

**CHINESE COMING TO AFRICA:
COMPETITION, COOPERATION, INTERACTION AND INTERDEPENDENCY
– LESSONS FROM TANZANIA –**

ABSTRACT:

This essay analyzes Sino-Tanzanian relations from a historical perspective and argues that the logic of the political and economic alliance between the Chinese and the Tanzanian states is also replicated at a social level as both Tanzanian residents and Chinese immigrants try to obtain access and maximize the real, potential, or imagined benefits that result from their interactions. In putting a great emphasis on both Chinese' and Africans' capacity to exercise their agency in order to negotiate their interactions, this article suggests that the two groups generally mediate their social and personal differences in ways meant to improve the quality of their socio-economic relations. Drawing from both academic work, and on-site research conducted in Tanzania over the last four years, this article suggests that the Chinese immigrants' capacity to adapt to the local conditions, to interact with African people on a daily basis and to form long term relations of interdependency suggest their desire and gradual attempt to become integrated in the Tanzanian socio-economic networks, in both the formal and informal sectors.

Introduction

China's engagement in Africa, its extractive and mercantile goals, the impact Chinese state and non-state actors have on local economies, and the implications of China's increased commitment to African states' developmental agendas have become major topics of debate in Africa and in the Western world. Although much has been written about "China in Africa" in the last decade, surprisingly little attention has been paid to exactly how Chinese immigrants and Africans interact on the ground. A handful of authors, however, have conducted original research on socio-economic interactions between Africans and Chinese immigrants, thus enriching the field of studies of Sino-African relations. Elizabeth Hsu (2002, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b) has documented the social interactions between Chinese immigrants and locals in Zanzibar, Tanzania, and other parts of East Africa; Heidi Haugen and Jorgen Carling (2005) have studied entrepreneurial Chinese communities in Cape Verde; Gregor Dobler's (2007) research on a frontier town in northern Namibia has also rendered valuable ethnographic data on the nature of Chinese-African interactions in West Africa. In addition, there have been several attempts to analyze Africans' views with regards to China's surge into Africa through ambitious polling carried out across Africa (Pew

Global Attitudes Project, 2007, Sautman & Yan, 2009). That being said, for the most part, the views presented in academic work consists of the African leaders, bureaucrats, and other local experts. As a consequence, we still know very little about how average African people see Chinese state and non-state actors and how the two groups interact on a daily basis.

In this essay, I argue that the socio-economic relationship between Chinese immigrants and local residents in Tanzania is predicated on the same pattern of interaction and cooperation that has governed the political and partial economic alliance between the Chinese and the Tanzanian states for the last fifty years. Despite the fact that Chinese immigrants and residents of Dar es Salaam might, at times, have very different agendas and perhaps strikingly different ways of seeing this partnership, their on-the-ground cooperation is greatly influenced by their common history, past success stories of mutual cooperation, and the future benefits of this partnership, be those real, potential, or imagined. In addition, while Tanzanians and Chinese might also have similar views on their mutually beneficial relations, various aspects of this partnership are constantly being negotiated and renegotiated: in the market, in the informal sector, and even at the state level. Consequently, both formal and informal Sino-Tanzanian relations demonstrate a great deal of agency on behalf of both Chinese and Tanzanian actors. This clearly suggests that the story of China in Africa is not the monolithic, hegemonic, and unidirectional relationship that some Westerners have previously suggested (Economist, 2008; Mail and Guardian, 2008).

Understanding the history of the state and the Chinese immigrants in Tanzania, their present albeit limited role in Tanzanian economy, and the way the Chinese Diaspora is perceived by the locals will provide a new understanding of what China in Africa is, and its impact and potential future trends. I analyze the Chinese's engagement in Tanzania by using a conceptual framework proposed by scholar Stephanie Rupp. According to Stephanie Rupp (2008), the post-colonial interdependent Sino-African relations were founded on the principle of promoting China's own energy-based needs, political and economic goals and other strategic interests *while* assisting African states in their quest for development,

economic progress, and political stability. This is a crucial divergence from what the colonial powers of the last century sought to establish (and indeed successfully implemented), namely a political and economic domination over the African countries and their people. This new framework, based on “pragmatic cooperation for mutual benefit,” suggests that the relations between China and various African states have become “increasingly intertwined and interdependent” (Rupp, p. 83), especially over the last decade. Furthermore, it also explains why Sino-African partnerships are generally approved by a majority of African people and their political elites.

I plan to analyze Mrs. Rupp’s hypothesis by applying it to Sino-Tanzanian relations in the light of the state-to-state patterns of collaboration and the informal interactions between Chinese immigrants and local Tanzanians. Since the goal of the Chinese state and that of most Chinese immigrants, in Africa is clear: they are there to stay (Large, 2007)

A brief history of Sino-Tanzanian relations

According to various sources, Tanzania is Africa’s largest recipient of Chinese aid¹, having received more than 2 billion dollars in aid since 1961, when the two countries established formal diplomatic relations. As many scholars believe that China’s thrust for resources fuels most of its engagement across the continent,² Tanzania’s very limited mineral resources make it an unlikely candidate for this distinction. However, if we look at the history of the two countries we see a fairly clear pattern of political and economic solidarity that can, at least in part, explain why China has forged a strategic partnership with an African country has low mineral resources.

¹ This information is corroborated by at least two different sources: H.P.B Moshi, and J.M. Mtui, *Scooping Studies in China-Africa Economic Relations: The Case of Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam, Economic Research Bureau, (2008); and a Centre for Chinese Studies Report entitled *China’s Interest and Activity in Africa’s Construction and Infrastructure Sectors*, (2006), p.45, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/chinese-investment-africa-full.pdf>;

² Robert Rotberg, ed. “Introduction”, *China into Africa, Trade, Aid and Influence*, vii-ix, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, (2008).

