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De-centring the study of Sino-African migrations

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Through the publication of original research, policy discussions and evidence-based research papers, AHMR provides a comprehensive forum devoted exclusively to the analysis of current migration trends, migration patterns and some of the most important migration-related issues.

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Chief Editor's Note

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This special issue of African Human Mobility Review titled "De-centering the study of Sino-African migrations" brings together a selection of critical research contributions from scholars who offer knowledge to bridge the scholarship gap on Migration Studies. The journal is well-established in the peer-reviewed social science arena with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary intellectual perspectives. It also provides a venue for further research on emerging areas, highlights important issues, and describes new cross-disciplinary applications.

We are confident that this special issue provides a significant resource for scholars and practitioners that offers new ways of thinking about migrations between Africa and China. It also promotes the critical role of knowledge that consults facts and credible evidence to make decisions.

This special issue would not have been possible without the professionalism and hard work of our Guest Editors, Professor Anna Triandafyllidou, who holds the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration Program at Toronto Metropolitan University and Dr. Oreva Olakpe, researcher at Toronto Metropolitan University. We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to all reviewers for their thoughtful, insightful, and scholarly evaluation of manuscripts.

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Editorial

Migrations Between Africa and China: A Decentered Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Sino-African relations have generated much interest in the last 20 years and particularly in Europe and North America, as China has been emerging as a new center of power. However, research on Sino-African relations and the related migration flows has conceptualized Africa as only a site for power struggles between world powers, considering the governments and the people in Africa as lacking agency. They have both been considered mostly as passive recipients of policy changes or geopolitical power relations rather than active contributors to shaping those. In fact, Sullivan and Cheng (2018) point out that attempts to understand Sino-African migrations in the media and major publications are often tainted by stereotypes and undifferentiated notions of China and Africa. While it is true that these undifferentiated notions shape dominant discussions in the media (and at times also in academic research), it is equally true that asymmetries of power globally and between China and African countries are important in shaping those relations. Thus, critical analysis and research that unpack these asymmetries are just as important as acknowledging that people and governments in Africa are active agents of their own destinies. This special issue and this introductory paper form part of such an effort of a critical and decentered (Triandafyllidou, 2021) approach to Sino-African migrations.

Migration between China and Africa has increased significantly during the last 20 years alongside the growth of Sino-African trade from the 1990s onwards. Such growth in both trade and migration flows was part of a broader Chinese economic expansion to the African continent through loans, infrastructure development, and also scholarships (Cheru and Obi, 2010). The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was established in 2000 specifically to cement relations between China and African countries. During the last 20 years, migration flows between China and

Africa both increased and diversified (Cissé, 2021). There are estimates ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of Africans in China, with Nigerians constituting the largest number (Castillo, 2014), while there are estimates of one to two million Chinese migrants across Africa. However, in either case these estimates are generic and partly unreliable, as relevant statistical data do not exist or are outdated (Cissé, 2021).

This migration has particularly come under the spotlight during and after the pandemic because of the exacerbation of racist incidents registered against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, particularly at the port city of Guangzhou in southeast China. Additionally, the focus on these migrants has sharpened because of the devastating effect of the pandemic on the type of cross-border trade that these traders and entrepreneurs had developed over the last 15 years (Mathews, 2022).

This special issue is inscribed within a slowly emerging critical area of research that discusses the nature, role, and importance of migration flows between China and sub-Saharan Africa. Such literature has paid particular attention to the business and trading practices of sub-Saharan African migrants in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, pointing to their largely informal and networked character, based on personalized trust, despite widespread lack of legal status (Mathews and Yang, 2012; Haugen, 2012; Castillo, 2014; Mathews, 2015a, 2015b; Min et al., 2016; Mathews et al., 2017; Lan, 2017). These studies have framed African migration to China as an expression of a "low-end" globalization process that happens informally, at the fringes of the world economy and which is to be contrasted to the "high-end" globalization of large corporations, transnational flows of capitals and goods, and formal international trade.

The special issue both complements and contradicts the above analytical perspectives. From our perspectives, considering whether the migration flows and related economic activities between Africa and China are a "low-end" or "high-end" globalization risks missing the point of how these flows and exchanges are inscribed into a wider ebb of social and economic power asymmetries and struggles. We seek therefore to develop a critical line of research, with a twofold objective. On the one hand, we aim to take a closer look at the diversified experiences of different types of migrants within each flow, including not only labor migrants or entrepreneurs but also marriage migrants and international students, investigating their intersectional and dynamic trajectories (as labor migrants who marry locally, or international students who become entrepreneurs, or petty traders who move transnationally). On the other hand, we seek to theorize the place of Africa and China in the remaking of centers (symbolically, politically, economically) in the twenty-first century by considering how migration flows and their representations in political and media discourses reflect power asymmetries and power struggles. We look at the China-Africa relationship not as a peripheral one (compared to the "Western" centers of power) but rather as a multi-polar one, inscribed into a broader framework where China and Africa are two poles alongside Europe or North America (and also

Eurasia, South America, or Southeast Asia). We thus seek to deconstruct notions of "periphery" and "center" and argue for multiple "centers." Eventually our special issue argues for a multiple decentering (Triandafyllidou, 2020) and nuanced understanding of emerging international migrations between China and Africa.

This introductory paper starts by outlining the contours of Sino-African migrations in the next section while the subsequent section reviews the existing literature and introduces our novel analytical and empirical perspectives presented in this special issue.

SINO-AFRICAN MIGRATIONS AND THEIR EVOLUTION

Scholarly research to understand the dynamics of the growing Sino-African migrations is broad, ranging from theoretical analysis to country-specific empirical studies on Chinese migrants in specific African countries, or African migrants in China, as well as studies that seek to link the related population flows to broader socioeconomic and geopolitical drivers.

Considering Chinese migration flows to different parts of Africa, these were driven by a variety of factors – not just Chinese infrastructural investment in African countries but also individual trajectories of traders or other types of workers. Earlier studies (Kuang, 2008) distinguished among three types of Chinese migrations to Africa: labor migration by big Chinese enterprises, entrepreneurial migration of traders, and what Kuang terms as proletarian migrations in transit in Africa to other parts of the world. Kuang (2008) relates these migratory flows to China's foreign policy goals in Africa while Park (2009) points to the evolution of these pathways (and the related integration patterns) in the 2000s. Park discusses how Chinese migrants to African countries came from mainly coastal provinces like Fujian, Guangdong, and Zhejiang and how over time, this expanded to include migrants from urban areas including Shanghai, Beijing, and Tianjin, as well as overseas. Park also highlights how specific workers choose their paths; for example, medical doctors come through government-government agreements, whereas construction workers and miners may rely on government-licensed private employment agencies. What are some of the long-term implications of these pathways and patterns? This volume features a contribution to this area, taking a deep dive into the rise of Afro-Chinese communities on the continent.

African migration to China has emerged also in the early years of the twenty-first century as China became a new destination for workers and traders (Bodomo and Ma, 2010). Two of the largest Chinese commodity markets, Yiwu and Guangzhou, attracted an increasing number of traders and aspiring entrepreneurs (Bodomo, 2010; Bodomo and Ma, 2010; Bodomo, 2012) generating a vibrant context of small trade and business activities, particularly in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. This type of socioeconomic activity was labeled as "low-end globalization" (Mathews and Yang, 2012) as it was characterized by small capital, unregulated markets, and oftentimes irregular migration status for the businesspeople involved. Mathews and

Yang (2012: 95) argue that China's economic role in manufacturing cheap goods "enables Africa and other developing-world regions to experience globalization." While such dynamics are certainly at play, we feel that the "low-end" vs "high-end" globalization framework tends to focus too much on the power of the state in shaping the migration trajectories of migrants, disregarding the role of migrant agency (Triandafyllidou, 2019). Indeed, Mathews and Yang (2012) themselves point to the importance of individual initiative, informal networks, trust relations, and flexible arrangements in these business relations.

Important insights on Sino-African migration flows can be given by studies that situate these migrations into the broader context of economic relations between China and specific African countries. Cissé (2013), for instance, compares Sino-African traders in China and Senegal with a view to delving deeper into migrations between world regions that have been hitherto considered "emerging" (like China) or "peripheral" (like African countries, for their most part) to global capitalism. However, these new migration flows, outside of dominant streams of South to North pathways, need to be studied within the context of a broader net of economic partnership relations between China and several African countries, as these have developed in the last two decades. Chinese economic investments for infrastructural projects in Africa carry with them important geopolitical implications too, as they unsettle the monopoly of geopolitical and economic influence of Europe and North America over the continent (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2009). As the role of China in Africa evolves though, Chinese policies toward its diaspora in Africa as well as toward African migrations to China have been shifting, for example, with the mitigation of personal passport issuance processes and certification processes for labor service companies, as well as giving greater independence to provinces to dispatch labor (Ding, 2023). On the other hand, China has embraced the migration of African students for higher education in Chinese universities but has not removed structural barriers to their mobility in China (Mulvey, 2022).

In line with the above observations to better understand Sino-African migration, Sullivan and Cheng's (2018) study of Chinese online forums and websites where Chinese immigrants discuss life in Africa, unpacking their real daily struggles and diverse experiences, has thus focused on disaggregating the notion of "the Chinese" in Africa with a view to studying the varied experiences of Chinese migrants in different parts of Africa. These differences are shaped by a wide range of factors including provincial origin, age, occupation, or class. Similarly, Yuan and Pang (2018) argue that research on African migrants in China often overlooks the diversity of these populations, their origins, experiences, and livelihoods. They counter this oversimplification by focusing on the mobility of Congolese migrants, specifically through the lens of the Chinese concept "guoke," which means "transient guest." Effectively, both African migrants in China and Chinese migrants in Africa face significant precarity – in terms of policies and practices that regulate their legal

status, working conditions, and overall livelihoods – in their migratory trajectories even if the local contexts differ (Cissé, 2021).

There has been a distinct line of research that has focused particularly on the experiences of sub-Saharan African migrants in Guangzhou, a major port city in southeastern China, and Hong Kong pointing to the role of informal marketplaces like the Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong (Mathews, 2011) and the overall development of informal trade through African middlemen and traders particularly in those areas (Mathews, 2015a, 2015b; Mathews et al., 2017). Such research points to the socio-cultural dimensions and personalized trust relationships underpinning those economic activities and argues that this should be considered as low-end globalization because it relies mostly on personalized contacts, physical presence, and even physical carrying and shipping of the tradeable goods. It does not dispose of large capital nor formalized infrastructure that usually characterize (high-end) globalization processes (Mathews and Yang, 2012).

Looking at how this "low-end" globalization has evolved in the era of COVID-19 and omnipresent and powerful smart phones and digital platforms, Mathews (2022) points to the adaptation of these "low-end" processes to a new reality where low-value and low-volume trade takes advantage of digital technologies to develop new connections and fight old inefficiencies in supply and demand. But Mathews (2022) argues, these technological changes do not take away the importance of the personalized trust nor do they help scale up the activities to convert them into "high-end" globalization.

Our critique to this line of analysis is twofold. First, we are concerned that such research reproduces the dominant framework on international migration that presumes that "good" migration is regular, safe, and orderly as per the Global Compact for Migration mantra. Such a perspective ignores that more often than not migration happens, as in the Chungking Mansions or in the African quarters of Guangzhou, informally, irregularly, and without planning (Triandafyllidou, 2021). Sino-African migrations are not an exception to the rule but an expression of the multiple forms that international migration and human agency take. We thus need to turn our understanding upside down and recenter our understanding of globalization rather than frame these "peripheral" migrations within the dominant analytical frameworks of "low-end" and "high-end" globalization.

Second, such research has ignored the formal aspects of these activities, such as the structuring of communities of migrants without status that negotiate with the state (Olakpe, 2023); the international educational policies that have characterized Sino-African migrations (Mulvey and Mason, 2022); and the transnational circulation of information flows, which has elevated, for instance, the racist incidents registered in Guangzhou in 2020 and 2021 into a global issue (see also Oshodi in this special issue) prompting the reporting in both European and African media.

DECENTERING OUR FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SINO-AFRICAN MIGRATIONS

This special issue seeks to build on the findings of earlier research discussed above but also to break away from dominant analytical perspectives predicated on hierarchies of low- and high-end globalization of "North" and "South" power imbalances, and of regular and unregulated migration flows. We seek to disrupt the narrative of the "good" regular migration that has become dominant, if not hegemonic, obscuring alternative perspectives and the realities of migration on the ground. The narrative of safe, orderly, and regular migration tends to unilaterally privilege the wishes and needs of destination country governments (and employers or other stakeholders) disregarding the country of origin, country of transit, and own migrant perspectives (Collet and Ahad, 2017; Mouthaan, 2019), which are particularly important for understanding why and how Sino-African migrations emerge, despite a particularly hostile and restrictive policy environment. Studying these new migrations involves questioning our West-centric understanding of international migration and its governance focused on states and international organizations. It requires paying more attention to the role of different stakeholders and actors incorporating views from the margins (Cuttitta, 2020).

Decentering at first instance makes us think about geopolitics and hence speaks about countries of origin, transit, and destination; this type of decentering may also be seen as nonsensical, or at least imperfect, as an increasing number of countries are implicated in at least two of these three roles as both origin and transit, like Ghana, or both origin and destination like Nigeria, or as all three roles together, notably as origin, transit, and destination, like, for instance, Turkey or Morocco (Triandafyllidou, 2021).

Therefore, it is important to consider multiple perspectives of decentering: decentering toward different world regions and considering the multiple directions that international flows take among different countries and continents rather than mostly toward Europe and North America. Thus, our study of Sino-African migrations requires us to consider that, for instance, Nigeria or Ghana as countries of origin of African migrations to China are also countries of destination and transit and are involved in geopolitical negotiations within the African Union or with the European Union. Adopting center-periphery logics that simply replace Europe or North America as a destination of sub-Saharan African workers or traders with China do not do justice to the dynamics and complexity of Sino-African migration flows. What we learn from Sino-African migrations is the networked and polycentric character of contemporary migration flows and the complexity of migration drivers and migration choice (Black et al., 2022; Teye et al. 2022). We are thus invited to consider those in their diversity and from multi-focal perspectives.

In this special issue, Amoah and Hodzi do this by studying the ongoing internationalization of China's higher education sector, with a focus on its impact on African migration trends and the agency of African actors in Sino-African

educational partnerships and collaborations. Their study deviates from the West-centric narrative of internationalization of higher education and instead show that it is multi-centered. They uncover the workings of internationalization shaping higher education and migration choices of young Africans on the one hand but also the asymmetries that exist in Sino-African educational cooperation as it develops.

In the same line, Oshodi (in this special issue) analyzes the West African media reporting on the treatment of Africans in Guangzhou during the pandemic. Oshodi investigates what the coverage says about transnational information flows and perceptions of Sino-African migrations in Africa. To this day, reporting on Sino-African flows has been overshadowed by Western media and shaped by their representation of China as a threat to Western dominance and norms in Africa. Oshodi's conceptualization looks at China through the lens of its domestic realities, its actions outside China, and its activities within Africa, on the one hand, and the conceptualization of China in Nigerian and Ghanaian media, on the other hand.

Decentering our perspective on migration involves also considering not only the role of states and formal policies and actors (such as governments or international organizations) but also the role of informal and personalized networks like those that are documented in the research on Sino-African migrations. Such networks characterize international migration more broadly and have been increasingly characterized as migration infrastructures (Xiang and Lindquist, 2014) that play a crucial role in international migration. Thus, a closer look into Sino-African migrations shows the importance of such networks. For instance, in this volume, Jiang uses ethnographic research to study the role of religion-based networks in helping African Muslims in Guangzhou to navigate challenges of everyday life. In these informal and personalized networks, Jiang's research highlights the business ethics of the African Muslim community, which shaped their outlook on life, their business engagements and decisions, and their experiences in China; this deviates from the focus on the impact of undocumented status, crime and illegality in the community and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Sino-African migration and African communities in China.

Moreover, decentering enables us to elevate, unravel, and discuss aspects of Sino-African migrations that may not be evident when we adopt West-centric conceptualizations, hierarchies, and norms in the study of migration. A decentered approach also allows us to see and better understand structures that are created by Sino-African migrants and migrant communities to address the issues and challenges they face in their everyday lives. Research has shown that irregular and informal migration leads to the emergence of formal-informal community structures in migrant communities that fill the gaps and address the problems that formal laws and policies cannot (Olakpe, 2023).

In the same vein, Adebayo (in this special issue) studies communities of deported Nigerian migrants to understand how deportability and deportation experiences in China create "deportsporas" in Nigeria. In this study, Adebayo

examines how a volatile immigration law and policy environment in China and living under the constant threat of arrest and deportation shape the experiences and the entire existence of undocumented Nigerians in Guangzhou – including their family dynamics, masculinity, migratory decisions, and livelihoods.

Finally, in this special issue, Wang's ethnographic research analyses South-South cross-border marriages taking place between Chinese men and Ethiopian women. The study of Afro-Chinese marriages is relatively underexplored, particularly those occurring in the continent. Wang's research uncovers the networks, factors, and ideation that facilitate Sino-Ethiopian marriages and the outcomes that materialize as a result. Rather than use a racial or cultural lens, Wang studies the marriages within the complex context of China's expansion in Ethiopia, the socioeconomic status of Chinese and Ethiopian women, and how perceptions of China shape the migration outcomes of these cross-border unions.

These structures show the contributions that communities, regardless of their status, make to society, demonstrate their agency and their resistance to oppressive migration laws and policies shaped by the current state of the international as well as regional and domestic practices and contexts. These structures are important for several reasons. They shape both short-term and long-term migration outcomes, including individual and collective approaches to law and policy.

They also show us how migrants interpret migration policy, law, and norms as they evolve. Additionally, communal structures give us deeper insights into how and why migrants organize themselves. Lastly, they enable us to destabilize negative perceptions and understandings of these communities that have persisted in how we study Sino-African migration and migrants.

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Higher Education as "Strategic Power"? An Assessment of China–Africa Higher Education Partnerships and Collaborations

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Abstract

China is internationalizing its higher education sector – setting up several bilateral and multilateral partnerships between public and private institutions across the globe. However, as the "West" is disentangling itself from partnerships with Chinese institutions of higher education and the Confucius Institutes (CIs), African countries seem to be turning to Beijing. As a result, China overtook France to become the most preferred destination for African students. But, is higher education Beijing's new strategy to enhance its global status? What is the effect of the shift toward Chinese higher education on Africa's migration trends, and what is the agency of actors in Africa? Focusing on these questions, and premised on the concepts of student mobility, South–South Cooperation (SSC), and people-to-people exchange to explain the novelty and exceptionality of the partnerships, this paper explores the typology, nature, and processes involved in these partnerships and collaborations.

Keywords: education, internationalization, mobility, students, cooperation

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INTRODUCTION

This paper elucidates the evolution and characteristics of the China–Africa educational partnership at macro-level. It sets out proposals for advancing debates to the micro-levels within the broader discourse on higher education internationalization in the context of South–South Cooperation (SSC). Kevin Gray and Barry Gills (2016: 557) describe SSC as,

> … a key organizing concept and a set of practices in pursuit of historical changes through a vision of mutual benefit and solidarity among the disadvantaged of the world system … conveying the hope that development may be achieved by the poor themselves through their mutual assistance to one another, and the whole world order transformed to reflect their mutual interests vis-à-vis the dominant global north.

With knowledge production being at the core of North–South inequalities, China–Africa cooperation in education, seemingly, seeks to challenge the asymmetries in global education production and consumption.

This paper examines the nature and processes of the making of the China–Africa partnerships and collaborations. It also addresses critical questions such as: Who initiates the collaborations? Who pays for them? Who benefits? What objectives are they meant to achieve? The discussion then extends current debates from the macro- to the micro-level by examining the career and social mobility of the students involved in the China–Africa educational partnerships at the backdrop of the rising student numbers and academic collaborations. By exploring these key issues, the paper sheds light on how countries that were traditionally seen as sources of international students are strategically positioning themselves as destination countries in the global higher education landscape and the impact of these efforts on the career prospects and quality of life of the students. This is a significant departure from existing studies that have predominantly focused on the discourse at the macro-level. The paper therefore makes four critical contributions to the discourse on higher education internationalization – the contributions center on the South–South dynamic between China and Africa; the type of both equal and unequal relationships between China and specific African countries; the primacy of the state instead of the universities in this exchange; and how this influences future global leadership in higher education.

