is presented as negligible, can be misleading because it suggests that Chinese firms have limited manoeuvrability, leverage and bargaining power vis-à-vis Beijing. The above-mentioned tariff dispute between the Chadian government and CNPC hints at a gradual change of CNPC's motivations and behavioural practices, torn between the directives of the Chinese government and the objectives of a multinational firm. China's first oil company does not only resolve (or, at least, does not anymore) in terms of securing long-term investments, seen as a strategy for market penetration, but is more and more concerned with economic viability (Moreira 2013). In Chad, this dimension will probably even amplify given the projected evolution of the project. If the Chinese production is initially ascribed to local consumption, oil will ultimately also be exported due to the gradual increase of the number of wells and the limited processing capacity of the refinery. Consequently, the easiest solution to export the surplus of unrefined oil is via the Chad–Cameroon pipeline, which is only used at half its potential capacity of 225,000 barrels per day. An agreement regarding this matter was concluded between Exxon and CNPC, as well with the government of Cameroon in early 2012 (Magrin and van Vliet 2012).

As for Johannesburg, the Chinese malls must adapt to a quickly evolving market in South Africa. If economic challenges are first felt by shopkeepers, operating autonomously and harboured within these different malls, they also have a direct effect on the wider business outlook of each commercial structure. In other words, failure or success has some kind of reciprocal influence. Most of the surveyed Chinese merchants claimed that their profit margins and economic opportunities have been declining in recent years. Since the turn of the century, competition has been increasing through the emergence and densification of different types of trading structures. The market gap, which initially favoured the setting-up of Chinese malls, is shrinking and the commercial offer of affordable goods has gradually diversified over the years. In parallel, customers in South Africa have become more credit-worthy, and consequently also more selective. A Chinese shopkeeper at *China Mart* recalled that, during the early 1990s, his clientele was primarily concerned with acquiring the cheapest products available. He started off selling various types of jeans,

ranging from good quality to second choice. Although the price difference between the two was only minimal, customers almost exclusively picked the cheaper ones, which persuaded him to market "reject jeans" for a while (Anonymous 3 2010). This changed quickly, as potential customers have increasingly started looking for branded goods and quality.

Nowadays, various local franchises tend to supplant Chinese distribution centres and the trade share of the latter seems to be decreasing. Direct competition does not necessarily come from big shopping centres, located in the wealthy northern parts of Johannesburg, such as Sandton, Rosebank or Hyde Park. Products marketed in these malls are predominantly directed at the high end of the middle as well as the upper class, and require a certain purchasing power. The Chinese commercial structures are rather challenged by the growing numbers of local retail and wholesale establishments which are mostly targeting a clientele with smaller purses or wallets. In the field of clothing, Chinese traders are rivalled by franchises such as *Edgars* or *Ackermans*, while others, such as *Mr Price*, *Makro* or *Africa Cash & Carry*, compete with the Chinese on a wide range of products. According to various Chinese wholesalers, chain stores can rely on important financial capacities, have several outlets as well as a large commercial platform, and benefit from various forms of expertise (marketing, bookkeeping, fashion designers, etc.).

> They [the Chinese], on the other hand, need to do everything by themselves, without necessarily being an expert in these fields, making it more and more difficult to compete with large franchises (Anonymous 2 2010).

With more or less similar prices between these direct rivals, some end-consumers tend to move away from Chinese shops, often being associated with the informal sector and the bottom end of the market. The reactions of the various groups of economic operators relying on the Chinese malls are mixed and depend on the type of clientele they themselves are targeting. Overall, this has spurred newer developments to become more modern and diversified. They seek to provide a customer-friendly environment by seeking to offer a "complete shopping experience" with a wider range of products and shops, food courts and sometimes even sporting infrastructure (for hire), almost akin to the concept of a South African shopping mall.

In spite of that, the biggest source of competition for the Chinese has originated from within their own group. Following the success of the first Chinese malls and the substantial turnovers made by their tenants, more and more Chinese people have come to Johannesburg to try running, renting or buying a shop. This has prompted the rapid development of additional commercial structures. By the end of 2013, there were 23 Chinese developments across Johannesburg, half of which had opened within the preceding three years. To some extent, the Chinese malls seem to have become a victim of their own success. As commercialised product lines are often similar, some of the surveyed operators expressed their concern about declining profit margins and the risk of possible market saturation (Anonymous 2 2010). This apparent paradox can be explained by two diverging views. On one hand, Johannesburg continues to be seen as a major hub for commercial activities, enabling them to succeed in business and also keeping the demand for additional retail space high. On the other hand, is it also possible that the construction of some of the newer Chinese distribution centres has been done without sufficiently taking into account the realities of the local market. The second scenario would illustrate a growing gap between the interests of promoters, trying to rent out as much retail space as possible, and those of shopkeepers, mainly concerned about making profits through sales.

If challenges loom large in both case studies, the reactions put forth by the Chinese activities suggest a longer-term engagement. What remains uncertain is whether these behavioural changes have directly been caused or have merely been accelerated by risk. As for CNPC, the growing importance devoted to profit is not only related to the Chadian context, but reflects shifting priorities of a large multinational, aiming to establish itself on the global market. In Johannesburg, the modernisation and gradual inclusion of end-consumers in the market strategy of Chinese malls appears to be a direct result of changing market realities in the host economy.

Conclusion

Along with the recent acceleration of Sino-African trade exchanges and political ties, Chinese economic presence in Africa has gained increasing visibility. This expanding foothold not only mirrors the growing internationalisation of the Chinese economy, but also re-

flects the gradual "reinsertion" of the African continent within trans-national dynamics of globalisation. By opting for a geographical lens, which is often neglected or even absent in the field of research about "China–Africa", this paper has specifically focused on the analysis of Chinese spatiality in sub-Saharan Africa. In other words, it has focused on the way in which two contrasting activities – a state-owned oil company in Chad and privately-owned commercial malls in Johannesburg – engage with their respective host environments.

Both case studies are part of a broader landscape of a recent revival of foreign investments in Africa. The title of this paper, "Of Other Spaces?", is borrowed from a paper by Foucault (1984) and suggests that one of the underlying questions is whether this unfolding of Chinese activities is unique and diverges from that of the more "traditional" foreign economic agents. The main argument, outlined throughout this paper, shows that the Chinese spatial foothold is characterised by an ambivalent and hybrid configuration. While there is a tendency towards enclaved investments, similar to other foreign economic agents on the continent, both of the case studies also interact closely with their host environments and have developed into "resource spaces". In comparison to Western engagement, Chinese activities – as seen in both examples – are more directly targeting the domestic market in the receiving economy.

Given their dissimilar product offerings (energy in Chad and retail goods in South Africa), both Chinese undertakings have brought about new possibilities. CNPC is pursuing the upstream and downstream integration of the domestic petroleum industry, adding a completely new dimension to the Chadian economy and providing the possibility for additional (more or less related) investments. On the other hand, the presence of Chinese malls in Johannesburg has generated an increase in business activities and cash flow, attracting secondary economic operators in retail and wholesale at different scales (from local to international). In a different cultural area, Nyíri (2012) has studied the impact of Chinese investments in special economic zones in the China–Lao borderlands and characterised them as "enclaves of improvement". This description also resonates with the functioning of both case studies in Chad and in South Africa, although the spill-over effects in both cases are an unintended consequence of their activities. However, this article is less concerned with

connected development opportunities than with the influence of the host environment on the conduct of Chinese activities.

If the combination of a niche approach and a strong domestic component explains most of the initial success, the implementation of these activities has not been without challenges. This is even more valid due to the lower strategic relevance of these projects. Consequently, the circumstances and procedures that have facilitated the Chinese arrival are not necessarily those that guarantee the continuation of operations. In the face of several operational risks – reflected on one side by a price dispute in Chad and on the other by rising levels of competition as well as fears about market saturation in Johannesburg – both Chinese activities have shown signs of gradual changes in behaviour and an ability to adapt and adjust. Altogether, "hybridisation" and "in-betweeness", both from a spatial and economic point of view, seem to be attributes that help increase the viability of both Chinese activities in their respective host environments. Nonetheless, whereas the transformations of the shopping malls in Johannesburg seem to be directly related to the South African context, in the case of CNPC in Chad the operational risks have mainly highlighted an internal shift of the company's priorities. Despite the disparity in motives, the findings reveal that both activities are responsive to evolving realities and continuously renegotiate their position in their respective host economies.

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In the Shadow of the States: The Informalities of Chinese Petty Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

Allen Hai XIAO

Abstract: The burgeoning interstate relation between China and Nigeria is in fact hiding the vulnerable condition of transnational Chinese petty entrepreneurship. Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs in Nigeria are faced with everyday corruption practised by both Nigerian authorities and ordinary Nigerian people, the dominance of self-interest over cohesion and mutual support among the Chinese compatriots, and variations in state policies due to dynamic and changing interstate relations. To overcome their position of weakness, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs strategize their interactions with both Nigerian and Chinese nationals. Informality is a characteristic of such interactions. Economic informality is primarily embodied in the documentation service businesses that are indebted to those popular corrupt practices in Nigeria; while social informality takes place in cyberspace. Interaction via the Internet among Chinese involved in Chinese–Nigerian businesses helps small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs to cope with fluctuations in interstate links at the macro-level and to develop a sense of community.

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Introduction

China–Africa relations have attracted significant attention in recent years; indeed, with the development of bilateral interactions between China and various African countries, the field of China–Africa studies has emerged (Monson and Rupp 2012). A growing number of research projects have moved from focusing on the national level (Alden 2007; Taylor 2009; Shinn and Eisenman 2012) to concentrating on the community and individual levels, covering the Chinese presence in a range of African countries, including Cape Verde (Haugen and Carling 2005), Tanzania (Hsu 2007), Namibia (Dobler 2009), South Africa (Park 2009) and Ghana (Giese and Thiel 2012). Ethnography has become a useful tool in shedding light on the Chinese presence on the ground on the African continent (Strauss 2012). This article is an ethnographic study of small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

The definition of "small-scale entrepreneur" is based on Smart and Smart's (2005: 3) account of petty capitalists as "individuals or households who employ a small number of workers but are themselves actively involved in the labour process". Considering the context of this research, I would add that the social status of this group of people also needs to be taken into account, as well as their labour process. Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs in Nigeria do not have much in the way of social connections with institutions like the Chinese embassy and consulate, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and big private corporations. They may earn more money compared to levels of income at home in China, but actually they tend to make less than the Chinese staff in the institutions mentioned above; moreover, they generally have a lower social status and live with the uncertainties that accompany transnational business.

This weak connection with the state, however, does not imply that small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs live and work in a non-state context. Instead, they negotiate the cultural constitution of states in their everyday lives (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Regulation (Roitman 2005) and corruption (Gupta 1995) are both constitutive of the governmentality of states and are entangled with the strategic practices of petty entrepreneurship. This paper will shed light on the vulnerable situation of small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs under (inter)state effects.

Despite the vulnerability of Chinese petty entrepreneurship in the China–Nigeria context, small-scale entrepreneurs develop strategies to cope with state effects. The author argues that informality is a characteristic of such strategic practices. In this article, informality is categorized into two types: economic and social.

Economic informality widely exists in the informal sector, which includes "all income-earning activities that are not regulated by the state in social environments where similar activities are regulated" (Portes and Haller 2005: 404; Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989: 12). This definition slightly overemphasizes the distinction between the informal and the formal economy. Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, and Ostrom argue

> that the formal–informal continuum [applies] strictly to the continuum between relatively high and relatively low levels of the reach of official governance mechanisms, suitably specified and measured in each context (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, and Ostrom 2006: 7).

Moreover, Hart (2006: 29–31) proposes four ways in which the informal economy relates to formal orders: division, content, negation and residue. I concur with the "continuum" argument and will elaborate on it based on the case of small Chinese businesses in Nigeria.

Social informality is a characteristic of transnational communications in cyberspace. Misztal (2000) interprets (in)formality as an interactional resource, and I further refine the term within social practice with regard to the economic practice of informality (above). In informal social interaction, "people can cooperatively change the course and speed of conversational flow, thereby maximizing the amount of information and exploration of the topic" (Misztal 2000: 34), which is a feature of online behaviour. Nevertheless, social formality and informality "provide practical solutions to situated interactional problems and, therefore, facilitate the local production of social order" (Misztal 2000: 35). Since many small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs have joined online communities, the author will also explore how online chatting tools affect Chinese petty entrepreneurship in Nigeria and to what extent this form of communication helps them to cope with their vulnerable situation.

In sum, this paper aims to explore why small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are vulnerable in the shadow of the states and what strategies they develop to deal with this vulnerability both economically

and socially. Methodologically, I researched petty entrepreneurship between China and Nigeria during four months of multi-sited field-work in Guangzhou and Lagos from December 2011 to September 2012. I worked as an assistant to a 44-year-old Chinese businessman named Fei in Guangzhou and conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews with informants based on his business networks. Simultaneously, I joined various online communities where many Chinese businesspeople involved in China–Nigeria business gather virtually and conversed with them extensively. I secured the informed consent of all key informants to disclose the information provided through either interviews or participant observation. The information that is not referenced in this article is based on participant observation. All the names in this article are fictitious in order to guarantee the anonymity of the informants.

Small Chinese Businesses

In 1971, formal diplomatic ties between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Nigeria were established. Official recognition resulted in an increase in trade and led to numerous aid projects and exchange programmes. In 2006, Nigeria became the first African country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with China on the establishment of a strategic partnership (Taylor 2007). According to a speech by Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in Beijing, the value of China–Nigeria trade exceeded 13 billion USD in 2012, while ten years ago it was just 2 billion USD (Aganga 2013).

In many aspects, it seems that China–Nigeria relations on the whole are booming. However, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are not experiencing a similar expansion in bilateral relations. They are neither engaged in the oil businesses, which are predominantly operated by Chinese SOEs, nor do they have sufficient capital to enter the well-established free-trade zones. Instead, they take on the risks of transnational business alone and frequently negotiate business directly with local Nigerian agents and clients. Their presence is less visible to both the host and home states.

Chinese migration to Nigeria began in the 1960s after Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom. Those early migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan engaged in enamel-manufacturing, textile and other light industrial production (Li 2000). Mi-

gration from mainland China to Nigeria began following the Chinese economic reform of the late 1970s. In 1999, the Chinese migrant population in Nigeria had reached 5,800, including 630 Taiwanese and 1,050 Hong Kong citizens (*Skyline Monthly* 2006). Mainland Chinese migration increased greatly after 2000. An official Chinese journal stated that, in 2008, there were 50,000 Chinese in Nigeria, with 30,000 of them living in Lagos (Zhuang 2010). However, research informants indicated that the practice of overstaying visas is very common among small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs and that these numbers are therefore underestimated.

The Nigerian commercial environment has opened up in recent years. For instance, in 2004, the Nigerian government originally imposed regulations on the import and sale of foreign textile products, in order to stimulate domestic Nigerian production (Ministry of Commerce, China 2011). In 2010, however, the Nigerian Customs Administration relaxed the prohibition list, and the Nigerian government allowed foreigners to run clothing retail businesses (Maritz 2011).

Despite this, Chinese traders continue to be blamed for "illegal textile-trading" at markets and have even been arrested by Nigerian immigration officials (*BBC News* 2012). Consequently, some small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs store goods in their houses to make their operations look like a wholesale business, and ask Nigerian customers to purchase from their houses. If the quantity of goods is too large to store at home, they rent a warehouse.

Apart from trade in goods, some established Chinese (earlier migrants) now provide services such as documentation, customs clearance and accommodation for more recently arrived Chinese businesspeople on the basis of the capital they have accumulated and the social networks they have established in local society. For newly arrived small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs with scant connections with Nigerian officials, documentation services are important to their success in the Nigerian business environment. There are three main documentation services:

■ Visa services: Most Chinese businesspeople are issued business visas for a one-month stay in Nigeria. These can be extended twice, for three months each time. Business visas are issued to businesspeople coming to Nigeria for business negotiations and are not valid for employment; those who want to legally work in

Nigeria usually have to obtain an STR (subject to regularization) visa from the Nigerian embassy in China and get a re-entry visa and a green card from the Nigeria Immigration Service in Nigeria.

- Company registration: According to the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) of Nigeria, Chinese businesspeople can register a private company with a minimum share capital of one million NGN (approximately 6,250 USD). The more share capital a company has, the higher the expatriate labour quota it can apply for.
- Expatriate quota application: Once a company is registered in Nigeria, it can assign different positions and hire staff from China; however, this is subject to a limitation on the number of expatriate positions to be approved by the CAC. This quota certificate is a necessary supporting document for applications for re-entry visas and green cards.

Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs tend to rely on agents to help them to get these documents. There are several reasons for the proliferation of documentation services. First, many small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs do not fully understand English documents that contain professional words and phrases. Thus, they need to rely on skilled agents. Second, they are independent entrepreneurs and most of them lack higher education. They need the necessary supporting documents – for instance, forged company guarantee letters and education certificates – which agents can provide. Third, some of them are involved in illegal business, so they need agents to help them to avoid face-to-face examination as part of their applications. These agents and their practices are involved in institutional corruption and the informal economy of transnational brokerage in Nigeria, which will be elaborated on in subsequent sections.

Another service relating to trade is customs clearance. Chinese agents have to cooperate with Nigerian brokers in this business because customs licences can be assigned only to Nigerians. One Chinese woman named Juan, who has lived in Lagos for six years, runs a customs-clearance business with her Nigerian husband. Normally, she stays at home to promote their business to online Chinese communities, while her husband operates the custom-clearance business outside.

Accommodation is also a profitable service business. Chinese people who visit Nigeria briefly prefer to stay in familiar environments. Based on home-stay accommodation, some businesspeople have developed small hotels targeting Chinese customers. They typically charge 40 to 60 USD per night for accommodation and three meals a day.

The above categorization of small Chinese businesses in Nigeria is based on the accounts of the research informants: trade in goods targeted at Nigerian customers, and service businesses (including documentation services, customs clearance and accommodation services) targeted at Chinese customers. Furthermore, the author found that, apart from documentation services, the other three types of business involve either tangible goods or fixed assets, and are regarded as core businesses by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs.

So why is the documentation service business distinct? First of all, this type of business is, to a large degree, more likely to involve informal transactions. People using the service do not receive receipts from agents at documentation service businesses. The agents do not pay tax on this type of informal business but profit from their connections with corrupt officials. Second, documentation services do not require investment in fixed assets, while the trading and accommodation service sectors both require substantial investment. This reduces or even circumvents the risks of long-distance transportation of goods and unsound investments in Nigeria. Third, documentation service providers must maintain close relationships with local Nigerian agents and have extensive networks of Chinese clients. So in this sense, this type of business requires more social than economic capital.

The running of a documentation service business is not incompatible with the operation of other types of business. Some Chinese businesspeople do both simultaneously. This is a common practice for transnational small-scale entrepreneurs, such as the Congolese in Paris (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 61–70) and African traders in Hong Kong (Mathews 2011) and Guangzhou (Yang 2011). Considering Hart's (2006: 20) account of the relationship between the formal and informal economy, this practice manifests as "an endless process of separation and integration" of profit-making.

Nevertheless, documentation service provision is often regarded by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs as a side business. Some of this

study's informants in Nigeria doubted the profitability of document service businesses even though they relied on their agents to extend their visas. The secondary status of documentation services in this case is different from the high social status enjoyed by Cameroonian brokers (Alpes 2012: 104–105).

The Vulnerability of Chinese Petty Entrepreneurship

Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are transnational migrants under the regime of two states: Nigeria as the host nation and China as the country of origin. They are vulnerable in the transnational process. This section identifies three factors that affect vulnerability.

Everyday Corruption in Nigeria

According to the corruption perception index released in 2012 by Transparency International, an NGO that monitors corporate and political corruption in international development, Nigeria ranks 139th among 176 countries and regions. Corruption manifests itself in Nigeria's political life at nearly every level of government, party politics and electoral processes, as well as in security agencies (Okoosi-Simbine 2011: 157–180). Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 69–109) elaborate on corrupt practices and strategies in Benin, Niger and Senegal, many of which I also found in the case of Nigeria. Chinese migrants in Nigeria have to deal with corruption within three local authorities: immigration, police and customs.

In Lagos, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are often subjected to unexpected visa and passport checks by Nigerian officials. Officers from the directorate of investigation of the Nigeria Immigration Service sometimes work undercover. Sometimes the Chinese overstay their visas and are arrested, but Nigerian immigration officials imply that immigrants who have overstayed can be released if they pay a "fine".

Thus, the primary strategy adopted by the Chinese in order to cope with Nigerian immigration officials is to avoid meeting them, especially during times when immigration controls are stricter. If they are "unfortunately" inspected by Nigerian immigration officials, the best course of action is to negotiate a price as soon as they are

stopped. Zhang, a Chinese trader who has conducted transnational business in Nigeria for nearly ten years, said:

> If you dash ["bribe" in the Nigerian context] on the spot, you can be set free immediately; if you are taken into a car, the price might be doubled. If you have been sent to the immigration offices, you will definitely spend much more (Anonymous 1 2012).

The immigration officials' practice can be seen as a "commission paid for illicit service" (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006: 73–74). The transaction is negotiable, and the legitimacy is highly ambivalent.

The police also exercise corrupt practices. Some Chinese informants complained that the police often stopped their cars and found faults with them. The Chinese believed that the police were prepared to just kill time until they were willing to pay. One clothing shop owner complained: "If you go out late, you will be assailed by the police; if you get up early you may encounter bandits. What a society!"