The last fifty years in Sino-Tanzanian relations can roughly be divided into three different phases with fairly distinct characteristics (Baregu, 2008). The first, between 1960s and late 1970s, is defined by the ideological and economic alignment between the two states. During this early period, scholars can arguably discuss a general “meeting of the minds” of both Tanzanian and Chinese political elites. This was the time when President Nyerere decided to experiment with a socialist agenda, while supporting liberation movements in East and Southern Africa, two goals the Chinese state was readily willing to embrace. The second phase, between early 1980s and early 1990s was characterized by internal economic reforms in Tanzania that were mostly imposed by Western institutions (namely the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and a change of focus in China’s foreign policy (under Deng Xiaoping, China temporarily suspended most of its external engagements choosing instead to focus on its own internal socio-economic problems). This era in Sino-Tanzanian relations is characterized by a minimal engagement of China in Tanzania. The third phase, which started roughly in the early 1990s, is characterized by both a renewed interest in China’s relations with Tanzania and a surge in Chinese migration to Tanzania. These migrants, as we shall see, came to the country either on government-sponsored work contracts or independently. Yet despite the different turns and twists in Sino-Tanzanian relations, the two countries did maintain diplomatic and political contacts at all given times.

George T. Yu, a scholar whose work on Sino-Tanzanian relations spans over the last 40 years, argues that, overall, China’s engagement in Africa is defined by three broad characteristics: continuity, flexibility and commitment (Yu, 2010, p.131). The case of Sino-Tanzanian relations seems to reflect this general pattern and this section of the paper is designed to illustrate how these three dimensions have been reflected historically in the formal interactions between the two states. According to the same author (1970, 1975), the post-colonial interactions between China and Tanzania should be seen in the light of the nature of the political and economic ties between the two countries which have been predicated, from the very beginning, on a partial, informal alliance. It was an alliance as both states saw great potential in the

partnership and had a clear interest in its success. It was only a partial alliance because (1) Tanzania had no intention of taking a stance against Western powers and (2) because President Nyerere was a firm supporter of a policy of nonalignment during the Cold War. This required Tanzania to be in amicable relations with both Western and Eastern countries. Lastly, it was an informal alliance as the cooperation between the two states “was given no formal organizational expression. (Yu, 1970, p.14)” The attributes of the informal alliance between the two states, along with the general trends in China’s foreign policy have had a crucial impact on how the Chinese state related to various African countries (Tanzania being one of the first African countries to cooperate formally with the Chinese state) but also on the nature and scale of Chinese immigration which Tanzania has experienced in the last two decades (Snow, 1988).

Another critical aspect that defines the close ties between the Chinese and Tanzanian states over the last half a century is the fact that the political elites on both sides had clear goals in mind when the two states began engaging with each other. On the Tanzanian side, there were military, economic, and political goals that caused President Nyerere to look favorably upon establishing formal relations with China. A clear supporter of African independence, Nyerere’s state was situated in the vicinity of three countries that were still under white domination – Mozambique, Rhodesia (currently known as Zimbabwe), and South Africa – all of which were, at the time, supported by various Western powers, namely Great Britain, Portugal, France, and the United States. As these countries were all heavily armed, they posed obvious security threats to Nyerere’s government. As Yu (1970) firmly argues, the urgency to obtain military and technical assistance might have been at the core of Nyerere’s decision to establish formal diplomatic relations with China. However, it is crucial to note that President Nyerere did not see the Chinese state as a better alternative to the West, but rather as a power that would allow him more leverage in foreign affairs. Simply put, “relations with China provided a balance for Tanzania’s interaction with the West.” (Yu, 1970, p. 25) On China’s end, Nyerere’s favorable view of socialism made him a perfect candidate for China’s anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle (Servant, 2007). Lastly, China had limited access to

foreign exchange, and saw through bilateral trade with Tanzania an opportunity to secure much needed foreign hard currency. (Yu, 1970)

Within the next ten years from Tanzania's independence (1964-1974), the Chinese state became a close ally of the local political elite, and stepped in on at least five different occasions to assist its African partner during sensitive political and economic times. This suggests both the Chinese' state commitment to foster its economic and political ties with Tanzania, and the flexibility of the Beijing government to deal with unforeseen events in President Julius Nyerere's developmental agenda. In all of these cases, China prove surprisingly able to allocate aid in a timely manner according to formal requests coming from its African partner that the Chinese state financed some projects that were overlooked, dropped, or rejected by Tanzania's Western partners. In addition, in several instances, the Chinese government stepped in of its own initiative and directly responded to Tanzania's needs.

In 1965, President Nyerere made two decisions that dramatically affected his developmental plans. In 1964, the Tanzanian government signed an agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), by which the latter agreed to provide technical and economic assistance to Tanzania for the creation of a coastguard service designed to police Tanzania's waters. The FRG also agreed to finance a separate project: the formation of an air force. Both projects were considered urgent and essential in Nyerere's developmental agenda. However, when Nyerere allowed the German Democratic Republic to open a consulate in Dar es Salaam in February 1965, the FRG immediately withdrew its military and economic aid – amounting to 112 million pounds (approximately 270 million dollars at the time; Bailey, 1975) - causing panic among the Tanzanian elite. China immediately stepped in and offered to provide technical assistance for the marine patrol and donated four patrol boats. A Chinese funded naval base was turned over to the Tanzanian authorities in 1971 while the Air base in Ngerengere –Morogoro – was finalized in 1974 (Moshi and Mtui, 2008).

In December 1965, the Tanzanian leadership was once again involved in an international controversy that came with dire costs to the national developmental strategy. When Great Britain refused to condemn Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence, President Nyerere broke diplomatic relations with Great Britain, only to restore them in 1968. However, when he interrupted political ties with the former colonial power, Great Britain canceled a 21 million dollar loan to Tanzania which caused severe hardships for Tanzania's developmental programs. In the immediate aftermath, China announced that it would finance some of the projects abandoned by the British state³ by offering an additional two million pounds in loans (approximately five million dollars) and one million pounds (1.4 million dollars) in grants to carry on with some of the projects that lost their funding (Bailey, 1975). Furthermore, in late 1960s, China made another move that surprised Nyerere's regime and boosted China's image in the country. When Tanzania was left with a considerable surplus of tobacco, one of the main sources of revenue and export in the country, China bought more than a quarter of Tanzania's crop (Segal, 1992).