SITUATING CHINA–AFRICA HIGHER EDUCATION IN GLOBAL EDUCATION MOBILITY TRENDS

In response to current global transitions in higher education, governments, state, and non-state institutions are intensifying higher education internationalization efforts (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Mihut et al., 2017). This is because the number of

international students has increased exponentially. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), the number of international students grew from a mere 2 million in 2000 to about 5.3 million students in 2017. The majority of these international students are from China, India, France, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and South Korea. Beyond this international mobility of students, other main characteristics of the global transitions in higher education internationalization include: rising flows and exchanges of scholars (for research, teaching, seminars, and conferences), academic materials and resources, joint programs, creation of diverse funding schemes, international campus branches, an intensified collaboration between governments, universities and markets to drive change (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Altbach et al., 2009; Chen, 2016; Knight and de Wit, 2018).

Several factors have contributed to this growing global interest in internationalization of higher education. First, the cutting of government funding for higher education compelled institutions in Western Europe, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, the United States (US), and Nordic countries such as Finland to look for alternative sources of financing. International students, mostly from emerging economies such as China and India became sources of income for most Western universities. To remain competitive in the global race for external students, internationalization became a marketization strategy that underpins the now entrenched neo-liberal governance approaches at higher education institutions (HEIs) (Mok, 2000; Lynch, 2006; Knight and de Wit, 2018; McCaig et al., 2018; Nixon et al., 2018). Internationalization is therefore a means for universities to attract international students – thus maximizing their income potentials.

Second, the growth in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) underlies higher education internationalization. Using ICT, remote teaching and learning enable universities to reach international students without incurring expenses that accompany a physical campus. For students needing to attain a higher education without physically relocating, distance learning has become an alternative. In addition, it has enabled students to circumvent the often-stringent visa requirements in the UK, the US, and other European countries. This has revolutionized how knowledge is produced and communicated globally (Altbach et al., 2009; Knight and de Wit, 2018), and enabled universities to increase their student numbers and revenue beyond what they could have with only physical learning. With the COVID-19 pandemic restricting student movement, universities that provided distance learning gained popularity, forcing traditional universities to consider hybrid learning to tap into the distance-learning market.

Third, states are regarding higher education as a source of "soft power." Joseph Nye (1990) defines soft power as the ability of a country to shape preferences of other countries, through the attractiveness of its culture, values, political, social, and economic advancement, so that they desire the outcomes it wants. Due to their cosmopolitan nature, universities are a bastion of multiculturalism and a tool for

dispensing a country's culture, values, and norms beyond its citizens. Previously, this was limited to the developed West but now, even emerging powers in the Global South, including China, consider internationalization of higher education as a diplomacy strategy (Yang, 2010; Fijałkowski, 2011; Bodomo, 2015; Knight and de Wit, 2018). Even for Africa, the exploits of African economic and educational migrants have been described as a form of soft power, even though African universities are still finding their footing in the global higher education space (Altbach et al., 2009).

Based on international student mobility, China and Chinese universities are becoming key players in the global higher education industry. For the Chinese government, the ultimate goal is making the country highly competitive as a destination for international students (Mok and Chan, 2008). Therefore, the country, through its decentralized arms has initiated numerous policies and strategies to restructure the education and governance systems to meet internal needs and be globally competitive (Mok and Chan, 2008; Zha, 2012; Chen, 2016). Popular among such policies are those relating to quality assurance of academic practices, international benchmarking teaching and research, the transformation of selected universities into world-class institutions, diversifying funding sources, promoting international partnerships, creating opportunities for international branch campuses in China, and aggressively developing English-language programs (Mok and Lo, 2007; Mok and Chan, 2008; Zha, 2012; Chen, 2016).

Operationalization of these policies has attracted African students to further their education in China. Similarly, African institutions, in need of infrastructural development and education development assistance, also are intensifying efforts to build partnerships with their Chinese counterparts (King, 2014; Li, 2018). As noted by several authors (Bodomo, 2011; Niu, 2013; King, 2014), China's educational internationalization has, since the turn of the century, been particularly notable in its partnership with African nations. Indeed, "the Chinese government attaches high symbolic value to the scholarships offered to Africa and it has a long history of using educational aid as a means to reinforce ties with African countries" (Haugen, 2013: 315). The result, as noted by Li Anshan (2018), is that the growth rate of African students in the past decade is highest among all international student arrivals in China.

China–Africa education partnership: Nature and typologies

Afro-Sino relations have a long history dating back to the 1950s when the primary focus was on the anti-colonial and ideological struggles in Africa (Besada and O'Bright, 2017). Over the past two decades, relations have significantly expanded to include trade, education, and training. Despite educational exchanges being put on hold in 1966 due to the Cultural Revolution in China, the education sector is now considered a key area of collaboration (Niu, 2013; King, 2014; Li, 2018). While the policy for educational support and cooperation between China and Africa has been generally fragmented, spanning from technical cooperation, education and

training, and human resource development cooperation (King, 2014), the 2018 Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) action plan offered a more specific theme, education, and human resources (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The Government of China initiated FOCAC in 2000 as a multi-purpose vehicle for engaging with Africa on all development fronts, including [higher] education (Niu, 2013; King, 2014; FOCAC, 2020). Among others, the areas of higher education cooperation between China and Africa includes staff exchange; promoting exchanges and cooperation in culture, art, and media; infrastructure development; support for human and institutional capacity building; supply of academic materials; joint research; recruitment of African students; and other collaborative programs (Niu, 2013; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). A typical example of exchange partnerships is embodied in the renowned 20+20 Cooperation Plan that was launched in 2009 (King, 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The plan encourages intensive one-to-one cooperation between 20 Chinese universities and colleges and 20 African institutions at the same level.

These policies and the respective programs emerging from them are facilitated through various public and private funding sources, mainly initiated and originating from China. The funding mix comprises provincial scholarships, special scholarships by private corporations (e.g., China National Petroleum Corporation), Chinese central and local government scholarships, as well as opportunities for self-funded studies (He, 2010; Haugen, 2013; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The Chinese government, as announced at the 2018 FOCAC summit in Beijing, plans to continue on this path by providing Africa with 50,000 government scholarships and 50,000 places for seminars and workshops for professionals of different disciplines (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Thus, in the spirit of cooperation and mutual development, China's approach to higher education has become more targeted. For instance, the FOCAC 2019–2021 action plan sought to offer tailor-made training for high-caliber Africans (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). In recent years, programs such as Master's in Public Administration have been specifically designed and delivered to numerous government officials of African nations (King, 2014). These policies and others alike have since 2000 been operated under the aegis of the FOCAC framework and these are partly why China's education cooperation has been described as Africa-based (Niu, 2013; FOCAC, 2020).

The relationship between China and Africa as regards higher education is, therefore, somewhat unique relative to those of Africa's arrangements with other established and emerging powers. China presents itself more as a development partner to African nations and institutions instead of the traditional development aid approach and mechanisms adopted by the UK (DFID), USA (USAID), and South Korea (KOICA) (King, 2014). Educational cooperation is, therefore, considered part of China's broader development assistance to Africa. For instance, in Nigeria, due to the lack of qualified Nigerian railway engineers, as part of its corporate social responsibility, the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation is constructing

a University of Transportation in Nigeria. Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari described the project as paving the "way for the domestication of railway engineering and general transportation sciences in Nigeria, thereby bridging the technology and skill gap in the railway and ultimately transportation sector" (Xinhua, 2019). This approach, according to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs is inspired by China's fundamental principles of equality, mutual benefit, win-win economic development, solidarity, mutual trust, mutual support, and support for its partner nations to explore their preferred development paths (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This is what has been termed as "overseas aid with its own [Chinese] characteristics" (King, 2014: 3). The linking of education cooperation with broader development cooperation means that China–Africa educational cooperation centers the state. Accordingly, China's [higher] education engagement with African institutions and nations has taken the form of support for various countries to pursue their priority education programs and projects, as has been witnessed in the construction of Science University in Malawi, and the building and equipping of the Polytechnic College in Ethiopia (King, 2014).

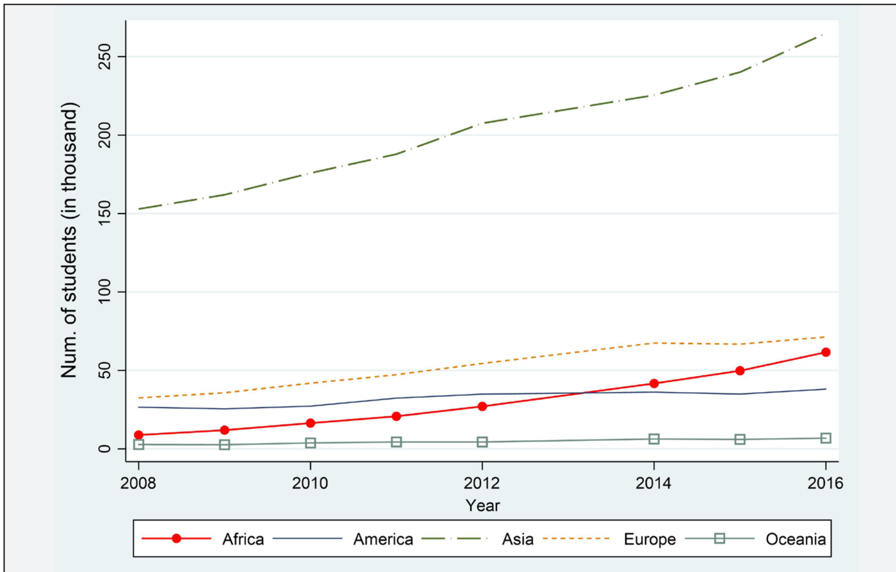
The implication is that China's internationalization agenda in the context of its relations with Africa departs from the purely market-driven approach adopted by many Western nations (Lynch, 2006; Altbach and Knight, 2007; King, 2014). Although the Ministry of Education of China established the China Scholarship Council as the primary vehicle through which the Chinese government awards scholarships, heads of state, through bilateral and multilateral agreements and forums such as FOCAC, still play a role in determining the nature of education and human resource exchange and training, which form part of China's internationalization process. It appears that the Chinese universities follow what the Chinese central government decides at the state level – giving an impression of a state-led higher education internationalization process. The result is that the state-driven process is geared toward achieving political and diplomatic objectives as opposed to an economic-led strategy. Moreover, China's involvement is gradually positioning African educational systems as internationalized, contrary to the situation a decade ago (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Haugen, 2013). However, the use of education as a soft power instrument to enhance a country's external image is not unique to China. The soft power dimensions of China's educational engagement, such as the language and cultural services offered by its Confucius Institutes (CIs) through various institutional partnerships do not, in theory, differ from those of other high-income nations and emerging powers. For instance, Germany and France use the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Française respectively, to promote their national languages and cultures. In Germany, scholarships awarded to international recipients by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) often require recipients to undertake mandatory German language courses. Arguably, China's CIs are imitating these strategies, in their quest to promote the Chinese language and culture. The difference, however, is that in practice, in the case of the CIs, unlike the Goethe Institute and the Alliance Française,

the visibility of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is obvious. In addition, CIs are normally established at foreign universities as joint ventures between the host university or school, a university in China, and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), which is supposedly a nongovernmental and non-profit organization, although it "is under the supervision of the Chinese Ministry of Education and is funded by the Chinese government" (Peterson et al., 2022: 27) – so the Chinese government remains with indirect influence over the CIs. Each CI abroad has two directors – one from the local university or school and another from the Chinese partner university. Over the past five years, CIs in the US and Europe have come under criticism due to allegations that they restrict academic freedom by prohibiting topics that are sensitive to the Chinese government. Resultantly, there are growing perceptions that the CIs advance the interests of the CPC more than the Chinese language and culture. This perception is, however, not shared by African universities that have CIs – none of the African universities have raised complaints about the CIs restricting academic freedom or advancing the interests of the CPC on their campuses.

African students in China: Trends

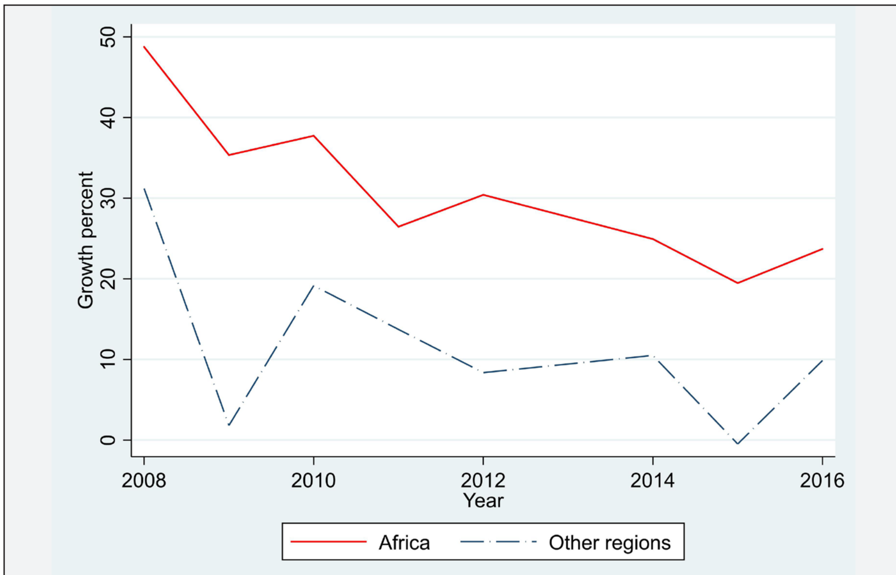
Following the background to the China–Africa educational partnership above, we now examine the status and trends of African students' engagement with China's higher education system. This, as argued by Robin Helms and Laura Rumbley (2017), is critical to an inquiry on whether higher education internationalization policies are essential to attaining academic, political, social, and cultural goals. On the surface, based on the increase of students from African countries studying at universities in China, China's internationalization process seems to be successful (Li, 2018). Pronouncements made at the 2018 FOCAC summit on increased scholarships, tailored study programs, and human resource capacity building initiatives announced by China indicate that the trend is likely to continue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The total number of students from Africa in China is third in relation to those from Asia and Europe, having surpassed the Americas since 2013 (see Figure 1) (Ministry of Education, 2019). As of 2018, 81,562 Africans were studying in China, a more than 40-fold increase in 15 years, from just 1,793 in 2003 (Li, 2018; Lau, 2020). Given that the growth rate of African students in China has remained the highest among all other international students since 2008 (see Figure 2) (Ministry of Education, 2019), it is expected that African students will remain the second most populous group of international students in China, second only to students from the Asian region.

Figure 1: Number of inward international students 2008-2016



Source: Ministry of Education (2019), China

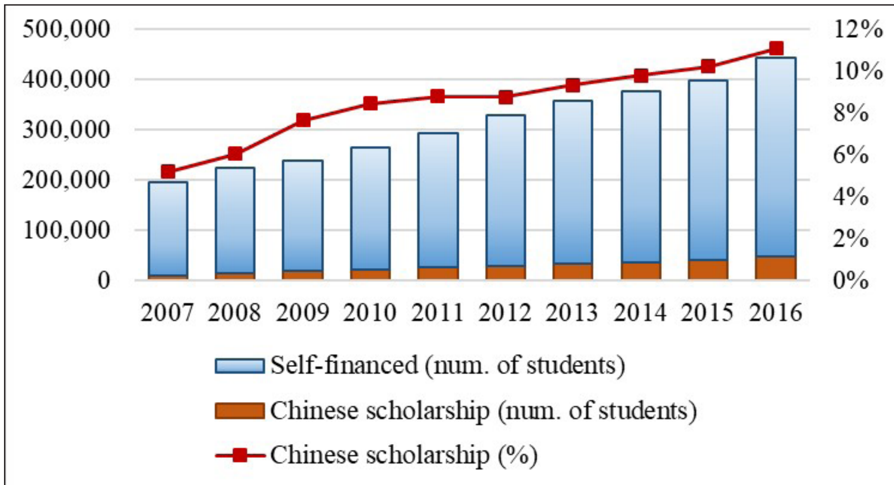
Figure 2: Growth rate of inward international students, Africa and other regions



Source: Ministry of Education (2019), China

Moreover, while there is a notion that African students in China are motivated by financial incentives (scholarship incentives mainly) (Haugen, 2013), current trends depict a different situation (Li, 2018). From 1976 to 1988, all African students in China were on scholarships. This trend changed from 1989 with two students studying in China on a self-financed basis and the number of those without scholarship exceeding scholarship holders for the first time in 1994 (Li, 2018). Since 2006, the number of self-financed African students in China has always exceeded their counterparts on financial aid, and this was as a result of the 2006 FOCAC summit when new forms of educational exchanges and partnerships, as well as more flexible visa application processes, were introduced (King, 2014; Li, 2018). In addition, the demand for alternatives to the expensive Western education, coupled with increased awareness of China as a destination for education among Africans of middle- and upper-middle-class status, and Africans doing business in China who are able to fund their education also contributed to this increase in self-financing African students in China. Consequently, there were as many as 41,322 self-financed students compared to 8,470 students on scholarships as at 2015 (Li, 2018). In fact, the proportion of overall international students on scholarships in China as at 2016 was approximately 11%, rising from about 5% in 2007, as shown in Figure 3 (Ministry of Education, 2019). Therefore, one could argue that China has been able to ground its higher education internationalization agenda in Africa in the institutional realities of the most crucial partners, universities, and colleges (Helms and Rumbley, 2017). This reality notwithstanding, it must be emphasized that the success in drawing educational institutions in the China–Africa educational partnership is attributable to the prevailing political and governance structure of China, which has strategically used the HEIs as instruments to achieve the desired soft power and internationalization outcomes (Mok, 2000, 2014; Mok and Chan, 2008; Mok and Ong, 2014).

Figure 3: Funding sources of international students in China, including Africans



Source: Ministry of Education (2019), China

While the policy aspect of the engagement is intriguing, the nature, conditions, and prospects of the students involved in the multi-faceted arrangements between China and the African nations require further inquiry. African students in China are far from homogenous, at least from a financial point of view as well as their pre-schooling situation. A previous study by Heidi Haugen (2013) provided a typology of African students in China, which serves as a significant starting point to understanding the nature of the people involved in the educational engagement and their aspirations. In that study, various kinds of students were identified in terms of: funding arrangements (four kinds), their schooling journey (four kinds), and the places of origin before commencing their studies, as shown in Table 1. Thus, while various policies are encouraging several Africans to seek higher education in China, attention must be given to the varying current and prospective integration and development of the students involved, given their heterogeneity. More importantly, this call is essential to the sustainability of the China–Africa education collaboration, as the experiences of the students during and after their studies are critical to others planning on embarking on similar journeys. As Haugen (2013) demonstrates, the negative experiences of African students can create a serious dent on the ambition of China to increase its soft power in Africa through educational engagements.