The police's practice can be seen as an "unwarranted fee for a public service" (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006: 73–74), which is either a negotiated transaction or extortion. As Smith (2007: 61–63) put it, "The most notorious and popularly recognized symbol of everyday corruption [in Nigeria] is the roadside police checkpoint".

The third authority is customs, which examines both goods going in and out of Nigeria. Customs officers sometimes stop inbound travellers and ask for money, but always after asking to open their luggage and scrutinize the items inside. I, myself, was urged to pay for a bag of "illegal" sausage when I went through customs at Murtala Muhammed International Airport (the major airport serving Lagos) on 1 July 2012. I also witnessed a Chinese lady paying a "dash" of 2,000 NGN for a bag of a particular Nigerian food item, which in fact was not on the export prohibition list, but small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs rarely pay attention to what the real regulations are, so are easily duped.

Corruption in Nigeria is practised not only by state officials but also by ordinary people. The case described below took place in the neighbourhood where I was staying. On 27 July 2012, my housemates in Lagos, named Hong and Zhang, arranged for a 40-foot container of imported furniture to be unloaded, and they hired local porters to move the furniture to the basement of their house. When the porters had almost finished unloading, a group of young Nigerians came to

interrupt their work. They claimed that they were a youth association on the estate and that Hong and Zhang should pay them for unloading goods in the area. The two sides quarrelled for three hours until the chief of the estate committee arrived. The so-called "youth association" turned out to be an autonomous organization consisting of some young residents of the estate which had not been approved by the committee. In addition to this case, the author also heard that every time a Chinese businessperson wanted to move goods from warehouses in the Alaba Market to another place, they had to pay money to the locals (Anonymous 2 2012).

Studying corruption provides a useful lens for understanding the effects of the state. Sometimes, the state is both a shadow and real: Political authorities grab interests and accumulate wealth through the informal economy (Reno 2009); state-sanctioned predation also leaves petty capitalist growth relatively unregulated (Nonini 2005: 167–200). In Nigeria, corruption is an everyday phenomenon and regarded as a "culture" (Smith 2007). The everyday practice of corruption in Nigeria makes Chinese petty entrepreneurship vulnerable in many ways.

Self-interested Chinese Communities and the Indifferent Chinese State

Through living and interacting with agents of the Nigerian state, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are relevant to the Chinese state, which is represented by the Chinese embassy and consulate in Nigeria. However, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are vulnerable to the inability or unwillingness of the Chinese state to support and care for them in times of difficulty, even when this difficulty has arisen from the lack of trust and atmosphere of self-interest that pervades the Chinese business community abroad.

The lives of small Chinese entrepreneurs in Nigeria are filled with, in addition to the problem of everyday corruption and the other challenges of acclimating to the local environment, the need to continuously calculate one's own and others' self-interests. To that end, below I have provided an example of interpersonal relations in a transnational partnership. The Chinese businessman named Fei (introduced earlier in the article) met Hong, a furniture businessman, in an online community. Fei then introduced Hong to his brother-in-law, Zhang, with a view to forming a business partnership. The three

made an agreement: Zhang would help Hong to make his way to
Lagos and would provide him with accommodation there. Mean-
while, Fei, though based in Guangzhou, would be responsible for
introducing Nigerian clients to Hong in Lagos. In return, Hong
would allocate 10 per cent of his sales revenue to each Zhang and
Fei. However, once Hong arrived in Lagos, he discovered that there
was great potential in the Nigerian markets. After settling into life in
Lagos with Zhang's help, he gradually started to venture out to the
markets with his Nigerian driver, but without Zhang, whom he left at
their shared accommodation. Zhang complained:

> He [Hong] never told me how many pieces of furniture would be
> shipped here, how much he sells, and how much money he has
> got back from buyers. Indeed, I hold a 10 per cent share, but what
> if he tells me that he only gets a hundred thousand naira but actu-
> ally he gets a million naira? (Anonymous 3 2012).

Distrusting Hong, Zhang asked Fei to start up a new business and
warned that Hong was not reliable, even though he was willing to
remain in the partnership and cooked meals for Hong every day as
his housemate. Meanwhile, Fei was unwilling to send new goods to
Zhang from Guangzhou because he did not trust Zhang not to take
all the profits while he was still in Guangzhou.

 From this example, it is evident that even when Chinese busi-
nesspeople establish partnerships, an atmosphere of suspicion and
doubt exists, and all sides are wary of each other for fear that the
other party might exploit their own self-interests. Generally speaking,
once a conflict arises between two parties and the business relation-
ship sours, it is likely that business partners might never meet again.
For instance, since their partnership ended, Zhang has hardly seen his
previous boss, who brought him to Nigeria. In addition, most senior
businesspeople tend to be cautious and mistrustful of their younger
Chinese translators or assistants. This phenomenon contradicts the
popular image of united Chinese communities overseas (Hsu 2007)
and the function of Chinese "trust" networks (Gadzala 2010).

 Furthermore, with regard to everyday corruption in Nigeria,
some Chinese migrants even go so far as to inform against their
compatriots, for instance by telling Nigerian immigration officials the
whereabouts of their fellow Chinese so that the officials can elicit
bribes from them. I heard of a Chinese businessman being inspected
on 11 July 2012 at his residence, which was at a secret location that

the Nigerian authorities had not known about. Subsequently, some Chinese said that they believed that this information could "only have been revealed by his [fellow] Chinese". Thus, the disunity of Chinese businesspeople in Nigeria aggravates their vulnerability.

Normally, when Chinese migrant entrepreneurs have a business dispute with their fellow nationals or feel distressed in an unfavourable social environment, they can seek advice and help from the Chinese embassy or consulate: the only representatives of the Chinese state in a foreign country. However, the Chinese embassy and consulate in Nigeria were widely criticized by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs. Some complained about the inability of the consulate to protect its citizens from extortion by the Nigerian authorities. Even though some praised certain staff in the consulate for their willingness to help during emergencies, overall they were not completely satisfied with the consulate's attitude to small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs. One businessman said that he had had a dispute with his Nigerian partner, so he went to the consulate to ask them to mediate; however, he was berated by a member of the consulate staff, who blamed him for the dispute before the businessman had the chance to clarify what had happened to his business. The businessman told me, "I felt outraged. People say that the Chinese consulate is our mother abroad. [But] if we had such mother, I would rather break off the relationship". The situation is similar to that in Cape Verde (Haugen and Carling 2005: 650).

Despite the fact that small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are likely to be ignored by the Chinese state, they still depend on clement macro-relations between China and Nigeria as the foundation of their businesses. Once, Juan told a Chinese restaurant owner that the Nigerian presidents of several commercial associations had been gathering to discuss a way to drive the Chinese out of Nigerian markets. But the Chinese restaurant owner did not take it seriously and responded, "It's impossible. Nigeria dare not turn against China. See how many Chinese there are in Nigeria".

Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are quite aware of their inability to influence state relations and also have no expectations that their Nigerian counterparts will have any influence on Nigeria–China relations. Even though they are unhappy with the Chinese authorities in Nigeria, they rely on the Chinese state's interaction with the Nigerian government for overall guidance and direction, especially having

witnessed China's retreat from Libya in 2011, which indicated the Chinese state's concern for Chinese migrants abroad. This difference in Chinese entrepreneurs' attitudes to the Chinese government at the state level and its bureaucratic arm at the local level is similar to the Chinese people's faith in the central government and simultaneous scepticism of and dissatisfaction with local government (Xiang 2010). By comparison, Indian entrepreneurs in East Africa do not manifest distinct attitudes towards the state and the local authorities, even though some recently arrived entrepreneurs might complain about the Indian government's scant attention to their businesses in the region (Gadzala 2011: 103).

Dynamic China–Nigeria Relations

The seeming irrelevance of the multi-layered state-to-state relations to small Chinese entrepreneurs' lives in Nigeria is disproven by several incidents that have caused tensions between China and Nigeria, as described in this section.

On 15 May 2012, the Beijing government announced that it would deal seriously with foreigners in China who had breached immigration rules by taking action against the so-called *sanfei* (三非, the "three illegals": illegal entry, illegal residence and illegal employment) (*Beijing Morning* 2012). Later on, some other local governments also implemented similar policies towards foreigners in their areas. Then, on 22 May 2012, in a seemingly tit-for-tat action, Nigerian immigration officials arrested nearly 100 Chinese immigrants in Kano and Lagos (Ehiabhi 2012). The Chinese embassy in Abuja and the Chinese consulate in Lagos immediately held talks with the Nigerian authorities about this matter (*International Online* 2012).

China–Nigeria relations became quite tense during that period, as visa policies were tightened on both sides. Nigerian officials regularly checked Chinese passports on the street or in Chinese companies. The media spotlight on the situation intensified when Mr. Emmanuel Ifeadi, director of the immigration office in Kano, described petty Chinese traders as "scavengers" who were taking away jobs from Nigerians (*BBC News* 2012). In response, the Chinese government became stricter about issuing visas to Nigerians to enter China. Relations deteriorated further after an incident on 18 June 2012, in which a Nigerian man died at a police station in Guangzhou after getting into a fight with a Chinese motorcyclist and being turned over

to the police. The following day, a public demonstration by a group of approximately 100 Africans in Guangzhou brought traffic to a standstill. The Nigerian embassy in Beijing asked the authorities to hand over the Nigerian's body so that they could conduct their own investigation into the cause of death, but the request was refused by the Chinese government (Zhou 2012). The author's Chinese informants in Lagos said that this incident led to some small-scale protests against the Chinese presence in Nigeria.

Thus, any variation in state relations may give rise to a chain reaction. Furthermore, Chinese policy towards Africans in China is linked to Nigerian policy towards Chinese in Nigeria. One junior Nigerian immigration official said that the arrests in May resulted from a bilateral agreement:

> Our minister went to China and complained that some Chinese businesspeople overstayed their visas and engaged in illegal transactions. Then, your [the Chinese] minister said, "If they really break the law, you should arrest them".

This narrative, to some extent, reflects a correlation between the two states' policies, though some officials denied any direct causality.

Variations in visa policy affect the transnational mobility of petty entrepreneurs. The increasing cost of overstaying a visa makes them re-calculate their profit margins. Frequent travel between Nigeria and China increases their financial burden, so they attempt to extend their visas for as long as possible to cut travel costs. Business visas can be extended twice for 90 days each time, though some agents claimed that they could make a third extension while others denied that this was possible. Direct questioning of an immigration officer revealed another picture when he said, "It's very difficult to get the third extension unless the minister has approved it". This uncertainty around visa extensions aggravates the vulnerability of small-scale Chinese businesspeople.

The sometimes extreme local response to the Chinese presence in Nigeria, caused by widely publicized events such as the death of the Nigerian businessman in Guangzhou, also affects small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs' everyday business. The protests in Lagos just after the Guangzhou incident caused some Chinese shops to close for a period, and Chinese people were advised by their friends to stay indoors.

Thus, changing state relations between China and Nigeria also make small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs vulnerable. By contrast, bilateral trade agreements (especially regarding China's import of oil from Nigeria) and the development of free-trade zones have little relevance to them, and they have barely benefitted from the China–Nigeria strategic partnership. However, incidents like the Nigerian death in Guangzhou or the promulgation of new policies relating to Nigeria have a greater significance, and small entrepreneurs pay attention to the details of such events. They are quite aware of interstate connections and vulnerable to the impact of these connections.

It is worth mentioning the role of the state in relation to the vulnerability of Chinese petty entrepreneurship. On the one hand, corruption, as a form of informal economy, exists under states' unregulated control (Roitman 2005); on the other hand, tightened regulations in response to dynamic interstate relations are also implemented by the Nigerian state. This fits within the paradox of state control (Portes and Haller 2005: 409–413). The local Chinese state, the consulate in this case, fails to be received favourably by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs and does nothing about their vulnerable situation.

In Nigeria, corruption practised by both state authorities and ordinary people also puts Chinese petty entrepreneurship in a weak position. The disunity of the migrant Chinese communities in Nigeria further aggravates the vulnerability of individuals. Chinese migration from mainland China to Nigeria only began in the 1980s and it does not have the same historical foundation as the ethnic Chinese enclaves in South Africa (Yap and Man 1996; Park 2009). The diverse migrant population does not help them to develop communities based on township, such as the Shunde community in Zanzibar (Hsu 2007). Moreover, individuals' distant relationships with the Chinese state gives rise to the one-way impact of the state. Many small-scale entrepreneurs complained about the unresponsiveness of the embassy and the consulate. This is largely because the day-to-day problems encountered by these migrant businesspeople are scarcely recognized by the Chinese state, which only intervenes in large-scale or major incidents.

To sum up, on the one hand, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs in Nigeria suffer from tensions between China and Nigeria arising from widely publicized, major events. Even though the incident in Guangzhou took place thousands of kilometres away from their resi-

dences in Lagos, Chinese migrants' businesses were partially affected by the local response to the event and the stricter Nigerian regulations that preceded it. On the other hand, these individuals rely on ongoing and productive interaction between the two countries. Conceptually, they believe that a powerful China is the backbone of their business in Nigeria. Although they suffer from the ebb and flow of dynamic state relations, they do not expect that Nigeria might turn against China, and they assume that China–Nigeria links will be maintained. These assumptions are embedded in their everyday narratives and their sensitivity towards international affairs.

The Emergence of Economic and Social Informality

The vulnerability of Chinese petty entrepreneurship does not equate to a total inability to deal with Nigeria's corruption, the self-interests of their compatriot community and dynamic state relations. In fact, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs actively interact with Nigerian nationals in informal sectors, and are thus indebted to that very corruption. Simultaneously, online chat room interaction becomes an alternative means of communication within the transnational Chinese community.

Documentation Services: The Emergence of Economic Informality

Although small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs suffer from everyday corruption in Nigeria, some of them benefit from business opportunities through cooperation with corrupt Nigerian officials. This section will discuss the three main service businesses operated by the Chinese to help their compatriot businesspeople obtain vital documents in Nigeria: visa applications and extensions, company registrations and expatriate quota applications.

The first, the documentation service business, deals with visa applications and extensions. As mentioned above, many small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are afraid to meet Nigerian immigration officials face-to-face. They prefer to negotiate immigration issues indirectly via a Chinese agent, who generally, but not always, relies on a Nigerian agent to approach immigration officials. Table 1 gives a

comparison of the rates charged by three different agents for various visa issues.

Table 1:   Comparison of Agent Fees (in NGN)

Item	Agent 1	Agent 2	Agent 3
Business visa: first extension	20,000 (Abuja) 10,000 (Lagos)	70,000	15,000
Business visa: second extension	40,000	70,000	30,000
Business visa: third extension	45,000	To be checked	Impossible
Re-entry visa and green card	120,000	150,000	130,000

Note: Currency is Nigerian naira (160 NGN: 1 USD, as July 2012).
          Currently, businesspeople seeking visa extensions are encouraged to have
          them processed in Abuja, as the Lagos Immigration Office has a reputation for
          being unreliable.
Source: Author's own compilation.

The prices are quite divergent on account of each agent's connection with Nigerian officials: Agent 1 is a Nigerian trader who has a long-time partnership with both Nigerian officials and Chinese clients; Agent 2 is a Nigerian policeman's wife who has to rely on her husband's friends in the Immigration Office; and while Agent 3 is himself an immigration official, his status is quite junior, so he is not directly in charge of visa approval. Some Nigerian agents – for instance, Agents 1 and 2 – act as middlemen between Chinese agents and Nigerian officials; consequently, they charge more than Agent 3.

Not all migrant Chinese rely on agents, whether Chinese or Nigerian, in order to negotiate visa issues. For instance, some large Chinese companies in Nigeria have long-established direct connections with immigration officers. The staff of these companies are, to some degree, exempt from immigration officials' investigations. A member of staff at a private company in Abuja told me that the senior managers of Chinese companies pass through airport customs controls with the escort of Nigerian officials.

Furthermore, not all small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs rely on Nigerian agents to handle their visa business. The case of Zhao and Ade, described below, indicates that small Chinese brokers can ap-

proach immigration officers without the aid of a Nigerian agent. Zhao, the owner of a Chinese store, recognized Ade, a Nigerian officer in the criminal investigation department, when Zhao was being arrested for overstaying his visa. After his release, Zhao established a visa business partnership with Ade. Zhao regularly collects passports from Chinese migrants and sends them to his partner Ade for visa extensions. This is an unusual way to establish business connections with immigration officials, but it is an example of the hard-won social capital that is so necessary in the documentation service business.

From Table 1, it is evident that most visa agents deal with business-visa extensions, because the STR visa (working visa) has to be applied for at the Nigerian embassy in China, so its application and processing requires transnational connections. However, Ade specializes in processing STR visas for Chinese businesspeople in Nigeria. He mails the client's passport to the Nigerian embassy in Beijing, and then gets it back stamped at the airport. The Chinese customer only needs to provide two photos and the appropriate fee to be spared the worry and effort of gathering the documentation normally needed to apply for the STR visa. The price of this service package is 300,000 NGN (1,875 USD). Ade and Zhao receive dozens of passports through Zhao's social network every week. This case demonstrates the transnational brokerage network in the visa business.

The second type of documentation business deals with company registration. In order to be legally employed with an STR visa, Chinese businesspeople need to hold a position of employment within a registered company in Nigeria. The aim of registering a company is not always to expand business; sometimes it is done simply to legitimize Chinese business activities in Nigeria and to earn the trust of customers and partners. The drafting of the documents required for registration necessitates interaction between Chinese and Nigerians.

Normally, the process of company registration is done via an agent. Nigerian agents help the Chinese businessperson to draft the documents required and to submit them to the CAC. They know how to elaborate on the details of the company in accordance with the law and to incorporate items that may be useful in the future, as was the case in the following example involving a Chinese–Nigerian joint-venture company. In 2012, Fei and his Nigerian partner Udo had just registered their technical company, but on the company registration documents, the business scope went far beyond what would

normally fall under the remit of a technical company. According to its charter, the company was established

- "to work, manage and maintain telecommunication systems […]",
- "to carry on the supply of communications equipment […]",
- "to carry on the business of oil-drilling, prospecting, and refining […]",
- "to carry on the business of agro-allied farming, agriculture, animal husbandry […]",
- "to carry on all the business of wholesale and retail sales of general goods […]", and
- "to carry on the business of clearing and forwarding goods […]".

The last two objectives cited above also appeared in another company document, which focused on the furniture business.

The fee for registering a private company with share capital of one million NGN through an agent was around 80,000 NGN (500 USD) (Anonymous 4 2012); however, according to the CAC website, the cost of registering a foreign or joint-venture company was only 10,000 NGN (62.50 USD), which implies that agents might make a huge profit.

One way round the company registration process for joint-venture companies is if the partners are married. Thus, interethnic marriage is seen as an alternative method of reducing the risks of a Chinese–Nigerian partnership. Generally, they do not have to register the joint-venture company, but base their business on the division of labour within families. For instance, in the case of the customs clearance business operated by the Chinese businesswoman named Juan mentioned earlier, the company was registered in the name of her Nigerian husband, while Juan took charge of promoting their business within the Chinese expatriate community. However, romantic relationships alone between Chinese women and Nigerian businessmen are less stable and reliable than marriage. Without a marital contract and familial obligation, business partnerships based on romance are more likely to break up.

The third type of documentation business deals with expatriate quota applications. If a company in Nigeria wants to employ a staff member from China, the manager must design a position for the non-local, foreign staff and apply for an expatriate quota with the

Citizenship and Business Department of the Nigerian Ministry of the Interior. The approval of the expatriate quota is essential when applying for an STR (working) visa for Chinese staff members. Unlike company registrations, expatriate quotas are more strictly controlled. A company with share capital of 10 million NGN may have a maximum allowance of 20 non-local members of staff, but sometimes the authorities will only approve five or six such positions. Udo and Fei applied for a quota of four non-local positions in July 2012, but had not received a response from the authorities after two months. A Nigerian lawyer named Charles told me that it usually takes six to eight weeks for expatriate employee quota examinations to be processed, but that the last case he dealt with took 12 weeks (Anonymous 5 2012).

The positions for which quotas are applied for can be designated in various ways. Zhang's telephone company has four expatriate quota positions: the managing director, the quality assurance manager, the systems control analyst and the factory manager. The titles given are only used in the application as, in reality, Chinese businesspeople only care about the number of approved expatriate positions. For positions of technical expertise, applicants need to provide qualifications, which can be forged by agents.

The price of expatriate quota applications is much higher than that of company registration. Taking Udo and Fei's company as an example, they had to pay 450,000 NGN (2,812.50 USD) to apply for a quotas of four. Charles, the Nigerian lawyer, charged 500,000 NGN (3,125 USD) for a quota of five, which is the minimum quota number he deals with. For each quota for an additional person, he charges an extra 100,000 NGN (625 USD). He said:

> I can promise that a quota of at least five will be approved; something that not every agent can do, because I have connections to the CAC (Anonymous 5 2012).

Once the quota is approved, the company is required to pay a small sum of money to renew the quota every two years. However, some small-scale entrepreneurs cannot afford to employ their full quota of Chinese employees, so their excess Chinese manpower quota is often sold illegally to anyone wanting to apply for an STR visa to come to Nigeria to work. To this end, agents can be paid to forge the relevant documents to prove the applicant's relevance to the company. Furthermore, expatriate quotas can also be used to open a private bank

account in Nigeria. According to Nigerian law, only foreigners with green cards are allowed to open a bank account. Thus, Chinese businesspeople who are in Nigeria with just a business visa may decide to exploit an expatriate quota position in order to open a bank account by claiming that they are in the process of applying for a green card.