After Julius Nyerere became the President of Tanzania, he made several appeals to Western countries to assist him by training and deploying medical personnel to his country, as Tanzania was suffering from an acute medical personnel shortage at the time (Yu, 1970). But it was China, once again, that promptly responded to Tanzania's president's request by dispatching medical assistance to Tanzania, a decision that was highly appreciated by the locals since Chinese doctors provided medical services to locals free of charge (Hsu, 2007). In 1968, China and Tanzania signed the Medical Assistance Agreement after the Chinese state sent various medical teams to East Africa as a response to earlier requests by Tanzanian leadership. By 2005, 990 Chinese doctors and nurses had visited Tanzania, serving both rural and urban areas. (Moshi and Mtui, 2008)

³ United Republic of Tanzania, National Assembly, *Parliamentary Debates, Official Report*, (10-30 June 1966), Dar es Salaam, 1966, Col. 229.

When the Chinese state offered to build Africa's largest railway in history in the late 1960s, many Westerners looked at the project with skepticism (Brautigam, 2010). The railway was designed to connect Tanzania's capital at the time, Dar es Salaam, with the Zambian copper belt town of Kapiri Mposhi. The 1860 kilometer long railway required approximately 51,500 Tanzanian workers and 15,500 Chinese technicians, engineers, and workers. (Yu, 2010) The railway construction began in 1970 and ended in 1975, six months ahead of schedule. Much has been written on the TAZARA railway and it continues to be a contentious issue in academic literature. While the railway is generally seen as a success from a technical point of view, some authors question the extent to which this was in fact an economic success and a useful tool in East Africa's development. Some argue that it was an unnecessary project that has proven to be too costly to maintain.⁴ But no matter what side of the debate the authors take, there is a general consensus that the project further improved the bilateral relations between China and Tanzania. But, as we can see, this project was only a continuation of China's active support in Tanzania's quest for development and not a single event in their strategic partnership.

There is one last dimension which needs to be taken into consideration: Tanzania's socialist agenda throughout 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, President Nyerere launched a series of social and development policies (known broadly under the name of ujamaa) that were to be the groundwork for Tanzanian socialism. As the Tanzanian state began experimenting with socialism, the Chinese state constituted a true model for Nyerere who had already visited China, in 1965. Furthermore, China had already registered notable success stories with respect to various agricultural policies and had undergone a series of political and economic reforms, which served as a real model for national development in the

⁴ The following articles and book chapters might be a useful introduction to this ongoing debate: George T Yu, "Working on the Railroad: China and the Tanzania-Zambia Railway", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 11, No. 11 (Nov., 1971), pp. 1101-1117; Ngila Mwase, "The Tanzania-Zambia Railway: The Chinese Loan and the Pre-Investment Analysis Revisited," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (Sept. 1983), pp.525-543; A.M Sendaro, "Workers' Efficiency Motivation and Management: the case of Tanzania-Zambia railway construction," *PHD Thesis*, University of Dar es Salaam, (1987). Jamie Monson, "Defending the People's Railway in the Era of Liberalization: Tazara in Southern Tanzania," *Africa*, Vol. 76, No.1, (2006), pp. 113-130 or Jamie Monson, "Liberating Labor? Constructing Anti-Hegemony on the TAZARA Railway in Tanzania, 1965-1976" in *China returns to Africa : a rising power and a continent embrace*, eds. Chris Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, pp.197-221, New York : Columbia University Press, (2008).

eyes of the local elites, given Tanzania's history as an agriculture-based economy. In this context, China became both an inspiration for the ujamaa development platform and a source of technical expertise. Indeed, during the Tanzanian socialist era, many locals acquired valuable technical skills under the supervision of Chinese technicians (Baregu, 2008.)

The following two decades in Sino-Tanzanian relations (1980-90s) witnessed fewer collaborative projects as Tanzania focused extensively on implementing the structural policies recommended by international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, while China focused its resources almost exclusively on domestic issues rather than foreign policy. The two countries did, however, maintain a permanent collaborative relationship, at least with respect to the transfer of military equipment⁵, educational programs, and medical assistance.

While China's role in building the TAZARA railway is well known, many people – both within and outside Tanzania – might be surprised to find that the Chinese state has successfully implemented more than 100 projects in the country,⁶ having a positive effect on sectors ranging from agriculture, mining, social services, and malaria prevention strategies to, in recent times, building roads, governmental buildings, and a stadium. It has also assisted in augmenting Tanzania's communication system and the textile sector.⁷ In addition, extensive oil explorations are currently being carried out all over Tanzania, (Rocha, 2007) and should any of them be successful it is quite likely that the contracts will be awarded to the Chinese firms undergoing the explorations.

Chinese in Tanzania: More on Who They Are and What They Do

⁵ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute maintains a well-documented database on Sino-Tanzanian weapons sales which is listed year by year. The database can be accessed at: www.sipri.org.

⁶ Center for Chinese Studies Report, p.46

⁷ Idem, p. 45-46

The history of Sino-Tanzanian political and economic interactions had a crucial impact on the Chinese migrant flows to Tanzania, the intentions and expectations of the immigrants, their experiences and their motivations. In this section I wish to briefly lay out the various types of Chinese migrants that came to Tanzania over the last fifty years, the push and pull factors that determine why migrants choose Tanzania over other countries in the region and how the different types of migrant experiences and expectations determine the extent of the interaction between Chinese living in the country and the locals they interact with.

Emmanuel Ma Mung (2008) identifies three types of Chinese migrants coming to Africa: temporary migrants working on government-financed projects or projects commissioned to large Chinese companies (building infrastructure, public buildings, national stadiums, airports etc); small scale entrepreneurs coming to Africa often independent of the Chinese state; and transit migrants who work in Africa temporarily but wish to eventually settle in Europe or North America. Mung also argues that contemporary migratory patterns are often facilitated by various migratory networks that are already well-established and that the growth of the overseas Chinese enterprises creates a demand for labor migration from China to Africa. Mung's analysis seems to accurately capture the migratory patterns in Sino-Tanzanian history. In the 1960s-1980s, most of the Chinese workers living and working in Tanzania were highly skilled, temporary migrants who were contracted by the Chinese state to carry out various projects all over the country.