Table 1: Typologies of African students in China

Type of student	Place of abode before joining a Chinese University/College	Source of funding
Scholarship students	Home country	Chinese government agencies, large corporate employers
Self-funding students	Home country, third country	Personal or family savings
Traders turned students	China	Profit generated from the students' businesses
Family firm trainees	Home country, third country	Profit generated from family members' businesses in China

Source: Adapted from Haugen (2013: 324)

MAKING SENSE OF CHINA–AFRICA EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

China–Africa educational cooperation is framed by the Chinese government as part of South–South Cooperation (SSC). Broadly defined, according to Meibo Huang (2019: 1) SSC is "cooperation at bilateral, regional, or interregional levels that is initiated, organized, and managed by developing countries themselves, in order to promote political, economic, social, cultural, and scientific development." In 2015, Beijing launched the South–South Cooperation Fund to support developing countries to implement and achieve their development objectives. At the end of 2017, China had supported more than 200 development cooperation projects, including projects on education and training, in more than 27 countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Earlier on, in 2015, President Xi had announced the establishment of the Institute of South–South Cooperation and Development (ISSCAD) – a flagship institute that subsequently launched at Peking University. According to the Institute's website, it "provides both degree education and non-degree executive training programs for mid-level to senior officials, as well as managers, researchers from government, academia, the media, NGOs and other organizations in developing countries." Several government officials from African countries, have been trained at ISSCAD – graduating with degrees up to PhD level. For China, funds and institutions like these provide ample evidence of its commitment to knowledge sharing, technical skills transfer and transformative learning in its relations with countries in the Global South. Importantly, it provides China an opportunity to train middle- to senior-level officials from Africa on development and governance – thus promoting its development and governance model. Therefore, internationalization of higher education is linked to China's foreign policy objectives while addressing educational and skills gaps in Africa.

The centrality of the state in China's internationalization of higher education and educational cooperation with African countries gives credence to Jurgen Enders's

(2004: 367) definition of internationalization, as referring "mainly to processes of greater cooperation between states, and consequently to activities which take place across state borders. Located within the SSC framework, internationalization and educational cooperation builds strategic relationships, based on mutual cooperation and mutual observation." The implication, in the case of China–Africa educational cooperation is the absence of the market in China's higher education internationalization because, for instance, the Chinese government announces, after consultation with African governments, training and education scholarships at FOCAC summits, then requests universities to accommodate the students selected by governments in Africa to study at Chinese universities.

Between China and Africa, internationalization is mostly a government rather than an institutional initiative aimed at the "generation and transmission of ideology, the selection and formation of elites, the social development and educational upgrading of societies, the production and application of knowledge and the training of highly skilled labour force" (Enders, 2004: 362). For instance, with regard to most of the scholarships, African governments link areas of study with their national priorities, thus reducing Chinese universities to implementers of bilateral agreements between China and African governments. The implication is that internationalization of higher education in China in the context of China–Africa educational cooperation is limited to student mobility and human resource training of Africans. Africans are receivers of training and education from Chinese universities and experts. This dynamic mimics the North–South dynamic in which the Global North is the producer of knowledge consumed by the Global South. In place of the Global North, by establishing educational centers such as ISSCAD, providing scholarships and tailor-making professional and technical training to suit the needs of African states, China is establishing itself as a producer of knowledge and expertise relevant to the African continent. While in the past, China was hesitant, increasingly it is asserting itself as a major developing country with development and poverty-reduction experience that other countries in the Global South can learn from. Therefore, instead of China–Africa higher education cooperation challenging the Western- and Euro-centric perspectives, it exposes the asymmetrical power dynamics between "South–South" countries like China and different African countries – where China is the producer of knowledge and expertise consumed by African countries.

To the contrary, internationalization of higher education should go beyond international student mobility. Instead, as argued by Foskett (2010: 37):

> Internationalization reaches to the heart of the very meaning of "university" and into every facet of its operation, from teaching and education to research and scholarship, to enterprise and innovation and to the culture and ethos of the institution.

That means internationalization involves transformative changes in what is taught, how it is taught, why it is taught, where and who teaches it. From that perspective, internationalization in China's higher education in the context of China–Africa educational cooperation is still conceptualized as an outcome rather than a process – the outcomes focused on being student mobility, training programs, and educational development assistance. There is, therefore, no meaningful integration of African and Chinese institutions, let alone the integration of African students in Chinese society and educational system. Accordingly, there is a need for China and African countries to regard internationalization as,

> … the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society (de Wit et al., 2015: 283, italics in original).

Without integration, China–Africa educational cooperation and internationalization of higher education between the two replicates the North–South asymmetries of power in knowledge production and consumption. For instance, as at 2018, there were 81,562 Africans studying in China compared to an estimated total of no more than 800 Chinese students in Africa, according to UNESCO (2020) statistics. A majority of Chinese students study in the US, UK, and Australia – together, the three countries make up almost 60 percent of Chinese international students. "These uneven flows of students and capital are an indication of the markedly different ways that the global political economy affects HEIs around the world" (Vavrus and Pekol, 2015: 6). Faculty exchanges in China–Africa education cooperation also reflect similar evidence of asymmetry – they challenge China's notion of people-to-people exchange, upon which its cooperation with Africa hinges. The impression is that Africans are consumers of China's knowledge and expertise. Kenneth King (2019: 337) argues that such evident asymmetry does not preclude the mutual equality in China–Africa relations because the principles of people-to-people exchange and "win-win economic, cultural or educational cooperation do not depend on precisely equal activities within the education sector but rather on a shared appreciation that the other party is equal." Nonetheless, the fact that fewer than 800 out of an estimated 600,000 Chinese students studying abroad consider Africa a destination for their higher education means that global inequalities in the knowledge production are taking root. With only about 800 Chinese students across Africa, institutions of higher education on the continent miss the revenue that Chinese students bring to universities in the West – thus they remain under-resourced and unable to benefit from the global internationalization drive.

Internationalization of higher education has in the past decade become a symbol of hierarchies of knowledge, influenced by "asymmetries of power and

expertise" (Larsen, 2016: 6). The effect is that Africa is peripheralized in the global knowledge production hierarchies, leaving its internationalization process in the hands of foreign donors, China included. The reliance on development assistance for development of higher education in Africa means that African institutions of higher education are the last resort for universities in China seeking cooperation partners because they lack in global reputation and "struggle to carry out the most basic teaching and research functions" (Vavrus and Pekol, 2015: 6). Consequently, regardless of the South–South cooperation and people-to-people exchanges rhetoric, China–Africa educational cooperation replicates the North–South cooperation inequalities that it seeks to redress. As argued by Marianne Larsen (2016: 6), as redress to the global imbalances in higher education cooperation, internationalization should "reflect an understanding of the globalized world characterized by flows of people, ideas, objects, and capital, that is, the movement of higher education students, academics, programs, and providers." In other words, internationalization ought to be transformative, seeking to understand and respond to the complexities of knowledge production and higher education cooperation between the "developed" Global South and the "developing" Global South.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Notwithstanding the asymmetries in China–Africa educational cooperation, principles of South–South cooperation and people-to-people exchange provide a framework to reframe internationalization of higher education and mobility in relational terms. As put by Larsen (2016: 10), "Thinking relationally allows us to see how mobile students, academics, knowledge, programs and providers are enmeshed in networks that both enable and constrain possible individual and institutional actions." Making an argument for mobilities theories, Larsen (2016: 2) argues that,

> [A] theoretical framework based on spatial network, and mobilities theories can provoke us to shift our attention from linear, binary, deterministic, Western-centric accounts of internationalization to understand the complex, multi-centered ways in which internationalization processes have played out across higher education landscapes worldwide.

Thus, enabling us to deconstruct why higher education internationalization perpetuate inequalities and asymmetrical hierarchies in higher education, which relegate Africa to consumption of knowledge produced in the West and China. As discussed in this paper, even though internationalization of higher education in China and the West is driven by different objectives – revenue in the West and soft power in China – the effect on the role and position of Africa in the global distribution of power is the same. Africa is still regarded by both China and the West as a consumer of their knowledge. The effect is that even though China–Africa educational cooperation is

described by both parties as a form of South–South cooperation, symbolizing mutual benefit and equality, the power asymmetries between China and Africa are similar to those that existed in Africa's relations with the Global North.

In essence, China–Africa educational cooperation has accelerated internationalization of higher education in China, with a focus on outcomes rather than processes. As discussed above, this is because there has been little integration of institutions of higher education, poor funding of HEIs in Africa, and state-driven higher education cooperation and student mobility that is not based on HEIs' needs. With institutions of higher education reduced to implementers of government policy, African students in China are often confronted by university non-responsiveness to their needs, particularly if they are self-financing. It is therefore imperative that institutions of higher learning in China be part of the bilateral China–Africa educational cooperation arrangements. Such participation will help them understand the purpose and intentions underlying China–Africa education cooperation and focus on internationalization as a process of integration rather than an outcome measured by how many African students graduate from their universities.

Internationalization in China–Africa relations is aimed at achieving political and diplomatic goals – the balancing of political objectives with educational objectives, not just of the states but of African students is imperative. This means that instead of internationalization being imposed on least-prepared universities and higher education teachers, universities of higher learning in China will see that African students are equally important. Similarly, it will enable more capacity development for African universities to be able competitors in the internationalization competition and provide meaningful partnership to their Chinese counterparts. As it stands, there is insignificant consideration for "the active involvement of academics in internationalization, their perceptions of other cultures and people, the value they place on internationalization and their competence in speaking and reading other languages" (Harman, 2005: 131). The effect is that the internationalization of Chinese universities is to a greater extent linear, binary, and deterministic – focused on channeling out African graduates to meet the demand from Africa and advance Beijing's foreign policy objectives. The effect is that the boundaries between the state, universities, and the market are blurred, leading to non-transformative cooperation.

Overall, a relational approach to internationalization will enable internationalization programs and providers to confront the representations that disadvantage African institutions. Broadly, leading universities in China and across the globe only collaborate with equally prestigious universities, unless their intention is to capacitate African universities. Most of the existing capacity-building programs reinforce representations of African universities as inferior and not worthy of student and faculty exchanges. Accordingly, China–Africa educational cooperation and internationalization of higher education in both China and Africa should be transformational and to a greater extent revolutionary, if principles of people-to-people exchange and South–South cooperation are to

be meaningful and usher Africa into the ongoing internationalization and global education competition. Yet, as discussed in this paper, China–Africa educational engagements challenge the dominant notions of South–South cooperation as an alternative to North–South cooperation. Instead, it shows that as China becomes more assertive and confident of exporting its development and governance model through institutions such as ISSCAD, the South–South dynamic is largely a replacement of the Global North with China; hence, a new "center" and an old periphery. China–Africa educational cooperation is therefore a betrayal of the South–South cooperation hope that Gray and Gills (2016) argued would transform the world order that favored the Global North because China is taking the place of the Global North in its relations with Africa.

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Framing Chinese Treatment of Africans in Guangzhou: A Study of Nigerian and Ghanaian Online Newspapers

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Abstract

The treatment of Africans in Guangzhou, China in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic – here referred to as the “Guangzhou episode” – generated strong criticisms and made news headlines within and outside Africa. This paper analyzes the reportage of the episode in four online African newspapers: two each from Nigeria and Ghana. Specifically, it sheds light on how the episode was framed, comparing coverage between both countries. Using a discourse analysis that prioritizes language, source, and focus, the paper demonstrates that while Western media were important influences and sources for the newspapers, the African migrants’ experiences in the episode were largely framed within (ahistorical) victimhood. Yet the idea of “African” migrants had a noticeable Nigerian dimension.

Keywords: African migrants, Guangzhou episode, media, victimhood, COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The growing Africa-China relationship has intensified migration from both sides. There are about 500,000 Africans in China – although some consider this figure to be lower, around 16,000 – and 1–2 million Chinese citizens in Africa (Amoah et al., 2020; Bodomo, 2020; Yan, 2020; Cissé, 2021). The number of African students studying in China has also increased. Not only do students form the second largest group of African diaspora in China (Li, 2018), but that category in China also surpassed those studying in the United States and Britain (Makundi, 2020). In 2018, for instance, China was the most popular destination for African students after France (Makundi, 2020). In the case of African students in China, there is the "intersection of educational and trading-led migration" (Ho, 2018), making a simplistic categorization of students as non-migrants problematic. As Africa-China relationships develop, however, the media dimension is increasingly becoming crucial (Li, 2017; van Staden and Wu, 2018). Although academic interest in this dimension appears slow-paced (Wekesa, 2017a, 2017b) when compared to other aspects, the literature on the former has nonetheless increased in recent times. Not only has the media become an arena for highlighting the perceived role(s) of China in Africa (Umejei, 2017), but it also represents a space for criticism and engagement. Thus, just as there have been copious reports on Chinese investment (and soft power) in Africa, there have been episodes of negative reports on China (Mudasiru and Oshodi, 2020). Even the much-reported Chinese-built African Union (AU) secretariat headquarters, a gift from Beijing to African governments in 2012, had its share of negative news in 2018 when reports emerged that the Chinese had been spying on Africans in the building (Dahir, 2018) – an allegation first made by the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, but that quickly spread across media outlets. Similarly, reports about the treatment of Africans in Guangzhou, a port city in southern China – hereafter referred to as the "Guangzhou episode" (Oshodi, 2021) – during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic generated even more negative reportage for China. Not only did the Guangzhou episode force Beijing to respond to questions about anti-African racism, but it also challenged officious Chinese statements on Africa-China relations. This paper focuses on the Guangzhou episode, especially on how it was framed by Africa-based media.

Guangzhou has a population of 18.7 million (*Global Times*, 2023). The official figure of 20,000 Africans in 2009 reportedly reduced to an estimated 16,000 in 2016 and 4,553 registered Africans by April 2020 (Marsh, 2016; Kirton, 2020). Two reasons can explain the decrease: frequent visa checks on Africans by the local government and the registration of traders (Jin et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the Guangzhou episode – a coinage used here to represent the reports on the treatment of Africans in the city and how African media, migrants, politicians, civil societies, and China responded – merits attention for four interrelated reasons. First, it represents a blight on a cordial Africa-China relationship, one that generated significant coverage in traditional and new media. Second, it happened in a unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic

in April 2020, when movement was restricted and work was done online in many places. The impact of and response to the pandemic varied across countries – from the ones that closed their borders for months to the ones that witnessed high fatalities. China, for example, did not relax its COVID-19 restrictions until December 2022. By focusing on online reports, this paper offers some insight into how Africa-China migration is mediated and framed through the media. Third, while it raises the ghost of racism and xenophobia against African migrants in China (see Sautman, 1994; Cheng, 2011) that generated several media reports, the Guangzhou episode offers a useful example of African media's agency. In this context, the media functioned as "a point of engagement" (Oshodi, 2015) when African governments were slow, weak, unable, and reluctant to respond to China. Although African governments summoned Chinese ambassadors and petitioned Beijing during the episode, there were instances when the media criticized both the Nigerian and the Chinese governments for their handling of the treatment of Africans in Guangzhou. An example is *The Guardian*'s editorial against the Nigerian Foreign Affairs minister's explanation that the Guangzhou episode was caused by miscommunication (see Onochie, 2020). Fourth, the Guangzhou episode merits attention because of its potential to promote anti-Chinese sentiments and reprisal attacks on Chinese migrants in Africa (see Oluwasegun and Akowe, 2020; Tarlue, 2020a; Oshodi, 2021).

To shed a deeper light on the Guangzhou episode, this paper analyzes reports from Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers. Specifically, it sets out to achieve two objectives: (i) to understand how the four African newspapers framed the episode, and (ii) to ascertain convergence – or divergence – between both countries. The paper is significant because it sheds light on the complexities and dynamism of the African media in their coverage of Africa-China relations. Given that it is through the media that many Africans gain knowledge of what happened in Guangzhou, the paper offers a lens to understand the frames through which the African media present to their audience what was arguably the most challenging period in Africa-China relations during the COVID-19 period. Structurally, the rest of this paper is divided into four parts. Section two locates the researcher in the research and discusses the methodology. Section three revisits the discourse about the news media as a framer and reviews the literature on the mediascape of Africa-China relations. Section four discusses the case of the selected newspapers. Section five is the conclusion.

NOTES ON POSITIONALITY AND METHODOLOGY

Although uncommon in the literature on Africa-China relations, before discussing my methodology, it is important to situate myself in the research. I do not approach the research as a tabula rasa. Aside from being an African who has never been to China but followed the reportage of the Guangzhou episode on local and international news platforms, my views on the episode have been publicly expressed in *The Conversation* (Oshodi, 2020). Yet, my views on the Guangzhou episode are not unchangeable. I can respond to new ideas and data. Since 2009, I have situated my understanding of "China

in Africa" within a broader context of events happening within China itself, within Africa and beyond. I am also a former journalist, an experience that contributes to my (re)imagination of "China in Africa" beyond a dominant *thin* perspective that focuses on events *within* – and not *outside* of – Africa. Specifically, since working on a postdoctoral project on China in African newspapers, I have been advancing a *thick* conceptualization of "China in Africa." A thin conceptualization of "China in Africa" focuses on a description of Chinese activities in Africa without attempting to connect it to events beyond Africa. Conversely, a *thick* conceptualization situates it within a broader international setting wherein students of the subject aim to situate both China and Africa beyond their respective geographies. Thus, the fact that an event that happened within China generated protests and actions within and outside Africa gives impetus to the need to interrogate Africa-China relations beyond the geography of continental Africa or China itself. By interrogating the Guangzhou episode through the lens of Africa-based newspapers, therefore, this paper fits into my *thick* conceptualization of "China in Africa."

Although there are significant differences between traditional and new media, some traditional newspapers operate online (having a website and social media presence), straddling between supposed traditional modes and modernity. All the newspapers selected for this study (*The Guardian* and *The Nation* in Nigeria and the *Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* in Ghana) fall into this category. Starting as traditional media selling hard copies, they do not only have online versions but have incorporated audio-visuals like *The Nation*'s videos, "GuardianTV," "*Graphic* Video Gallery," and "Guide Radio." Although not all stories in the print copies are available online (and vice versa), online versions have the advantage of being accessible, shareable, and read across national borders in a timely manner.

The *Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* are based in Ghana's capital city, Accra. *The Nation* and *The Guardian* are based in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial center and former capital. Nonetheless, while there are several other newspapers in Ghana and Nigeria, the four newspapers are purposively selected for three reasons. First, they have websites and published at least seven online reports on the Guangzhou episode during the four months of study (8 April – 8 August 2020). Based on a preliminary survey of newspapers in the two countries, seven stories on the Guangzhou episode were published. Second, two of the newspapers were selected because of their widespread and relatively longstanding existence (i.e., the *Graphic* was established in 1950 and *The Guardian* in 1983). Third, the study selected the *Daily Guide* and *The Nation* because they are owned by members of ruling parties. The *Daily Guide* was established in 1984 and owned by the Blay family, with links to the New Patriotic Party that won presidential elections in 2016 and 2020. *The Nation* was established in 2006 by Mr. Bola Tinubu, a leading member of the ruling All Progressive Congress that won Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 presidential election.

Table 1: Newspapers and their reports on the Guangzhou episode

Newspapers	Reports on/with "Guangzhou"
Graphic	7
Daily Guide	7
The Guardian	18
The Nation	20
Total	**52**

Source: Author

I accessed data for this study – reports of the Guangzhou episode – from the newspapers' websites and accessed reports through the search function on websites. Using the key location of the episode, the word that was searched is "Guangzhou." I carefully read the reports generated by the search and analyzed their contents manually. I read the headlines to ascertain frequently used words. But beyond the search function, selection of reports for analysis was also guided by two processes. First, I limited the search to reports between 8 April 2020, when the news of the Guangzhou episode broke in many news outlets, and 8 August 2020. I based my decision to select 8 August 2020 as the end date on the view that four months was a sufficient time to understand how the selected newspapers framed the Guangzhou episode. This decision was guided by the view that the life spans of news stories in media outfits are not necessarily long and often compete with many other news items. Second, after generating several search results from "Guangzhou," I then carefully read each report to ensure that they were relevant and connected to the Guangzhou episode.

As illustrated in Table 1, the search identified 52 relevant reports on the Guangzhou episode. Given the small number, I analyzed all the reports by reading and coding them by hand. I analyzed the reports using discourse analysis that consider "the social, political, historical and intertextual contexts which go beyond analysis of the language within texts" (Baker et al., 2008: 273-274). To this end, not only would the key frame – i.e., victimhood – be highlighted and analyzed but would be linked to the source question.