In summary, documentation service businesses could not exist without strategized interethnic interaction between Chinese and Nigerians. Corruption in Nigeria, whether practised by Nigerian officials or by ordinary Nigerians as agents, facilitates economic informality in the transnational process. The documents provided by the service businesses are necessary for Chinese businesspeople who are migrating to Nigeria and who want to do business in a Nigerian context.

Generally, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs focus more on economic interests than political relations between countries. But the visa business involves politics and policy documents, which act as vehicles to control mobility. The brokerage of visa operations undermines the states' border control and creates a liminal space where strategized interethnic interactions can take place.

However, these individual actors do not aim to change state relations at the macro-level. The informal economy of documentation services protects small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs from the negative impacts of tightened state regulations and interstate connections. If it is difficult to get a reliable visa extension in Lagos, agents will seek connections in Abuja or elsewhere. Some agents have developed a brokerage network for service businesses where official national documents are for sale. In this sense, formal state relations are informalized by the complicity between Chinese and Nigerian agents.

Cyberspace: The Emergence of Social Informality

In recent years, the Internet has become an increasingly popular tool in facilitating transnational business networking between traders in the home country and traders in the diaspora. QQ, an instant messaging tool, is extremely popular among Chinese small-scale entrepreneurs in both China and Nigeria. A QQ group is a chat room that people may only enter with the permission of the group's founder and administrators.

Some researchers have examined Chinese perspectives on Africa and Africans based on open online forums which are frequented by many people who have never been to Africa (Shen 2009; Cheng

2011). Therefore, my research on online communities that incorporate Chinese businesspeople in both China and Nigeria adds another dimension to the study of China–Nigeria links.

Reputation and popularity vary in different QQ groups. When the word "Nigeria" was searched as a keyword in the QQ system, almost 100 QQ groups came up with membership in excess of 100 people. The largest group includes nearly 2,000 members. The administrators of this particular group regularly chat and even raise topics for discussion, such as experiences of life in Nigeria, major recent events, and new policies on international trade. Moreover, they protect the QQ group from being attacked by hackers. If a member sends a suspicious website link to the group, the administrators will warn the other members and may even expel the culprit.

Compared to everyday interaction within the Chinese communities in Nigeria, communication within the QQ groups is rather informal: Group members may not know each other, but they do not have to be cautious about verbal etiquette; even if they do know each other, they are less likely to become involved in conflicts of interest. Efforts to protect one's own self-interests are, to some extent, reduced in the "culture of real virtuality" (Castells 1996, 2001). The sociability of online communication is much characterized by relatively egalitarian relations and the informal nature of interaction (Misztal 2000: 197), though face-to-face interaction also involves informal actions.

The social informality of the transnational online community has three ways of overcoming the vulnerability of Chinese petty entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The first is information exchange. This information is not only limited to business opportunities, but also includes predictions about dynamic interstate connections. For instance, when Nigerian immigration officials began to arrest Chinese in Nigerian markets in May 2012, QQ group members used the chat room to inform each other about where the immigration officers were going, and even suggested that their members stay indoors.

There is always heated discussion in the QQ groups about various high-profile or newsworthy events. The discussants often try to predict the consequences of the events and, what is more, the potential impact the events may have on their businesses and everyday lives. The forum users also criticized the Chinese government's new entry/ exit laws towards foreigners when it was reported that the

sanfei foreigners who have been deported would not be allowed to re-
enter China for ten years (*China News* 2012). Many small-scale Chi-
nese entrepreneurs believe that the stricter the Chinese government is
on Africans in China, the tougher the Chinese migrants' lives will be
in Nigeria.

The second strategy of small-scale Chinese businesspeople to
overcome their vulnerability is to diversify the discourse on corrup-
tion in Nigeria. Even though everyday corruption in Nigeria is notori-
ous, some small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs benefit from the infor-
mal economy of the documentation service business. Thus, Chinese
businesspeople are ambivalent about the culture of corruption. In the
online community, some newly arrived Chinese businessmen related
their experience of being extorted by the Nigerian authorities and
reminded other QQ group members not to make similar mistakes.
Some more senior Chinese businessmen shared their strategies for
coping with corrupt officials. These narratives diversify perceptions
of Nigeria's society and culture, especially by local entrepreneurs in
China, who often regard Africa as being in turmoil.

The third way in which the social informality of the transnational
online community supports petty entrepreneurs in Nigeria is by offer-
ing help and consolation, and by providing a platform for grievances
to be aired. Since many small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are dissatis-
fied with the Chinese consulate's arrogance and indifference, they
often provide their fellow QQ group members with advice and assis-
tance. One Chinese businesswoman in Guangzhou had her cargo
sent to an incorrect address in Lagos, but did not have any staff there
to fetch the goods. After she expressed her anxiety in the QQ group
chat room, Fei asked his partner Udo to take the goods to the right
address.

Cyberspace develops the function of cohesion that the Chinese
embassy and consulate cannot achieve. It avoids calculated face-to-
face interactions among Chinese businesspeople in Nigeria. Some-
times, their fragmented narratives and conversations in the online
communities are more helpful than their cautious communications
with their Chinese partners, who live with them in Nigeria.

Ironically, the states sometimes need individuals to contribute
social capital. For instance, I found that Chinese diplomatic officials
would seek out opinion leaders in the online communities and use
them to spread information and convey announcements. Due to the

shortage of trusted people on the ground, the Chinese consulate depends on the opinion leaders within groups of independent Chinese entrepreneurs when they want to gather people for meetings. Likewise, the authorities in mainland China also needed Fei's informal connections in Nigeria to deal with the death of the Nigerian in Guangzhou. This evidences the stratification of small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs based on their accumulation of social capital, which is similar to their situation in Namibia (Dobler 2009).

Private online communities, unlike open Internet forums, endow their members with a sense of solidarity. These online networks become "forms of specialized communities" (Castells 2001: 132). Since they are situated in the context of China–Nigeria business, their sociability is constructed around specific interests, but they are not completely involved in a formal network of business interests.

Both economic and social informalities are interactional strategies employed by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs: The former is characterized by interethnic interaction between Chinese and Nigerians; the latter is typified by informal intraethnic interaction within transnational Chinese communities. These strategized interactions help small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs overcome their vulnerability when faced with everyday corruption in Nigeria, their lives in self-interested communities without the support and concern of the Chinese state, and dynamic interstate relations.

To some extent, social informality promotes economic informality. Since many documentation service businesses are semi-legal or illegal businesses, their advertisements have to be distributed informally. Cyberspace becomes an ideal place to advertise such businesses. The author found some QQ groups specializing in visa documentation, where visa agents gather virtually to share information and their experiences of evading state regulations.

However, cyberspace cannot substitute formal interactional modes, such as family networks, township connections and *guanxi* (关系, interpersonal relationships). As with the link between the formal and informal economy, formal and informal sociability are also juxtaposed in this case (Misztal 2000). Considering the triangular partnership between business partners Fei, Zhang and Hong, Fei and Zhang as in-laws are members of the same extended family, while Fei met Hong via the Internet. Even though the importance of the Internet has grown in recent years, it "sustains the bonds of community by

complementing, not replacing, other channels of interaction" (Di-Maggio et al. 2001: 318).

Conclusion

This article has explored the informal practices used by small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs to cope with their exposed situation in the shadow of the states. The burgeoning bilateral interactions between China and Nigeria mask the vulnerability of transnational Chinese petty entrepreneurship, which results from three factors in the states' regimes.

Small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs are faced with everyday corruption in Nigeria, practised by both Nigerian authorities, such as immigration, police and customs officials, and ordinary Nigerian people. The self-interest of members of the Chinese expatriate community in Nigeria without the protection of the state aggravates this vulnerability. Moreover, variations in state policies due to dynamic state relations exert huge influence on the business and everyday lives of Chinese small-scale entrepreneurs.

To cope with their weak position, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs strategize their interactions with both Nigerian and Chinese nationals. Informality is a characteristic of such economic and social interactions. Portes and Haller (2005: 407) emphasize that the informal economy is "dependent on social ties for its effective functioning". Likewise, Hart (2006: 33) also mentions social norms that "have emerged to organize the informal economy". Thus, the integration of economic and social informalities in this article fits with these statements.

Economic informality is especially embodied in the documentation service businesses. This informal sector is a space where legality becomes ambiguous and border control by the two states is relatively weak. For instance, in the visa business, these official documents, which should have been a tool of border control, are informally transacted. Strictly speaking, this business breaks laws, but it prospers because the state lacks the capacity and will to regulate appropriately. In the informal sector, people can obtain a visa even if they lack the necessary supporting documents. In other words, activities in the informal sector accelerate the mobility of people and goods and undermine state border controls.

Social informality is based on cyberspace. Interaction on the Internet among Chinese small-scale entreprenuers helps them cope with fluctuations of macro-interstate links and develop a sense of community. Simultaneously, online communities facilitate the economic informality of documentation services. In using these services, small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs reduce transaction costs and ensure their regular mobility even if they live in self-interested communities.

However, the informalities should not be exaggerated. The informalization of state regulations does not mean that small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs' activities in the informal sector can affect state relations and policies. They just aim to overcome their vulnerability in the shadow of the states rather than to alter the macro-situation. In the Chinese small businesses in Nigeria, formal practices, such as trade in goods, and informal practices, such as documentation services, are juxtaposed in a "continuum" (Guha-Khasnobis, Kanbur, and Ostrom 2006). The practices of informalization facilitate individual businesses when dynamic state relations inhibit personal transnational mobility.

Also, informal social networking on the Internet does not mean that traditional Chinese interpersonal interactions will be completely altered. Online communication tools offer an alternative way to develop new interactional strategies and facilitate an appropriate balance between the informality and formality of interaction (Misztal 2000). However, how this technology and new form of sociability impact transnational petty entrepreneurship between China and Africa remains to be explored.

Exploring informalities offers insights into China's engagement with Africa. Existing literature has emphasized the potential of the informal economy (Neuwirth 2011) and of the Internet (Castells 1996) in shaping societies and individual lives. This article integrates both into a framework of economic and social informalities in the context of Chinese petty entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Along with formal links established and maintained by both Chinese and Nigerian institutions, the small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs' practices, which are relatively secret and extremely dynamic, contribute to shaping the Chinese–Nigerian relationship.

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Appendix

Key Informants with Whom the Author Conducted No Formal Interviews

Ade, a Nigerian official in Lagos

Charles, a Nigerian lawyer in Lagos

Fei, a male Chinese trader from Jiangxi

Hong, a male Chinese trader from Jiangxi; Fei's business partner

Juan, a Chinese businesswoman from Northeast China; married to a Nigerian businessman

Udo, a male Nigerian trader in Lagos

Zhang, a male Chinese trader from Henan; Fei's brother-in-law

Zhao, a male Chinese shop owner from Shandong; Ade's business partner

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Non-Interference 2.0: China's Evolving Foreign Policy towards a Changing Africa

Richard AIDOO and Steve HESS

Abstract: China's non-interference policy has come under scrutiny in regards to its growing and deepening relations in Africa. The policy has come to represent an about-face from conditional assistance and investment associated with the Washington Consensus. Although often well received in much of the global South, this policy has drawn a lot of criticism from the West and others. These commentators have perceived non-interference as an opportunistic and often inconsistent instrument for enabling China's increasing access to African resources and markets. This article suggests that despite some consistent support for the rhetoric of non-interference, China's implementation of the policy has become increasingly varied and contextualized in reaction to Africa's ever-more diversified political and economic landscape since the early 2000s.

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Introduction

Lately, some good news has come out of Africa. Some African economies are posting impressive economic growth rates, and the landscape of political dictatorships and oppression is gradually giving way to the introduction and entrenchment of electoral democracy and civil liberties. These changes are largely unfolding thanks to the immense contribution of China and other Asian economies. China's stake in African economies has continuously grown over the past decade, with trade rising from 5 billion USD in 1997 to over 200 billion USD in 2012 (Taylor 2009; Wallis 2013). As the country endeavours to firmly ground its interests in Africa, the debate among stakeholders and academics has often centred on delineating the nature and intent of Chinese foreign policy towards the continent. Moreover, a great deal of attention has been paid to whether Chinese engagement either presents the continent with new opportunities or represents a new form of foreign exploitation. As a consequence, less attention has been paid to the particular policies and guidelines that have come to define this critical twenty-first-century partnership.

China's non-interference policy is one such policy that has received the aforementioned treatment in most literary circles. In contrast with Africa's relations with the EU and North America, China has largely deployed economic aid and investments with the principle of no strings attached (Hess and Aidoo 2010; Clapham 2006). This policy strategy is attributable to its principle of non-interference and its desire to provide an alternative to Western-style, conditional giving and investments under the Washington Consensus. The principle of non-interference, a well-known but nebulous strand of Chinese foreign policy, has featured prominently in its relations with African countries as it has in the larger developing world since the 1950s. While frequently well received throughout much of the global South, this policy has drawn a lot of criticism as the West and others have perceived non-interference as an opportunistic and often inconsistent instrument used by China to increase its access to African resources and markets.

This article suggests that despite its consistent support for the rhetoric of non-interference, China's implementation of the policy has become increasingly varied and contextualized in reaction to Africa's increasingly diversified political and economic landscape since the early 2000s. Whereas non-interference may have guided the initial

interactions of Chinese officials with their African counterparts, the application of the policy has subsequently shifted and adapted to meet local conditions. Chinese engagement was initially received warmly by a diverse array of African leaders, who welcomed Beijing's non-conditioned, hands-off approach to aid, assistance and economic partnership. However, as Sino-African economic linkages have deepened, relations that were once widely embraced as mutually beneficial have become more complex. This has occurred as African economic sectors that compete with Chinese investment and goods have become increasingly hostile towards Beijing's engagement with the continent, which has placed new pressures on China's African partner states.

Moreover, Africa's political transformation over the last several decades has complicated Beijing's foreign policy overtures towards Africa. As China's presence has become established in an increasingly diverse set of political regimes in Africa, including Ghana's high-capacity democracy, Nigeria's low-capacity democracy, Ethiopia's low-capacity non-democracy, and Angola's high-capacity non-democracy, its foreign policy approach has developed accordingly. In non-democracies, Beijing has developed dense linkages with incumbent parties and provided stalwart support against opposition forces. In more democratic regimes, Beijing has forged relationships with incumbent and opposition parties, hedging risk in anticipation of leadership turnovers. In low-capacity regimes, Chinese officials have formed bonds with incumbents but have increasingly avoided confrontations with powerful opposition forces. In instances of opposition breakthrough, Beijing has quickly and aggressively courted new leaders, even leaders such as Zambia's Michael Sata, who had previously espoused anti-Beijing sentiments.

In short, the practical implementation of non-interference has differed across political contexts – the overarching aim being to sustain stable economic and diplomatic relations with African partners and avoid disruptions in the face of possible political changes or upheavals. Interestingly, this strategy has thus far enabled Chinese interests to weather political change in democratic, authoritarian and partly democratic transitional regimes. These developments suggest that as opposed to suggestions that Beijing has been "propping up" dictators (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008), China's overarching strategy is eminently pragmatic, aimed at forging positive working relations

with any partner state that can help advance its economic interests –
regardless of whether its political regime is authoritarian or democratic.

Situating Non-Interference

In spite of the debates and controversies surrounding non-inter-
ference, segments of African populations and African leaders have on
balance shown strong support for Beijing's style of engagement on
the continent. Advocated in Beijing's official foreign policy for nearly
60 years, non-interference has since emerged as an important tenet of
Third World solidarity and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In
1954, during meetings aimed at addressing heated border disputes
between their two countries, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian
Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru issued a joint statement emphasiz-
ing their adherence to the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence".
These included non-interference, mutual respect for sovereignty and
territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggres-
sion, and peaceful coexistence (Hess and Aidoo 2010: 359). As ex-
pressed in subsequent international declarations advanced by Beijing
and other developing nations, specific violations of non-interference
might include: armed interventions, threats of force, support for do-
mestic insurgencies and rebellions, hostile propaganda, and using
one's economic and political power to destabilize a foreign country or
limit its ability to determine its own development and internal affairs
(Hess and Aidoo 2010: 359).

The Five Principles attained global significance a year later when
they were affirmed by 29 countries from Asia and Africa participating
in an international conference in Bandung, Indonesia. This set the
stage for their eventual adoption by NAM and a for series of declara-
tions advanced by large coalitions of developing countries in the
United Nations General Assembly from the 1960s to the 1980s
(United Nations General Assembly 1981; Hess and Aidoo 2010: 358–
359). During the Cold War, the Five Principles parallelled efforts by
Third World countries to assert their newly won national sovereignty
and resist the domination and interference of Soviet and American
superpowers. Since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has continued to
espouse rhetorical support for the principle of non-interference,
which has served to leverage China against Western condemnations
of its own domestic practices – including human rights violations –

and to build solidarity with partners in the global South (Tull 2006: 460–461).

As reflected by the Five Principles and South–South allegiance, the Chinese policy of non-interference encapsulates some essential features and rhetoric of China's diplomatic efforts towards developing countries. These include respecting the sanctity of internal and external sovereignty; abstaining from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of a particular country, refraining from acts that may be perceived as threats (both aggressive and subtle) to the independence of a country, avoiding the use of economic or political measures to force a country or its government to acquiesce to particular demands, and eschewing any efforts to assist or tolerate the overthrow of a regime in power. These ideals have been touted in decades of Chinese diplomacy toward the developing world. From Beijing's consistent reference and adherence to its Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression with Burma during the political displacement of Aung San Suu Kyi in the 1990s to its current insistence on non-interference in Sudan and South Sudan, non-interference has served as a guidepost for China's actions or lack thereof in global affairs.

This has further prompted scholars and other stakeholders to investigate the motivations behind China's vacillations within the frame of this policy. The adherence to non-interference or non-intervention has been perceived as a pragmatic step towards securing and sustaining access to vital resources in most of the developing world. In Africa, China's seemingly non-engaging stance towards rogue and non-democratic regimes in Zimbabwe and Angola has been perceived as Beijing's way of gaining uninterrupted access to oil and non-oil resources. In addition, the policy of non-interference has been instrumental in furthering South–South solidarity in the developing world. This solidarity has been the bedrock of China's relations with countries in the developing world, especially in Asia and Africa. It offers countries on those two continents some assurance of mutual respect and prolonged friendship amidst changing global orders. Another motivation behind the policy of non-interference is to enable China to distinguish its political and economic agenda in Africa from the West's. Given Africa's haunting past with colonial rule and the role played by the West in this history, China has been continuously prodded to prove the difference between its contemporary relations

with Africa and that of the West in the continent's past. With such a difficult task, Beijing has persistently alluded to the policy of non-interference as a complete detour from decades of Western inter-ference that were wrapped in conditional giving and diverse interventions.

With such motivations, when forging relationships in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, Beijing has emphasized its role as a fellow member of the South, its history free of imperialism or colo-nialism in foreign lands, and its willingness to provide aid, assistance and economic opportunities on the basis of equality – without the paternalistic prescriptions or conditions often demanded by Western donors and international financial institutions. After decades of Western countries applying the prescriptions laid out in the Washing-ton Consensus, doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of Western conditional support as a remedy to Africa's development maladies. This is encapsulated in infamous and proverbial sound bites such as "We must turn toward the East, where the sun rises", as Zimbabwe's Mugabe welcomed China, and the admission by Ethio-pia's Meles Zewani that "neoliberal reforms advocated by the World Bank and others had failed to generate the kind of growth they sought" (Halper 2010: 62). Expectedly, the West has also been very suspicious of China's activities in Africa. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently tapped into this suspicion as she retorted that

> it is easy – and we saw that during colonial times […] to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders, and leave […]. We don't want to see a new colonialism in Africa (*Reuters* 2011).

In the past decade, a body of scholarship has attributed China's ac-cess to untapped resources and potential markets in parts of the de-veloping world to the deployment of its charm or soft power (Kur-lantzick 2007). However, some contend that this strand of argument represents a simplistic way of explaining a rather complex relation-ship between China (an emerging global economy) and Africa (a con-tinent in transition). Additionally, China's recent economic expan-sions are a result of its "flexigemony", which entails Chinese actors adapting their strategies to suit the particular histories and geographi-es of the African states with which they engage in economic partner-ships (Carmody and Taylor 2011). This provides China the flexibility it needs to successfully work with diverse political regimes in differ-ent domestic contexts and, most important, to redefine the extent of

its domestic involvement. Hence, in spite of the growing disaffection among some African populations, China and its non-interference policy generally receive strong approval in national public opinion surveys (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738; Pew Research Centre 2007). However, a closer look at these empirical studies also reveals a more nuanced African response with regards to the policy of non-interference and Sino-African partnership.

In most literature and the media, China's relations with Africa and its policy of non-interference have garnered a two-pronged response – harsh, critical censure from China sceptics and the West, assuaged by a rather accepting and optimistic response from African populations. Nevertheless, recent growing anti-Chinese sentiments, coupled with allegations that Beijing has attempted to meddle in the domestic affairs of nations like Zambia, Sudan and Libya, suggest that this growing relationship is rather nuanced. These alleged instances of interference have occurred even as Beijing persistently professes rhetorical support for the policy of non-interference on Africa's evolving political and economic landscape.

Complementary and Competing Economic Relations

The recent image of Africa, or at least of a large part of the continent, has been a departure from decades of economic stagnation. With a pro-growth economic agenda, stronger and more open political institutions, the continent has significantly improved its prospects for development (Mahajan 2009; Radelet 2010a, 2010b). In economic terms, Africa's growth has been diverse with present and future growth trajectories classifying countries as oil exporters, pre-transition, transition and diversified (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). As shown in Figure 1, this patchwork also highlights progress toward diverse sources of economic growth and the generation of export revenue to finance further growth.