The interactions between Chinese and Tanzanians at this early stage in Sino-Tanzanian cooperation was often quite limited (Monson, 2008), yet the impact of the projects financed by the Chinese state on how locals related to the Chinese migrants was nonetheless remarkable. The successful completion of the TAZARA railway, framed as a step forward in the anti-colonial struggle (Monson, 2010), was embraced as a joint success of the cooperation between the two states and their peoples (Yu, 1975). John Kaduri, an engineer who did not directly interact with any Chinese migrants before the

completion of the railway in 1975, stated that: “It was the mid 70s. I had never seen a Chinese person, but I liked them already.” (interview, 2008). Furthermore, the medical Chinese teams who were dispatched in Tanzania as part of Nyerere’s plan to provide medical services free of charge (Baregu, 2008) were also welcomed by those locals who benefited from the services of the Chinese doctors. These early interactions between Tanzanians and Chinese migrants would, arguably, have a crucial impact on how many people in the country would perceive the (now) growing Chinese diaspora. However, as Elizabeth Hsu in her study of the Chinese diaspora to Zanzibar (2007) argues, from 1960s to early 1990s, most of the contacts between Chinese and Tanzanians were either professional or political. Chinese migrants, by virtue of their relation to the Chinese state (i.e. being dispatched to Tanzania to fulfill certain political and economic goals), primarily functioned as agents designed to transfer their knowledge and skills to their local counterparts and / or offer their services to the general public, yet almost exclusively in a professional setting.

With the revival of Sino-Tanzanian relations, in mid 1990s, and the relaxation of migration policies in China, Tanzania would witness a new wave of migration, which also coincides with the third phase in Sino-Tanzanian relations. The Chinese migrants coming to the country were no longer predominantly trained professionals, but small scale entrepreneurs who tried to reach their own personal, economic goals instead of being a part of government-led strategy for development (Hsu, 2007; Ho, 2008). Like in much of Africa, this shift happened in a rather abrupt manner (over less than ten years), and is indicative of various changes in Sino-African interactions. First, Tanzanians now interact with independent Chinese migrants⁸ in a setting that is no longer mediated by a formal authority. More specifically, most locals’ perception of the Chinese in the country is now marked by the Chinese immigrants’ presence in the market (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2009). At the same time, the very context

⁸ For the purpose of this article, the Chinese migrants I am referring to are mostly independent entrepreneurs who do not work on projects financed by the Chinese state.

in which Chinese and Tanzanians interact with each other is also indicative of the differences between long-term Chinese immigrants and those who are engaged in temporary positions, possibly interested in securing other types of job opportunities in Tanzania, in the rest of Africa or in the West.

The story of one Chinese immigrant and his family must be told in its entirety because it illustrates the interplay between the migrant's typology, the extent of interactions between Chinese migrants and the locals, and also suggests several reasons why Tanzania is chosen as a destination by some Chinese migrants. The 38 year-old man, who is known to his neighbors and customers as John, has lived in Tanzania for almost 15 years. His uncle, who worked on the TAZARA railway as a construction engineer, stayed behind after the completion of the project. He used the money received from the Chinese government to open his own retail store and was to bring his wife to Tanzania in 1981. However, the couple never had any children and when his investment started to pay off, he decided to expand to other sectors in the market and to invite his brother's children to Tanzania. John speaks both English and Swahili fluently. In his neighborhood, locals consider him a hard-working man, and some of those who have worked with him over the years told me he is strict but fair.

I came to Tanzania back in 1995 after my uncle told me there are great business opportunities here. He also told me that Tanzanians are very nice people, albeit undisciplined, but that in general they treat foreigners very well. When I got here, I realized that the opportunities my uncle was talking about weren't so easily accessible, or at least we weren't able to access them. However, we managed to make enough money for us and our family and even send some back to China. Our strategy was simple: we did as many things as humanly possible – we opened a car wash and repair shop, which operated non-stop, we sold other products on the side, mainly electronics, and my sister initially brought to clean the house and cook for us started a small garden in the back of my uncle's house. Given the favorable weather in Dar es Salaam, her crops were going well most of the year and she soon started to sell the crops at the fruit market. Everyone was working as much as we could and because of the general lack of competition we witnessed back in the 1990s, it was fairly easy to do business in Dar es Salaam.

But it was difficult at times. We didn't know the language or the customs. The people were trying to talk to us, to communicate, to make small talk and I didn't speak the language. I also didn't want to waste time. Tanzanians are nice people but many lack discipline. When the money you make is depending on how many hours you put in, you simply can't waste time chatting. After three years spent in Dar es Salaam I managed to learn Swahili. Then one day my uncle said: you are the youngest man in the family. It is your duty to learn English. English will bring us new

customers. We need that. Some of the money we made was then reinvested in English classes which I took three days a week for over a year. It served us well. We are now happy.⁹

The story of John and his family is indicative of some of the general trends in Chinese migration, engagement, and interactions with people in Tanzania. First, his uncle was able to stay in Tanzania as a result of the past policies and politics of the Chinese state towards Tanzania and their formal interactions in the 1960s-1970s (Snow, 1988). Second, despite the fact that John's uncle once worked for the Chinese state, his post 1975 career path along with the decision to bring in some of the members of his family were both independent of any state direction (Ho, 2008). In addition, just like Hsu (2007) discovered upon doing research in Zanzibar, Chinese often think of Tanzanians as being nice and accommodating people who exhibit a positive attitudes towards foreigners. Third, like many other Chinese immigrants interviewed, John thought that the relative lack of competition in Tanzania made it an ideal destination for people with entrepreneurial skills like himself. Furthermore, John's own story on how he came to Tanzania is illustrative of how many Chinese migrants find their way to Africa. One of the most important factors that made John move to Africa was his participation in, and connection to, other Chinese migrants that operated in a preexisting ethnic economy (Portes and Jensen, 1987).