AFRICA-CHINA MEDIASCAPE AND FRAMING

The media occupies an important position in migration. It mediates the narrative by highlighting, gate-keeping, or sustaining discussions. While there are other factors that shape perceptions of migration and the experiences of migrants, the role of the media in intergroup relations must not be underestimated. In addition to signposting government's actions such as deportation of migrants (Peil, 1974; Aremu, 2013; Akinyoade, 2015), elsewhere there is more direct evidence of the connection between

media reportage and the outbreaks of violent intergroup conflict, as in Rwanda (Forges, 2007). Yet the role of the media remains Janus-headed. Even in places where they contributed to conflict, as in Rwanda, the media also plays a positive role in intergroup relations and building tolerance (Paluck, 2007). Some reports have highlighted the role of the media in framing migration in Europe (Berry et al., 2015; CCME and WACC, 2017; EJN, 2017). As one report notes: "Media narratives continue to shape public opinion, but it also reveals how in all countries journalism is a distorting lens as much as a magnifying glass" (EJN, 2017: 7).

As in migration reportage, newspaper reports on Africa-China relations can mediate the dominant narrative of state actors, offering new perspectives. For instance, while former Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, notes in his autobiography that, "Although some Marxist socialists in 'Biafra' appealed to China for help, we have no tangible evidence of any material support or assistance to Biafra by the Chinese" (Obasanjo, 2015: 219), newspaper reports during the war suggested that Biafran forces had an "arms deal with China" (*Daily Graphic*, 1968: 1). Media reports have also emerged as important sources of data for understanding Africa-China encounters. The Media-Based Data Collection (MBDC), for example, offers "a comprehensive database of Chinese development finance flows to Africa from 2000–2011" (Strange et al., 2013: 2).

At this juncture, it is important to stress that the Africa-China relations mediascape remains a contested arena where "China in Africa" can be seen from differing lenses. Thus, while Africa-China relations have attracted significant academic and media interest in the last 20 years, details of the relations have been marred in several unknowns, creating room for rumors and myths (Yan and Sautman, 2012). This has perhaps prompted some to view the field as some sort of salad where non-Chinese views that "know nothing about either China or Africa" on the one hand and "Chinese scholarly commentary" that "tends to observe Party lines closely" on the other hand (Chan, 2013: 7) survive and flourish in their respective spaces. Sometimes there is competition in these views. The "real China in Africa" may therefore vary across spaces. If Chan's description of the field is correct (in spite of his own troublesome reference to a "Dark Continent" instead of "Africa" in his book's title), to therefore understand the coverage of Africa-China relations is to accommodate the role – and in some instances, goals – of the media in the framing of stories. Li's work, *Mediatized China-Africa Relations*, captures the media dimension of knowing, positing that the "role of media and mass communication should never be underestimated, especially in our understanding of China in Africa" (2017: 5). Yet the media is itself not immune from the broader contestations about what the true picture is. One expert offers this picture: "The Chinese press painted a consistently rosy picture of friendship and mutual benefit. … Journalists in Africa and in the West were much more skeptical" (Bräutigam, 2009: 3). Given this situation, observers must be continuously wary of the media as an objective source and reflection of the state of Africa-China relations. In other words, we must be wary of how "news" is

framed in a context where information does not always emanate from news sources. This study illustrates in the section on the source question that news about Africa-China relations in African media can be influenced by Western media reportage and frames.

The aforementioned influence on the "news" in Africa is not limited to Western media. China understands the importance of the media in its relationship with Africa. For instance, Li (2017: 9) notes that "Chinese media houses in Africa … act as a mouthpiece of the Chinese party-state and boost China's image internationally, an objective that has to be implemented through the media organizations' own decision-making processes." The Chinese media presence in Africa predates the official recognition of China by many African countries in the 1970s. Xinhua News Agency bureaus were present in more than 25 countries in the 1960s and 1970s and China Radio International (CRI) was the third largest international broadcaster in sub-Saharan Africa in the mid-1960s (Li, 2017). It is against this background that "mediatization" – i.e., "a process in which the mechanisms of media involvement and media evolvement serve to shape, reinforce, refute or challenge public understandings, just as in other mega-processes like modernization, globalization and industrialization" (Li, 2017: 12) – becomes useful in understanding the Western and Chinese influence in Africa's mediascape. This paper, however, adopts framing as a conceptual framework for its analysis. This is because it allows the study to account for the specific choices of the sampled newspapers and how they reported the Guangzhou episode.

Like many concepts in the social sciences, framing does not have a universally accepted definition and has been used inconsistently (de Vreese, 2005: 51). As McQuail (2003: 454) puts it, "The idea of framing is an attractive one, but how it works as an effect process is less easy to account for." Nonetheless, "*a frame is an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic*" (de Vreese, 2005: 53, original emphasis). Thus, framing has been described as the "construction of social reality" (Scheufele, 1999: 104) and "a way of giving some interpretation to isolated items of fact" – an action that "is almost unavoidable for journalists" and "in so doing departing from pure 'objectivity' and introducing some (albeit unintended) bias" (McQuail, 2003: 343). Framing, it must be stressed, goes beyond the journalist or the media outfit. It entails "both presenting and comprehending news" – which means that it also encapsulates the individual level (Scheufele, 1999). In any case, communication, as the dynamic process that it is, entails frame-building and frame-setting (de Vreese, 2005). Frame-building relates to how frames emerge as influenced by factors internal and external to journalism and manifests in the text. Frame-setting represents "the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions;" it "refers to the interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions" (de Vreese, 2005: 51–52). As already hinted in Li's work, "China in Africa" is a mediated space. The mediascape is particularly made more complex by the differing control and ownership regulations that operate in China and Africa.

Western media, with or without their bias and frames, interject this duality. Thus, although "the entry of Chinese media into Africa is an integral part of Chinese media spreading tentacles globally" (Wekesa, 2017b: 11), the media ecology on the continent remains contested. Bräutigam appears to present this contestation in her seminal work, *The Dragon's Gift*:

> Journalists have given us quick sketches, but these impressions are often very partial, and sometimes, even in the best newspapers, surprisingly wrong. Chinese journalists do not enjoy freedom of the press. Other journalists are more balanced in their presentation, but lack the background to distinguish between foreign aid and the broader range of economic cooperation activities sponsored by China's developmental state. Such a differentiation is important if we are going to understand how China operates as a donor, and how Chinese aid and economic cooperation affect development (Bräutigam, 2009: 20).

The differentiation that Bräutigam talks about accentuates "frame-building" and "frame-setting." This can become more pronounced when there are contestations and real interests in shaping what is real as in the Guangzhou episode. On the one hand, Chinese media aiming to fight off the negative reports countered the narrative of maltreatment of Africans and called out the United States and Western media for polluting Africa-China relations. On the other hand, African and indeed global media reported otherwise, often adhering to the line that Africans were maltreated by their Chinese host in Guangzhou. But the rigid bifurcation of Chinese and non-Chinese media, as in the Guangzhou episode, must also not be taken as the ultimate divisions in the unfolding context. There are indeed overlapping relationships that could have implications. One writer drew attention to this, noting the influence of China on private media in Africa wherein they hold stakes or invite local journalists to "special Beijing-sponsored seminars" (Essa, 2018). It is in this context that this appraisal of newspapers as an arena of contestation and the Guangzhou episode is located. This serves as an opportunity to investigate the investigator: the media.

FRAMING THE GUANGZHOU EPISODE

In this section, I offer a discussion of the framing of the Guangzhou episode in the four newspapers. As highlighted in Table 1, the selected Nigerian newspapers (*The Guardian* and *The Nation*) had more reports – and for a longer period – than the Ghanaian ones (the *Graphic* and the *Daily Guide*). One reason that might have accounted for this is the "Nigerian dimension" as discussed in this section. This dimension provides more incentive to the Nigerian newspapers to keep their main audience (i.e., Nigerians) informed relative to their Ghanaian counterparts. Indeed, only a Nigerian newspaper published an editorial on the Guangzhou episode. Nonetheless, there are important similarities and differences across the four newspapers. For instance, while reports generally suggest a geographical definition of "Africans" to mean migrants from

continental Africa, one newspaper, *The Guardian*, reports the United States's advice to its African-American citizens to avoid Guangzhou (Adekanye, 2020). This section discusses the framing of the Guangzhou episode under three main subsections: the source question, victimhood, and the Nigerian dimension.

The source question

Media reports have their sources; sources that can determine whose voices are heard, silenced, neglected, or displaced. Journalists frame their stories, but the sources available to them can limit or shape these frames. Thus, a critical understanding of framing requires a careful interrogation of the news sources. This study acknowledges the influence of Western media on reports in the newspapers. For instance, all the African migrants reported on in the *Graphic* and the *Daily Guide* were sourced from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Indeed, five of the seven reports in the *Daily Guide* cited the BBC. Some reports used pictures of Africans on Chinese streets similar to those used in Western media. The first story by Ghana's *Graphic* entitled "Africans 'evicted from Chinese hotels over Covid-19 fears'" published on 8 April 2020 is credited to the BBC (2020a). On 11 April 2020, the newspaper credited the Cable News Network (CNN) with the story, "Virus fears spark xenophobia in China" that partly read:

> CNN interviewed more than two dozen Africans living in Guangzhou many of whom told of the same experiences: being left without a home, being subject to random testing for Covid-19, and being quarantined for 14 days in their homes, despite having no symptoms or contact with known patients (CNN, 2020).

The source of the *Graphic*'s first report was the BBC, and the accompanying pictures for the story were also used by the BBC (see BBC, 2020a, 2020c). Like the *Graphic*, *The Guardian*'s first report on the Guangzhou episode quoted Dailymail.co.uk (*Guardian*, 2020b). The newspaper also credited Agence France-Presse (AFP) for a story entitled "Nigeria says treatment of nationals in China 'unacceptable' " (AFP, 2020b). Interestingly, a similar report was in *The Nation* but was written by local Nigerian journalists (Ikuomola et al., 2020). That some reports were influenced by the framing of Western media is not in doubt and it is noted in Chinese media. For instance, one Chinese media house describes the situation thus: "Western media have a great influence on many media in African countries and their unbalanced China reports also affect local media's understanding of China" (*Global Times*, 2020b). The fact that reports were sourced from Western media does not mean that Chinese voices were silenced. With the exception of the *Daily Guide*, reliance on Western media was not static in the *Graphic* and in the two Nigerian newspapers. In fact, Chinese media (like Xinhua, Southcn.com, and China Daily) and voices (like Chinese government officials, ambassadors, investors, and activists) were accommodated in reports.

Chinese versions of the Guangzhou episode, however, often viewed it as a result of miscommunication, fake news, conspiracy, or exaggeration (e.g., CGTN, 2020; *Global Times*, 2020a, 2020b; Reuters, 2020). Some of these views were reflected in the reports of the African newspapers. Chinese media like Xinhua (Adekanye, 2020; *Guardian*, 2020a) and China News Service (AFP, 2020a) were cited in *The Guardian*. Again, the fact that the African newspapers cited Western media (as in the preceding paragraph) does not necessarily mean the absence of Chinese voices in such reports. *The Guardian* offers an example.

A report in *The Guardian* was credited to AFP, but the same report offered information from a Chinese state-run media source, China News Service, that "businesses and residential compounds "must implement non-discriminatory service … treat all Chinese and foreigners in Guangdong equally, and firmly oppose any racist or discriminatory speech and behaviour" (AFP, 2020a). Similarly, although sourced from Dailymail.co.uk, the first story in *The Guardian* on the Guangzhou episode – "Five Nigerians test positive for coronavirus in China" with a rider, "Investigate humiliations of Nigerians in China, FG urged" – credited the Guangzhou Health Commission as a source for the announcement of the infected Nigerians (*Guardian*, 2020b). Although it published a strong editorial that criticized the treatment of Africans in Guangzhou, *The Guardian* accommodated Chinese views by publishing a features report written by Chinese ambassador to Nigeria, Zhou Pingjian, entitled "Pandemic: Solidarity and cooperation most potent weapon" (Pingjian, 2020). In his piece, Pingjian articulated the official Chinese position, for instance, that "What happened in Guangdong recently is a similar story like Wuhan, in essence. All the measures taken there aim to fight against the COVID-19, not against any Nigerian, any African, or any foreign national." Similarly, *The Nation* published a story on the Chinese ambassador's responses (Ikuomola, 2020b). Chinese migrants in Nigeria were also given a voice in reports.

The voices of a diverse group of African stakeholders were reflected in the reports. These included African migrants in China, many of whose names were omitted in reports. It is understandable that mentioning the names of African migrants in China in reports could have unexpected implications for them. The media control in China means that it is risky for African migrants to be publicly identified to be a source of the reports on the mistreatment of Africans in Guangzhou. Hence, Nigerian newspapers that reported the views of migrants sometimes used anonymous labels like "Nigerian businessman," "an insider," or just first names – e.g., "Thiam" or "Denny" – that could make tracing difficult (*Guardian*, 2020a; Ikuomola et al., 2020). Importantly, giving a voice to migrants provides some nuance. For instance, beyond the general reportage of maltreatment in all the newspapers, *The Nation* added:

> Those who had earlier been quarantined were also said to be included in the new isolation arrangement; a situation which did not go down well with the Nigerians, who were said to have paid $100 per night in the hotel where they

> were isolated for the 14 days, including that "the new hotel they were moving them to was said to cost $400 per night; an amount they considered to be far too high, especially as they were to pick the bills themselves" (Ikuomola et al., 2020).

Such details about the quarantine were not reported in the other newspapers. The response of the Chinese government to the cost of quarantine was also absent in reports.

Other African voices in reports on the Guangzhou episode included those of foreign affairs ministers, ambassadors, parliamentarians, individuals, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within and outside Africa. It also included African media. For instance, the *Graphic* (on 11 April 2020) quoted Nigeria's *Vanguard* newspapers and Kenya's *The Nation* (Yeboah, 2020) and it published an interview conducted with Ghana's ambassador to China on Citi FM (Arku, 2020). Similarly, *The Nation* reported stories from the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN, 2020b). The Ghanaian and Nigerian newspapers, however, differed in terms of how they gave a voice to migrants. Unlike the Ghanaian newspapers that relied on African migrants interviewed by the BBC, the Nigerian newspapers directly reported the views of the migrants in China. Although Ghanaian newspapers referred to Ghanaians as victims in Guangzhou, little mention was made of their views as compared to the Nigerian newspapers.

After its seventh reports on the Guangzhou episode within the study period, it is important to note that the *Graphic*'s next report entitled "China to cancel interest-free loans to African nations" was obtained from a Western media source (BBC, 2020b). Thus, the *Graphic* started its reportage on the Guangzhou episode with a report from the BBC and moved on to another issue on Africa-China relations from the same international media source. Although this appears to confirm the view about the influence of Western media in Africa (*Global Times*, 2020b) or "the domineering role played by the BBC, from the colonial era until today" (Serwornoo, 2019: 1371), the real picture, as highlighted above, is more complex, as news sources on the Guangzhou episode are more diverse than limited to Western media like the BBC. African and Chinese sources and voices were also reflected in reports.

Victimhood

In many instances, African migrants were framed as the victims of the Guangzhou episode. Five important points are worth highlighting in the language of victimhood. First, all the newspapers framed the treatment of African migrants in Guangzhou in negative terms. In the 52 reports, words like "maltreatment," "inhumane treatment," "abuse," "racist attack," "racism," or "xenophobia" were used 20 times. Other words used in headlines to describe the episode included "discrimination," "unacceptable," "victimization," and "humiliating." As illustrated in Table 2, "maltreatment" was the most frequently used words in headlines. It was used 11 times across newspapers. The

second point relates to how they framed the "African" victims. Although "Africans" were commonly used, this was interjected with the use of specific African nationalities. "Nigerians" and "Ghanaians" were used in the two Ghanaian newspapers, although references were also made to "Kenyans" in the *Graphic*, and "Sierra Leonean," "Togolese," "Nigerians," "Beninois," and "Ethiopian" nationals in the *Daily Guide*. Sometimes, the use of the nationality is emphatic, such as "maltreatment of Africans particularly Ghanaians by Chinese officials in China" (Tarlue, 2020b). "Africans," "Nigerians," "Ugandans," "Guineans," and "South Africans" were identified as victims in the Nigerian newspapers. As noted above, only one newspaper, *The Guardian*, referred to African-Americans in the Guangzhou episode (Adekanye, 2020). As discussed later, there was more focus on "Nigerians" than other African nationals.

Table 2: Top words in headlines on the Guangzhou episode

Newspapers	"Maltreatment" or "inhumane treatment"	"Abuse"	"Racist attacks," "racism" or "xenophobia"
Graphic	2	-	1
Daily Guide	3	-	2
The Guardian	2	1	-
The Nation	6	2	1
Total	**13**	**3**	**4**

Source: Author

Third, rather than a static one-sided perspective that blames Chinese authorities for the plight of the migrants, the newspapers adopted a fluid approach that tended to adjust to the news source and their priorities at particular points. For instance, on 18 April 2020, about ten days after the news of maltreatment broke, *The Nation* still reported that African envoys "denounced the manner Chinese authorities in Guangzhou, a city in Guangdong Province, dehumanized Africans who were being unfairly blamed for fresh outbreaks of coronavirus disease in the province" (NAN, 2020a). Indeed, after initial reports that blamed China for the plight of the African migrants in Guangzhou, subsequent reports shifted the blame to fears of COVID-19 spreading in China, Nigerian government and citizens, and largely miscommunication. Reports about the fear of COVID-19 spreading among African communities in China were noticeable in a *Graphic* report on 16 April 2020. Three days earlier, the *Daily Guide* reported concerns by local Chinese health officials that there could be a second outbreak after a spike in imported COVID-19 cases. The headlines for the next two reports in the *Graphic*, which were the last in the study period, emphasized the safety of Ghanaians in China. Beyond the Guangzhou episode, however, a piece in *The Nation* drew attention to the tendency to "criminalize the disease or stigmatize infected individuals or those presumed to be" – such as Africans in China, Asians in the United States and COVID-19-infected Nigerians in Nigeria (Basikoro, 2020).

Though "miscommunication" was noticeable in views credited to representatives of Nigerian and Ghanaian government and Chinese officials, this was usually absent in African migrants' voices. However, it is important to stress that a shift to other issues was not a repudiation of the language of victimhood. For instance, *The Nation* and *The Guardian* ended their coverage on the Guangzhou episode with a report about a group that petitioned the UK Parliament for the "abuse," "racism," and "discriminatory treatment" against Africans in China. Similarly, the last two reports in Ghana's *Daily Guide* that related to the Guangzhou episode used "maltreatment" and "stigmatization." Interestingly, the voices that highlighted this were those of Ghanaians in Norway and a Member of Parliament in Ghana respectively. They were not those of the Ghanaian or African migrants in Ghana.

Fourth, although victimhood is largely constructed in terms of migrants' reported experiences in Guangzhou, there are instances where the (in)capacity or (in)actions of African leaders were highlighted. Such references are noticeable in the Nigerian newspapers. This is captured in their blaming of the ruling elites for failing to rise to the challenge confronting African (particularly Nigerian) migrants in China. For example, *The Nation* on 21 April 2020 published an article entitled "China mocks Africa," where the author contends that the "muted responses of the governments of African countries show clearly that they are ill-equipped and indisposed to defend their interests, when confronted by the emerging Chinese hegemony" (Amalu, 2020). Yet African leaders and ambassadors – individually and collectively – responded to the maltreatment of Africans. Nonetheless, *The Guardian*, in its editorial of 5 May 2020 expressed a stronger criticism of government: "Nigeria that should be aggrieved was initially apologetic on behalf of the 'accused'" (*Guardian*, 2020c).

Fifth, the victimhood is generally framed as ahistorical. Reports were not linked to past reports of Chinese racism against Africans (Sautman, 1994; Sullivan, 1994; Cheng, 2011) or to more recent reports of racism during Chinese New Year celebration (BBC, 2018; McDonald, 2021). Interestingly, one report that linked the Guangzhou episode to an earlier event was a story credited to CNN, a Western media outfit, in the *Graphic* that stated: "African residents say local hostility to their presence is nothing new. But when coronavirus cases emerged in the African community this month it served to amplify existing tensions" (CNN, 2020). Although not a news report, one exception to the ahistoricity was *The Guardian* editorial of 5 May 2020 that stated:

> Lest we forget, a recent exhibition of visual arts in China was replete with designs that present Black Africans in comparison with animals of various types. Besides that, this was no art as understood by decent values and universal standards of creativity, we should think that exhibition was disrespectful and despicable (*Guardian*, 2020c).