Figure 1: Segments of Present and Projected Economic Growth among
African States
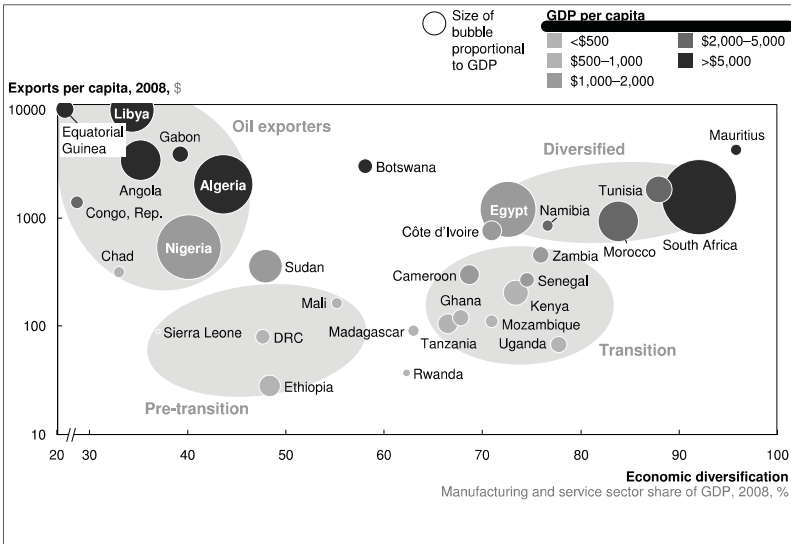
These developments have significantly improved the continent's posi-
tion in the global economy, attracting economic interests from Eu-
rope, the Americas and Asia. The most momentous among these
have been China's expanding economic interests. Chinese economic
engagements in African countries have largely been centred on re-
source extraction of both strategic and non-strategic resources and on
securing a growing market (Zweig and Bi 2005; Taylor 2009). To
sustain access to such critical economic interests, Beijing has rhetori-
cally evoked non-interference as part of its foreign policy agenda to
steer clear of domestic political entanglements that might soil its im-
age as purely a "business partner".

Of course, growing Chinese engagement has produced both
winners and losers among its major economic partners. The nature,
whether complementary or competitive, of China's economic activi-
ties in a particular African state determines the respective support for
or opposition to Beijing's engagement. Kaplinsky, McCormick, and
Morris (2010) note that China's engagements with individual African
countries are often complementary. China provides these countries

with appropriate capital goods and cheap consumer goods in exchange for strategic and non-strategic resources. An influx of competitively priced Chinese manufactures, often sold for half the price of Western goods, improves the purchasing power of African consumers and reduces the overall cost of living (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

On the other hand, the importation of consumer goods has presented new competition for local producers. As Beijing becomes more vested in African economies, scholars and stakeholders continue to vacillate between the opportunities and challenges of its trade, investments and aid, all of which are meant to transform these economies. China provides a market for African primary commodities while simultaneously competing with these African economies for the global market for manufactured products. As demonstrated by the export similarity index, the competitive nature of Chinese imports has varied dramatically across the continent. The exports of countries with nascent manufacturing sectors – such as South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania – face the greatest competition from China's exports, whereas those countries with greater reliance on resource exports – such as Nigeria, Sudan and Angola – face the least (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). Of course, the competitive challenges posed by China's economic activities also vary depending on the specific economies with which it is doing business. Studies of countries like Ghana (Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010), Zimbabwe (Sachikonye 2008) and South Africa (Edwards and Jenkins 2013) have shown Beijing's economic overtures to be threatening to some specific domestic industries, particularly in the manufacturing sector, while complementary to others, such as mining. In other words, China's growing economic footprint has generally benefitted some specific economic sectors in Africa, while harming others.

As China's interests in African economies diversify to include investment in the African manufacturing sector, the economic stakes increase, giving Beijing a farther and more controlling reach into these economies. In fact, in recent years, 22 per cent of Chinese investment in Africa has been in manufacturing, rivalling its better-known involvement in mining (29 per cent) (*The Economist* 2011). While such ventures have contributed to job growth and the transfer of skills to local workers, they inevitably put pressure on the policy of non-interference as the Chinese government and its companies seek

to be part of the decision-making apparatus aimed at safeguarding their investments. There has been an uproar over the adverse effect of Chinese trade and investments on African manufacturing industries, including the deterioration of local working conditions and the proliferation of questionable business practices in local economies (Taylor 2009). The widespread nature of this problem has drawn negative responses from many Africans, indicated by the growing anti-Chinese sentiments among sections of different populations (Donovan and McGovern 2007). A recent increase in Chinese manufacturing investments has elevated concerns over the shady nature of these business deals in certain places – especially ones that are joint ventures between Africans or African governments and Chinese partners.

China's continually growing interest in African raw materials, particularly oil, puts Beijing at the core of a vital economic sector that is characterized by messy and corrupt politics, which further complicates Chinese efforts to increase economic engagement without interfering in the internal affairs of partner states. As noted by Duncan Clarke (2008), for China nothing rivals its drive to capture oil and gas potential in Africa, as loans, aid monies and debt write-offs grease the political wheels to help finance access to oil deals in some of Africa's known oil economies. This urge is exacerbated by China's exceptionally robust economic growth in the past two decades, which will continue to depend mainly on oil to fulfil its increasing transportation and industrial needs in the foreseeable future. Chinese firms have been involved in various deals with the majority of the 19 African countries that produce oil or have proven oil reserves (Taylor 2009).

In some cases, Beijing must compete against established and well-known Western companies for these oil and gas concessions. In such cases, differences between China's approach to African resources and that of the West become imperative to the securing of oil contracts. For China, oil and politics are one, in contrast to the Western model. Some small, Western-owned firms have wittingly or otherwise acted as Trojan horses for larger Chinese interests in oil deals (Clarke 2008: 401). For instance, in 2010, business in Ghana's new oil industry became confusingly messy for most of the industry's watchers as a 5 billion USD joint bid by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) was put forward to purchase the stake of the Texas-

based company Kosmos Energy. This instance was perceived as arm-twisting by the Ghanaian government to transfer the assets and the stake of Kosmos in the Jubilee oil field – Ghana's largest – to the Chinese instead of to ExxonMobil (the choice of Kosmos Energy) (Dogbevi 2010). Also, in Nigeria, a Chinese oil investment deal – oil-for-infrastructure – reached under the Obasanjo administration was suspended by the Yar'Adua administration pending investigations into corruption. In both cases, Beijing is either tied to some iniquitous investment activity or perceived as a crony to a corrupt African government. Such instances provide proof for critics who label China's activities in Africa under the policy of non-interference as self-serving and opportunistic.

Moreover, as noted in a report by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (2005), African commodity exports to China, such as oil, metals, cotton and timber, do not typically have a net-positive impact on job creation. Moreover, the poorest and most marginalized populations of African partner states cannot easily access the revenue streams connected to these industries. These trends suggest that in China's African partner states – many of which were already plagued by substantial income inequality – this problem may persist or grow (Department for International Development 2005: 14–16). Thus, unskilled workers and other marginal groups may be dislodged from a sector of the economy harmed by Chinese engagement but may not be able to access the benefits gained in other (often extractive) sectors. These circumstances can readily contribute to pushback against Beijing's presence in African societies. Consequently, even in extractive industries, which have seen record growth from China's unquenched demand for commodities, particularly energy resources, Beijing has experienced complications to its "business-is-business" approach to economic relationships.

Beijing's Foreign Policy in Africa's Changing Political Landscape

Much has been written about the soft-power-oriented "charm offensive" China has used to pursue its foreign policy goals since the early 2000s. Seeking to win supportive allies, deflect criticisms of its internal policies, acquire needed raw materials and export markets and avoid direct confrontations with the United States, China has re-

frained from the overt use of its military and economic resources to influence its foreign partners. Instead, it has extended offers of aid, assistance and economic partnership to foreign states, insisting on upholding the principle of non-interference and forging "business-is-business" relationships with "no political strings" attached (Kurlantzick 2007: 37–56; Alden 2007: 8). Since the initiation of Jiang Zemin's "Going Out" policy in 1999, China's non-interference strategy has proved remarkably successful in winning allies and securing the market access and resources needed to sustain the country's dynamic economic growth.

Throughout Africa and elsewhere in the global South, Beijing has forged an expansive body of bilateral and multilateral agreements with its foreign counterparts as Chinese officials, firms and entrepreneurs rapidly expand into new markets, finding new opportunities to work, trade and invest. To the present, these deepening bonds have been facilitated primarily through direct government-to-government exchanges, with Beijing currying favour and linking up with national leaders and ruling parties in various African states. Since the mid-1990s, Beijing has frequently deployed national-level officials, including heads of state, to high-profile face-to-face meetings with their counterparts in various African capitals and at regional organizations, such as gatherings of the African Union. Moreover, Beijing has hosted African heads of state and delegations representing ruling governments and has even established a formal multilateral institution – the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) – as a base for launching regional initiatives, facilitating greater economic and political cooperation and extending offers of aid and assistance (Shambaugh 2013: 109–110).

By framing its diplomatic overtures in the rhetoric of non-interference, Beijing has attempted to focus on maintaining friendly relations with local ruling elites, who as sovereign rulers formally represent the entirety of their constituent territories and populations. Ruling parties such as the National Congress Party (NCP) of Sudan, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) have even participated in joint training and cooperative exchanges with the Chinese Communist Party, deploying delegations of cadres to China for such programmes. Once agreements for cooperation have been struck and relationships with ruling parties have been es-

tablished, Beijing has utilized its friendships with local rulers to gain market access for its own firms, who seek avenues to needed resources, local consumer markets and opportunities for local investment. Beyond removing barriers to trade and investments, Chinese officials have also bundled offers of aid and assistance into high-level deals requiring the contracting of Chinese firms to complete projects or the purchasing of Chinese products (Geda and Meskel 2009: 20). Moreover, when operating in economies often troubled by official corruption, cronyism and a lack of transparency, Chinese firms have rightly or wrongly been accused of using their influence with ruling parties to win market share and contracts, displacing local businesses (Goldie-Scot 2012: 249–251).

Perceived collusion between ruling parties and Beijing has resulted in varying degrees of local backlash in African states negatively affected by China's engagement. To cite some notable examples, such actions have included the kidnapping of 29 Chinese workers by Sudanese rebels in January 2012; the adoption of anti-Beijing rhetoric by Zambian opposition candidate Michael Sata during the 2006, 2008 and 2011 presidential elections; the killing of four Chinese workers in South Africa in November 2011; violent labour strikes at Chinese-owned coal mines in Zambia in 2012; the arrest and deportation of Chinese miners in Ghana in June 2013; and demonstrations by workers and traders against Chinese goods in Ghana, Senegal, Kenya and Malawi over the last several years (Cropley and Martina 2012).

These manifestations of anti-Chinese sentiment have been extraordinarily diverse. Some have taken place within the domain of conventional, institutionalized politics, while others have taken non-institutionalized forms outside the legal limits of political actions. Some have been violent in nature, others non-violent. They have also adopted a diverse collection of targets, with some actors taking aim at local ruling governments and their officials, and others acting directly against Chinese multinational companies and their property or Chinese nationals, whether workers or independent entrepreneurs. The single common thread has been that these groups and individuals have attributed negative social and economic changes in their communities to China and carried out collective action framed around China's influence in their respective countries.

As noted by scholars of contentious politics, the repertoires of contention adopted by social actors are shaped by the structure of

opportunities and threats in a given political environment (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 48–49). These structures vary substantially across countries and regime types and have a powerful impact on determining the prevailing repertoire of contention adopted by actors making claims directly or indirectly on a government. Tilly and Tarrow (2007) categorize regimes by their degree of capacity, a government's ability to take actions that affect the "character and distribution of population, activity, and resources within [its] territory", and by their degree of democracy,

> the extent to which people subject to a given government's authority have broad, equal political rights, exert significant direct influence over government personnel and policy, and receive protection from arbitrary [government] action (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 55).

As reflected in much literature on contentious politics, particular types of regimes tend to experience specific repertoires of political contention. High-capacity democracies are more likely to see social movements, low-capacity democracies often experience military coups and ethnic or religious struggles, high-capacity non-democracies yield many insurgencies and bouts of violent state repression, and low-capacity non-democracies often see protracted, high-intensity civil wars (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 56–57). The emergence of more democratic forms of government amidst Africa's political transformation, which is of particular interest to this study, has in recent decades created a continent with highly varied structures of political opportunities and threats as well as highly varied forms of popular contention. This transformation has required that Beijing and other outside players adapt their foreign policy strategies to an increasingly varied political terrain.

As indicated in Table 1, China's closest African partners have varied significantly in terms of their degree of political freedom and capacity. Despite allegations that China has an interest in propping up dictatorships in sub-Saharan Africa, Beijing has developed close relations with democracies and non-democracies alike. Moreover, China's closest relationships have included more stable regimes, such as Ghana and South Africa, as well as weak and less stable regimes, such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan, where political risk and human rights concerns have deterred Western actors, creating opportunities for Chinese firms. In this study, we have identified twelve countries

in sub-Saharan Africa noted for their high levels of Chinese foreign direct investment, trade and assistance. These cases are classified as high or low democracy based on Freedom House's (2013) *Freedom in the World* report, which combines ratings for political rights and civil liberties. They are classified as high- or low-capacity based on combined measures for the strength of the security apparatus and ability to provide basic public services included in the Fund for Peace's (2013) *Failed States Index* report. Hereafter, the combined score of these two measures is referred to as "political capacity". Both measures are dichotomous; the six countries with the lowest scores ("most free") according to Freedom House are labelled as high democracy: Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Nigeria. Those with the six highest scores ("least free") are listed as low democracy: Sudan, Ethiopia, Angola, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Uganda. Similarly, the six cases with the highest ratings for political capacity are Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Angola and Kenya. The six with the lowest ratings are Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Nigeria and South Sudan. This study focuses on four cases, each representing one of the four categories of the categorization scheme: Ghana as a high-capacity, high-democracy case; Angola as a high-capacity, low-democracy case; Nigeria as a low-capacity, high-democracy case; and Ethiopia as a low-capacity, low-democracy case.

Table 1:   Categorizing China's African Partners

	High Democracy	Low Democracy
High Capacity	Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia	Angola
Low Capacity	Nigeria	Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Source: Fund for Peace 2013; Freedom House 2013.

In each of these four cases, China has adapted its foreign policy strategies to address new and varied forms of popular backlash that emerge from the real and perceived losers of deepened engagement. It is in this context that Beijing has increasingly realized the diversity of anti-China pushback across the region – in both manner and degree – and modified its non-interference policies to ensure lasting positive relations with ruling governments, access to desired re-

sources and markets, and the safety of its citizens, firms and their respective assets in the region.

Ghana

Ghana's current political system is considered as one of the most stable democracies in Africa. Since its return to constitutional rule in 1992, the country has maintained free and competitive political contests among its varied political parties, led by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC). This more recently emerged political image of the country stands in contrast with the decades of political instability and economic stagnation that have characterized most of the post-independence era. With sturdy and collective pressures stemming from both external and domestic interests, Ghana stepped into a democratic era in the early 1990s, turning away from the years of military dictatorship that had dominated its postcolonial political discourse. Over the past two decades, competitive elections with a series of electoral turnovers have pushed Ghana over Huntington's crucial threshold of democratic consolidation (Huntington 1993). Besides the political transformation, economic liberalization and reforms coupled with the discovery of oil have renewed external interests in the Ghanaian economy. China and its economic entrepreneurs have shown significant interest in Ghana's economy as investments in different sectors have increased over the years – Chinese exports to Ghana increased from 93 million USD in 2000 to more than 1.5 billion USD in 2008, and significant infrastructure projects such as the 622 million USD Bui hydroelectric dam have been undertaken (Power, Mohan, and Tan-Mullins 2012).

In a democratically free Ghana with a transitional economy (see Figure 1), its relationship with China is both complementary and competitive (see Baah and Jauch 2009). Ghanaians generally see China's influence as a positive one but are somewhat circumspect with regards to non-interference, as they support the policy but with some reservations (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738). So, in spite of the complementary provision of infrastructure such as road networks, railway systems, football stadiums and the Bui hydroelectric plant, there have been serious negative consequences of working with China. Such instances include the weakening of the clothing and textiles sector from an influx of cheap textiles from China. These developments

negatively affect the perceptions of the popular Chinese economic efforts in Ghana. In recent years, Ghanaian textile companies and their workers have largely been depicted as hardworking and law-abiding, competing against large-scale Chinese manufacturers engaged in illegal modes and networks of production such as counterfeiting, smuggling, tax evasion and the use of child labour. The business strategies of the Chinese are often referred to as unethical (Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010). In recent years, the main source of Ghanaian frustration toward the Chinese has come from the latter's involvement in illegal mining (galamsey) activities in different parts of the country. As Chinese nationals enter this unregulated economic activity, they get into intense and sometimes life-threatening competition with the locals who continue to see this as their mainstay. "These Chinese people do not respect our laws and local traditions. When they see opportunity, they move in at the cost of all else", said an angry and frustrated hotel operator in Awaso in Ghana's Western Region (Interview 1 2013). Though public outcry has led to the deportation of large batches of Chinese nationals, this has yet to be converted into a political agenda by a particular political party.

As a result of the mass deportation of Chinese nationals, there seems to be some official retribution from Beijing in the form of tightening visa requirements for Ghanaians travelling to China as well as delaying the payment of a 3 billion USD China Development Bank (CDB) loan to Ghana. Tsikata, Fenny, and Aryeetey (2009) also cite the case of CALF Cocoa Processing in Ghana, a joint venture between the government of Ghana and China International Cooperation Company for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (CALF), which later degenerated into domestic political propaganda. This case began with a line of credit totalling more than 18 million USD from the Chinese Exim Bank to the Rawlings administration to invest in a cocoa-processing project alongside a gold mine and a fishing net and rope factory. This investment became entangled in domestic politics when it was reported that the Ghanaian government's share was managed by a company with ties to the 31st December Women's Movement, an outfit of the wife of (then) President Rawlings. This project was fraught with internal political wrangling, leading to the halting of this investment plan by the succeeding government (Tsikata, Fenny, and Aryeetey 2009). The attempt by Beijing to establish its economic prowess in Africa faces the difficulty of upholding

promises both to keep things "strictly business" and to avoid domestic interference, real challenges for Beijing's economic expansion in Africa.

But in contrast to the neoliberal reforms under the Washington Consensus, the policy of non-interference has appealed to some Ghanaians and elites, who perceive this policy as less bureaucratic and paternalistic than the approach embraced by Western actors. Conversely, the shades of unpopularity and indifference registered with China's economic engagements may be attributable to the competition between its economic actors and domestic economic interests – the textile industry and galamsey. Perhaps most important, Ghana has seen regular and peaceful rotations in power between its two leading political parties in recent years. Neither has tapped into anti-Chinese sentiments, since securing Chinese investment and trade has become critical for governments once in office. Thus, in Ghana's competitive democratic environment, opposition challengers have a strong expectation of victory in approaching electoral contests, dissuading them from publicly criticizing China to win political points, even when it has to do with Chinese interference into local matters. As put by a local in Awaso in the Western Region of Ghana – one of the areas that has seen an increase in galamsey,

> We know they [the Chinese] are bribing the politicians and leaders, but we will not say anything. All we can do is vote them out of office (Interview 2 2013).

Angola

Following a peace accord in 2002, Angola ended 25 years of civil war and began the long process of rebuilding the country's economy and putting it on a path of development. In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, Angola's government, led by the victorious Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola (MPLA), courted a range of international donors to help finance the country's post-conflict recovery. The Angolan government struggled to secure funding from the IMF and World Bank, failing to develop an approved poverty reduction programme and meet other conditions (Burke, Corkin, and Tay 2007: 17). Meanwhile, Angola accepted a 2 billion USD financing package from China in early 2004, followed by a 2 billion USD loan in 2007 (Campos and Vines 2008: 6–8). Both loans had very low

interest rates, were used to fund infrastructure projects, were required to be repaid through oil sales over a period of 12 to 15 years, and also had almost no associated conditions – other than the requirement that at least 70 per cent of all construction work and equipment be purchased from Chinese firms (Alves 2013: 107–108). These funds were used for a range of infrastructure projects throughout the country, including the rehabilitation and construction of roads, hospitals, schools, irrigation systems, the country's telecommunications network and water treatment facilities (Campos and Vines 2008: 7–8). Bilateral trade between Angola and China exploded from 1.8 billion USD in 2000 to 36 billion USD in 2013, with crude oil making up over 95 per cent of Angola's exports to China (Ren 2014). Chinese investment in the country rapidly expanded, particularly in construction and oil and diamond extraction (Campos and Vines 2008: 15–18).

In general, Angola and China have had highly complementary economic relations. As its consumption continues to soar, China's demand for Angola's oil resources has grown. At the same time, post-conflict Angola has struggled with the conditions posed by international financial institutions, creating a need for China's outside financing as well as its affordable technical assistance and construction projects. Nevertheless, some sectors of Angolan society have expressed frustration with China's growing involvement in their country. First, Chinese firms have tended to import Chinese nationals to work in both high- and low-skill positions rather than to hire local labourers. Second, Chinese companies have often secured contracts through high-level closed-door discussions with Angolan officials, leading to suspicions of corrupt deal-making and collusion between Chinese firms and the ruling party. Third, Chinese construction projects and consumer products have gained the reputation of being of low quality, such as roads that quickly develop potholes or even wash away during seasonal rains. Finally, Chinese investment has mostly flowed into extractive industries, such as oil and diamonds, which produce high profits – most often captured by well-connected individuals – but relatively few jobs for average Angolans. These frustrations have played a role in criticism of China by Angolan civil society actors and even violence against Chinese nationals, including robberies and physical attacks, by both criminal gangs and anti-government rebels (particularly in Cabinda). In those cases, Chinese nation-

als are identified as supporters of the Angolan government and thus serve as proxy targets for anti-regime violence (Faucon and Su 2010).