Another important factor in John's account of his social life in Dar es Salaam relates to the division of labor and interaction between members of his family and his Tanzanian customers. As we can see, he has become the person of contact between his family, their businesses and the outside world, primarily because he is able to speak both Swahili and English. Yet behind this business, there are other Chinese immigrants who only rarely interact with the locals. His uncle runs the business and is in charge of ensuring that the shop and the car wash store are always adequately supplied with products coming from Chinese immigrants that act as intermediaries between manufacturers in China and Chinese immigrants in Tanzania. In addition, John's sister, who doesn't speak either Swahili or English, also plays a role in the family business by cooking, cleaning and growing vegetables. Lastly, John's two other

⁹ Interview taken on July 29th, 2009

brothers who came to Tanzania in 2006, each play a role, in the back of the store, where they are responsible for repairing the electrical equipment (television sets, radios, stereos etc), but they never interact directly with Tanzanian customers.

Seen from a different perspective, John's story reveals many of the perceptions Chinese immigrants have about Tanzanians and is indicative of the experience of a large number of immigrants upon arriving to Tanzania. The language barrier poses significant limitations and those who wish to turn a profit must at the very least learn Swahili. But even when immigrants speak the language and engage with locals, as John's own account shows, some stereotypical cultural perceptions might prevent many Chinese from making friends among the Tanzanian people (though I have seen exceptions).

There is also a perceived difference in efficiency and effectiveness that Chinese immigrants see when comparing themselves to the Tanzanian people.¹⁰ John's statement that Tanzanians lack discipline is, for example, something the majority of the Chinese interviewed believe. Yet these complaints should not necessarily be seen as the result of racism or racial tensions between Chinese and Tanzanians. These presuppositions are perhaps more indicative of some structural differences between the two groups with respect to how the Chinese immigrants see their role in the local economy and what they consider to be the underlining reasons behind their limited capacity to get a share of the market.

Chinese Immigrants and Local Tanzanian Residents: Engagements, Interactions, Variations

The feelings that the residents of Dar es Salaam have towards Chinese immigrants in Tanzania are extremely complex. The history of the Chinese engagement in the country informs their views to a

¹⁰ The following article provides a comprehensive analysis of the cultural differences between Africans and Chinese immigrants, many of which apply to the Tanzanian case as well: Stephanie Rupp, "Africa and China: Engaging Postcolonial Interdependencies" in *China into Africa, Trade, Aid and Influence*, ed. Robert Rotberg, p. 65-86, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, (2008). Mrs. Rupp also correctly suggests that efficiency is an argument Chinese managers use when justifying the use of Chinese workers in their projects overseas.

particular extent, but is not the only factor in their assessment. Besides the historical solidarity that makes many Tanzanians to look favorably upon the Chinese population in the city, it is worth mentioning that most of the local media and political elite have depicted both the Chinese state and the Chinese people in favorable terms, a tradition unchanged since the early 1960s. A survey of some 20 articles dealing with Chinese immigrant investors published in the Tanzanian press in 2009 revealed no anti-Chinese feelings and very little criticism directed towards Chinese companies in the country. As far as the political elite is concerned, many high level officials have spoken publicly of their support for Chinese immigrants and investors. On February 15, 2009, when President Hu Jintao visited the country, Tanzanian president Jakaya Kikete reaffirmed once again his admiration for the Chinese state by declaring that:

The government and people of Tanzania attach special value to our bilateral relations with the government and people of the Peoples Republic of China. It has been a very beneficial relationship indeed. Tanzania has received generous support to our development endeavors in many fields including social, economic, cultural as well as defense. In many ways, the support we got from our Chinese friends has contributed to what Tanzania is today¹¹.

At a news conference in Istanbul, Turkey, on February 22nd, 2010, President Kikwete once again defended China's engagement in Tanzania and Africa, arguing that: "Africa needs a market for its products. Africa needs capital and investment. Africa needs technology for its development. China is ready to provide all that. What is wrong with that?"¹²

This positive view of the Chinese state did not go unnoticed in Beijing either, a fact that became clear when Tanzania had the honor of being Africa's only leg of the world torch relay, ahead of the Olympic Games. This newsworthy event was also a very calculated decision on behalf of the Chinese Olympic Games Committee in collaboration with the local authorities. The 5 kilometer-race begun at the

¹¹ Statement by Jakaya Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, during the State Banquet in honor of Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China, State House, Dar es Salaam, (February 15th 2009)

¹² The Citizen Correspondent "President Kikwete slams West over Sino-African relations", *The Citizen*, (February 22nd 2010), article available at <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/news/4-national-news/450-president-kikwete-slams-west-over-sino-african-relations.html> (accessed on March 4th 2010)

TAZARA railway station and ended just in front of Mkapa National Stadium,¹³ two of the Chinese projects Tanzanians are most fond of. While the torch was met with fierce criticism all over the world, in Dar es Salaam more than one thousand locals, Chinese immigrants, and foreigners marched together and chanted songs of support for both the Olympic Games and, for some, the Chinese state.¹⁴ Not one single Tanzanian citizen engaged in anti-Chinese protests.

In order to quantify people's perceptions of the Chinese community in Dar es Salaam, I used two methodological approaches to test how people perceive, interact with, and relate to the Chinese immigrants that live and work in Dar es Salaam. On one hand, I designed a standard questionnaire that was intended to provide me with a sociological set of data on how locals perceive the Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, I did ethnographic work that involved interacting with people from various social and economic backgrounds, who engaged in informal conversations with me on the presence of the Chinese immigrants in the city.

The questionnaire was designed to reveal what people think of the Chinese immigrants: how exactly they interact with them as well as what types of products and services locals purchase from the Chinese living in the city. Furthermore, one of the questions asked the respondent to identify, according to the best of their knowledge, any project that the Chinese state has ever financed or implemented in the country. To allow for a wider variety of answers, I strategically chose two locations in Dar es Salaam where the research was conducted. The two locations chosen were the Maktaba street – in the historical and commercial center of the city where the number of Chinese citizens and businesses are limited – and the Kariakoo neighborhood, a place known to the locals as the “epicenter of Chinese immigrants in the city.” Moreover, I also decided not to conduct the interviews myself, because I considered that my European heritage would alter the answers my respondents would give. In 2009, for almost a month and a

¹³ Suleiman Jongo, Torch Keeps Protesters at Bay in Dar, *The Citizen*, Dar es Salaam, (April 14th, 2008).