Aside from the few exceptions, most reports framed the maltreatment of Africans within the COVID-19 context. This context included reports of COVID-19 spreading within African communities and how that could lead to another wave of spread, implying that some Nigerians failed to quarantine, miscommunication by Chinese authorities, fear of the spread within the Chinese population, and an allegation that a Nigerian who tested positive for COVID-19 attacked a Chinese nurse who tried to stop him from leaving an isolation ward at a Guangzhou hospital (Arku, 2020; CNN, 2020). Although the fear element in Guangzhou is similar to a report in December 1988 where there was an allegation that "African students began a class boycott to protest against accusations that they were AIDS carriers" (Sautman, 1994: 420), no historical connection was made in many of the reports. But a Nigerian dimension was popular in all the newspapers.

The Nigerian dimension

Reports in the newspapers about the Guangzhou episode focused on the treatment of African migrants in China, but this was framed against a noticeable Nigerian backdrop. One of the most detailed reports on the Nigerian dimension in the two Ghanaian newspapers was a 17 April 2020 report in the *Graphic* entitled "COVID-19: Ghanaians in China safe amid discrimination against Africans" (Arku, 2020). The report is based on Ghana's ambassador to China, Edward Boateng's interview with an Accra-based radio station, Citi FM. The report states that the Guangzhou episode was escalated by the actions of Nigerian migrants (who did not self-quarantine, ate at a popular restaurant, and later tested positive for COVID-19) and by the Nigerian government (that delayed stopping travels to China unlike Ghana that issued an early alert in January). In addition, two days before the *Graphic*'s story, *The Guardian* reported that Nigeria's Foreign Affairs Minister, Geoffrey Onyeama, and the Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria, Zhou Pingjian, emphasized "poor communications" (Onochie, 2020), a frame that became popular across newspapers. Emphasizing poor communication, *The Nation* quoted Nigeria's foreign minister saying, "If the authorities in Guangzhou had informed the African Consulates in Guangzhou that this was the situation and these were the measures they were putting in place, it could have become a joint effort" (Ikuomola, 2020a). However, *The Guardian* offered a critique of this argument:

> The intolerably weak excuse offered by Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama was that the mistreatment of Nigerians and the attendant strong response to it by a Nigerian embassy official as glaringly captured on video was due to "poor communication." He even advised his fellow Nigerians who were appalled to be objective in assessing such incidents – as if Nigerians were hasty in their reaction to so obvious an appalling incident. But later, wiser counsel prevailed and this minister felt the need to speak up for his country and his countrymen. "We are extremely disappointed with the treatment meted out to our people

> because we have good relations with the government and people of China" he said, somewhat meekly (*Guardian*, 2020c).

Given the actions of Nigeria(ns), the *Graphic*, based on Mr. Edward Boateng's interview, reported that the Guangzhou authorities panicked, and decided "to test all Black Africans regardless of nationality" (Arku, 2020), thus shifting the language of discrimination to one of moral panic on both sides: where Chinese authorities reacted based on the fear of COVID-19 spreading while Nigeria's response was about the morality of discriminating against its citizens in Guangzhou. The moral panic in both the Chinese and the Nigerian governments' voices is also discernible in the Nigerian newspapers' coverage. The *Graphic*'s reportorial shift marked the end of its reports on the maltreatment of Africans in China. Indeed, its next report on "Guangzhou" was published two months later, on 16 June 2020 and entitled "COVID-19: Over 600 stranded Ghanaians due home this week" (Annang, 2020). Conversely, the Nigerian newspapers continued with their reports on the Guangzhou episode after their Ghanaian counterparts stopped. In fact, while the *Daily Guide*'s and the *Graphic*'s reports on the Chinese treatment of Africans in Guangzhou ended on 12 April 2020 and 17 April 2020 respectively, *The Guardian* still reported on the Nigerian dimension on 29 April 2020 (Akeregba et al., 2020) and published its last report entitled "NGO petitions UK House of Lords, others over abuse of Africans in China" on 4 July 2020. *The Nation*'s last report was similar to those of *The Guardian* but published earlier on 29 June 2020 with the headline "NGO petitions UK House of Lords, others over abuse of Africans in China."

Two reasons can be adduced for the difference in the life cycles of reports on the Guangzhou episode in the Ghanaian and Nigerian newspapers. First, is the Nigerian dimension, as discussed above. It is worth noting that there is a significant population of Nigerians in Guangzhou; one estimate puts their figure at about 10,000 in 2014 as compared to 264 Ghanaians in 2013 (*Premium Times*, 2014; Sundiata, 2015; Obeng, 2018). The relatively high population compared to Ghanaians or migrants from many other African countries might have increased Nigerians' visibility in Guangzhou. Nigerians were more involved in the Guangzhou episode than Ghanaians because Nigerians tested negative to COVID-19 in China and there was the circulation of a video of a Nigerian diplomat in China seen criticizing the Chinese authorities for how they treated Nigerians. This visibility of Nigerians in the episode likely sustained the interests of Nigerian newspapers in covering the story. Second, the Ghanaian newspapers relied more on Western news sources for their reports. For instance, the first three stories in the *Daily Guide* quoted Western media. Ghanaian newspapers gave voice to government but hardly interviewed Ghanaian or African migrants in China, except when they quoted interviews conducted by Western media. When their Western sources shifted focus from the Guangzhou episode to other issues, they also appeared to have shifted interest.

CONCLUSION

Given its ability to paint an image of the experiences of African migrants in China, the media occupies an important position in Africa-China relations. In this paper, I analyzed how four African-based newspapers framed the treatment of African migrants during the Guangzhou episode. I discussed their framing under three subheadings: source question, victimhood, and the Nigerian dimension. The paper contends that while the newspapers relied on Western media coverage for some of their own reports, they nonetheless accommodated Chinese and African voices. Although the Guangzhou episode was generally framed in terms of the victimhood of migrants, the "African" identity was reduced to national, and more importantly, a Nigerian dimension in many instances. The focus on the Nigerian dimension, while introducing some nuance in the discourse in terms of Chinese justification, frames the Guangzhou episode as moral panic.

Beyond the aforementioned, however, accessibility of online reports – as the ones analyzed in this paper – offers more space for interrogating knotty issues like racism, that is both controversial and recurring in Africa-China migration discourse. It democratizes access to information about Africa-China migration exchanges, even in a difficult global moment. Unlike in the past, when tensions between African migrants and their Chinese host were covered on traditional media (like radio, television, or newspapers), the Guangzhou episode demonstrates that online African-based media can publish their independent reports as well as cull reports from other media sources around the world. By generating and sustaining a particular image of Africa-China relations, local media can therefore influence how stakeholders within Africa respond to Chinese migrants on the continent. This is because the main audience of the local newspapers is Africa. This could have implications for Chinese migrants in Africa in particular and Africa-China relations in general. Even if their reports cannot be accessed in China, it could have an impact on the perception of Chinese citizens in African countries, as was the case when some members of parliament in Nigeria following the spread of reports on the maltreatment of Africans in Guangzhou initiated moves to deport Chinese migrants (*Core News*, 2020). Nonetheless, this paper calls for further research into the role of the media in shaping Africa-China migration. Aside from the need to further interrogate the timing, focus, and sources of reports on African migrants in China (and vice versa) using interviews, it is not yet known whether the media coverage of the Guangzhou episode had any impact on African migrants in China. Investigating this impact could provide deeper insights into the role of the media on African migrants' experiences in China.

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Faith-Based Business Ethics Among African Muslim Small-Scale Business Owners in Guangzhou, China

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Abstract

Based on 14 months of ethnographic research, this article examines how African Muslim migrants build and maintain faith-based business ethics and how they apply these ethical business norms to help navigate their transnational lives in Guangzhou, China. Most of the African Muslim migrants included in the study are small-scale business owners who engage in semi-formal economic activities in both local and home markets. They face racial, cultural, and legal challenges on a daily basis. Unable to access formal means of support due to their precarious economic and legal status, many African Muslim small-business owners rely on informal business ethics to ensure a safe trading environment and mitigate risk. Their business ethics, I argue, are rooted in what I term "religious common ground" – the moral and ethical values shared among migrants from different Muslim groups. This article also explores the enforcing mechanisms of African Muslim small-scale business owners' business ethics, such as mosques and co-religion business networks. This article concludes that there is no universal, standard code of conduct among African Muslim business owners in Guangzhou. Individuals among different Muslim communities have diverse interpretations of business ethics and practice them differently based on their nationality, ethnicity, religious habits, and socio-cultural backgrounds. This article contributes to a small but important literature that addresses the central role that religion plays in Muslim migrants' business practices in a non-Muslim society.

Keywords: African migrants, Muslim migrants, Africans in China, Islam, religious common ground

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2013, Dina, a second-hand clothing trader from Zambia, told me a story about how she and her three business partners were cheated. They had met a Guinean man and his Chinese wife two years earlier. The couple had a big showroom in Tianxiu (a trading mall popular among African traders in Guangzhou, a large manufacturing city in Southern China) where they displayed various samples for bulk orders. The items they showed Dina and her partners were of good quality at a fair price, so Dina and her partners each placed an order, returned home, and waited patiently for the goods to arrive. However, when the items did arrive at the port in Angola to then be transported on land to Dina's business in Zambia, they were quickly re-directed to Guinea instead, and mysteriously disappeared completely. Together, the four Zambian traders lost USD 59,000, of which Dina lost USD 22,000.

Last year when Dina visited Guangzhou for business, she found the Guinean man whom she believed had cheated her. She got into a physical fight with him and ended up scratching him. But the confrontation did nothing to help her get her money back. Nor did her efforts to enlist the help of law enforcement:

> I went to [the] police twice for this. ... I see something going on there: the first time I went to the police, they asked me to come back the next day at 12 p.m. The next day I went there, the policeman was not there, but another one was there. The Guinea guy did not even show up. And the other policeman said to me, "What do you want us to do? If we deport him, you won't get your money back; if we send him to court, you still cannot get the money back." The next time they say if this is a case between Chinese and Africans, they can take care of it. But if this is between Africans, they cannot do anything about it. You see, they are defending him! After that, I do not do business with Africans. I see a shop opened [operated] by Africans, I go [leave]. (Dina, 20 December 2013).

Dina keeps the business card of the Guinean man, hoping that one day she will find a way to get her money returned. During my fieldwork among African traders in Guangzhou, I heard stories like Dina's almost every week. With cheating in business so common in Afro-Chinese trade (Mathews et al., 2017), how can small-scale business owners like Dina protect themselves and mitigate risks? This article explores that question through focusing on the business ethics of small-scale African Muslim business owners in Guangzhou, especially on its creation, practice, and implementation.

African migrants in Guangzhou have drawn considerable scholarly attention as a growing migrant group over the past two decades. Within this literature, many studies have focused on Afro-Chinese business relations and African trading activities and networks (e.g., Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2007; Haugen, 2011, 2018; Lyons et al., 2012; Cissé, 2015; Marfaing and Thiel, 2015; Mathews, 2015; Marfaing, 2019; Röschenthaler, 2022). This research shows that most Africans in Guangzhou

are engaged in low-end globalization, which is defined as “global migrants who only have a small amount of capital and who make a living through semi-legal or illegal activities” (Mathews et al., 2017: 2). Traders come from virtually every country in Africa, purchasing a vast range of goods, including mobile phones, clothing, computers, furniture, and construction materials (Castillo, 2014).

Despite the frequency of cheating among traders involved in Afro-Chinese trade, business ethics and their implementation in this branch of commerce are insufficiently addressed in academic work. Mathews et al. (2017) attribute cheating in business between Chinese and African traders to “mistaken cultural assumptions”: Africans assume the Chinese will always cheat them, so they bargain for a low price believing that the quality of the goods they receive will stay the same. In response to the low price, Chinese traders substitute their products for lower quality ones in order to make a profit. Mathews (2022) further points out that in response to this widespread distrust, religious beliefs among devout Christian and Muslim traders from Africa and refutation (interpersonal trust) are two major mechanisms to mitigate African traders from cheating customers, while African traders have also developed tactics to avoid being cheated. Most prominent among these tactics are to be present in person to supervise the process of acquiring goods (i.e., they physically travel to China to negotiate, purchase, and load goods on transport) or to rely on fellow African brokers and logistics agents in China to facilitate trade for a commission fee.

Religion provides a suitable angle from which to consider business ethics. Previous studies have pointed out that being religious can reinforce ethical decision-making and the implementation of a higher number of ethical practices in business (Astrachan et al., 2020). Other research has shown a correlation between religion and work ethic in Muslim communities: some scholars link Muslim entrepreneurs' work ethic with Islamic religious values (Elfakhani and Ahmed, 2013; Hidayah et al., 2019) and argue that the development of Muslim enterprises is inseparable from an Islamic spirit that places emphasis on hard work, honesty, trustworthiness, thrift, and charity (Othman, 2016; Ahmed et al., 2019; Machmud and Hidayat, 2020). However, most of these studies focus on the role of religion in formal business contexts, where business is conducted at medium-to-large scale. Less studied is how religion shapes business conduct in situations where people with limited capital trade on a small-to-medium scale.

This article responds to this gap in knowledge by investigating how African Muslim small-scale business owners create business ethic norms in the context of the informal economy between China and Africa. Research has pointed out that the impact of religion on business ethics is stronger in informal than formal business contexts, where institutional safeguards such as laws and contracts are often irrelevant or inapplicable to small-scale traders (Mathews, 2022). This article builds on this insight and argues that business ethics based on religious norms among small-scale African Muslim business owners in Guangzhou, serve as an essential tool for these business owners to maintain a safe and positive trading environment. By

documenting diverse experiences of participating African Muslim business owners concerning business ethics, this article contributes to a nuanced understanding of a key aspect of growing international migration and economic connections between Africa and China.

My research also updates current literature by providing an ethnographic account on the business ethics of African Muslims in Guangzhou, an important yet largely neglected transnational migrant minority in China. Despite Guangzhou experiencing growth in its African Muslim migrant population in the recent two decades (Su, 2017), there is little research specifically on African Muslims and their interactions with Chinese and other foreign Muslims. While Li et al. (2009) briefly mention that African Muslims in Guangzhou have established a tightly-knit and active community, their research lacks detailed documentation. In comparison, Mathews et al. (2017) offer a more thorough and comparative study of religious practice among Africans, yet they focus primarily on Christian Nigerians. In a more recent article, Jiang (2022) argues that Islamic charitable giving enables African Muslims to cope with everyday challenges in China, particularly related to their tenuous immigration statuses and social exclusion. By examining the religious and moral comprehension of trade among Muslim business owners, my research offers a novel understanding of the intersection of religion and business ethics in the context of Afro-Chinese migration.

In this article, the term “African(s)” refers to Black Africans from sub-Saharan Africa; as Mathews et al. (2017; 55) state, “this is what ‘African’ typically means when used in Guangzhou.” The term was used by many Africans I met to self-identify. However, it nonetheless can overgeneralize and ignore the diversity among the individuals with whom I interacted. Therefore, I use the term “African(s)” in this article mainly to signal geographic origin rather than identity. In most cases, North Africans associate themselves more with – and often are considered by others to be – Arabs. In some situations, though, some also consider themselves “Africans.” I will point out these nuances as this article unfolds. I use “African migrants,” “African traders,” and “African small-scale business owners” to highlight different facets of Africans I met in the field. The term “African (Muslim) migrants” emphasizes the temporality of their legal status in residing in China. I use “African traders” and “African small-scale business owners” to emphasize occupation and economic status. The term “African trader” includes both small- and large-scale traders, while the term “African small-scale business owner” includes small-scale traders as well as these Africans who engage in semi-legal commerce, like operating unlicensed restaurants and hostels. Although many of my interlocutors were small-scale traders, in this article, I address them as “African small-scale business owners” to emphasize their diverse occupations and low-end economic status.

This article has three main sections. First, I introduce two key contexts that are essential to understand the African Muslim migrants in the study – Guangzhou’s multi-ethnic Muslim community and the informal economy in which African small-

scale business owners engage. Second, I discuss what business ethics are and how they connect to the moral and ethical values shared among the Muslim community – what I call "religious common ground." Through two ethnographic cases, I show how different Muslim individuals practice business ethics and point out the fluidity of the business ethics. In the third section, I discuss the enforcing mechanisms for ethical norms, such as safety nets (e.g., mosque staff, leaders in the group, etc.) and peer pressure (e.g., co-ethnic and co-religion networks). I conclude that while religion provides a common ground through which individuals can establish some common norms, the informal nature of their business ethics means that they are hard to enforce, and therefore, other factors have an impact on them as well.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Guangzhou's multi-ethnic Muslim community

Previous research has pointed out that Guangzhou's history in the maritime trade, its current economic position as China's southern manufacturing center, and comparatively lenient policy on religion together have contributed to the formation of a multi-ethnic Muslim community in the city (Li, 2014; Su, 2017; Jiang, 2022). There are three principal Muslim groups in the city: Chinese Muslims, African Muslims, and Arab Muslims. Muslims tend to live close to the four mosques located in the Yuexiu District. The neighborhood of Xiaobei, in particular, has become a place where Muslims of diverse origins congregate. African Muslims do not only interact with each other and Chinese residents, but also with other Muslim groups. Inspired by previous scholars who adopt a holistic view by situating Africans alongside either Chinese internal migrants (e.g., Lan, 2015) or other groups of foreigners (e.g., Mathews et al., 2017), and echoing Adebayo (2022: 211) who argues that "contemporary Afro-Chinese interactions cannot be understood without considering how African communities are constituted in Chinese cities," I examine how African Muslim small-scale business owners practice business ethics in relation to other groups rather than looking at them as if they were independent.

Most African Muslims in Guangzhou come from West African countries, such as Guinea, Nigeria, and Niger, with smaller numbers coming from East African countries, such as Uganda, Somalia, and Tanzania. In the field, I witnessed a range of socioeconomic statuses among the Africans I met, with the majority being economically disadvantaged. Due to rigid immigration control, it is hard for many small-scale business owners to obtain a long-term visa (Lan, 2016). Among my interlocutors, a few obtained a 6–12-month business visa (after which some were able to renew it); others remained in China illegally or semi-legally by either being undocumented or conducting business while on a tourist or student visa.

There is no consistency in the documentation of the size of the African population, making it hard to estimate accurate numbers due to their high mobility (Castillo, 2014). During the time of my fieldwork in 2014, an estimated 16,000

Africans registered legally in Guangzhou (Qiu, 2015). Between 2,500–3,500 African Muslims (they were identified by skin color through the mosque's staff) attended the morning prayer on Eid al-Fitr, an important holiday that marks the end of Ramadan (the Islamic holy month of fasting) in 2014 (Guangzhou mosque staff, 30 July 2014). This constituted about 10–15% of the 26,000 Muslims who prayed at that mosque on that day (Third Division within the City Administration for Religious Affairs of Guangzhou, 2014). I have not encountered one person among the African Muslims I met who did not attend the Eid al-Fitr prayer.

Since 2014, several sociopolitical factors have had an impact Guangzhou's African community at large, leading to changes in population numbers. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an even smaller African presence in the city. So, too, has the rise of online business, which has limited the necessity of conducting trade through local brokerage businesses (Mathews, 2022). According to a recent study, the Guangzhou government in April 2020 disclosed that there were approximately 4,500 Africans legally residing in the city (Castillo and Amoah, 2020). Despite the time gap between my fieldwork and the publication of this article, the research herein nonetheless provides insight into how business ethics develop and operate within a migrant community, and the particular importance of religion in facilitating the ethical business norms in the context of the informal economy.