In Angola, President dos Santos and the MPLA have established effective and unchecked power over the political system. The influx of oil revenues and China's emergence as a source of foreign support and financing, which places no pressure on dos Santos to make good governance reforms, have strengthened the grip of the ruling party and enabled it to dominate all potential sources of countervailing political power. In 2008 elections, the MPLA won 82 per cent of the vote, compared to 10 per cent for the leading opposition party (Amundsen 2013: 2). As a consequence of the party's political dominance over Angolan society, Beijing's foreign relations have centred on currying favour with the MPLA, particularly President dos Santos' inner circle, where political power is heavily concentrated, and providing direct support to the ruling elite. Since opposition actors are fragmented and weak, Beijing focuses on the MPLA and President dos Santos, making little effort to hedge its bets by reaching out to opposition or civil society actors.

Nigeria

Nigeria represents a political paradox in sub-Saharan Africa. It has immense political and economic potential yet is plagued by a multitude of challenges that have hobbled this oil exporter. Though Nigeria has seen a sustained period of civilian rule since independence from the British, democratic governance is in a transitional phase with embers of past military rule and ethnic rivalry still glowing underneath the incipient democratic culture. After navigating some turbulent times through the military dictatorships of the Babangida and Abacha administrations, Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 under Olusegun Obasanjo, a period which also saw the start of the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in contemporary Nigerian politics. The subsequent Yar'Adua administration gave way to Goodluck Jonathan's government after the former's sudden demise. These series of governments under the Fourth Republican dispensation have been continuously dogged by ethnic and religious violence, endemic corruption and elite competition (Campbell 2013) as exhibited by low-capacity democracies. However, as a leading member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC), Nigeria's oil economy has attracted investments from different parts of the world, including China.

China's investments in Nigeria's oil and gas industry have increased along with Sino-Nigerian trade relations, which grew from 384 million USD in 1998 to 10 billion USD in 2011 (Crusoe 2011). China's growing presence is evidenced by deals like the Petro-China contract with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in 2004, valued at 800 million USD, and Sinopec's contract with the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company and the Italian company Eni to develop the Okono and Okpoho fields, which have combined reserves of 500 million barrels (Taylor 2009: 47). In addition to these, China's "oil-for-infrastructure" bid with the Obasanjo administration (1999–2007) included contracts to accomplish tasks such as the modernization of Nigeria's railways at the cost 8.3 billion USD by the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation (Obi 2010: 181). The Jonathan administration was also able to secure an oil-for-infrastructure deal for 1.1 billion USD in low-interest loans (as part of a 3 billion USD loan) to develop airports, roads and a hydroelectric plant (*Associated Press* 2013). Nevertheless, China's interests in the Nigerian oil economy have developed amidst the corruption and the risk of insurgencies in Nigeria's oil-rich regions and the notoriety of Boko Haram – the militant Islamic group. For instance, it was reported that the CNOOC offered a 2.7 billion USD development-spending commitment on top of the more than 2 billion USD purchase of a 45 per cent stake in a Niger Delta oil block during a period when the insurgency in the Niger Delta was expected to discourage new investors (Mahtani 2006).

Despite these influences, Nigeria's population is yet to be widely convinced of Beijing's cornerstone principle of non-interference (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738). Even though there is a somewhat healthy support for China's influence, some remain sceptical of Beijing's growing presence, as signalled by the widely publicized investigation by the Yar'Adua administration of contracts awarded to Chinese firms under the Obasanjo administration (Obi 2010). One of the major contentions that may easily stir dissatisfaction for China's policy of non-interference is the problem of de-industrialization, as Nigerian infant industries claim they are outcompeted by all the cheap Chinese products dumped on the Nigerian market. This is further exacerbated by the participation of the Chinese in petty trading, a

phenomenon known as the "illegal Chinatowns" (see Ogunsanwo 2008). In March 2013, the governor of Nigeria's Central Bank, Lamido Sanusi, authored an editorial in the *Financial Times* that warned that China is engaging in "predatory" trade practices, such as manipulating its currency and using subsidies to promote its own exports. As the world's second-largest economy, it has now emerged as an

> economic giant capable of the same forms of exploitation as the West [… and] is a major contributor to the de-industrialization of Africa and thus African underdevelopment (Wallis 2013).

In a bid to deal with a very strategic but hard-headed partner on the continent of Africa, China has continuously extended good relations and development packages even in the face of challenging periods of Sino-Nigerian relations. To maintain and build on this relationship, China has largely adhered to its non-interference maxim of "business is business" as it works with the different administrations – irrespective of any domestic political mess resulting from the democratic process. As one Chinese businessman expressed in an exchange in Nigeria, because in a democracy everyone decides, nothing works. Neither China nor Africa needs democracy (Michel and Beuret 2009: 29). This attitude represents Beijing's delicate approach to dealing with a very important partner in its engagement in Africa – it ignores Nigeria's democratic stumbles and tows the line of the government in power and the influential elites. This is the function of non-interference in an oil economy with limited capacity and an open, if imperfect, democratic system.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia can be defined as a low-capacity non-democracy with its chequered political history largely featuring different autocratic regimes characterized by centralized political authority and personalized rule. In 1991 Meles Zenawi and Tigray Popular Liberation Front (TPLF) insurgents displaced the previous Derg administration and assumed control of the state. As an insurrection group, the TPLF had ideological ties to the PRC through its embrace of Maoism and the related strategy of a people's war. However, upon taking power, the new leadership (rebranding itself the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) abandoned references to Marxism, instead adopting the rhetoric of democracy and market economics as it suc-

cessfully courted support for trade and development assistance from Western powers and international financial institutions, namely the IMF and World Bank (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005).

By the mid-1990s, the Zenawi administration had begun to eschew Washington-based development programmes, turning instead to the East for economic inspiration and practical support. The regime reached out to non-Western powers, China in particular, to balance against Western influence and reduce its leverage over Ethiopia's internal affairs. China reciprocated these overtures, capped with Meles' visit to Beijing in 1995 and Prime Minister Jiang Zemin's visit to Ethiopia in 1996 (Adem 2012: 145). Thereafter, relations between China and Ethiopia expanded and deepened as the two countries forged a growing number of bilateral and multilateral linkages. In 1998, the China–Ethiopia Joint Commission was created as a permanent body entrusted with reviewing and making recommendations for improving the two countries' bilateral relations. Thereafter, Ethiopia became an active participant within the Beijing-initiated FOCAC, established in 2000, and hosted the organization's second ministerial conference – the first held in Africa – in 2003 (Adem 2012: 145). In 2008, the governments of Ethiopia and China agreed to establish a "special economic zone" outside of Addis Ababa aimed at attracting foreign investment and enterprises – one of six on the continent (Giannecchini 2011; for more in-depth analysis of China's special economic zones in Africa, see Brautigam and Tang 2011). These efforts contributed to a rapid expansion of Sino-Ethiopian economic relations. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose from 100 million USD to over 1 billion USD in 2010 (*Afribiz* 2011), making China Ethiopia's leading import and export trading partner as of 2011 (Geiger and Goh 2012). Chinese foreign direct investment, largely non-existent in 2004, rapidly increased to 58.5 million USD in 2010 (Geiger and Goh 2012: v).

As its economic and political linkages with Ethiopia expanded, Beijing forged extensive bonds directly with the ruling EPRDF, making no visible effort to play it safe by reaching out to the opposition. These connections were manifested in cross-party exchanges between officials from the EPRDF and CCP (Getachew 2014); the observing and emulation by the EPRDF of CCP tactics for quelling social unrest and political dissent (*Ezega News* 2010); and Beijing's installation

and support of a system for monitoring and filtering Internet traffic and jamming unwanted radio and TV signals. The system, run by Ethiopia's Information Network Security Agency (INSA), was highly publicized at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, when it effectively shut down transmissions from the independent Ethiopian Satellite Station (ESAT), as well as Voice of America and Deutsche Welle (*Addis Neger* 2010; ESAT 2011). Moreover, when providing aid, assistance and investment in Ethiopia, Chinese firms and government officials typically arranged contracts with EPRDF officials behind closed doors, leaving out Ethiopians without strong personal connections to the party and leading to accusations of unfair collusion between Beijing and the EPRDF (Goldie-Scot 2012: 249).

The downsides of Chinese engagement, as well as Beijing's perceived one-sided support for the EPRDF, have generated sporadic resistance from various sectors of the public. These include local workers who complain of poor treatment and low wages at Chinese firms (Geda 2008), local manufacturing and construction firms harmed by Chinese competition (Gebre-Egziabher 2006; Geda and Meskel 2009), opposition activists who allege that Beijing has strengthened the EPRDF's autocratic hold on political power, along with ethno-regional insurgents who consider Chinese firms and employees as proxies or allies of the ruling party – even targeting the Chinese company, Sinopec, in a deadly 2007 attack at an Abole oil field. In general, such anti-Chinese resentment was relatively muted and Ethiopian public opinion was generally supportive of Beijing (Pew Research Centre 2007). These trends reflect the general success of Beijing's policy of direct engagement with the EPRDF. In a tightly controlled political system dominated by a hegemonic single party that claims over four million members, and which won 99.9 per cent of local *kebelle* elections in 2008 and secured 544 of the 547 seats in national legislative elections 2010 (Human Rights Watch 2010; Tronvoll 2011), little space has existed for opposition politicians to mobilize public support against Chinese engagement. The primary risk to Chinese interests has come from non-institutionalized actors, particularly ethno-regional secessionist movements that have taken to using Chinese firms and individuals as proxy targets for the government in Addis Ababa. As a consequence, Beijing raised concerns about political instability in general but made little effort to hedge its bets by reaching out to opposition parties as it has in competitive multiparty

systems such as Ghana. Instead, China has thrown its full-fledged support behind the EPRDF, which has consistently won big in elections, expanded its reach across Ethiopian society via its large party cadre and denied the opposition the resources or opportunities to achieve relevance or influence government policies. As a consequence, China's non-interference has consisted of unreserved support for the incumbent party, driven by the expectation that – even after the recent passing of Meles Zenawi – the EPRDF has and will continue to maintain hegemonic control over Ethiopia's political landscape for the foreseeable future.

Concluding Remarks

In the past decade, the two tales that have defined post-independent Africa are the continent's ongoing political and economic transformation and China's momentous return to the continent. Though these two big stories have received attention in academic circles, very little research has been done on the connection between the two trends. The changes in Africa's politics and economics have had varying impacts on the China–Africa discourse. These impacts have led to some nuances in African responses to China and its policy of non-interference. China has been consistent in its rhetorical insistence on non-interference in the domestic affairs of African states. Like most international norms, non-interference is characterized by an identity challenge that lends itself to adapting conceptual and contextual usages of the term. As China shifts from its largely ideological role of the 1950s to the current pragmatic economic engagement in Africa, its cornerstone policy of non-interference has been increasingly challenged with the growing need to protect its now-established economic interests across the continent. Also, along these lines, China has drawn some appeal in most African countries with its principle of non-interference. This policy provides an edge over other competitors for African natural resources and markets, especially in regards to its Western rivals.

However, a careful look at recent trends in Sino-African relations reveals that the seemingly broad appeal of China's economic strides and practical implementation of non-interference is much more nuanced than is often reported. Non-interference appeals to both the African elites and the masses. Statements by African elites imply an

overwhelmingly positive reception on the continent, but many sectors of African society have revealed growing displeasure with Beijing's unwanted competition in domestic markets. Hence, Beijing's gain in elite support for its non-interference policy must adapt to accommodate instances of popular dissatisfaction with China. These are often based in the country's competitive edge over African labour as well as some of the reported underhanded deals with some African governments over strategic resources like oil. Emerging anti-Chinese protests around Africa reflect this sentiment and have dictated that Beijing adjust its application of non-interference to perform well in its operations within a variety of political and economic environments.

In different African political and economic situations it has become clear that China's non-interference policy can be perceived or re-examined based on the following: First, China continues to display the ability to engage in diplomatic twists and turns in reaction to public support or lack thereof regarding its activities in Africa. In democratically stable countries like Ghana where public opinion can pressure a government or even threaten its existence, China carries out society-wide charm offensives and manoeuvres to avoid being perceived as directly interfering in the domestic affairs of the country. Recent changes in visa regulations and the brouhaha over Beijing's 3 billion USD loan to Ghana represent sudden shifts in China's engagement with Ghana. These shifts were perceived as reactions to Ghana's handling and subsequent deportation of illegal Chinese miners. This stands in contrast with Chinese dealings with autocracies such as Ethiopia or Angola, where Beijing gives overt support to ruling parties, even carrying out cadre exchanges and political training sessions. Second, despite Africa's political and economic diverse landscape, the approach to economic and resource relations has proven less complex for China, as it has continuously stuck to its plan to improve infrastructure and also give out loans. This approach may not seem different from what the West has done for decades in Africa; however, China continues to insist on an approach that improves African countries with little to no interference in their political economic setup. For instance, the major oil economies like Nigeria and Angola may be complex political and economic terrains to traverse, as corruption and social expectations might prove a challenging mix for an external actor. However, China's contributions through infrastructure and loans as it reiterates its "business is business" maxim

has kept it in business with the Nigerians as well as other complex, resource-based political economies. Third, as African political regimes continue to change, reaching out to the elites is central to the sustenance of Beijing's economic and diplomatic agenda in Africa. In most African polities, especially in countries lacking some level of democratic openness, such as Ethiopia and Angola, China's relationship with the elites provides a good basis for a long-lasting relationship, with the benefits of resources and markets. Whether political power can change hands or not, China has skilfully managed to either transition from the incumbent to an incoming opposition party or stay connected to the powerful elites. This has largely been accomplished while asserting its non-interference in the domestic affairs of the country. The case of President Sata in Zambia, who was anti-China in opposition and crossed over to pro-China as the winning candidate and current president of the copper-rich southern African state, is a known instance among many across the continent.

China has advocated a principle whose core tenets were aligned with the initial struggles for African political independence as depicted by the Bandung Conference in 1955 (*Review of International Affairs* 1955). Since then, post-independence Africa has been characterized by immense and unsettling changes in the political and economic landscape. These have introduced and re-introduced structures and institutions that influence relations with external actors on the continent. For these reasons, it has become evident that as the interests and situations change for the main players in this relationship – China and African states – so have the relevance and applicability of non-interference. Scholars and policy crafters should recognize these changes and perceive them as emblematic not only of structural changes in the continent's politics and economics but also of Beijing's intentions to adjust to these changes in order to secure its expanding economic interests. China will insist upon and uphold the policy of non-interference in its partnerships with African states since this sets it apart from past external actors on the continent. However, current research should recognize and address the emerging challenges and potential pitfalls to this policy, especially as Africa's politics and economics continue to evolve.

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Running Out of Time? The Evolution of Taiwan's Relations in Africa

Timothy S. RICH and Vasabjit BANERJEE

Abstract: This article highlights the precarious nature of Taiwan's diplomatic relations in Africa. Whereas Cold War rationales initially benefitted Taiwan, economic interests now appear to incentivize African countries to establish relations with China. Through qualitative and quantitative data covering much of the post-World War II era, this analysis argues that economic factors have trumped political rationales for Taiwanese–African relations. In addition, this article problematizes both conceptions of diplomatic recognition and Taiwan's enduring relations with Africa.

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Introduction

China's charm offensive throughout Africa has garnered significant attention. While once hesitant to play the role of an emerging superpower, China has joined peacekeeping missions throughout Africa, including Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), among others. Furthermore, China has tentatively supported United Nations reforms that would grant an African country a permanent seat on the Security Council (Meidan 2006). Meanwhile, less attention has been placed on the historic influence of Taiwan in the region, much less the implications of this historic influence on Africa today. Taiwan provided assistance and maintained diplomatic relations with much of Africa even as Western powers migrated towards China. Altogether 30 African countries have at one time or another maintained formal relations with Taiwan; currently, just three countries on the continent do so. This loss is largely attributable to China claiming to be the sole legitimate government of Taiwan. As such, a country could only have relations with either China or Taiwan. Taiwan's battle to maintain if not gain diplomatic allies has focused in no small part on Africa.

Despite no shifts in formal diplomatic relations since a 2008 diplomatic truce between Taiwan and China, important questions remain about Taiwan's relations across Africa. First, what factors encourage Taiwan's few African diplomatic allies to choose relations with Taibei over Beijing, especially under growing pressure to establish formal relations with China? Second, how have relations with Taibei both helped and hindered the political and economic stability of these African countries? Third, what leverage does Taiwan still have in Africa?

This article highlights the precarious nature of diplomatic relations in regards to Taiwan. Whereas battles over diplomatic recognition in decades past often focused on ideological disputes, economic factors appear to have supplanted these pressures. African relations first built upon Cold War rationales have evolved towards a convergence of economic interests that largely favour China over Taiwan. This does not, however, mean that Taiwan has no role to play in Africa as a rising China increasingly engages the continent. An analysis of African countries also highlights that comparatively weak countries are the main actors in this diplomatic battle, in stark contrast to most struggles over recognition.

We first address traditional theories and rationales behind diplomatic recognition. This is followed by an analysis of the history of Taiwanese and Chinese involvement in Africa. Through quantitative data covering much of the post-World War II era and supplemented by qualitative insights from written records, we highlight the structural factors that are influencing African relations with Taiwan; these factors potentially suggesting a reconceptualization of diplomatic recognition itself. Next, we show the ramifications of choosing to maintain relations with Taiwan over China. In conclusion, this article problematizes conceptions of diplomatic recognition and Taiwan's current relations with Africa.

Understanding Diplomatic Recognition

Diplomatic recognition itself is a reflection of state sovereignty. All three major approaches to the study of international relations – realism, liberalism and constructivism – assume sovereign states are the primary actors (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001; Toje 2010) in the international system, either alongside international organizations and multinational corporations (Russet and Oneal 2001; Gartzke 2007; Doyle 2011; Mousseau 2013), or influenced by non-governmental organizations and transnational networks of activists (Wendt 1999; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

The concept of sovereignty, however, is Janus-faced, as it refers to having both domestically accepted control of a territory (internal sovereignty) and internationally accepted control of said territory (external sovereignty). Jackson (1993) terms the Weberian exercise of exclusive authority over a population within a defined territory as "positive sovereignty". In contrast, he classifies as "negative sovereignty" that which is contingent on the acceptance of such an exclusive right by other international actors.

Furthermore, Talmon (1998) demonstrates that such acceptance of sovereignty can be either de facto, when international actors choose to conduct relations with other actors, or de jure, when international actors officially recognize a state as the sovereign representative of a population in a defined territory. Nevertheless, it is only through the accordance of de jure recognition by international actors – symbolized by diplomatic recognition – that a state becomes a full member of the international system with its consequent privileges,

such as entering into formal treaties and membership in international and regional organizations (Barkin and Cronin 1994).

Most importantly perhaps, diplomatic recognition signifies the acceptance by international actors of a state's exclusive authority over a population in a defined territory along with the right to represent that population externally (James 1999). Thus, states unable to exercise their authority within a part or all of their territory, such as Russia over Chechnya or Somalia over Somaliland and Puntland, are nevertheless acknowledged by international actors as having the exclusive right to do so.

External recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty is where its claims are the weakest, testifying to the island's precarious position. Taiwan's government clearly has internal sovereignty, especially since democratization, with supermajorities of Taiwanese identifying it as a sovereign democracy. However, Taiwan lacks formal diplomatic relations with the majority of independent countries. The island's diplomatic allies today are all comparatively weak countries. To put this into perspective, the Japanese puppet government of Manchukuo (1932–1945) received greater formal diplomatic recognition among European powers than Taiwan currently receives.

Taiwan's status is further underscored if we follow the guidelines set out by the Montevideo Convention, which outline the requirements for statehood (Council of Foreign Relations 1933). The Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan has a permanent population, regardless of whether the government claims to represent all of China or solely Taiwan. The geographic territory of the Republic of China remains partially in dispute as the antiquated ROC constitution includes all of modern-day China as well as additional territories (for example, Mongolia), yet the territory controlled by Taiwan is not in dispute. Similarly, the government of the ROC, having largely relinquished its claims to rule territories controlled by the PRC, is considered in Taiwan a legitimate government and is able to carry out the same governmental functions of other states. Taiwan's status as a state appears murkier only in the context of the fourth criterion of the Montevideo Convention: the capacity to enter into relations with other states. While the ROC has the ability to negotiate with other states, and has done so to various degrees over the past century, this capacity is partially predicated on the acceptance of other countries, normally through diplomatic recognition. Newnham (2000) asserts

that diplomatic recognition is crucial to the very definition of state sovereignty. If this is true, Taiwan is clearly in a difficult position. Although Taiwan has managed to establish informal relations with most major powers, with offices functioning as unofficial embassies, the fact that Taiwan goes to these lengths for informal relations reinforces the importance that recognition plays for a sense of sovereignty.

This is not to suggest that Taiwan's diplomatic battles are inherently unique. While there is no universal standard applied to recognition, a contagion effect appears evident in that in many cases governments are quick to recognize the government of an independent country once major powers have already done so. Some countries, such as Mexico with the Estrada Doctrine, go as far as to treat recognition as separate from moral or political judgement. That said, there is no obligation to extend diplomatic relations, as demonstrated by the number of countries that (have) withheld recognition to the Soviet Union, Spain, Israel and others for 20 years or more (Peterson 1982, 1983; Gray 2003). Ideological rationales for withholding recognition have also been common since World War II, especially in the cases of divided nations where dual recognition was rejected (for instance, East and West Germany before 1973). However, with the end of the Cold War, purely ideological rationales have fallen out of favour.