¹⁴ BBC News Desk, “Torch in peaceful Tanzania relay”, *BBC World*, (April 13, 2008), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7345245.stm>

half, Hassan and Marry, my two research assistants in East Africa spent several hours a day randomly interviewing people who agreed to participate in the survey. Each of my two research assistants interviewed 250 people in the neighborhoods that were assigned to them.

As of 2010, Tanzanians generally have a favorable opinion of Chinese immigrants¹⁵. It might also be useful to observe that some of the people both my research assistants and I interviewed did not necessarily have a definite opinion of the Chinese. My former Swahili teacher from Dar es Salaam was able to describe what many locals might feel about the growing Chinese population in Dar es Salaam:

The jury is still out when it comes to the Chinese immigrants. We haven't made up our minds about them. In recent years, their numbers have increased and we're not yet sure what that means and how that will affect us. And we don't want to hurry because we don't want to misjudge them. It would not be fair to them or to us¹⁶.

This perspective is in stark contrast to the opinions held by many of the Chinese immigrants with whom I spoke about the Tanzanian people. Most Chinese people who agreed to talk to me or my assistants had very clear opinions, mostly negative, about the Tanzanian people, while a significant number of the locals preferred not to be so blunt in their answers.

There is also a social dimension of Sino-Tanzanian interactions that could explain why the locals see the Chinese in favorable terms. Based on my survey¹⁷, many residents of Dar es Salaam generally see the Chinese immigrants as hard-working, well-intentioned people (411/500 answers); who live in similar conditions as they do (399/500); and who have a working knowledge of the business structures and

¹⁵ A Pew Global Attitudes Survey conducted in 2007 reaches the same conclusion. According to this survey, 78 percent of Tanzanians interviewed believe that China's influence in their country is more positive than America's. 77 percent believe China's influence in the country is growing while 50 percent believe China has an influence on how things are going in the country. However, as the survey suggests, many Tanzanians believe that no foreign power has a significant influence in their country. Pew Global Attitudes Project, pp. 44-46, (June 27, 2007) <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/256.pdf>;

¹⁶ August 12th, 2008

¹⁷The questionnaire included the following questions but they were often followed by additional questions: 1. When did you start working in Kariakoo? 2. Do you remember when Chinese first came here? 3. What do you think of the Chinese people? 4. How would you describe them? 5. Have you interacted with Chinese people? How? 6. Do you buy things from Chinese? What? 7. What do you think of the Chinese imports? 8 Why do you think Chinese are coming to Tanzania? 9. Do you know if the Chinese state has financed any projects in the country that have positively affected your life? 10. Do you consider the Chinese friends or enemies? Why? 11. Do you think the government should do something about the Chinese immigrants?

African markets (368/500). Other local respondents also stressed that Chinese immigrants “live a hard and simple life, just like the rest of us.” (393/500) “Not luxurious like the white men.” (119/500) “Chinese workers in Dar es Salaam are more disciplined than many of our brothers and sisters.” (78/500). A significant portion of the responders (267/500) also noted their appreciation for the fact that Chinese immigrants stay together and that they are very helpful to each other. Some responders noted their interest in the Chinese immigrants’ “spirit of togetherness,” (57/500), their “love and respect for fellow Chinese” (61/500), or the availability of the Chinese settled in the city to help the newcomers learn some words in Swahili (112/500). Another reason that some of the locals appreciate the immigrants is related to the Chinese people’s spirit of frugality (329/500): “Some will live on a bottle of water a day in order to save money,” says one responder. “They will wear a pair of shoes until is completely worn out,” adds another. “They will spend the money wisely, not like my husband who wastes half of his salary on alcohol the day he gets paid.” (A surprising 101 respondents discussed their approval of Chinese people’s capacity to save money by not spending it on alcohol; 87 percent of the people mentioning this issue were women).

The set of data gathered by my assistants was rather inconclusive as to whether the locals approve or disapprove of the Chinese imports. 267 respondents had a favorable opinion of these imports while 237 thought the imports are harming their economy, which created a statistical tie. However, there is a lot to be learned from how respondents justified their opinions. Among those in favor of the Chinese imports, the most important argument was affordability. With the arrival of the approximately 200 Chinese sellers and retailers who now work in Kariakoo market, most of the goods suddenly became more affordable. As one scholar also argues, “African consumers benefit from cheap products offered by Chinese firms. For instance, Chinese plastic sandals conquered the whole African continent in the last years. That changed the daily life of African women and children enormously in that way that going shoeless is [in] the past in poor African countries (Wrobel, 2008).” In this context, given the fact that Kariakoo is a local market where most of the people shopping have limited financial resources, the sudden drop in prices had a

significant impact on how they managed their finances. “Suddenly I had more money left at the end of the month,” a middle age woman who does most of the shopping in the market told me.

On the other hand, many of the people who said they engaged in buyer-seller relations with Chinese immigrants more than once a week confessed that they have chosen specific sellers based on their prior experience with them. The quality, the availability of products, the ability to speak Swahili, and the seller’s capacity to be courteous were among the factors that influenced how many of the people interviewed for this research chose their regular shops.

A common criticism of Chinese engagement in Africa is that Chinese immigrants flood African markets with cheap, low quality goods, thus driving locals out of business. My research does not contradict that hypothesis. However, many of the scholars who espouse that argument leave out the following facts: that African consumers have and exercise the right to select the specific seller they buy from; that economic relationships between Chinese immigrants and local residents are very fluid; and that if a buyer is not satisfied with the products he purchases, he *can and will* simply change his supplier. In a place like Kariakoo, where hundreds of merchants compete for customers, the buyers wandering around the market in search of various products are free to choose among different shops and sellers. As any buyer has the option of purchasing products of different qualities in one place, especially in a country like Tanzania where another ethnic community, an Indian one, already has well-established economic networks of production and distribution, anxieties about Chinese immigrants flooding the market with sub-standard, cheap goods are generally quite rare and are considered mostly irrelevant from a consumer’s point of view.