Informal economy and its vulnerability

The informal economic activities that African small-scale business owners engage in and the challenges they face provide a crucial context for understanding the development of their business ethics and the significance these ethics hold for them. Like other non-Muslim Africans in the city, African Muslims engage in diverse business types in different sectors, but in general can be divided into three main occupational categories based on their business activities: traders (purchase and resale), middlemen (business based on commission), and caterers (provide service, especially catering to African clientele such as restaurants, hostels, and hair and nail salons; see "catering networks," Castillo, 2014). Many of my interlocutors had multiple occupational identities both over time and at the same time. For example, Gambo, a Hausa businessman from Niger who owned a men's fashion shop in Xiaobei, later expanded his business into catering by starting two halal restaurants in nearby shopping malls. Lansana, a young Guinean man who studied Chinese full-time at a local university, worked part-time at a barbershop, while occasionally working as a middleman for his relatives back home.

The informality is reflected not only on the scale of the businesses that African Muslim business owners operate but also on their questionable legal status (e.g., the lack of a formal registration and paying taxes). Many of these businesses are conducted without a proper business license. In order to avoid police checks, these businesses are conducted hidden in apartments among many residential buildings in Xiaobei. I once visited a secret family inn owned by a Senegalese entrepreneur. She rented a

big apartment in one high-rise building and turned it into a restaurant, specializing in Senegalese food, and a hostel that charged between 30 and 50 RMB (about USD 5-8) per night. She was very discreet: there was no written menu, nor were there any signs. From the outside, the restaurant was no different from an ordinary apartment. One had to call for the daily menu, order in advance, and later either take out the food or eat in the living room of her "apartment." Besides business, she also offered a free praying corner for Muslims.

Informality also presents itself in the lack of a formal format of the contracts that many Africans in Guangzhou enter into. Many times, deals and business agreements are done orally or a handwritten "receipt" is provided rather than a formal invoice. These off-the-record transactions mean that there is no guarantee of the condition of the goods that African purchasers receive. Thus, Africans are particularly vulnerable to business risk and potential fraud (Mathews et al., 2017). For example, Sekou, a Guinean trader, once purchased a carton of shoes but left the country before he could check the final products being shipped to Guinea. He had no idea that the shoes displayed in the pictures sent by a Chinese trader were made from cardboard that eventually got destroyed by the humid conditions during shipping by sea. This became apparent only after the goods had reached customs in Conakry two months later. Since the sale was not formally done, with no quality assurance, Sekou lost all his money. After that, Sekou bought products only from people he previously worked with or ordered in smaller quantities, even though that meant an increase in his purchasing costs (Sekou, 22 March 2014). In addition to fraud like this, African migrants' precarious legal status has placed them in a further disadvantaged position. Many African traders are on short-term tourist visas to China, making them vulnerable to business failure (Lan, 2016), as it does not give them sufficient time to stay in China to supervise the process of preparing and shipping an order. This also makes establishing long-term, trusting relationships and networks difficult. In other words, by remaining in China for a short period of time, African traders take greater business risks. Even when African traders return to China and find the person who sold them defective items, it is hard to obtain compensation, primarily due to lack of institutional mechanisms to help small traders like them in China (such as in Dina's case at the beginning of this article). Additionally, because some undocumented migrants do not want to risk being deported, they must accept their loss in silence. These circumstances underscore the necessity of African business owners establishing a certain standard of ethics when dealing with each other to ensure a safe, trustworthy business environment to mitigate risk.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted anthropological field research in Guangzhou over a span of 14 months between 2012 and 2014, with additional follow-up interviews conducted remotely via the Internet and telephone in 2018. While in the city, I made extensive use of qualitative data collection techniques. My primary research methods were participant

observation and interviews. My actions in the field were very much in line with what Clifford Geertz (1998) calls "deep hanging out," a research methodology by which an anthropologist immerses themself in a collective, social, and cultural experience on an informal level.

As a female, non-Muslim anthropologist, I faced some barriers when conducting research primarily among African Muslim migrants, who were predominantly male (see Jiang, 2022). To increase opportunities for engagement, I received permission from the Imam of a local mosque that is popular among African Muslims to conduct research while volunteering there (on Mondays, Thursdays, and Friday Jumu'ah prayers, and on religious holidays). My main duties were tidying the prayer room, putting the canvas on the ground, and cleaning up after each prayer session. I also participated in other religious activities centered on the mosque, coming to know a number of African Muslims through my time there. Furthermore, I volunteered as a Chinese language teacher to Africans for six months at a family service center run by a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) in a neighborhood where many Africans resided. Additionally, I met interlocutors regularly at their shops, was invited to their homes, and communicated with them online through chat platforms (e.g., WhatsApp and WeChat).

In total, I interviewed 27 Muslims (25 males and 2 females) who came from Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, Senegal, and Liberia, with the majority hailing from West Africa. All my interlocutors resided in Guangzhou for most of the year. My informants came from diverse backgrounds: they were traders, shop owners, wage laborers (e.g., retail, cargo companies), students, barbers, hairdressers, and housewives. Some were associated with multiple of these categories, which were not always stable, but nonetheless they were involved in some kind of business, no matter how small the scale was. They all had different experiences in Guangzhou, informed by diverse factors: their nationality, socioeconomic status, gender, and time spent in Guangzhou. To ensure anonymity, I allocated pseudonyms to all participants.

When analyzing the data, I used an approach that combines anthropological interpretation (Geertz, 1973) and the reflexive approach in thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). My analytic procedures consisted of three consecutive processes of reading. First, I conducted a broad mapping of the fieldnotes and interview transcripts. I did this both to familiarize myself with the material and gain an overview of the qualitative data. Second, I followed an inductive approach (analytical themes come from the data), I labeled (coded) the material and generalized several themes. I paid special attention to different terms that shared meanings (e.g., good Muslim, honest earning, modesty, etc.) and the terms that emerged multiple times but carried diverse interpretations (e.g., honesty). Third, I conducted a close reading of the materials within the themes, with my interpretations for the explicit and implicit meanings behind data. However, no matter how

systematic or scientific the analytical process is, the analysis always remains a matter of a researcher's personal interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I discuss what I term religious common ground and how various factors – including nationality, ethnicity, and socio-cultural background – result in different interpretations of the ethical business norms among different Muslim communities in the city.

Religious common ground

Islam sets moral and ethical boundaries for followers when engaging with the market economy. It also provides a cultural explanation for certain business conducts and outlines guidelines on how followers ought to conduct business (Santoso et al., 2020). Among many of my interlocutors, Islamic values are embedded in their business conduct. For example, Moussa, a Senegalese trader who came to Guangzhou in 2012 and successfully established himself, conveyed his guiding principles in life: "As for me, I am primarily guided by my faith, embodying kindness, providing assistance, and helping those I engage with, with my personal interests taking a secondary place" (Moussa, 10 April 2018). Sharing a religious common ground means recognizing a "universal morality" that Muslims across different cultures acknowledge and follow (Osella and Osella, 2009). Specifically in this research, religious common ground manifests in how one runs a business, the type of business one operates, and how one views business gains and losses.

Islam has historically placed a strong emphasis on commerce and encourages individuals to sustain their livelihood through trade and business activities. As the Quran (2: 275) states,

> Those who consume interest will stand "on Judgment Day" like those driven to madness by Satan's touch. That is because they say, "Trade is no different than interest." But Allah has permitted trading and forbidden interest. Whoever refrains – after having received warning from their Lord – may keep their previous gains, and their case is left to Allah. As for those who persist, it is they who will be the residents of the Fire. They will be there forever.

This verse emphasizes the distinction between lawful trade and the prohibition of interest in Islam. Muslims are permitted to seize any opportunity to sustain their livelihood and engage in various buying and selling activities within the parameters of lawful trade. Many African Muslims use their faith to explain the meaning of profit and to justify making a profit. For them, profiting from business activities is necessary in order to support their family and is a blessing from Allah. This means that making a profit is allowed, but only if achieved in the proper way.

Specifically, Muslims need to balance money-earning and religious modesty, as being greedy is frowned upon by Islam (see also Mathews et al., 2017). Many business owners I interviewed emphasized that they charge their customers fair prices and that doing otherwise would make them feel uncomfortable. Interestingly, A-Ming, a Libyan middleman who held that one should get as much profit as possible in a business deal, would attribute business gains to Allah's generous offerings and argued that it was Allah's will; therefore, he accepted such big profits. A-Ming attached a background screen sticker to his phone that contained an image that read, "I am a Muslim. Islam is perfect, but I am not. Please do not blame Islam for my fault. Blame me," in case fellow Muslims blamed him for being too profit-driven.

Islam also influences how some of my interlocutors view business incidents in their lives. While some attributed business losses to a human flaw (e.g., cheating), some devout Muslims see business ups and downs as the will of Allah. According to the Quran (9: 51):

> Say, "Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector." And upon Allah let the believers rely.

This means that success and failure are ultimately determined by Allah, and as believers, they are encouraged to put their trust in Him and rely on His guidance and support. In the previous case, Sekou sees the setback as a test from Allah, and said this means that he should work hard and try again to succeed, with a full acknowledgment of Allah's ultimate control over all events and outcomes in his life.

In addition to skepticism over excessive profits and a framework for interpreting success and failure, Islamic belief also limits what types of business Muslims can conduct. As Bah, a Guinean shoe trader, explained to me that as a Muslim,

> You don't kill. Don't sell beer [alcoholic beverages]. Don't lie. Don't sell drugs. Religion tell[s] you what to do [and] how to do it. There are things you don't do. If you sell these things – when you get the money – it is haram [any act that is forbidden by Allah]; you cannot use that money to do anything. You cannot build a mosque [with that money]. You must do things that make God happy. The person does bad things – [even if] you build a house, you have lot of money, but when you die, all these [things] cannot bring with you. You have to be careful, because when you die, God will judge [you]. (Bah, 09 April 2018).

Similarly, Kaddy, a hair salon owner, told me that she could not do certain hairstyles (referred to as al-Qaza, a popular hairstyle whereby one trims parts of the hair while leaving other parts longer) even though there was a high demand from young people because Allah would not allow it. As Bah and Kaddy's remarks illustrate, not all money is viewed equally, and religious outlooks can limit certain economic activities. Just as Islamic regulations dictate how much profit one can make, they also indicate that

how one earns a profit is important, perhaps even more important than the amount of the profit. However, despite the shared values and ethics, as my fieldwork revealed, I encountered several cases that demonstrate the diversity and fluidity of the business ethics among African Muslim small-scale business owners in Guangzhou, which I discuss in the next section.

Diverse interpretations and practices of ethical codes

§ Case 1: Different interpretations of honesty

Aside from regulations on profit, Islam also contains rules about how business should be conducted, and what values should be central to business transactions. Honesty in business, for example, is an important value among my interlocutors. Many verses in the Quran emphasize the importance of honesty and fairness in financial dealings and interactions. For example, "Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly, nor deliberately bribe authorities in order to devour a portion of others' property, knowing that it is a sin" (Quran, 2: 188). An honest business transaction brings a Muslim a profit that is blessed (Santoso et al., 2020). While all Muslims regard cheating and selling religiously-prohibited items as disgraceful behavior forbidden by Islam, perspectives on what is considered proper business conduct sometimes vary due to different factors, including socioeconomic backgrounds and different theological and religious doctrine considerations of the Muslim business owner(s).

Guangzhou is notorious for its counterfeit products (Mathews, 2015; Mathews et al., 2017) where one can buy fake – but convincing – big-brand products, for example, a Prada purse for USD 100-200. These counterfeit items are popular in the African market. During my fieldwork, I sought to establish whether the acceptability of the making and selling of these counterfeit products was conceived differently by different Muslims from different backgrounds. For some Muslims, like Ali, a cell phone trader, counterfeit goods are not acceptable and selling them is considered a distinguishing factor between Muslims and non-Muslims. On the other hand, other Muslim traders make and sell counterfeit products. For example, Nancy, a Chinese national who converted to Islam through her marriage to a Cantonese Muslim, sells counterfeit high-end designer jewelry part-time. She provides her own theory on selling counterfeit goods, which, according to her, is shared by other Chinese Muslims:

> I don't think Allah would be mad if I sell fake goods. I think as long as I tell my clients that this is fake, it is ok. I always am honest with my clients. I made this piece of Tiffany necklace using the same material as the original one, but I sell it at about 1/4 of the price they would have to pay for the original one. I earn my share but I would not sell a fake one to someone as the original, or tell them it is made of 18-carat gold but actually it was gold plated – that is cheat[ing]. That is not allowed by Islam! (Nancy, 01 August 2014).

In discussing the attitude toward counterfeit goods among African traders in Guangzhou, Mathews et al. (2017) demonstrate the complicated relationship between the moral and the legal aspects in informal business that African traders engage in. Morality is how one conducts one's life (e.g., being honest with clients and refraining from shipping copied items as if they were authentic goods), and legality pertains to the arbitrary rules that are often neglected (e.g., knowing the counterfeit goods are not legal but still selling and shipping them). Nancy's case is a perfect example of the different understandings of the moral and the legal dimensions. For Nancy, the principal moral quality in business required by Islam is honesty, which she understands as being honest with clients about the status of her goods. But it does not matter to her whether her action – making and selling counterfeit goods – is legal, or whether her morality is selective, which means that she is dishonest toward the original brand by plagiarizing its design.

For other traders who sell counterfeit goods, their reasons are different. As mentioned earlier, Bah would not sell items forbidden by his religion, such as cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs but he does sell counterfeit clothes and shoes. When I first came to a shoe market with him, I noticed that the Puma sports shoes he ordered cost only 65 yuan (about USD 10) per pair. I warned him about these shoes being fake, concerned that he would be cheated. He laughed and said,

> Of course, I know this is [these are] fake. No one wants to buy fake if they can afford the original. But in my country, many people cannot even afford shoes. So, they don't care. If I sell them the original Puma for over USD 100, no one has the money for it. But some people can pay USD 20 or USD 30 for fake shoes. … Of course, the quality is not the same. They know! But at least they can wear good-looking shoes at a cheaper price. (Bah, 14 October 2013).

Bah's case shows that selling imitation goods is more about the economic status of one's clients, than moral or legal considerations. In addition, it also shows that Chinese counterfeit goods, to some extent, offer economically disadvantaged people an opportunity to enjoy new things at a lower cost.

The cases outlined above illustrate the diversity of understandings about what being "honest" entails and the "more acceptable" way of trading counterfeit items. While the legitimacy of making and selling counterfeit products is debated among Muslims, with different reasons for selling (or not selling) copied goods, the morality embedded in the religious common ground is the same. There appears to be consensus that a Muslim trader should be honest – be it honesty regarding the status of the goods sold to the clients (as seen in Nancy's and Bah's cases) or honesty in legal terms (as seen in Ali's case).

§ Case 2: Friendship versus business

In 2014, I spent some time with a Nigerian entrepreneur, Songo, and his Chinese wife, Fang, a Cantonese woman from a small town outside of Guangzhou. They fell in love and got married in 2009 and conducted business together, mainly trade and commission-based consulting. Songo and Fang's business is slightly larger than those of most small-scale African traders in Guangzhou: they rent a proper office and legally registered their business. Fang later converted to Islam. In many ways, Fang is a pious Muslim: she dresses modestly, cites the Quran, and prayed at Lailah al-Qadr (Night of Power) all night.

One story I heard about a debate between this couple offers an interesting window into how cultural and personal factors impact on the ethics involved in conducting Afro-Chinese business. Soon after Songo married Fang, one of his long-term clients visited them in Guangzhou and gave Fang USD 5,000 in cash as a wedding gift. Then the client asked Songo to purchase some goods for him, as usual. Songo left Fang in charge of the purchase. As mentioned before, middlemen usually take a percentage of the total purchase from the actual buyer. The business was done smoothly and Fang charged that client a 5% commission fee. However, in this particular case, the client expected something different. When the client found out about the commission, he got angry and terminated his business partnership with Songo. In his opinion, the USD 5,000 gift indicated that they were now friends and no longer clients. In his view, the couple should not charge him the commission like they would a stranger. While Songo and some of his African friends agreed with this client and sought to repair the relationship, the damage was done, and rumors about Songo and Fang being greedy started spreading. In her defense, Fang stated,

> What should I do then? I need to think about my own family. There are bills to pay: the rent of the office, the mortgage, the tuition of my kids … Songo always says that they are all family, they are our Muslim brothers and sisters, and we should not charge them. But I need to think of my small family first before thinking about his "big family" (xiangu xiaojia, zaigu dajia). (Fang, 22 June 2014).

The question in this dispute is simple but tricky: to what extent should a line be drawn between friendship and business? Fang and African Muslims hold different opinions on it. Both perspectives have some merit, and it is impossible to "win" this debate. Fang's case again proves the fluidity and diversity of business ethics in practice.

Enforcing mechanisms and trust building

As discussed previously, due to the informal and semi-legal nature of African migrants' business activities, there is a lack of formal mechanisms to enforce ethical business norms. The above section also shows that even though people follow business ethics

on a daily basis, their diverse interpretations on business ethics also result in different business practices. Therefore, African Muslim business owners in Guangzhou have developed some informal mechanisms to maintain and enforce their ethical norms: in particular, mosques, co-ethnic (native-place) networks, business associations, and social networks (word of mouth). Sharing the same religion adds a mutual trust between the two parties, who shared neither the same nationality nor ethnicity (Su, 2017). Many Muslim business owners I interviewed prefer doing business with other Muslims, although not exclusively. For example, Edel, a Hausa entrepreneur from Niger, and Ahmed, a young man from Yemen, met at a restaurant near one of the mosques and later developed a working relationship. As Edel explained:

> I will buy [stuff from] and sell [stuff to] non-Muslims, but I prefer to do business [develop a partnership] with Muslims. Do you know what is Islam? It is about how to conduct life. You see, we have a similar rule on how to conduct life, so there will be less unnecessary conflicts. I trust Ahmed. I work with him because he has a belief [in Islam], so we both have the same thing to guide us. I found it is interesting how many Chinese do not have a religion. … What if someone cheats you in business? You [Chinese people] cannot do anything about it. But, for us, at least we have a God to look for. If we did something wrong, we have this guilt in ourselves, and inshallah this bad person will be punished. But I don't know what you can do with people without beliefs? (Edel, 30 April 2014).

This statement, as biased as it may sound, should not be interpreted solely as discriminatory toward non-Muslim traders from a different background. Due to the high risk involved in the informal economy, it is not surprising to hear an African Muslim trader express that they only want to trade with others from the same circle (country, mosque, and religion), as in their minds, the co-religion and co-ethnic network (Muslim community, the mosque, and religious authorities like Imams) exert social pressures that reinforce moral standards in business conduct. In addition, the smaller the circle, the more controllable the situation, and safer and more trustworthy that businessperson is. In this sense, some Muslim business owners even explicitly expressed their preference for hiring Muslim employees due to the mutual trust based on shared religion rather than shared nationality, ethnicity, or place of origin (Su, 2017). They believed that sharing a similar moral code would reduce the rate of dishonesty and that believing in the same religious values would be a good mechanism to prevent cheating, as "there are only a few mosques where you can go" (Edel, 30 April 2014). Edel's earlier remarks also indicate another layer of enforcement that goes beyond secular law, that even if in this secular world where one cannot get punished due to lack of formal institutional assistance, there exists the judgment and punishment by God in the world of afterlife.

Consequences of code-breaking

In many cases, cheating or deviating from established ethical norms transpire without any consequences. There are, however, a few instances where people do get justice meted out to them. Previous research has shown that the networks that African migrants have help them cope with the difficulties they face in Guangzhou, such as by providing social aid and creating a sense of community, which in turn reinforce ethical business codes and business networks (Jiang, 2022). Therefore, to be excluded from a religious network can be harmful for someone who wants to remain in Afro-Chinese business, especially among African Muslim business owners; their religious networks are tightly-knit, making cheating and code-breaking especially dangerous.