Regardless of the stated rationale, the underlying goal of a state withholding recognition has been to coerce other states to act in a manner favourable to the denying state (Peterson 1997: 3); thus, it is not surprising that such withholding has been a common *modus operandi* of powerful states. Here, Taiwan's diplomatic battle for recognition differs from most other contemporary cases in that the island has not focused its efforts on establishing and maintaining recognition among world or regional powers. Rather, Taiwan's diplomatic competition with China has, at least since 1979, largely been relegated to the underdeveloped world – mostly Africa, the Caribbean and Central America. These countries provide little in terms of security or trade to Taiwan and in many cases barely meet the qualifications for statehood themselves. Thus, whereas debates surrounding diplomatic recognition commonly focus on powerful states offering or withholding recognition to weaker powers, the recognition of Taiwan evinces a very different framework.

Taiwan's Relations in Africa

Taiwan's present relations in Africa are in part a legacy of the Cold War. Whereas the governments of Taiwan and China both previously asserted themselves the sole legitimate government of a unified China and used diplomatic allies in Africa to support their individual claims, gaining diplomatic recognition has evolved into a means for Taiwan to maintain de facto independence. Furthermore, few countries today maintain any ideological reasons to back either Taiwan or China, with the battle for recognition prior to the diplomatic truce (established in 2008) limited largely to weak states that barely meet the qualifications for sovereign entities. The diplomatic truce, under which both Taiwan and China agreed to not pursue formal relations with those recognizing the other, prevented poor countries from using the promise of diplomatic recognition as a means of extracting financial commitments from their new patron. While several countries have attempted to test the truce, notably the Gambia in 2013, no country has switched recognition since its enactment.

Several countries had no relations with either side directly after 1949, as they were presumably waiting for a final settlement (Hsiung 1972: 54–55). Meanwhile, Mao Zedong viewed newly independent countries in Africa as partners in the "struggle against imperialism" (Mao 1998). Taiwan benefitted greatly from American anti-communist efforts after the start of the Korean War, allowing the island to maintain important Western diplomatic allies. Taiwan fared particularly well in Africa, receiving recognition from 13 of 23 African countries from 1960 to 1963, compared to only five for China. Despite the competition, five countries recognized neither government in 1963: Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger and Sierra Leone (see Klein 1963: 49–50). By 1971, the year the United Nations replaced the ROC with the PRC, African countries were roughly evenly split between the two sides, with Taiwan having 20 allies and China 22. However, by 1979, the year the US switched recognition, only five of the 50 African countries recognized the ROC.

The end of the Cold War undermined the rationale for many countries to maintain relations with Taiwan. Coupled with the island's democracy, Taiwan made increased appeals for diplomatic relations based in part on democratic commonalities, while also floating the idea to third countries of dual recognition, which proved unsuccessful. To a certain extent, Taiwan's ability to attract African diplomatic

allies improved with democratization. Taiwan, which provided various forms of economic assistance to South Africa before the latter's democratization (Pickles and Woods 1989), was also able to maintain diplomatic relations with South Africa until 1998 in part due to its financial support of the African National Congress (ANC) during the 1994 elections and beyond (Davies 1998; Tseng 2008). Throughout much of the 1990s, Taiwan maintained seven to eight diplomatic allies on the continent, a figure that increased briefly to ten in 1997. Still, this boost was short-lived, declining to 1979 rates by the end of the Chen Shui-bian (Chen Shuibian) administration (2000–2008).

Taiwan's own desire for diplomatic relations, especially in Africa, has also evolved over time. While once framed in terms of maintaining a political status equal to that of China, by the late 1990s diplomatic relations served more practical purposes. Maintaining even a few diplomatic allies prevented further political isolation for Taiwan and, with the exception of the occasional scandal, enjoying diplomatic relations remained domestically popular on the island. Furthermore, China's slow re-engagement with African countries allowed Taiwan to export technical assistance (especially in the agricultural sector), build global goodwill and secure its roots in several African countries.

Despite changing political conditions and even Taiwan's own rationales for diplomatic relations, relations in Africa remained particularly unstable. Diplomatic relations both during and after the Cold War remained precarious, with countries often switching support between Taiwan and China without an explicit ideological or political rationale. This is particularly evident in Africa, with Senegal and the Central African Republic each switching five times since both originally forging diplomatic ties with Taiwan in 1962. Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, the Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia and Niger all switched diplomatic recognition two or more times. Today, only three African countries maintain relations with Taiwan: Burkina Faso, São Tomé and Príncipe and Swaziland. The last to switch recognition in China's favour include Senegal (2005), Chad (2006) and Malawi (2008); the Gambia unilaterally broke relations with Taiwan in 2013, though China has not subsequently courted that country for recognition.

The final diplomatic clash occurred in 2006 when Zambia's opposition presidential candidate Michael "King Cobra" Sata declared that he would recognize Taiwan if elected president because of China's labour policies and its closeness to Zambia's ruling party. In

response, the Chinese ambassador called a press conference to state that the Chinese were withholding investments due to Sata's remarks and threatened to break off relations with Zambia if Sata were to be elected (Brautigam 2010: 150–151). The diplomatic truce between Taiwan and China in place since 2008 even endured after the independence of South Sudan in 2011: While both Taibei and Beijing recognized the independence of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, diplomatic relations were only established between Juba and Beijing. The Gambia's unilateral breaking of relations with Taiwan in 2013 also failed to rekindle the diplomatic competition, as China refused to initiate recognition.

We do not imply that recognition necessitates a deep commitment to relations; rather, it is often a minimalist action necessary for international relations. Technically speaking, diplomatic recognition requires little more than an announcement and a document. Perhaps the easiest means to identify whether relations are more than simply an exchange of pleasantries is to identify whether both parties have established embassies within each other's capital. Those with extensive relations necessitate in-country embassies, whereas those with less important relations or limited resources can manage with accredited diplomats covering several countries in a region. To put this into perspective, Rich (2009) reported that the average number of embassies within each of 194 countries was only 44, with 33 countries having less than 10 embassies on their soil. Among African countries, the average drops to 33 embassies per country. A simple regression of the number of embassies in African countries with one independent variable (log of area in square kilometers) leaves us with the unsurprising finding that area highly correlates with number of embassies ($p < .001$), with an adjusted R^2 of .3096 (N=51).

Even when ideological rationales do not underpin diplomatic relations, economic interests can provide insight. China–Africa relations historically fluctuated from engagement, largely along ideological lines, to indifference (Large 2008; Van Ness 1998). China's ideological support for African leaders was not limited just to its conflict with Taiwan, as China's assistance in efforts in both Mozambique and Angola to combat Soviet-backed organizations suggests (Yu 1988; Snow 1998).

However, after the end of the anti-colonial and postcolonial conflicts, China rededicated itself to relations with African countries to

counter its diplomatic isolation in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. The Chinese foreign minister visited approximately 14 African countries between 1989 and 1991 to reaffirm ties (Tull 2006: 460–461; Taylor 2004). China's rise as an economic superpower has given Beijing greater incentives for a more enduring and substantial involvement on the continent. Though evidence of economic rationales influencing diplomatic recognition exists elsewhere (Pfannestiel 2003; Kahler and Kastner 2006), it is most explicit in the Taiwan–China battle. Taiwan has long provided official development assistance (ODA) to developing nations, many of whom have suggested such aid influenced their decisions to keep up diplomatic relations with the island (Lynch 2003). Claims of "dollar diplomacy" or "checkbook diplomacy" often follow. In Africa alone, Taiwan granted Niger a 50 million USD loan in 1992 shortly before it was recognized there and 35 million USD in assistance to the Gambia in 1995, more than all other donors to the latter country combined that year. Niger switched back to recognizing the PRC in 1996. Beijing accused Taibei of offering São Tomé and Príncipe 30 million USD in aid in exchange for recognition in 1997, with Taibei making similar claims about Beijing's 100 million USD assistance package to Guinea-Bissau in 1998 (Rawnsley 2000: 32).

The evolution of China's interest in Africa problematizes Taiwan's efforts to deepen relations. Crucial to China's continued economic development is access to energy inputs, especially oil and metals. Since the early 1990s, the first trip made each year by the PRC's minister of foreign affairs has been to an African country, symbolizing the importance of China–Africa relations. China further strengthened its ties with the continent through the creation of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 and the founding of the China–Africa Development Fund (CAD) in 2007. Within one year, the CAD granted over 90 million USD to projects in Africa and subsequently invested an additional 5 billion USD in the short term (China Development Bank 2009).

The PRC has also offered various assistance packages to African countries if the latter recognize the PRC, or at least ignore Taiwan's efforts to switch recognition, leaders in Beijing – before the diplomatic truce – having been increasingly confident that African holdouts would eventually come their way (Wang 2001: 732). In 2004 China presented the first major alternative to an International Monetary

Fund bailout, by offering cash-strapped Angola with a nearly identically sized aid package without restraints. By 2006 China had offered an additional 9 billion USD loan to the country. Similarly, a 2008 agreement provided 9 billion USD to the DRC for far-reaching investment in exchange for millions of tonnes of copper and cobalt. This "Chinese Marshall Plan" probably altered Sino-Africa relations to the effect that recognizing Taiwan became increasingly less attractive for African countries (Jiang 2009). Not surprisingly, African exports to China more than doubled from 2006 to 2008 alone, with 32 African countries clearly benefitting in terms of net gain in earnings from exports to China (George 2009: 97). While the actual amount of Chinese aid to Africa is often misreported (see Brautigam 2010), the increased economic ties are evident.

The Decision to Recognize Taiwan

Though Cold War ideological frameworks have lost saliency, economic conditions may provide greater insight. Those states with few exports logically should be the most willing to recognize the ROC, as the appeal of access to China's market should be weaker. As economic relations do not occur in a vacuum, non-economic rationales require consideration. For example, a sense of democratic solidarity could lead to higher recognition for Taiwan in the post-Cold War era. Taiwan may be viewed as a political model to follow, cultivating an image as an "exporter of democracy". Even if Taiwan's democratic status does not directly influence other states, democracies may find breaking relations with Taiwan more difficult than authoritarian regimes might (Larus 2008). However, corrupt authoritarian governments also may view the recognition of Taiwan as an effective means to strengthen their position, especially if it is combined with economic assistance from the island. For example, while the absolute monarchy of King Mswati III in Swaziland has long left the country a pariah state in international politics, Swaziland maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan, which donated 300,000 USD worth of computers as well as over half that amount in rice to that country in 2012 (*AllAfrica.com* 2012). A cursory view of the few Taiwan-recognizing countries worldwide suggests that size may be a factor, as smaller countries are less likely to lack the natural resources China desires. One would also assume that states comparatively geographically dis-

tant from the PRC would be more insulated from Beijing's push for recognition.

To analyse the potential factors influencing diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, we employ a Probit model with a dichotomous dependent variable (1=recognition of the ROC) using data from 1960 through 2007 (Table 1). While diplomatic recognition data is available as far back as 1950, economic data, unfortunately, is not. We rely on Rich (2009) for both the data and model specification, and focus our attention solely on Africa. This data provides the most comprehensive means for us to address the economic influences on diplomatic relations and to control for other potential influences consistent with ideological or historical claims. A time-series set covering much of the period of the diplomatic battle between the ROC and PRC further helps us avoid taking a myopic view of relations at a particular point in time and misattributing the foundation of such relations based on the statements made by representatives of the particular countries.

To capture level of democracy, we use Polity IV Scores, which range from -10 (most authoritarian) to 10 (most democratic). Unfortunately, Polity does not include any country with a population of less than 500,000, which, if smaller countries are more likely to recognize the ROC, may bias the statistical results – Cape Verde, Seychelles and São Tomé and Príncipe are thus excluded. In contrast, Freedom House scores every country, but is only available for the past four decades and would therefore not cover much of the early switching of diplomatic recognition. To identify whether a given country's similarities with Taiwan's politics influenced relations (for example, both being democracies), we also include the absolute difference between Taiwan's Polity IV score and that of the African country. In terms of economic variables, we include exports as a percentage of GDP, available from the World Bank. Three control variables are also included: the size of the country in square kilometers (in thousands, available from *The World Factbook* (CIA n.d.)), the distance between a country's capital and Beijing (in kilometers, available from Kristian Gleditsch's dataset on distances between capital cities) and a dummy variable for whether the year was during the Cold War (–1991).

Table 1: Probit Models of Diplomatic Recognition of Taiwan, 1960–2007

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Polity Scores			0.0087	0.0106
Polity Difference				
Area (k²)	-0.0001	0.0004	-0.0001	0.0004
Cold War	0.4849***	0.0921	0.5286***	0.1074
Distance From Beijing	0.0006***	0.0002	0.0006***	0.0002
Exports as % GDP	-0.0108**	0.0044	-0.0109**	0.0044
Recognition (t-1)				
Constant	-8.2928***	2.0986	-8.3465***	2.1502
N	2040		1984	
Pseudo R²	0.1218		0.1244	
	Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Polity Scores	0.0089	0.0107	-0.0074	0.0136
Polity Difference	-0.0013	0.0105	0.0392**	0.0152
Area (k²)	-0.0001	0.0004	0.000	0.0001
Cold War	0.5234***	0.1155	0.3388*	0.1676
Distance From Beijing	0.0006***	0.0002	0.0002*	0.0001
Exports as % GDP	-0.011*	0.0045	-0.0054	0.0045
Recognition (t-1)			3.4446***	0.1433
Constant	-8.3339***	2.154	-4.6075***	0.9382
N	1984		1954	
Pseudo R²	0.1244		0.6949	

Note: ***p<.05, **p<.01, *p<.001.
Source: Authors' own compilation.

Since Polity does not assign values to countries with populations under 500,000, Model 1 includes only exports and the control variables. Here, exports as a percentage of GDP negatively correlate with recognition of Taiwan, while geographic distance from Beijing as well as the dummy variable for the Cold War era positively correlate with recognition, all at .01 or stronger. Thus, even controlling for the Cold War era, which in some respects could be viewed as artificially inflating the number of Taiwan's diplomatic allies, the negative correlation between a country's exports and recognition of Taiwan is evident. Model 2 adds Polity scores for the African countries, while Model 3 also includes the absolute difference in Polity scores between Taiwan and the African country. Yet, these inclusions fail to change the core findings of the original model. In other words, the evidence does not support claims that Taiwan's relationships in Africa are based on democratic solidarity or similarities in regime type.

Finally, to capture the relative stability of relations from year to year (referring to the fact that a country that recognizes Taiwan in Year t is likely to have recognized them the year before, t-1), we included a lagged dependent variable in Model 4. While the Cold War and distance from Beijing still reach statistical significance, exports do not. These findings suggest that diplomatic recognition, even under conditions amenable to dollar diplomacy, remains fairly sticky as countries are unlikely to switch frequently within a short period of time. This suggests that economic factors are long-term trends and not simply the result of short-term changes in a country's exports. Of particular interest is that the absolute difference in Polity scores does reach statistical significance at .01, with a coefficient that appears counterintuitive: As the differences between Taiwan and African countries increase, recognition of the ROC is more likely. Additional tests show that this pattern is consistent during the Cold War and in both Taiwan's authoritarian and democratic eras, in stark contrast to claims that Taiwan's democratization allowed it to hold onto allies.

As a last measure, two additional controls were included: a dummy variable for Ethiopia and for Swaziland. Ethiopia never had relations with the ROC, while Swaziland never had relations with the PRC. Rerunning Models 1–4 with these additions produces largely consistent results (regressions omitted for brevity). In Models 1–3, no statistically significant change occurred. Unsurprisingly, the Swaziland variable was strongly correlated with recognition of the ROC (.001),

yet the Ethiopia variable failed to reach statistical significance. For Model 4, the inclusion of these two dummy variables reduced the statistical significance of the absolute difference in Polity scores to .03, while the Cold War variable was no longer significant at .05 (p=0.079). Overall, the findings here regarding relations between African countries and Taiwan largely mirror the broader patterns in Taiwan's diplomatic relations shown by Rich (2009).

Considering that Probit models are not linear and thus the coefficients cannot be interpreted similarly to OLS models, the findings in Table 1 require further elaboration. Predicted probabilities generated from Model 4 give greater insight. Holding the other variables at their mean and varying only the Cold War variable reaffirms expectations. The likelihood of an African country recognizing Taiwan during the Cold War was 7.89 per cent, compared to only 4.75 per cent post-Cold War. Varying the exports as a percentage of the GDP also highlights the distinction during and after the Cold War. With exports at 2 per cent of GDP (the minimum within Africa during the timeframe), countries were predicted to recognize Taiwan at a rate of 10.56 per cent during the Cold War, but only 5.6 per cent after. At the other extreme, exports at 136 per cent of GDP, African countries were predicted to recognize Taiwan at a measly 2.39 and 1.02 per cent, respectively. The findings here reaffirm that economic factors, even during an era of ideological appeals, appear to influence the recognition of Taiwan among African countries.

More enlightening is the distinction of the absolute difference in Polity scores between the two eras. At the mean Polity difference (6), the likelihood of recognizing Taiwan differed from 8.09 per cent during the Cold War to 4.88 per cent afterwards. The distinctions are similarly clear at the extremes: Where Taiwan and the African country had the same Polity score (and thus an absolute difference of zero), the predicted probability that the African country recognized Taiwan was only 5.7 per cent during the Cold War, dropping to 3.31 per cent after 1991. At the other extreme (a 19-point difference in Polity scores), the predicted probability of recognizing Taiwan reaches 15.74 per cent during the Cold War, but only 10.34 per cent later. These counter-intuitive findings suggest that Taiwan's ability to maintain allies had little to do with similarities in political systems.

Reducing the sample to just those who switched recognition from the previous year, while maintaining the same independent vari-

ables, the influence of the Cold War and Polity scores are again apparent (regressions omitted for space). Predicted probabilities holding all other independent variables at their mean show a 1.79 per cent likelihood of a country switching from China to Taiwan during the Cold War, a rate that drops to 0.09 per cent in the post-Cold War period. Again, Taiwan fared better when the other country was less similar to itself. Using the absolute difference in Polity scores, the probability of an African country switching recognition to Taiwan was only 1.17 per cent during the Cold War and .058 per cent post-Cold War for those with the same Polity score as Taiwan (absolute difference of zero), whereas at an absolute difference of 19, the probability of switching to Taiwan reached 4.54 per cent during the Cold War and 2.57 per cent post-Cold War.

Several implications emerge from these findings. First, if increased exports do in fact incentivize the recognition of the PRC, then Taiwan would seem to have little incentive to provide African countries assistance to promote export-oriented growth. Not only is this ironic based on Taiwan's own path to industrialization, but it would suggest an uncomfortable decision for Taibei: Provide aid which may not best serve African recipients, or provide assistance that promotes export growth, which may ultimately push the recipient towards Beijing. It is unlikely that Taiwanese officials or African recipients ever identified such an explicit link. Still, the statistical pattern suggests enduring relations with Taiwan may come at an economic cost.

Second, the empirical analysis is consistent with the growing influence of China, but says little about the substance of PRC–Africa relations. The increasing amounts of Chinese aid and investment are without dispute (Pehnelt 2007; McLaughlin 2005; Brautigam 2010). Debates endure regarding whether China's efforts to secure natural resources are a form of neocolonialism (Zweig and Bi 2005; Frynas and Paulo 2006; Melber 2007) whereby China is simply repeating the colonial-era exploitation of resource-rich areas of Africa, albeit without political control, and paying lip service (if that) to a deeper, mutually beneficial relationship. The results, however, contrast with views that Chinese interests are centred only around natural resources. While over three-quarters of African exports to China originate from oil-rich Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville and Sudan (IMF 2005; Hanson 2008), Chinese companies

have expanded rapidly in 49 countries across the continent, numbering over 2,000 by 2012 (see Alden 2007: 14; Cheng 2012).

Furthermore, the diplomatic truce established in 2008 prevents countries from essentially offering diplomatic recognition to the highest bidder, a game which, as China's economy grows, Taiwan simply could not expect to compete in. The truce also ended a self-perpetuating cycle of diplomatic shifts. Previously, each diplomatic loss to "dollar diplomacy" simply freed up money to be spent attempting to lure away another country. Aid was often increased to Taiwan's loyal diplomatic allies after the latter "lost" a country to China. For example, aid intended for Malawi was given to Swaziland in 2008 after Malawi switched recognition months before the diplomatic truce (*AllAfrica.com* 2012). Yet, it remains unclear as to whether the truce or the so-called "Chinese Marshall Plan" has frozen in place existing Taiwan–Africa relations or simply created fewer avenues for Taiwanese influence on the continent.

Last, the findings conflict with arguments claiming that Taiwan's democratization has helped maintain diplomatic relations. Empirical evidence suggests that diplomatic recognition of Taiwan among African countries is more likely when the two political systems differ greatly. As such, Taiwan again is in a precarious position: To encourage democratic reforms in Africa appears to also encourage a switch in recognition to China. Again, this is not to suggest that Taiwanese officials intentionally discourage reforms, but that the recognizing African state is unlikely to have similar goals related to the recognition.