While residents of Dar es Salaam are able to choose whom they buy from, and are thus in a more advantageous position relative to the Chinese immigrants, many of the local producers do not have any comparative advantage over their Asian counterparts. Most of the Tanzanian sellers interviewed in

Kariakoo expressed their frustration with the Chinese immigrants, complaining that because of Chinese imports their profit margin has been severely reduced over the years, with some of them being forced to close the doors to their shops. Some have pointed out that Chinese retailers practice preferential pricing for Chinese and Tanzanian shop owners, thus allowing the former to enjoy a larger profit. Others have complained about the wider variety of products from Chinese sellers which, in the eyes of local shop owners, puts the Chinese in a more advantageous position in the market.

Another contentious issue that many local producers lamented about was the sale of counterfeit products. This issue often had two dimensions that frustrated local businessmen. On one hand, some Chinese immigrants sell counterfeit goods that illegally use internationally known brands for shoes, clothes, and electronics. On the other hand, some Chinese sellers now feature products that were historically made by local Tanzanian producers but are now also made by local Chinese workers. In my research, I discovered at least two types of goods that were predominantly produced by Tanzanians but are now also made and sold by Chinese immigrants: kangas (printed colored cotton fabric often used by women all over East Africa), and wood crafts that are currently made by Chinese craftsmen who have relocated to Tanzania. The two products are also somewhat indicative of very specific types of audiences, one local, one foreign, which might stand as proof of the aggressive expansion of Chinese immigrant businessmen into local markets.

Kangas are garments typically bought by local women (though tourists also purchase them occasionally). Some historians argue that kangas were invented in Zanzibar in the 1880s (Fair, 2004; Beck 2001), by a series of innovative merchants who wished to cater for the local women's desires for more varied clothing options. However, while the idea of the kanga originated in Zanzibar, the fabrics used to make kangas were often imported from Europe, sometimes already imprinted with patterns and inscriptions (Linnebuhr, 1992) and for most of the 20th century, kangas would generally be sold by Indian merchants (McCurdy, 2006). The proverbial inscriptions printed on kangas would usually be in Swahili and

the messages would touch on critical aspects of life in East Africa, such as politics, sex, religion, or ethics (Linnebuhr, 1992). After Tanzania became independent in 1961, kangas were also produced by a significant number of local Tanzanian artisans who began competing against the traditional Indian economic networks. In recent times, however, Chinese immigrants have also started making kangas, given the popularity of the fabric among African women. In addition to the independent Chinese entrepreneurs who now produce the cloths for the local market, kangas are also produced by the Tanzania–China Friendship Mill, the country’s largest textile mill (Ching Kwan Lee, 2009). With the Chinese investors currently holding the largest shares in the company, Chinese immigrants seem to have become deeply involved and invested in the local production of kangas.

The interest of independent Chinese entrepreneurs in Kanga production serves as an interesting tension in informal Sino-Tanzanian relations. Whereas the fabric was indeed historically marketed by Indian merchants, it has been a part of the East African identity for over one hundred years (Fair 2004). In addition, Indian merchants have also inhabited the region for many centuries, thus also claiming their place in Tanzania’s history. But the surge of Chinese entrepreneurs in this industry signals one of the critical sources of discontent many of respondents have become aware in recent times: that the Chinese immigrants are no longer only present in the country in specialized industries – textiles, retail stores, restaurants etc – but are slowly entering economic sectors that were historically reserved exclusively for the locals. Furthermore, some Chinese immigrants now operate in economic environments that were traditionally reserved only to the poor residents of Dar es Salaam. Before the increase in the Chinese population, none of the people I interviewed seemed to recall any non-Tanzanians selling flowers in the street, roasted peanuts on the beach and in the harbor, or *mishkaki* with lime and *pili pili* (traditional Tanzanian meat-on-a-stick often sold in the evenings in markets, commercial areas or close to the major restaurants, and other social gatherings). Now Chinese immigrants also engage in such petty businesses, which previously only poor local residents were known to do.

An episode I experienced during my stay in Dar es Salaam in 2008 was emblematic of some of the local people's growing frustration with the Chinese living in the city. When I was getting out a taxi in front of one of the major cinema centers in Dar es Salaam, I saw two young men, a Tanzanian and a Chinese, fist-fighting just in front of the main entrance to the cinema. After five minutes, they stopped and the Tanzanian picked up his peanut tray and said to the Chinese man, who also had a peanut tray next to him: "You traveled for 8000 k[ilometers] just to sell peanuts at a cinema? How would you feel if I went to your country to do the same?" That episode was an expression of what many street vendors feel about the Chinese. Historically, Tanzanians are used to seeing and interacting with foreigners working in the country – especially Westerners and Indians. But locals generally expect foreigners to operate in fairly distinct socio-economic environments. More specifically, Tanzanians might appreciate the simple lifestyle of the Chinese immigrants (see above), which would situate Chinese immigrants on a position of equality with their African counterparts. However, their involvement in sectors operated only by the local residents is still rejected, given that Chinese immigrants are still seen as foreigners, albeit with different agendas than the outsiders Tanzanians normally interact with in their daily lives.

Tensions are deemed to occur because many locals see distinct boundaries between what they, as Tanzanians, do and what foreigners do in their country. The Indian population in Tanzania has historically been involved in the textile industry and in retail businesses, which is why the Chinese presence in those sectors has not necessarily been seen as a an atypical event, but rather as an alternative for them as consumers. But Chinese petty entrepreneurs selling sun glasses, peanuts, roasted corn, cheap T-Shirts, fruits, and vegetables in the street is something that most, if not all, of the local residents of Dar es Salaam have never heard of until recently.

As Chinese immigrants trespass these boundaries, which predate their arrival to Dar es Salaam, unavoidable tensions between local and Chinese residents are likely to continue and take various forms, even violent ones (as seen in the example presented above). What is important to notice is that Chinese

immigrants' attempts to expand their services into areas previously dominated by Tanzanians is not seen by many of *them* as a transgression of any boundaries. In fact, on various occasions, I brought this up with some Chinese residents. They generally defended their strategies by arguing that Tanzania has an unexplored market, with plenty of opportunities for both Chinese and locals, and that consumers ultimately have only to gain from this competition. This discourse denotes a particular understanding of how free markets operate which is, in general, consistent with how Chinese do business in Tanzania. What is even more important to notice in this discourse, however, is that most of the Chinese migrants interviewed did not position themselves in relation to other foreigners, thus clearly distinguishing themselves, as outsiders, from other Tanzanians. Instead, they posit themselves as economic actors competing for the same social space as other residents. To some limited extent, Chinese immigrants see themselves as equal to Tanzanians and thus eligible to engage in competition for local markets from the same position, despite the fact that these migrants do not have any prior experience or involvement in these sectors.