In the introduction of the article, I shared the story of Dina, who was betrayed by a Guinean trader and his Chinese wife. Coincidentally, a few weeks later, I learned that a friend of a Hausa businessman from Niger, Daran, was also cheated by the same Guinean trader, but with a different ending:

> That was two years ago (2012). I brought my friend to Tianxiu to this Chinese lady who I always buy things from ... Next time when he went alone, he found this Guinean guy who offered him a cheaper price. So, he paid USD 2,000 as the deposit. The next day I went to Tianxiu, the Chinese lady told me, "Daran, I saw your friend ordered from that guy but he does not have [any] things. He is cheating." So, I went to ask him for [the] money back. He speaks French. He said, "ne pas avoir d'argent" ["don't have any money"]. How come [he has] no money? I fight and fight. And I called the police. The Chinese woman (his wife) works there, also cheats. She lied to the police. The police knew him! They asked him to give back the money to us. Finally, he did.
>
> The next time, he saw me, he said, "Sorry, bro." And we made peace. After that incident, I find out that he is even a friend's friend. Now we just say "bonjour" ("hi") if we meet on [the] street, but he is not my friend. I identify myself as a Muslim. [Being] Muslim is not just about praying, not eat[ting] pork, these kinds of things, but it is about here [he pointed to his heart]. He is not a true Muslim. (Daran, 21 January 2014).

The somewhat different attitudes this Guinean man displayed to Dina and to Daran are interesting. First, he gave back the money to Daran, but not to Dina, which seemed like a demonstration of a gender bias. Second, he apologized to Daran – perhaps this came from a sense of morality based on religious merits? Scholars have pointed out both the benefits and the limits of co-ethnic and co-religion networks of transnational migrants in conducting business (Kim, 1999; Yuniarto, 2015). Perhaps in this sense, the co-religion network functioned stronger than the co-ethic one, in that the Guinean man felt peer pressure from the Muslim community? Perhaps the conversation with Daran was done in French – which both sides are fluent in – so that

they avoided any miscommunication, which might have taken place in Dina's case? Moreover, the police handled these two cases differently; but why did the alleged connections between the Chinese wife and the police work in Dina's case, but not in Daran's? Perhaps this was because Daran was a tough-looking African man, and Dina was a woman? Perhaps because Daran has a resident visa, and Dina is transient (on a tourist visa)? Perhaps Daran speaks fluent Chinese and Dina does not? Perhaps this happened so many times, that the police finally got tired of this couple and decided to take action? I tried to locate this Guinean businessman but he and his wife had moved, so my questions will remain unanswered, although I suspect that sharing the same religious network alarmed him and pushed him to make amends with Daran.

CONCLUSION

The historical presence of Islam in Guangzhou combined with the city's extensive trading economy have attracted Muslims from diverse origins, making the city home to one of the largest and most diverse communities of foreign Muslim migrants in China (Su, 2017). The majority of African Muslims interviewed in this study are small-scale business owners, engaging in various informal activities in the context of low-end globalization. Their marginalized social status and their low-end, informal economic activities make them vulnerable to business risk and potential fraud. As the article shows, without formal means of support, African Muslim small-scale business owners largely rely on the business ethics to ensure a safe trading environment and to mitigate unforeseen risk. However, their business ethics are informal, dynamic, and context-shifting. Various factors, especially one's cultural background and socioeconomic status would impact on the interpretation and implementation of such business ethics. The article then explains what faith-based business ethics entail and discusses two cases where people held different interpretations of them. In the last part of the article, I discussed how business ethics were enforced, emphasizing the importance of co-religion business networks. Future studies are needed to explore the effectiveness of other enforcing mechanisms, especially the role of communities in enforcing ethics – the role of Muslim leaders, mosques, and leadership of African business and ethnic associations.

This article highlights the vital role of religion in acting as an alternative source of formality and guide in an inherently precarious environment for small-scale business owners in the context of Afro-Chinese informal trade. The discussion of morality, and particularly morality among Muslim traders, hence provides insights into not only the study on relationship of religion to economy but also studies on religious minorities at large. In addition, this article introduces the term "religious common ground," referred to as a shared set of values that regulate individuals' social, economic, and religious conduct. This term helps researchers better understand the religious networks and ethical guides that African and other Muslim groups have built and on which many of their interactions are based. Ethnographically, this article provides an ethnographic account of a group that is important yet often overlooked,

considering the scant research on African Muslims and their interactions with Chinese and other foreign Muslims in Guangzhou. By studying how African Muslim small-scale business owners practice business ethics in Guangzhou, this article adds a nuanced perspective to a growing literature on the African presence in China in the context of emerging international migrations between China and Africa.

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Deportability, Deportation, and Nigerian "Deportspora" in China

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Abstract

How do the manifestations of deportability in everyday life and deportation experiences constitute African migrants into a "deportspora" in China? Despite the scholarly attention paid to the migration of Africans to China, questions of deportability and the simultaneous, reverse flows through their deportation are under-explored. In this article, I examine this critical gap by exploring the lifeworlds of Nigerian migrants and deportees from China, using data from two separate studies conducted in 2017 and 2020–2021. Nigerians are exposed to "illegalization," experience deportability threats, and become vulnerable to arrest and re-dispersal as deportees. The realities of being undocumented and overstaying, the social act of running, and the host society's instrumentalization of deportation to regulate or order the migrant community all point to the existence of Nigerian deportspora in China. The import of this form of social formation makes deportability and deportation an essential part of social life in the African migrant community in the Chinese city of Guangzhou. The article advances critical debates in deportation studies, especially in the under-researched context of Sino-African migrations.

Keywords: Africa-China, deportation, Guangzhou, illegality, migrant deportability

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INTRODUCTION

The "influx" of migrants from African countries to China has attracted significant research attention. While some debate the presence of African resident populations in Chinese cities (Bodomo, 2010; Castillo, 2014), others describe the emergence of the African community (Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2007; Gordon et al., 2017; Adebayo, 2022a), the precarious homing experience of Africans (Castillo, 2015), issues of racialization, regulation, and control (Lan, 2017a; Liang and Le Billon, 2018; Huang, 2019), and the extent of the temporariness of African presence, as marked by the realities of circulation, transiency, stuckedness, and immobility (Haugen, 2012; Niu, 2018; Adebayo, 2022b). However, the issue of deportability and deportation as they affect African migrants in China has received less attention. Despite the deportation of Africans as state practice in China (Wilczak, 2018), we know little about how deportees experience it nor understand how deportability threats and the reality of deportation influenced the evolution of the African community in China. This article seeks to fill this gap by exploring deportability and deportation in the everyday lives of Nigerians and how they shape social relations and associational life in the Nigerian migrant community in China.

As immigration regimes of the Global North toward Africans tightened over two decades ago, China became a choice destination for some African migrants (Lan, 2017b), thus emerging as a frontier for the formation of the new African diaspora in Asia (Bodomo, 2010, 2016; Anshan, 2015). Since the 2000s, the narrative of China as the "New Promised Land" (Lan, 2017b) for Africans has crept into discussions. Moreover, the phrase "China Dream" also emerged (Marfaing, 2019), framing a Chinese version of the popular "American Dream," which is suggestive of the ideal that citizens and immigrants alike should have access to equal opportunity to prosper and be successful in the United States of America. Different figures exist on the population of Africans in China, from hundreds of thousands (Bodomo, 2016) to 22,000 in Guangzhou city alone (Haugen, 2019). Thus, a formidable African community has emerged in China, and Afro-Chinese families are no longer uncommon (Zhou, 2017; Adebayo and Omololu, 2020). In Guangzhou, where most Africans reside, the majority are undocumented Nigerian men (Haugen, 2012; Bodomo, 2016). Therefore, many Africans fall into the category of deportable diasporas or a group of undocumented migrants vulnerable to "illegalization" (Haugen, 2019) and removal. Because of their "illegalization," these migrants experience what De Genova (2002) framed elsewhere as deportability threats. Under massive state surveillance and anti-Black policing practices, undocumented Africans are routinely arrested and re-dispersed as deportees (Lan, 2017a; Haugen, 2019; Huang, 2019). This environment makes Chinese cities qualify as critical nodes to explore experiences of deportability and deportation among African migrants.

Exploring the experiences of deportability and deportation of Africans in China calls attention to a chronically under-researched aspect of African-Chinese exchanges. More than filling a critical gap in African deportation research, the context

of study provides significant insights into the contradictions in the host country's disposition toward the undocumented foreign population, which is simultaneously tolerated and persecuted. In Guangzhou particularly, I show this contradiction by documenting how the Nigerian migrant community structure is recognized and, at the same time, the members of the same community are targeted, routinely arrested, and hauled to the airport empty-handed for deportation. Further, the experiences of Nigerians, as a sub-population of Africans in China, offer a compelling case for unraveling how Africans experience deportability and deportation as part of their presence and community making in an emergent migration destination. This attempt can unveil hidden processes in the constitution and diasporization of Africans in East Asia. Moreover, I contend that deportation is a fundamental process to understanding the making and unmaking of the African diaspora in East Asia. Finally, I use this contribution to advance critical debates in deportation studies, especially connecting deportation to migrant community structures and processes in the context of Sino-African migrations.

This article starts with introducing the socio-political context of the study – with a focus on the Chinese immigration policy and particularly its enforcement and evolution during the last 15 years. I present my analytical framework proposing deportability as a governmentality while deploying deportspora as a concept that reflects the lived experience of African – specifically Nigerian – migrants in Guangzhou. The third section of the article presents the methodology, while section four focuses on analyzing the empirical materials to describe the role of deportation in the Nigerian community's emergence, structuring and unmaking, the materiality of deportability as evidenced by migrants' interpretation of running objects, and how the community responds to the deportation reality through relations of information sharing and mitigation of impact of deportation. The final sections discuss and conclude the article by underscoring the critical role of deportability and deportation in the social life of an African migrant community in China.

Chinese immigration enforcement and the notion of deportspora

For a long time, China did not have a coherent immigration policy in place. Immigration matters were managed through a number of laws and regulations, such as "the Law on Control of the Entry and Exit of Aliens (1985), Detailed Rules on the Implementation of the Law on the Entry and Exit of Aliens (1994), Regulations on the Examination and Approval of Permanent Residence of Aliens in China (2004)" (Lan, 2014: 5). Lan (2014) asserts that, prior to 2012, authorities at multiple levels of the Chinese state – up to 17 of them and sometimes working in an uncoordinated manner – participate in the administration and enforcement of the regulations. However, as immigration became increasingly prominent in China, it also became apparent that a relatively unified immigration policy was necessary (Pieke, 2012). The growth of a resident African population in provinces such as Guangdong already in the 2000s made the need for such a policy more urgent. The

media presented this population in a negative light, interpreting their socio-political engagement and occasional protests as disorderly behavior perpetrated by *mafan*, that is, troublemaking foreigners. During the 2010s, African communities in the Guangdong province were increasingly targeted by police through random checks in public areas (Adebayo, 2022a).

Early experimentation with an expansive immigration policy, the Interim Provisions of Guangdong Province on Administration of and Services to Aliens (2011) in Guangzhou created the so-called *sanfei* population, a special label applying to migrants who enter, stay, and work in China illegally (Lan, 2014; Haugen, 2019). The policy introduced several radical changes compared to previous laws and practices: it rewarded citizens who report *sanfei* aliens, tasked institutions and organizations that Africans normally engage with to verify passports and visas and reporting irregularities to authorities, imposed heavy penalties on those who failed to report *sanfei*, and prevented foreigners from residing near areas the state deems to have implications for national security and public order. Expectedly, the national Exit–Entry Administration Law passed on June 30, 2012 and that went into effect on July 1, 2013, took inspiration from and retained the harsh provisions of the Interim Law of 2011.

Despite the introduction of such a law, practices associated with the regulation of the migrant population have changed frequently and for the worse. For instance, the Registration Certificate of Temporary Residence (RCTR), which foreigners are required to obtain from the police within 24 hours of their arrival, and which used to be valid throughout the duration of foreigners' stay, has been curtailed to a 7-day validity period (Huang, 2019). This means that foreigners need to go through the same procedure practically every week, with significant costs in time and money to fulfill the procedure. Huang (2019: 4) recently drew attention to how such "volatile regulations" and harsh enforcement have been used as a means of regulating and "disciplining" Africans in Guangzhou through indiscriminate stop and search, random and spontaneous visa checks at public places, and frequent drug raids. The imposition of heavy fines became a "lucrative business" for police officers. Also, a negative media campaign represents Africans as unruly and dangerous, while pressures from the top echelon of the Chinese police and monetary incentives interweave with the racialized targeting of Black people (Huang, 2019). African migrants in Guangzhou have learned to live under the constant threat of deportation.

The threat to expel and deport irregular migrants is not unique to China. Galvin (2015: 1) states that migrant expulsion is an increasingly common feature of immigration systems worldwide, with significant changes occurring in "the nature, scope and use of deportation or forced repatriation as a state practice." Nyers (2003) argues that states' obsession with managing and controlling migration with stricter border policies has created an "abject diaspora" or "deportspora." Those falling in the category of deportspora are vulnerable to forced removal owing to the state's framing

of their presence as dangerous and threatening of the host nation's values and public order.

Previous studies on deportability – or the possibility of being removed – and deportation of Africans mainly examine their experiences in Europe and North America (De Genova, 2002; Carling, 2004; Willen, 2007; Kleist, 2018), especially the case of sex workers deported from European countries (Plambech, 2018). While a few studies exist on deportation in Africa and Central Asia (Galvin, 2015; Schuster and Majidi, 2015), there is a need to understand how African migrants in East Asia experience and navigate the risk of removal and actual deportation. Exploring these issues within East Asia as they affect African migrants is essential, primarily because of how the flows of Africans have intensified in a country like China in the past two decades.

I examine the gap in Sino-African migration scholarship by exploring the lifeworlds of Nigerian migrants concerning their experiences of deportability and deportation in China. I show how the state and everyday practices of control against *sanfei* or "triple illegals" shape the everyday life of Nigerians. I argue that Nigerians in China fall into the category of deportable diasporas, a condition shaped in significant ways not only by their insecure or irregular status but by the social reality of constant threat to be deported that characterizes their whole existence. In advancing this position, I present deportability and deportation as a social reality where undocumented status, overstaying, and running (in the literal sense) collide with the nation-state's governmentality over undocumented migrants.

METHODOLOGY

The article combines data generated from two of my previous studies: I conducted the first among Nigerians residing in Guangzhou (2017), while the second involved Nigerians deported from China (2020–2021). As part of my doctoral research, I interviewed 69 participants during two separate visits to Guangzhou in 2017, including 52 Nigerians. The research relied on an ethnographic method whereby I interacted with Nigerians in markets, shops, homes, bars, and places of worship to understand how they settle in Guangzhou city. The length of the interviews varied, depending on the time and openness of each participant to speak, with a minimum duration of 12 minutes, a maximum of 370 minutes, and an average of 67 minutes. The participants included mainly Nigerian men – some had newly arrived while others had lived in the Chinese city for a long time – from community leaders to businesspeople. Their backgrounds were diverse in terms of age group, ethnicity, travel experience, and duration of stay. They fell mostly in the middle-age category (31–50 years), were predominantly men (58% of whom were married), were involved in a wide range of occupations, and occupied different positions in the community. I could recruit only a few women, which is partly due to the male-dominated character of the Nigerian community. The men were mostly engaged in businesses related to

the thriving commodity economy. Also, there were more Igbo participants from South-eastern Nigeria.

The majority had secondary education, and prior to departing from China, many of them engaged in trade-related activities. In terms of travel experience, most of the participants were first-time travelers. Those with previous travel experience had traveled within the African continent. Only a few of them had spent under one year in Guangzhou: about 40% had been in China for one to five years, 29% had spent six to 10 years in China, and 18% had been there for over 15 years in 2017. A dominant theme that recurred throughout the data was the issue of undocumentedness and how it shapes the everyday life of Nigerian migrants, notably as it exposed them to deportability threats and deportation. My positionality as a Nigerian researcher working with Nigerian migrants in Guangzhou has been discussed in-depth elsewhere (Adebayo and Njoku, 2022).

The second research involved a "multi-local fieldwork" in which I interviewed 27 Nigerians between September 2020 and March 2021. Multi-local fieldwork involves linking several local spaces as a connected field over a period (Wulff, 2002). Thus, this study comprised face-to-face interviews in Nigerian cities (Lagos, Ibadan, and Nnewi) and two virtual interviews with Nigerian community leaders in Guangzhou. A total of 22 participants were men deported from China. The larger context of the study was to examine how the deportation shaped the transnational livelihood, masculinity, and family dynamics of Nigerians who used to reside in China. Following the approach of Miller (2012) to conducting life stories, participants freely discussed their experiences and how they navigated undocumentedness, the circumstances of their arrest, experiences while in detention, and eventual deportation from China. I relied on networks of Nigerians in Guangzhou to locate some Nigerian deportees in Lagos and applied the snowballing technique to connect with others. I also recruited a Nigerian deportee whom I met in Guangzhou in 2017 as a research assistant in Ibadan between 2020 and 2021. His involvement facilitated access to other Nigerian deportees in Ibadan and Lagos, mostly people he knew when he resided in Guangzhou as an undocumented migrant for about eight years.

Of the 22 deportee men interviewed, 14 identified as Igbo while the rest were Yoruba. In terms of age, 10 fell in the middle-age group, three were elderly (50+), and the rest were young (30 years and under). Around 16 were married and close to half had traveled abroad prior to going to China. The earliest year of arrival in China they reported was 2005 but up to two of them came as late as 2016. The minimum duration of stay prior to deportation was a year, but one participant had lived in China for 13 years before he was deported. All the participants were involved in trade or business-related activities, except a few who reported carpentry, travel agency, driving, or betting shop operator as their jobs. Two reported that they were unemployed. Among the rest of the participants, two were wives of deportee men living in Nigeria; two were community leaders who had lived in China for over 14 years, while the last person was a visa agent who help prospective migrants to process

visas and assist those trying to return there after deportation to prepare the necessary documents.

I conducted all the interviews in English and pidgin English, both of which are commonly used in Nigeria. I transcribed the English-language interviews verbatim and translated the pidgin ones directly to standardized English for analysis purposes. I also took extensive field notes, which were processed along with the interviews during analysis. Unlike the first study, interview guides in the second study contained questions designed to elicit data on the participants' experiences of deportability and deportation. Participants shared stories of how they navigated various situations and escaped being deported while living in China, and described the circumstances and their actual experiences of deportation.

The two data points based on ethnographic processes enabled me to elicit information from Nigerians facing deportability threats in China and those who had experienced deportation and were residing in Nigeria. The data provided a more holistic picture than would have been possible with data based on the experiences of those in China or Nigeria alone. In the next sections, where I turn to the social reality of deportation in the Nigerian migrant community in Guangzhou, I created pseudonyms for participants.

SOCIAL REALITY OF DEPORTATION AND NIGERIAN "DEPORTSPORA" IN GUANGZHOU

Deportation has played an essential role in the Nigerian community's emergence, structuring, and unmaking in China, although this role is rarely acknowledged. Haugen (2019) and Adebayo (2022a) are the few exceptions in this regard. Both researchers, working specifically in the Nigerian community and exploring the historical process of its formation, allude to how some of the early Nigerian arrivals in mainland China had been deported, initially to Hong Kong from countries like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea before turning to mainland China. Nigerians went to these East Asian countries to offer their labor in factories and were later deported to Hong Kong, where they lived until the news of opportunities in mainland China led to their departure for Shenzhen and Guangzhou (Haugen, 2019; Adebayo, 2022a). One could say that the journey to mainland China partly began with a deportation-inspired congregation of Nigerians from elsewhere – Hong Kong. Nonetheless, while recognizing the connection between deportation and the arrival of Nigerians in China, deportation has, more generally, revealed itself as a reality to reckon with in structuring the Nigerian community in Guangzhou. Before I analyze the details of this assertion, I discuss how experiences of deportability are linked to the regulation and illegalization of migrants, and the context of undocumentedness. This is then followed by a discussion of the materiality through which Nigerian migrants experience it.