Concluding Remarks

This paper provides a mixed-methods approach to viewing Taiwan–Africa relations. As with other areas of the developing world, much of Africa has been wooed by China's "charm offensive". While the diplomatic truce may have prevented Taiwan from losing its three remaining diplomatic allies on the continent, Taiwan is not necessarily destined to lose out to Chinese interests. Potential backlash to Chinese investment may still push an African country to unilaterally break diplomatic relations with Beijing, a possibility that would provide a serious challenge to maintaining the truce and give Taiwan the opportunity to develop greater informal, if not formal, relations with

the given country. Similarly, Taiwan may focus on specific aid niches that either complement Chinese strategies in Africa or at least fly under the radar of Beijing officials. Taiwan could also establish informal offices throughout more of Africa, much like the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Offices (TECRO). Currently, the only African nation with a TECRO office is South Africa. While expanding formal diplomatic relations is unlikely, one should be hesitant to assume that Taiwan is quickly becoming locked out of Africa. Simply put, economic diplomacy offers Taiwan options to expand its role in international relations where formal diplomatic recognition is unlikely.

Taiwan's historical relations with African countries further highlight theoretical blind spots in the literature on diplomatic recognition. Whereas much of the literature remains focused on major countries recognizing smaller ones, the Taiwan case emphasizes the role of smaller political powers and in the process presents a narrative where African countries have greater agency. This analysis suggests greater attention be placed on our conceptions and rationales for diplomatic relations, especially as globalization arguably erodes the importance of states as the main actors in international relations. The dual forces of economic globalization and the rise of the PRC as a political and economic powerhouse present clear challenges to Taiwan's diplomatic efforts. Yet, while these forces create greater incentives for African countries to pursue relations with China and even challenge the diplomatic truce, economic globalization also increases connections between Taiwan and China in areas where political diplomacy has largely failed. Ultimately, this analysis highlights the growing role of economic interests rather than ideological commitments in Taiwan's diplomacy.

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Invisible Body and the Predicaments of Existence in an Urbanizing China

Meiqin WANG

Abstract: This article contextualises the art practice of Beijing-based artist Liu Bolin and examines ways in which his artworks illuminate the sociopolitical conditions that regulate the everyday reality of under-privileged social groups amid China's spectacular urban transformation in the 2000s. The tension between individual existence and the force of urbanization underlays Liu's most important work, entitled *Hiding in the City*. This performance photographic series, in which Liu covered his body thoroughly with paint so that he "disappeared" into the background, was initiated as a response towards the demolition of an artist village in Beijing where the artist resided and worked. The series has since been developed into an ambitious and years-long project in which the artist surveys the disparate urban living environment of the city, bringing to the surface dominant forces that render the existence of the individuals "invisible".

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Introduction

A hallmark development in the history of contemporary Chinese art has been the officialisation of unofficial art, a category referred to as avant-garde art, underground art, or experimental art, depending on the occasions in which it is presented. The 2000 Shanghai Biennale marked the beginning point, when photography, video, film, and installation artworks (mediums that officialdom deemed to be inappropriate in the realm of high art) were exhibited in the state-owned Shanghai Museum of Art (Hou 2002; Berghuis 2004; Wang 2009). The climax of this new trend was the founding of the first Chinese Pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2003, in which the cultural authority exclusively featured two contemporary mediums: installation and film (Wang 2009). After 2003, there was an explosion of artist villages in major cities across China, which was partially facilitated by the rise of culture industry, a new policy initiated by the Chinese central government in 2002 (CASS 2002; Wu 2002). This policy emphasizes exploring economic potentials in the cultural field and encourages regional official administrators to cultivate local cultures and transform them into economic capitals (CASS 2002). With the tremendous financial and reputational success that a few Chinese artists who reside in artist villages have made in the international art world, contemporary Chinese art has become a valuable cultural asset and the artist village has now assumed an important role, along with the rising cultural industry.

Suojia Artist Village was born out of such a context. It was an artist colony in the northeastern outskirts of Beijing, consisting of several rows of warehouse-like studios in a walled compound. In 2001, a Beijing agriculture-related company leased the land where the compound stood from the Suojia Village authority (Zhao 2005; Li 2009). In 2004, amid the wave of speculation on contemporary Chinese art, the company constructed large artist studios and sub-leased them out to artists. This was the beginning of the Suojia Artist Village, which was given the formal name of Beijing International Art Camp by some ambitious and globally minded artists who were among the first to move in (Li 2009). Many of them not only worked but also lived in their studios. This was the very location where Liu Bolin began his practice as a contemporary multi-media artist. The

present article[1] brings Liu's art practice into context and examines ways in which his artworks illuminate the sociopolitical conditions that regulate the everyday reality of underprivileged social groups amid China's spectacular urban transformation in the 2000s.

The Demolition of Suojia Artist Village and Liu Bolin's Performance Photography

Liu Bolin's earliest and most important art project, *Hiding in the City*, originally entitled *Urban Camouflage*, is a performance photographic series that centres on the complex social landscapes of Beijing, the capital and one of the most rapidly urbanising cities in China. This series provides a unique way for the artist to integrate his personal experience as a migrant artist working in the city, as well as to interrogate the conditions of existence of disenfranchised social groups in a rapidly changing society. His migrant identity is a result of his choice to leave an official institution in his hometown in Shandong province and come to Beijing to work independently as a professional artist. In *Hiding in the City No. 2 – Suo Jia Village* (2005, Figure 1), standing in front of a half-dismantled building with debris scattered around, Liu is painted into his surroundings: covering himself from top to toe with the colours and shapes of the background, he dissolves into the background and becomes almost invisible. A photo is taken after hours of painting on the artist's body. This photograph is at once a documentation of the performance and the end product of his artistic creation. The project combines painting, photograph, and performance and involves Liu's artistic vision, plan, and his and his assistants' painting skills. Equally important is his sense of space and of the human body within it, which has undoubtedly derived from his training background in sculpture (Tarocco 2008: 16). The early pieces of this series were a direct response to the enforced demolition of a

row of studio complex in Suojia Artist Village where Liu worked as a
studio assistant for a renowned sculptor.

Figure 1: *Hiding in the City No. 2 – Suo Jia Village*, photograph, 126x160 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2005.

At first glance, Liu Bolin's performance looks like an attempt to inte-
grate himself into the surroundings. However, Liu himself argues
otherwise: "I do not melt into the environment; on the contrary, I
believe that I am encroached by the environment" (Liu 2008a: 8).
Through the performing act that makes him disappear, he reveals the
power of the engulfing environment. In the meantime, Liu's camou-
flage can also be seen as an act of self-protection: he voluntarily
blends himself into the environment so he can spare himself from
further damaging forces. This is an act of self-mutation, similar to
that which many insects and animals do by camouflaging into their
natural environment when threatened. This explains the work's origin-
al title: *Urban Camouflage*. As a migrant in Beijing, facing the sudden
loss of his work place where he also lived and realising his inability to

change things, Liu Bolin metaphorically hides himself into the urban structures of the city to protect himself from further harm. This protection can only be symbolic, however, as Liu once wrote: "In human society, it is not enough to hide in order to make oneself safe" (Liu 2008b: 32). Nonetheless, the symbolic disappearance serves as a strategy through which the artist copes with his adverse reality and expresses his sense of powerless and vulnerability.

Liu Bolin's inspiration of this performance series came from an unfortunate event. Early in the morning of 15 November 2005, a few artists in Suojia Artist Village were woken by unusual noises outside. They then saw that a dismantling team with bulldozers sent by the district court was getting ready to tear down studios, accompanied by more than a hundred police (Wang 2010). While artists here had received an official enforcement notification from the court more than five months earlier announcing the decision to demolish, many were still hopeful about the matter since they were told that their landlord company was in the process of appealing to the local authority (Zhao 2005). Upon receiving the official notice, some moved out, but others decided to stay and watch, hoping that the increasing media coverage of their situation and protest would convince the decision makers to have second thoughts (Zhao 2005). To their dismay, they watched as a whole row of studios was torn apart in front of their eyes over two days.

This is not another story of Chinese authorities cracking down on contemporary Chinese artists on the ideological and political front due to their alternative artistic vision. If there were an ideology involved, it would be an economic and managerial one, related to the Beijing municipal government's general effort to reclaim underused rural land for highly profitable urban development projects in the wake of commercialised urbanisation since the 1990s (Cartier 2001; Ho and Lin 2004). For that purpose, a tighter regulation was implemented to rule out illegitimate land use. According to the official enforcement notice, the reason for demolishing the artist village was that the buildings in this studio compound were constructed and used illegally since the company that owned it had not applied to the city authority for the necessary construction permit (Zhao 2005). However, the artists were not informed about the illegality of their studios (Zhao 2005; Li 2009). When the artists found out what had been going on, they protested and appealed to the authority, hoping that

the growing cultural significance of the artist village, with many famous artists as its occupants, would spare the compound from demolition. Their efforts seemed to work temporarily. The demolition decision was suspended for a couple of months, but eventually reenacted (Zhao 2005; Li 2009).

Out of frustration and anger, on 27 November 2005, eleven days after the demolition, art curators Zhao Shulin, Huang Yao, and Zhang Zhaohui organised an exhibition titled "Chai, chai! chai?" (拆，拆！拆?, Demolition, demolition! demolition?) (Li 2009; Wang 2010b). Artists hung their works along the dilapidated building. The show was a spontaneous protest by many artists who either had had their studios dismantled or lived in other buildings of the compound to witness the disheartening process. It was in this exhibition that Liu Bolin made his first appearance. His performance photographs attracted immediate attention among curators and artists and *Hiding in the City No. 2 – Suo Jia Village* was used as the poster image for advertising the show (Li 2009; Wang 2010b). His relatively innovative approach to art and the relevance of the message expressed by his work seemed to fit well with the purpose of the exhibition. He quickly became known among artistic communities. People were surprised by the sudden emergence of this young artist, whose art seemed to process a high level of maturity (Li 2009).

Inventing the "Invisible Man"

It is time to take a quick look at the bigger picture of the contemporary Chinese art scene in Beijing within which Liu Bolin acquires his inspiration, conception and methodology of art making. Contemporary Chinese art began to take off in the 1990s, when China was becoming more proactive in pursuing economic growth and material abundance. A more relaxed political environment and an increasingly commercialised society facilitated the circulation of ideas such as artistic freedom and individualism, while a rapidly changing society provided enough new social and cultural phenomena that prompted artists to take on as the subject matter of their artistic exploration (Gao 1997, 2005; Wu 1999, 2000). In the meantime, however, the lack of necessary institutional and public support also characterised the development of contemporary Chinese art of the 1990s, a residual legacy of the official hostility towards the avant-garde art movement

in the 1980s (Andrews and Gao 1995; Gao 1997). In 1989, the Chinese minister of culture issued a decree to prohibit artworks in contemporary media such as installation and performance to exhibit in public museums. This decree remained in place for most of the following decade (Van Dijk 1992; Gao 2005; Wang 2009).

Such were the circumstances for contemporary art practice when Liu Bolin spent his formative years studying sculpture. Born 1973 in the city of Binzhou in the Shandong province, he graduated in 1995 with a bachelor's degree in sculpture at Shandong Academy of Arts in Jinan. Four years later, he was admitted to the graduate school at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing under the tutelage of Sui Jianguo, a mid-career sculptor who had pioneered the transformation of academic and realistic sculpture into experimental and conceptual art. After receiving his MFA in 2001, Liu Bolin went back to his home province and taught sculpture at Shandong Academy of Arts for a couple of years. Without totally settling down there, he accepted an offer from his former advisor Sui Jianguo to work for him as one of his studio assistants (Li 2009). In May 2005, Liu arrived in Beijing to begin his new job. He worked and lived in Sui's studio, which happened to be located in one of the newly emerged artist colonies: the Suojia Artist Village. Artist Li Jianzhang provides a vivid description of what the colony was like during its prime:

> For people who have never being to the Suojia Artist Village, its heyday is hard to imagine. Back then, there were plenty of big names [famous artists] as well as art galleries here. At the front of each studio there would be a group of people, either drinking tea or haranguing each other. Wandering crowds could be seen everywhere around the entire district: they came in twos or threes or more as they visited various galleries and passed in and out of every open studio. The liveliness and prosperity was almost comparable to that on the eve of the Olympics in 798 [also known as 798 Factory, one of the many artist colonies that had transformed into a famous art district and official tourist site by 2008] (Li 2009).

There were more than a hundred artists in this colony, many of whom were well-known in China. This booming art scene must have excited and inspired Liu Bolin. In an interview he reflected on the vastly different atmosphere between the time when he was studying in Beijing and the time when he came back:

> I have never seen such big studios in Jinan [the city where he taught] and they were beyond my imagination […] it was utterly different from the time when I left Beijing. There were rows and rows of artist studios, there were even art galleries in the village, and so many artists were making art there. It felt like heaven (Li 2009).

Liu found himself arriving at the heart of a thriving contemporary art scene, which had just entered into a period that could be termed "the age of artist villages and big studios" (Wang 2010). The overwhelming optimism, boosted by the thriving international art market for contemporary Chinese art (Vogel 2006; Ebony 2006; Elegant 2006), had motivated many young artists and art graduates to leave their hometown for Beijing, or to stay if they had graduated from an art school in the city, joining the army of migrant artists. Here they expected to be better informed about current trends of contemporary art; build up connections with leading art critics, curators and galleries; and, of course, achieve greater success more quickly. Artists streamed into Beijing and artist migration characterised the formation of the artist population there (Wang 2010a). They often rented large studios and filled up artist villages across Beijing, as the thriving art market had convinced many artists that renting a big studio in an artist village was a necessary investment because it made a strong statement that the artist was seriously engaged with his or her art (Wang 2010; Wang 2010a). For young artists who had yet to be able to make such investments, working for an established artist provided an alternative to be in an artist village. This was a time when many Chinese artists, boosted by generous funding from domestic and international galleries and museums, were making ever-larger art projects and needed a lot of studio assistants. Liu Bolin apparently followed the second path and was excited to be living and working in the Suojia Artist Village until its demolition half a year later (Li 2009).

Many established artists could easily move to one of the plentiful nearby artist villages. For Liu, it could have been traumatic, since not long ago he thought Suojia Village was an ideal place for art making. When his boss's studio was torn down, Liu temporarily lost his place of work and sleep. His response to the devastating situation was swift and artistically inspiring. Two days' after the demolition, he inaugurated his performance photography series *Hiding in the City*, which expressed his utmost dismay and sense of vulnerability. Robin Visser,

in her study of Beijing urban aesthetics in the mid-1990s, adopted the concept of "spaces of disappearance" to refer to the creative response and aesthetic resistance of a number of cultural professionals including avant-garde artists facing the construction boon in the city (Visser 2004). Liu's art seems to continue this tradition of inventing "spaces of disappearance" as a creative form of resistance. Through demonstrating a virtual disappearance, he silently protests the real dominant social force that practically renders his existence "invisible".

Liu's performance photography received immediate acclaim in the contemporary art circle of Beijing, where artists, curators, critics, and galleries abounded. Many were surprised at his sudden emergence. Indeed, he had not made himself known to the contemporary art circles, either when he was a sculpture student or when he worked as a studio assistant. However, living in one of the most thriving artist villages and working for an established sculptor certainly exposed him to the most cutting-edge trends and thoughts of contemporary art. In an interview, Liu stressed that he was already in the middle of conceiving an art project to express his experience as an "unknown" and "invisible" migrant living in a fast-developing urban society, before the demolition of the artist village took place (Li 2009). He had actually already done some preliminary research and preparation, which explains why he was able to materialise his conception only two days after the demolition. Furthermore, he attributed his successful implementation of his ideas in early pieces of *Hiding in the City* to many discussions he had with Sui Jianguo, his former advisor and then boss (Li 2009).

In the meantime, as discussed earlier, the climate has become conducive for new Chinese art and new artistic expressions. On one hand, the Chinese cultural authority was investing more and more in promoting contemporary art in an effort to take ownership of this dynamic component of contemporary Chinese culture, for various reasons (Berghuis 2004; Wang 2009). On the other hand, the international demand for contemporary art from China seemed to be increasing constantly, with a seemingly insatiable demand for new artworks (Vogel 2006; Ebony 2006; Elegant 2006). Domestically, art dealers from China and abroad established numerous art galleries and primate museums in major cities. These new exhibition spaces were eager to display new art that had yet to find a place in the state-

funded exhibition spaces or cultural programs. Consequently, there were plenty of opportunities for young artists to exhibit their art. In the case of Liu Bolin, a positive reception at the "Chai, chai! chai?" exhibition encouraged him to continue exploring the potential of combining performance art, painting and staged photography and using his body as the medium for art making. He soon began working as an independent artist dedicated to the ongoing series *Hiding in the City* and, from the second half of 2006, he started participating in many exhibitions staged at the 798 Factory (Serpotta 2008: 107; Li 2009). He became known as the "invisible man" as his "invisible body" performed throughout Beijing against a wide range of urban settings.

Engaging Other "Invisible Bodies"

The personal frustration that Liu Bolin endured as a migrant artist living in Beijing became the source of his artistic experiment and put him on the map of contemporary art. Importantly, Liu did not stop with the predicament that he experienced personally as an artist in a city where unprecedented opportunities existed side by side with unpredictable stresses. Instead, he became preoccupied with the process of urbanisation in China and the "interstices between freedom and control, expression and silence, the individual and the communal, presence and invisibility" (Tarocco 2008: 14). Starting with the distressing experience inflicted upon the artist village, he soon went beyond and embarked on an ambitious project that aimed to explore the complex urban environment of Beijing and its spatial and social relationships that have shaped the conditions of existence as well as experiences of many other "invisible men". These included laid-off workers, migrant workers, and other poor urban dwellers in Beijing, many of whom he encountered personally. Nationwide, Chinese urban transformations have contributed to an alarmingly widening gap between the rich and poor (Liu et al. 2003; Roberts and Kanaley 2006), which was already in place since its adoption of the market economy (Hanser 2004; Zhao and Belk 2008). This inequality and increasing urban poverty are being produced particularly in major cities, where urban expansion and construction characterise their economic activities and the transformation of the urban landscape (Cartier 2002; Visser 2004; Broudehoux 2007). Beijing seems to ex-

emplify this process, especially with the spectacular architectural projects built there for the Olympics, which displaced many urban dwellers from old communities in the city centre (Visser 2004; Broudehoux 2007: 389). Furthermore, "construction for the Olympics has also triggered a dramatic rise in property prices, making it less affordable for people to live near the city center" (Broudehoux 2007: 389). Left with no choice, many people had to relocate to urban peripheries where migrant artists usually congregated, offering many contemporary artists first-hand experience of the problems of urban development. As such, the "invisible body", an artistic invention of Liu Bolin, found its solid social foundation in the urban reality of Beijing.

Hiding in the City No. 17 – People's Policeman (2006, Figure 2) is a sarcastic portrayal of the relationship between people and "people's policeman" – the appellation for Chinese police, even though, in reality, people's policemen often do not work on the side of the people (the majority commoners). In this piece, a policeman, the agent of state power, dressed in his solemn uniform, is covering up the eyes of the artist who is seated on a chair. The body of the policeman appears to penetrate that of the disappearing artist – the encroaching environment that the artist refers in this scenario is the state power. The image highlights the tension between individual freedom promised by a growing consumer society and continuous social control over individuals through such state mechanisms as policing and national policies. In particular, the experience of encountering police constitutes a bitter collective memory of migrant artists who have lived in an artist village in Beijing, as many of them have experienced being randomly questioned, expelled, or even detained and their exhibitions being intervened or cancelled by the police (Feng 2003; Yang 2007; Li 2009). Furthermore, blindfolding the subject says a lot about the changing practice of policing in China in the past two decades when police were constantly deployed to secure home evictions, neighbourhood demolitions and land confiscations for urban construction. It is undeniable that there has been a growing distrust among Chinese people towards the authority and its policing – a system that has been increasingly seen as the state or local governmental machinery that functions to cover up truth from the public, collaborate with the powerful and wealthy, and persecute the poor and powerless (Yang 2010; Chang 2013; Bristow 2011).

Figure 2: *Hiding in the City No. 17 – People's Policeman*, photograph, 160x100.2 cm

In 2006, at a major exhibition in 798 Factory, Liu participated with his *Hiding in the City No. 18 – Laid Off 706* (2006, Figure 3). This work features several Beijing residents who were once employees of a factory in the same architectural complex where 798 Factory is now – this whole area used to be a state-owned arsenal factory – during the planned economy era, but were laid off during the nationwide market reform and economic restructuring in the 1990s. Six former 706 Factory workers line up against the wall of the deserted factory space that once provided them job security. Still in their work uniform, the pale and ghostly presence of these figures reminds insider viewers of the past glory of this former state enterprise and its inevitable fading out from history, taking with it the hopes of people whose labour once enlivened the banal room. The legacy of Communism is occasionally

visible in Beijing as represented by the large characters on the walls in old buildings that temporarily survived the wave of urban demolition and reconstruction. Austere slogans such as the one painted high above on the wall, reading "The force at the core leading our cause forward is the Chinese Communist Party", used to play a dominant role in mobilising Chinese people for high productivity. But these no longer carry meaning in a city that opens itself for global capitalism and is in the midst of a rapid transformation into a fully-fledged consumer society. The Communist Party has found new causes to lead in a capitalist economy and the old causes have been abandoned, together with its former supporters. As Anne-Marie Broudehoux sharply put it, "the Communist Party that once fought alongside the workers against capitalist exploitation is now supporting the capitalists in their struggle against the workers" (2007: 391).

Figure 3: *Hiding in the City No. 18 – Laid Off 706*, photograph, 160x130.3 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2006.