While conflicts between Tanzanians and Chinese operating in the informal sector in Dar es Salaam are likely to continue, and perhaps even intensify, it becomes necessary to note that, from a different perspective, some of the Chinese retailers in Dar es Salaam are also directly helping Tanzanian street vendors. Some readers might be familiar with the cardboard vendors carry around in many African cities. These cardboards often have dozens of goods attached to them – sun glasses, puppets, plush stuffed animals, wallets etc – which vendors try to sell to anyone who takes the time to look at them. Out of 40 street vendors I talked to in Dar es Salaam, 25 claimed the products they have on display came from Chinese retailers, eight had Indian suppliers, and seven were getting the goods from Tanzanian retailers. Half of those getting their merchandise from Chinese retailers said they used to have other suppliers but that they changed because Chinese retailers offer better conditions and better prices. Others were encouraged by their friends to enter this business and get their products from Chinese suppliers. This

suggests that there are many ways in which Chinese immigrants are involved in the informal economy in Dar es Salaam, and that the impact of “China in Africa” cannot be thoroughly evaluated without bearing in mind these different dimensions of Chinese engagement, in Tanzania and all over the continent.

When presented with the above historical, sociological, and ethnographic data from both a Chinese and a Tanzanian perspective, it becomes essential to find the best way to read and analyze it. As we have seen in the previous two sections, both in the market and elsewhere Chinese immigrants and local Tanzanians are engaging each other at different levels and capacities. My methodological approach tried to present both Chinese and Tanzanian perspectives, anxieties, strategies, and opinions, and was designed to capture these views in light of the constant interaction between the two social groups.

Looking at the last fifty years of Sino-Tanzanian relations, we see the interdependent nature of the political and economic engagements of the two states. However, as my ethnographic data suggests, the same theoretical framework is also suited to define and explain the generally amicable interactions between Chinese immigrants and the local residents. In the market, on the street, or in other socio-economic sectors, the two groups interact with each other regularly, as both Chinese and Tanzanians rely on each other. They are interdependent, because neither would be able to be economically successful without the other, nor could they successfully achieve their own personal economic goals. If the Chinese were to exclusively sell goods that would instantly break, then their consumers would progressively move away from them since, as we have seen, Tanzanians are well aware of their economic agency and their wide range of choices. Therefore the Chinese’ economic success is correlated with generally positive feedback of their relationship to the local actors. In addition, as we have seen, many Tanzanians also welcomed the low prices as this has allowed them to redirect some of their resources to other ends that were previously more difficult to attain. Therefore, the changes Chinese immigrants bring to Tanzania’s internal market, be it formal or informal, are often judged by the locals in the light of their benefits. Many of the goods imported by Chinese immigrants are not only judged by their price but also their quality and

accessibility. More broadly, most of the people interviewed for this project quantified and judged their interactions with the Chinese immigrants based on the direct impact on their daily lives, except when they are in competition with them.

Conclusion

Next year will mark 50 years since Tanganyika and its Asian partner established diplomatic relations and, for many Chinese and Tanzanians, this will indeed be a moment worth celebrating. In 1961, when the two countries first cooperated at a formal level, their statesmen had a very different way of doing politics and business yet found a way to engage in bilateral agreements that were, to some extent, beneficial to both countries. The political friendship between the two states, though often motivated by different interests, suggests a formal pattern of mutual cooperation and interaction that has historically served a large variety of actors. The same pattern of interaction has also historically served as the basis of how Chinese immigrants and local residents in Dar es Salaam relate to each other and how they see each other in the light of their common history, past success stories of mutual cooperation, and future potential benefits, be those real or imagined.

Analyzed from a different perspective, we have seen that Sino-Tanzanian relations, both at a state and non-state level, have not been unidirectional but the result of a continuous interaction between the two groups. The Chinese have stepped in on various historical occasions to assist the Tanzanian state. On their end, the Tanzanian elite have acknowledged their partner's assistance and even defended Sino-African relations, especially in recent times when China's engagement in Africa has faced severe criticisms especially in the Western media. In Dar es Salaam, as my ethnographic data suggests, both Chinese and Tanzanians are profoundly aware of their role in the local economy and they continuously try to position themselves in ways that will secure a better outcome for each of them.

As far as many Tanzanians are concerned, they do not measure this wave of migration in terms of doctrines or ideologies, but in relation to its impact on their lives. So far, this impact has generally been positive, which is why, despite the increase in numbers and their sometimes negative effects on the local economy, Chinese are still looked upon favorably. But what this analysis of informal Sino-Tanzanian interaction suggests is that many of the differences and disagreements between the two groups of people are often discussed and negotiated in a shared social environment. There is a constant mechanism by which Tanzanians and Chinese adapt, reform, or change the way they relate to each other: some learn from their own mistakes, while others are driven out of the market just to be replaced by actors who are more prone to acclimatize to the local conditions. This phenomenon says something about how people relate to each other, but it might also have crucial implications for the political spectrum. The interaction between Chinese and Africans is, to some extent, governed by what can be seen as a sustainable and mutual engagement. As long as this generally beneficial relationship is clear to the actors involved, Sino-Tanzanian relations will constitute a success story. But for this to be maintained, both the Chinese and the Tanzanian states should actively attempt to improve their bilateral relations to reflect and cater to the complaints, anxieties, and hardships that some of the locals have experienced as a result of the Chinese' growing presence in the country. It is true that many of these matters are negotiated in the social sphere, both public and private, but the Tanzanian state should also give it a new formal representation, reflected in the legislation and the policy making strategies employed to further promote and ensure the development of this East African nation.

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