In a magazine review essay, Liu Bolin shared an anecdote involved in the making of this piece (Xia 2011). With some effort, he located these former 706 Factory workers who were now in their 50s and all without a formal job. Depending on a small state pension, some had to take care of their elderly parents and still support the education of their children. Most of them shared an apartment of 20 square meters with their single child without any prospect of purchasing an affordable home in the near future due to the skyrocketing property prices in Beijing. Liu Bolin was deeply touched by their hardship and wished to speak for them through his art. He invited them for a meeting and told them his intention. They rejected him, asking questions such as: What are you up to? What if this raises social controversy? and What if we are laughed at by foreigners? It was only after half a month of persuasion that Liu was finally able to convince the former workers that his art was meant only to raise social awareness of their problem rather than create new problems. On the day of the exhibition opening, the six former workers dressed up in their old work unit and shoes, which they had kept all this time, and teamed up against the wall. Liu Bolin, assisted by his three painter friends, painted on the workers until they "disappeared" into the dilapidated walls. The work attracted a lot of visitors and was selected by the exhibition review committee as the most innovative and humanistic piece of the exhibition (Xia 2011). According to Liu, the most satisfying experience came when he was later told by these participants that some local officials had been motivated by this piece to start resolving the hardship of workers laid off from the 706 Factory. In this case, an artistic intervention of the social problem has produced a positive result, not only in awareness but also in reality. This kind of exercise belongs to what Robin Visser described as the kind of urban aesthetics that is part of "a new realm of agency" and a form of creative solution towards problems brought up in Chinese urban development (Visser 2010: 33). In particular, Liu's efforts seem to have transcended, even only with a small number of people, the common practice of self-policing, a practice widely encouraged among the Chinese public (Broudehoux 2007: 392).

Figure 4: *Hiding in the City No. 45 – Family*, photograph, 160x100 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2007.

Hiding in the City No. 45 – Family (2006, Figure 4) consists of two mi-
grant worker parents and a son engulfed in a glistening redness that
shows five yellow stars shining over their heads. The enormous Chi-
nese national flag is a reminder of the absolute dominance of the
state authority over its citizens, in this case the one-child policy intro-
duced in 1978 to curb population growth. Parents and the child are
alike being confined within the suffocating redness, which renders
their features and identities indistinguishable. To bypass this policy,
many peasant families migrated to cities so they could raise more than
one child without being fined by officials from their hometowns. In
recent years, however, wealth and vital social resources have been
allocated toward establishing world-class Chinese cities, resulting in a
dramatically worsened urban-rural gap in income, infrastructure, edu-
cation, healthcare and social insurance (Broudehoux 2007: 393; Ye

2009: 118; Li 2012: 42–54). In order to provide their offspring with a better start in an urban area, many more peasant families have left their homeland and migrated to cities. They often have to live in urban-rural fringe zones where they rent cheap and shabby houses from local peasants and work on low-wage jobs. This is also the locus where migrant artists live and work, so their paths often cross over. Many artists have employed rural migrants to participate in their art by serving as models or collaborators or conducting some manual labour for their art projects. A number of conceptual artists such as Song Dong, Wang Jin, Wu Wenguang, and Zhang Dali are known for employing a large number of migrants in the creation of their art (Gao 2005: 209–234). Liu Bolin also employed such migrants on several occasions, including this work, which again involved a process of conversing with them for their voluntary participation (Wang 2010b).

Hiding in the City No. 56 – Illegal Taxi Driver (2007, Figure 5) illustrates the practice of unlicensed private taxi services that are often found near bus and subway stations or the entrances of major residential compounds, particularly those located away from the center of Beijing. Known as *heiche* (黑车, black automobile), those vehicles are owned by individuals who operate outside official regulations, avoiding paying tax or other fees associated with regular taxi companies. The drivers are mostly unemployed urban dwellers, peasants who have recently become urbanites after their farming land was urbanised, or nearby rural migrants who no longer consider farming work a worthy job. Their practice belongs to the kind of "urban informal" sector that has seen a proliferation in the process of urbanisation across the developing countries and is generally denounced by local governments (Roy 2005). Drivers for *heiche* service, like migrant workers and migrant artists, are often subjected to official cleaning during important political events (Zhang 2001; Yang 2007; Li 2009). I had first-hand experience of this in Beijing in November 2013, when the Third Meeting of the Eighteenth Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party was in session. Though discouraged by the city authority as illegal business and inappropriate for the spectacular image that Beijing has constructed into, private taxis are popular among the low-income population living in the urban-rural fringe zones where public transportation or regular taxis are not easily available. Also, the service is usually cheaper than a regular taxi fare. This

piece depicts a mini-van and its "disappearing" driver captured on an empty highway. The driver is painted into the gray tone of his vehicle, and his invisible body seems to suggest the preferred anonymity of his "informal" practice.

Figure 5: Liu Bolin, *Hiding in the City No. 56 – Illegal Taxi Driver*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2007.

Overall, these works demonstrate Liu Bolin's critical engagement with the urban living space of Beijing and his participative approach in realising his artistic concept. At the center of these pieces are the collective experiences shared by disenfranchised individuals who live in Beijing. In all of these staged photographs, figures are unanimously painted into the colours and patterns of a carefully chosen background. The inability of individuals to stop the supposedly progressive (as presented in the official rhetoric and public media) but often distressing changes brought about by market-driven urbanisation in China is presented by figures standing still with closed eyes totally

engulfed by the environment. They all become "invisible". However, the invisibility of the figures urges viewers to think about factors that have brought up such a result and to become aware of how the dominant power and ideology have rendered individual existence precarious and marginalised.

Performing to Reveal

The above-mentioned works are a few examples of Liu Bolin being compelled to incorporate the bodies of others to most powerfully visualise the tension between the individuals and official directives that they either live by or break away from. Most often, however, Liu deploys his own body as the medium as he stages various scenarios for his performance of "disappearance" in more than a hundred different locations in Beijing. Here he follows the artistic legacy shared by performance artists worldwide, while simultaneously departing from that tradition. Performance art involves working with one's own body, demonstrating certain level of physical endurance, and showing oneself physically during a private or public demonstration (Berghuis 2007; Lincot 2007). Most performance artists aim to engage with their audience, either physically or mentally, during the performance. In China, performance art has been regarded as one of the most unconventional and experimental mediums (Qian 1999; Berghuis 2007: 12–33). However, Liu's goal is not to engage viewers with the medium itself nor during the process of performing, but to reveal a fraction of the urban reality after the performance is completed. And, of course, he hides rather than "shows" his body in his performance. Furthermore, his breaching of the code of performance art is also presented in his combination of a traditional medium, painting, and an academic realistic style that was long denounced as non-experimental and conservative by avant-garde artists in China (Andrews and Gao 1995; Gao 1997, 2005). Liu also incorporates photography, more as a tool to document and present his performance than as a form of art of its own right. As such, it becomes clear that his choice of medium and style is closely related to the content he seeks to express; that is, to reveal the disparate urban spaces of Beijing where mainstream discourses exercise their effect upon individuals.

Figure 6: *Hiding in the City No. 48 – Beijing Welcomes You*, photograph, 118x180 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2006.

Hiding in the City No. 48 – Beijing Welcomes You (2006, Figure 6) is one of several of Liu's pieces related to the theme of Olympics, a once-dominant visual reality of Beijing. In this one, Liu "disappears" into the background of a large construction fence that shields a construction site from public view. The fence is curtained with gigantic cheerful images of the Olympic mascots, accompanied by their names underneath, in both Chinese characters and pinyin. Read together, they sound like "Beijing welcomes you", which is also written underneath the mascots. In Beijing in 2006, it was impossible to miss seeing these mascots and other Olympics-related signs. At this time, when Beijing was in the middle of conspicuous urban redevelopment and construction for the Olympics, Liu was "disappearing" on such a construction site. Accompanying dramatic physical transformations of the city, the state mounted a massive civic political campaign in order to promote the Olympics and to show to the world the "Beijing spirit". Slogans such as "New Beijing, Great Olympics" and "Civi-

lised Olympics" were printed on billboards and shown on electronic screens in every corner of the urban public space, subjecting the urban public to a constant reminder of this national undertaking and it significance. By so doing, as Maurizio Marinelli argued, the Foucauldian concept of "knowledge" and "governmentality" are at work (Foucault 1991):

> The citizens became part of the normalising force: they both had to internalize the myths, which represented the source of power, and, simultaneously, they were subject to mechanisms of surveillance and reinforcement, which aimed at conforming their behavioural patterns to the explicit and implicit rules of the grand design of the State (Marinelli 2012).

Hiding in the City No. 50 – Construct Harmonious Society Together (2007, Figure 7) deals with an outdoor billboard advocating "Building a harmonious socialist society", where again we see the official "knowledge" being produced and projected as the normalising force (Foucault 1991). This is an overall strategic objective of social development that was officially brought up in 2004 by the new government administration under the leadership of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao after they came into power in 2002 (CCP 2004). The new mandate aimed to address the severe social and environmental problems caused by the previous administration's over-focus on GDP growth and the development of eastern coastal cities (Li and Cary 2011). Chinese cities were soon "harmonised", as the slogan and its variations in texts and visual delineations appeared in all kinds of forms and took over public spaces. Here, Liu Bolin asks viewers to look at an assortment of images highlighted by coloured panels depicting people of different races, ages, and nationalities enjoying a joyful moment. They all look happy, and as if to conform to one of the directives promoted by the "civilising" programmes that urge people to smile more for a better collective image of Beijing, they all smile (Broudehoux 2007: 390). The irony is that Beijing showed no sign of slowing down its rampant urban development, which had been the main cause of major disharmonies and violence that the "harmonious" discourse aimed to overcome. By calling attention to this official discourse, Liu exposed "the fractures in China's harmonised cultural discourse" (Tarocco 2008: 18). Furthermore, as some critics observed, rather than creating a fairer and more harmonious society, the rhetoric has often been used to justify the increasingly

tight controls on the media and the Internet in China (Li and Cary 2011; Larmer 2011).

Figure 7: *Hiding in the City No. 50 – Construct Harmonious Society Together*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2007.

Liu Bolin apparently was aware of this contradiction as he soon completed the piece *Hiding in the City No. 55 – Demolition* (2007, Figure 8). Demolition has been an almost omnipresent phenomenon in Beijing since the 1990s when the city started commercialising its urban centre (Visser 2004), but became particularly intensive in the years right before the Olympics. One way that Beijing has modernised itself is by expanding its urban proper and transforming its traditional spaces either into spectacular architecture for a competitive image of global city or highly profitable commercial projects (Broudehoux 2007, 2010). Beijing is not unique in this case, as cities across China have been engaging in an effort to expand their urban territory by converting rural counties into municipal districts and bringing in large areas

of rural land under the municipal government's direct jurisdiction (Cartier 2001; Sargeson 2004; Ho and Lin 2004; Hsing 2010). The urban-rural integration movement, a national policy that was initiated in 2002 but only really began in Beijing in late 2008, has further expedited the transformation of rural land into urban proper and rural population into urban dwellers (Ye 2009). This was considered a major source of economic growth as it transfers rural population and their land "from low-productivity rural sectors to high-productivity urban sectors" (Ye 2009). Reflected in the domain of housing architecture, urbanisation is manifested in one-story peasant houses being replaced with commercialised high-rise apartment complexes and relevant urban structures. In the distance, behind the half-dismantled brick house where the artist "disappears", is a row of newly built apartment structures, on the left of which is unfinished construction.

Figure 8: *Hiding in the City No. 55 – Demolition*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2007.

This is just a glimpse of the spectacular construction boom in which China has engaged itself, a topic that has been addressed by a number of scholars (Cartier 2002; Campanella 2008; Mars and Hornsby 2008; Hsing 2010). Replacing the industrial movement of the earlier decades, the urban construction movement is also an essential part of the continuous and remarkable achievements in the economy that China has become known globally for in the past two decades. As many have noted, urbanisation has become a policy priority, and construction (and, I should add, demolition) has become the primary motor of accumulation (Liu et al. 2003; Hsing 2010; Zhang 2011).

Figure 9: *Hiding in the City No. 86 – Bird's Nest*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2009.

As a thousand-year-old city, Beijing holds ancient landmarks such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City that still play a role in conferring the cultural identity of contemporary China. Liu's "invisible body" interacts with these sites by disappearing into them, reminding viewers of the continuous role these structures have played in the

urban fabric and cultural imagination of contemporary Beijing. In the meantime, as one of the most modernised cities in China, Beijing is now embracing globalism and boasting cutting-edge technology and forward-thinking architectural designs, as demonstrated by the newly built National Stadium, also known as the Bird's Nest. Eulogised as a technological feat, its process of construction had been closely reported by the official media. *Hiding in the City No. 86 – Bird's Nest* (2009, Figure 9) highlights this joint venture of leading Chinese and international architects, with the artist disappearing in front of this postmodern structure, a symbol erected to represent China's global ambition as well as national pride, and "an intoxicating spectacle" that conceals the collusion between the state's autocratic power and the economic interest of a few at the expense and exploitation of the disenfranchised (Broudehoux 2007, 2010).

The accumulated wealth of the people who have benefited from China's development is now expected to be spent on consumption. The shift away from the old communist ideology was accompanied by turning away from its former production-oriented planned economy and embracing the consumption-oriented market culture (Zhao and Belk 2008). In particular, consumerism has played a core role in the Chinese urbanisation since the beginning of the 2000s and has been actively promoted as a sign of urbanity. Leaving its material shortage and "shortage culture" behind (Hanser 2004: 14), the thriving Chinese economy has contributed to the material abundance and urban consumers are now provided with more than enough commodities to choose from. *Hiding in the City No. 93 – Supermarket No. 2* (2010, Figure 10) presents a section of a supermarket shelf filled with neatly piled drinks of various Western brands, seemingly capable of offering consumers infinite options. The freedom to consume (if one has the means to consume) is the new slogan here, reflecting the American-led consumer modernity that has captured the mindset of Chinese urbanites and formed the foundation of urban consciousness. Being modern and urban, which has always been desirable, is now being interpreted as consuming (Zhao and Belk 2008; Schein 2001). Furthermore, people who can afford to consume are even represented as ideologically superior and regarded as more active and desirable members of the society (Zhao and Belk 2008: 237). In the context of global consumer capitalism, David Harvey rightly argues that

> Quality of urban life has become a commodity, as has the city it-
> self, in a world where consumerism, tourism, cultural and know-
> ledge-based industries have become major aspects of the urban
> political economy (Harvey 2008: 31).

In this context, urbanity can and must be acquired and expressed
through consuming.

Figure 10: *Hiding in the City No. 93 – Supermarket No. 2,* photograph,
118x150 cm
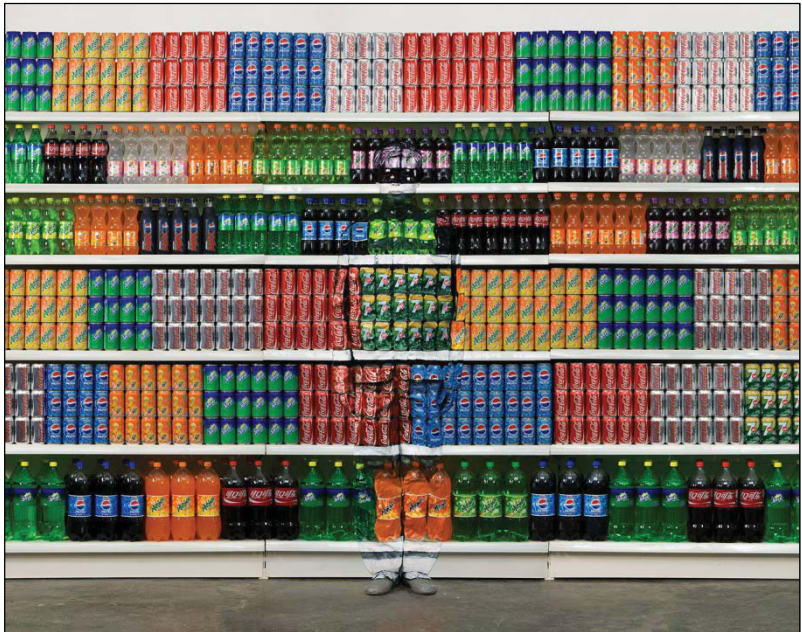
Source: Liu Bolin 2010.

A consequence of this rapid economic development through indus-
trialisation, urbanisation, and excessive consumption, is the severe
deterioration of ecology and the highly polluted urban living envi-
ronment. Mountains have been deforested, if not split or leveled for
urban constructions; rivers have been dried if not contaminated by
industrial wastes; and landscapes have been transformed beyond
recognition. In particular, for urban dwellers, outdoor air pollution
has recently been identified as the fourth-leading factor for premature

death in China (Wong 2013). To compensate for the destruction of
nature, urban planners started designing green zones and parks amid
concrete jungles made up of urban high-rises to bring a small piece of
nature back to human living. *Hiding in the City No. 94 – In the Woods*
(2010, Figure 11) speaks to the belated human awareness of the im-
portance of trees, nature, and clean air, in which Liu Bolin "disap-
pears" into a small forest in an urban park.

Figure 11: *Hiding in the City No. 94 – In the Woods*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2010.

Following this performance, Liu immediately created his next piece,
Hiding in the City No. 95 – Coal Pile (2010, Figure 12), identifying a
major factor that has contributed to the notorious air pollution in
Beijing. The problem has long tortured Beijing dwellers and other
living in northern cities but, since the winter of 2013–2014, it has
become a national problem, shrouding most central, and even many
southern and eastern cities such as Shanghai and Nanjing (Ramzy
2013). The heavily polluted air and the hazardous smog have forced

the closure of many schools and other facilities (Li 2013). Absurdly, this human-induced disaster has created potential opportunities for businesses. For example, a prominent property developer was reported to have recommended that all real estate developers install air filtration systems (Ramzy 2013). It seems that the entrepreneurs are quick to react, not to solve the source of problem to benefit all, but to capitalise from the situation. If this is to become a reality, we will find ourselves in an even more severe situation, in which air pollution continues to get worse, while clean air, an elemental gift of nature, needs to be purchased. Harvey criticised the commodification of water – another formerly common property – but it is likely that the accelerated condition of capitalism will lead to air in China soon being "brought within the capitalist logic of accumulation" (Harvey 2003: 145–146).

Figure 12: *Hiding in the City No. 95 – Coal Pile*, photograph, 118x150 cm

Source: Liu Bolin 2010.

Conclusion

Trained as a sculptor, Liu largely conceives his performance as "social sculpture"; that is, living sculpture with a social content (Benedetti 2008: 23). The body, a solid entity, is established (by simply standing, sitting, or lying) like a piece of sculpture to interact with the space surrounding it and through which it brings to surface what is otherwise invisible or ignored. With this concept of "social sculpture" in mind, he has continued to explore the larger urban environment of Beijing and occasionally other cities where the process of "normalising" citizens takes place. His "invisible body" of himself and of others becomes a critical tool with which Liu can illuminate the multifaceted social environments that have profoundly conditioned the lived space of urban dwellers there and Chinese citizens in general. The intrinsic value of those widely cherished ideas, such as progress, modernisation and development, are silently questioned through the motionless body whose identity and personality are indiscernible. Essentially, Liu interrogates the often incongruous experiences in an urban setting where socialist and Confucian ideologies that promulgate collective ideals are combined with consumerism and global capitalism that promise personal choice and individual freedom. However, as Liu's art has made clear, the latter is not guaranteed for everyone. All of these combinations have produced various forms of control over individuals across the three realms of the urban space that Lefebvre (1991) identified: physical, mental and social.

Liu Bolin's art is grounded on his examination of these social processes, and this is what makes his art relevant in understanding contemporary Chinese society, particularly the urban living experiences of Beijing. Richard Hertz summarises the characteristics of postmodern art (contemporary art), in comparison with that of modern art, as

> rather than exclusivity, purity, and removal from societal and cultural concerns, the emphasis is on inclusivity, impurity, and direct involvement with the content of contemporary experience (Hertz 1993: xii).

Liu's art carries clear traits of postmodern art defined by Hertz and one may argue that the strength of his art lies in its expression of social and cultural concerns. Through his artistic persona the "invis-

ible body" and his signature process of "disappearing", Liu engages closely with the content of contemporary experiences.

Although many of Liu Bolin's artworks bear clear political message and his art has generally been read as a critique against politically oppressive power (Tony 2011; Celii 2012; Shen 2012), Liu actually rejects a pure political interpretation of his art (Benedetti 2008: 23). He maintains that the political dimension is one of the many living conditions that he engages in his art and he is primarily interested in the development of all humanity (Liu 2010: 38). As such, he is more concerned with urging his audience to reflect upon, through concrete scenarios staged by his performance photographs, how our contemporary society in general has rendered individuals invisible. He voices his broader critique as follows:

> What it means to be human today is complicated by economic development. What disappears with death is the human body, but what is slowly weakened by rushed economic development is the human spirit (Liu 2008b: 32, 34).

If we are to follow the perspective of the artist, then the predicaments that Chinese individuals experience that he exposes are by no means only relevant to the people of China under the country's political and social specificities. On the contrary, the tension between the economic and urban development and the inadequacy and injustice produced along the process has a worldwide resonance with the coming dominance of global capitalism. In particular, Liu's portrayal of individuals deprived by the unchecked economic development has only become more pertinent in a time where a distressing process termed "the urbanisation of poverty" has been unfolding across the globe (UNHSP 2011). Reporting on the alarming increase of slums worldwide, researchers have argued that

> the vast urban slums of the present day are the creation of new global economies that offer little promise for advancement through education and employment (UNHSP 2011: 583).

This only means that more and more "invisible bodies" are being created under the current global economic system.

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CASS see Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

CCP see Chinese Communist Party

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