Regulate and manage: Illegalization and ordering of migrant community

As the population of Nigerians swelled in Guangzhou, they became targets of blame and stereotype (Pang et al., 2013; Adebayo, 2022a). There is also a widely-shared view that the local authorities are against public gathering or assembly – the exact model of sociation common with Nigerians in the city. Whether in the market areas along Guangyuan Xi Lu, places of worship, or in Nanhai, where a growing number had taken up residence, Nigerians gather in groups to chat, catch up, or share drinks with music, sometimes blasting from loudspeakers. Additionally, Africans, mainly Nigerians, are accused of drug peddling, fraud, and corruption of Chinese girls (Lan, 2017b; Adebayo, 2022a). Deportation emerged as an instrument of control and depopulation to address these social vices.

During the Beijing Summer Olympics (2008) and the Asian Games (2010), the Chinese authorities deployed deportation to regulate the presence of African migrants. They used it to manage who could be seen in public and who could not. Apart from the undocumented, deportability threats were ever-present to help invisibilize the unwanted. During that period, “if someone has paper and you do not know where/how to walk, the person’s paper will be destroyed or terminated” (Bolaji/Male/LG/2020). To address the drug trade problem, in which foreigners and Chinese locals actively participated, a significant issue that peaked with the Dragon Hotel incident of 2013, the authorities intensified raids on Black African foreigners, with Nigerians being the primary target.

With the Entry and Exit Law of 2013 in place, a Nigerian community leader named Ben (GZ/2017), viewed the law “… as a punitive measure to depopulate Nigerians, to ask them just to go.” As an instrument in the host society’s performance of governmentality, the intensification of raids aimed at deporting Black foreigners helped the Guangzhou authority to spatially re-order the city (Wilczak, 2018). It also contributed to the trans-local dispersals that led to the concentration of Nigerians in ghettoized communities in Nanhai.

Apart from its use in regulating foreigners’ presence, the authorities used deportation to moderate the relationship between the state and migrant community leadership. For example, in the early 2000s, a head of the Nigerian community in Guangzhou, was deported for immigration offences. Before that deportation, he was previously deported for overstaying his visa but had managed to return to China before the statutorily permitted duration to be with his family – including his Chinese wife. However, the subtext of his forced removal was that he had advocated for the removal of overstay fines. The erstwhile community leader criticized the fine as exploitative and deliberately targeting Nigerians because the police have come to depend on the income (also see Huang, 2019). His hard-line position led to the re-visitation of his history and eventual deportation (Ben/Male/Community Leader/GZ/2017).

Still, on the use of deportation to manage illegalized migrants, the state practice of removing unwanted foreigners was humanized to establish a regime

of "voluntary" exit called "amnesty." The amnesty was brokered by the Nigerian community leadership with the backing of the Chinese local authority and supported by the Nigerian embassy in China. It essentially provides an opportunity for the easy exit for overstayers by canceling imprisonment time and imposing a reduced fine. Community heads talked about the amnesty program as a significant achievement that legitimized their continuing existence. However, as an initiative aimed at reducing the population of undocumented Nigerians in the city, amnesty ensures that "these people are deported without necessarily paying that huge amount of fine … and provided they can give details of their stay in China" (Falusi/Male/Nigerian Consulate/GZ/2017). Moreover, some community members perceived amnesty as an opportunity for the Chinese authorities to apprehend "persons of interest" – individuals who have records of criminality or have been under watch. Consequently, the amnesty arrangement could be interpreted as part of China's governmentality aimed at reducing the population of "unwanted" immigrants while also supporting a system of entrapment and surveillance of foreigners.

Undocumentedness, overstaying, and deportability

De Genova (2002: 438) has famously observed that "it is deportability, and not deportation per se, that has historically rendered undocumented migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity." In the simplest stipulation, deportability refers to "the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state" (De Genova, 2002: 439). Undocumented migrants face deportability the most, owing to their permanent condition of instability by not being in possession of valid documents in a host country and the vulnerabilities this condition exposes them to. It is important to note, however, that, for some Nigerians traveling between China and Nigeria, the deportability experience starts at the point of departure, continues while in transit, and worsens at the destination upon the expiration of visas.

Chad (Male/LG/2017) faced deportability threats before his journey began. At the international airport in Lagos, he faced questions about why his Chinese visa was issued in Zambia. As a first-time traveler, a status that airport officials in Lagos could "smell," he was interrogated and pressured to explain how he acquired a Zambia-issued Chinese visa. Eventually, he paid US$300 in bribes before boarding the plane. When he arrived in Hong Kong, from where he planned to enter mainland China, he faced the same problem. In Hong Kong, he could not defend the document he carried. Thus, an airport official escorted him to a flight that would return him to Nigeria. On the way to the plane, he confessed to the airport staff that he had obtained the document through an agent and was on his way to start a professional football career in China. The staff later freed him and helped him purchase a boat ticket to mainland China. Chad was metaphorically "deported" at departure and during transit but managed to reach Guangzhou. However, not everyone manages to reach their destination. Harry (Male/LG/2021) reported that he was deported en

route after the immigration staff in Hong Kong told him that the system had flagged his passport.

Upon arriving in China, Nigerian migrants face deportability when they become undocumented and illegalized due to visa expiry. Those with expired visas expressed their situation with the analogy of "death." The Igbo Nigerians typically say, "it died," but the Yoruba Nigerians say, "pali ti ku," that is, "paper (has) died." Most Nigerians in Guangzhou, where almost all my research participants resided, entered China on a 30-day Business Visa (see also Haugen, 2012). Once this document expires, some migrants attempt to renew it, but they can only do so for a brief period. Others abandon their documents without trying at all. Regardless, the two categories of migrants are unified in their eventual desire to stay put and overstay.

To overstay, participants engage in sense-making by processing and trying to understand their situation in the city, enabling them to ease into their imminent status as undocumented migrants. Some may compare the cost of maintaining a stay against the cost of not doing so. Upon arrival, having a "legal" stay is desired, but some quickly learn about the cost implications, which forced them to reassess their options. Overstaying becomes a rational decision, not just a coping strategy (see also Lan, 2017b). "I allowed my visa [to expire] because coming back then [to Nigeria] was too difficult for me because my business was not much that flourishing" (Smith/Male/LG/2021). A deportee who resides in Ibadan, Nigeria, said:

> I decided from the outset [to overstay] because the money I would use to extend my visa was too much; it was too much to do a student visa. Then, I thought that if it [the visa] would collapse, let it collapse. And that God will protect us. (Abayo/Male/IB/ 2020).

Moreover, some decided to overstay in consultation with family members in Nigeria. When China adopted tougher measures, Bunmi (Male/LG/2020) contacted those at home and shared his plan to return but was discouraged from doing it. His girlfriend at the time, now his wife and mother of three, admonished, "that the people still in the place did not have two heads." She encouraged him to stay put instead and avoid going to unsafe and unnecessary places. Similarly, Bunmi's uncle told him to stay put although he had shared his plan to travel to another country when he returns to Nigeria. His uncle said he could return, if:

> … [I] had a place, that I would be staying [upon returning] … and don't I know that it will be like a shame to me that I went to China and did not come with anything tangible … All the people that knew I traveled in the church. (Bunmi/Male/LG/2020).

Upon becoming overstayers, they experience deportability fears, often rendering them immobile (Haugen, 2012; Adebayo, 2022b). Migrants intending to participate

in the economy that Africans in Guangzhou created must be relatively free to travel in the city and to other trading nodes in Guangdong and beyond. However, "without your visa, there are some places you can go, and there are places you can't go" (Benard/Male/GZ/2017). Also, "if you don't have documents, you have to hide from the police" (Sulei/Male/GZ/2017). The immobility resulting from these situations can be temporary or prolonged. Temporary types can occur because of the usual or routine evasion of the police or immigration officers. Prolonged immobility can result from intense policing that makes the public space unsafe for the undocumented.

A case of prolonged immobility was reported to have occurred in 2013, during a high-profile drug-related raid at the Lihua Hotel in Yuexiu district (also called the Dragon Hotel) that led to the arrest of 168 suspects, the majority being from Nigeria (see Adebayo, 2022a). At the time, many undocumented Nigerians hid from the police for a long time. Those going out acquired information about when and how to move and learned the routine of police patrols. While outside the comfort of apartments, they must freeze in place temporarily when they learn of police patrols in their vicinity, freezing long enough until it is safe to move about again. Sometimes, however, immigration officers operate outside the known routine by setting up raids when migrants were not expecting it. Nelson (Male/GZ/2017) narrated an encounter of this nature while waiting and hiding from the police at an apartment in Nanhai:

> I was there, and my friend told me that today is a working day for the Chinese [police] that I should wait till 1:30 pm … So, I was in the house with them. Small-time, we heard a noise, people were running around the corner, so the guy now opened his window and looked down. He saw that many police surrounded the environment. So, those policemen were busy, breaking [in], checking, checking one house. After 30 minutes, we thought they had left because we opened the window again and checked if they were still around … Within a little time, they entered that compound again – the one they were checking before, the one I was in. So, they started breaking the doors. The building was five stories.

Whereas the quote above exposed the tensions and fears linked to deportability, a more critical issue is that the lives of undocumented Nigerians become uniquely unpredictable. Faced with deportability, they effectively substitute order and predictability for disorder and unpredictability. They risk sudden arrest and deportation where all of one's savings and possessions could be lost without any possibility of recovering them. "Everything is unaware; it is sudden; it just happens" (Chisom/Male/LG/2021). A female migrant (Alice/Female/GZ/2017) captured the reality of this suddenness and the possible consequences in the following quote:

> Visa issue can give somebody a high BP ... No matter how much you make, no matter how much you have, that visa issue is a problem because you can pack

> the money in a house and just for one day, they will come and carry you and go, and all the money is lost. It is gone. At least, if you have your visa, even if they take you to the station, you have a hope of coming back and also claim your things, you understand? But when you don't have a visa, they will take you to Nigeria, and everything you have in the house is gone.

Because of this unpredictability, some carry all their cash wherever they go. As many undocumented Nigerians are unbanked, they live on the move. Living life on the move could mean carrying one's money everywhere or living as though one may be arrested anytime and deported. As one deportee Nigerian (Eke/Male/LG/2021) told me:

> Because of those paper issues, you don't really keep money at home. So you'll always have your money with you so that even if it happens at your residence, you still have your money with you.

Another Nigerian deportee (Chisom/Male/LG/2021) whom I met and interviewed at his Lagos apartment corroborated the above:

> There's one thing we do in China when you are going from your house in the morning: you will assume that you may not come back to that again … So, every day is a blessing, it is grace because as you're coming out of that house on the staircase, you could be rounded up, when you're in the bus you could be arrested, when you're in the market you could be apprehended, so you're prepared for the worst every day.

Furthermore, there are Nigerians who, despite lacking documentation, manage to create a semblance of stability by renting shops. However, their lives remain firmly held back because of their deportability. This category of Nigerian migrants rents shops through informal arrangements with local Chinese intermediaries. Still, their presence in the market is fragile and unstable (see Adebayo, 2022b). According to Smith (Male/GZ/2017), "Anything can happen, anytime!" Smith sells clothes and other fashion accessories in the shop he owned with a partner. However, Smith does not feel safe, being always on the lookout for the police. On one occasion, he directed me to look at a shop under lock. That shop, he said, belongs to a friend who was arrested and deported about five months ago because of "illegal" residency. The friend had lived in China for about seven years before being deported.

Curiously, deportability is not the sole preserve of undocumented Nigerians. Nigerians residing "legally" in China under seemingly "legitimate" visa arrangements also experience deportability fears. Consider, for instance, the case of Olu (Male/GZ/2017), who holds a student visa. Olu has been a student in China perpetually because he could not secure a long-term visa. To maintain a stay, he moves between

universities all over China to enroll as a student. While spending most of his time in Guangzhou and visiting his school occasionally, he is never sure if his visa will be renewed. Olu told me:

> You might be denied … [there is] the fear that probably they won't grant you another one. Other than that, life continues. When you get it done, you say, "Thank God! I am renewed," and you continue with your life.

Finally, living through the possibility of deportation exposes some to vulnerability. For instance, among those working in precarious informal jobs, as restaurant attendants or goods packaging, the threat of deportation is subtly deployed to keep undocumented Nigerian workers in line. Ahmed (Male/GZ/2017) worked as a help in a restaurant owned jointly by a Nigerian man and his Chinese wife. Once when the husband was away in Nigeria, his wife refused to pay his salary. When he demanded payment, she told him, "This is China." Ahmed regarded the assertion as a subtle threat. In interpreting "This is China" as a deportability threat, one should not miss the parallel of the assertion with the brutally crude and unfriendly condition of city life in Africa. "This is China" likely parallels "This is Lagos" where brute unforgivingness of city life can consume the most vulnerable (Agbiboa, 2016).

The materiality of deportability: Running and the social life of "canvas"

Deportability mediates the everyday life of Nigerian migrants through how it is reckoned as a phenomenon to be feared. In this section, I develop a portrait of deportability using the act of running with "canvas" as an aspect of the materiality of navigating deportation in Guangzhou city. Having a status that puts one in the position of always being alert to run involves paying attention to one's environment and sorting faces in the crowd, in the market, on the streets, and on public transport. Immigration officers could be anywhere, and one must always be ready to run. "If they come now, as I am talking to you now … I will fly and not run because I don't want to go back to hell fire in Nigeria without money" (Buchi/Male/GZ/2017). That is, "Being a Nigerian, one will understand what I mean; running faster than my shadow, running faster than Ben Johnson, as we may say it in Nigeria" (Chisom/Male/LG/2021).

For many of those whose lives are conditioned by deportability, running is about bailing oneself with one's legs. Undocumented Nigerian men and women, young and old, pegged their survival against their ability to run and evade arrest. In the words of Alice (Female/GZ/2017), who had an 11-year-old son in 2017 and sold food around markets along Guangyuan Xi Lu, running is a social constant:

> When our "customers come," our brothers [laughs], we call them our customers or our brothers, that is immigration, when they come, everybody will be running helter-skelter. That is how we have been living.

Describing her experience with a son in hand, she explained thus:

> I'm not the only one with a baby; others too have babies; sometimes they have caught them, and it is a must that they must go [be deported]. It is just that sometimes when they come around, I leave my business and start running up and down to look for him [her son]. So, if I get him, I will carry him, look for somewhere, and hide.

Similarly, one participant in their 50s who had traveled to China as an older person, met with me in a Lagos market, narrates that:

> When you are in China, you need to put age by one side. China is like a war front. You need to package yourself very well; you leave age by the side because you know the reasons you are there: for you to survive. (Enny/Male/LG/2021).

Thus, running is framed as a response to navigating the war-like environment of Guangzhou city life. To survive this war environment, one must be conscious of one's deportability and always be prepared to act.

To run and survive deportability, however, some participants rely on the materiality and functionality of "canvas." Canvas refers to any running shoes that are soft on the feet and flexible enough to allow the wearer to move swiftly and take flight or run comfortably. Being able to run and having the right shoe to do it is essential, as some Nigerians perceive that the Chinese immigration authorities have professional runners working for them (Chisom/Male/LG/2021). John (Male/LG/2021), who told me that "I am with my canvas even till the day I returned to Nigeria," perceived that canvas is crucial to escaping, even though one can be apprehended. He explained:

> If you see them first ahead of you, you will move, not that you will now be running like a person running 1,000 miles, no. It will be in a coded way [swiftly] … So, you will see many of our people; they'll normally put on canvas, when they come to China, you will see many of them wearing canvas, except those that have genuine papers, resident visas or those that marry the Chinese, or those that come to buy goods … I was with my canvas weathering those things because sometimes, we used to meet them at the markets where we buy clothes.

Similarly acknowledging canvas, Chisom (Male/LG/2021) added:

> Wherever we see they are working or operating, you are already moving with your canvas … ready to run because they will pursue you … If it's not your

> day, they will catch you unaware, and when they catch you, your fate is going to the detention center.

To push deportation forward through running and escaping is considered a victory. In the view of some participants, the canvas or running shoes emerge as a symbolic object having a capacity to determine one's prospect of remaining in China. In one of the stories shared by participants, one narrative stands apart in this respect precisely because the participant attributed both his escapes and eventual deportation to his canvas. Before his arrest, he described two of his former successes due to using canvas to succeed:

> On two occasions, one-on-one, I dodged them; they were pursuing me. God just gave me the space to turn back … and ran away with speed … So, the second one, … I came to buy material, I bought it, they packed it inside my bag, I paid them. Coming out with the goods into the street … [and] as I was walking, I saw the policeman at the opposite sides, one-on-one. He asked me for my passport. So, what I did was that I dropped the goods immediately and turned back with speed. I always go with canvas … The day they arrested me … I was with a shoe [regular shoes]. I was not putting [on] canvas, so that was why I could not run very well that day. (Enny/Male/LG/2021).

From the preceding, the "death" of visas is a precursor to deportability. While the fear remains a constant, and the possibility of eventual deportation was accepted as a certainty, they nonetheless embrace running as a social act in which canvas plays a vital part. In addition, the persistence of deportability and deportation as a social reality shapes migrants' social relations and associational life. I analyze this dimension next.

Living within the bounds of deportability and deportation

Deportation is a social reality among Nigerians. As such, they live within the bounds of its challenges, including everyday deportability threats. One of the ways to appreciate this observation is to zoom in on how migrants interface with deportation-related information and mitigate the impact of deportation through specific community practices.

Nigerian migrants form a complex web of interdependences around information sharing. Undocumented Nigerians rely on community intelligence gathering and information circulation. This community intelligence draws heavily on joint monitoring and information sharing. Before leaving home, an undocumented migrant can call people he knew were already on the street to know how to move. "We also have general communication, and if you move out, you can call a brother you have there and ask, 'How far?'" (Stanley/Male/GZ/2017). When the state introduces new measures that could lead to deportation, those who encounter them inform others through community channels. For example, Nnamdi (Male/GZ/2017) "works" in the

airport as a hustler without valid documents. Because of his situation, he learned to pay attention to his surroundings and developed skills to identify immigration officers in the crowd. Most importantly, when he learns new information that could impact deportation, he shares such information with co-nationals.

Moreover, migrants and their community associations participate in fundraising on behalf of those arrested and awaiting deportation. Individual members and community heads with strong networks dedicate time to this activity. Also, community association executives function as intermediaries and negotiate with the police regarding arrested co-nationals. They usually are the first responders who visit the police station or detention center to assess the situation on the ground and determine the basis of detention and the needs of the detained. Local authorities typically recognize these intermediaries who may visit police stations to negotiate releases.

Relatedly, the migrant community mobilizes to raise funds to alleviate the economic, social, and mental burdens of deportation. Describing his fundraising activities for those imprisoned and awaiting deportation, a community leader said, "Most times, what I did was to go around, carrying offering plate for them among the community people to contribute to send them home" (Ben/Male/Community Leader/GZ/2017). Funds can go into purchasing tickets and paying mandatory overstay fines. However, such community support lightens not only the economic burdens of unprepared and forced removal; it lightens the weight of the social burden, especially in alleviating the fear of returning home as people, whom Carling (2004) called "empty-handed returnees." They lift this burden by using part of the community-donated funds to buy gifts for the members awaiting deportation.

Furthermore, in living within the bounds of existence produced by the reality of deportation, Nigerian migrants participate in a "farewell ritual." This involves meeting up with home-bound co-nationals at the departure terminal of the Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport to send them home. Documented and undocumented migrants participate in this ritual, even though the danger of deportability remains high for those with expired documents. The meet-up is where community members present community-sourced gifts to prospective deportees. Because those arrested and processed for deportation rarely get the opportunity to pack their belongings, the meet-up also serves as a handover point of personal belongings that friends packaged on behalf of the migrant facing deportation. Those who have goods stored away with plans to sell in Nigeria as part of routine transnational trade but are prevented from doing so because of their arrest also benefit from the "farewell ritual." Conversely, a person considered a "bad friend" can have his belongings sold off and not paid.

DISCUSSION

This article has so far attempted to fill a critical space in Sino-African migration literature by exploring the experiences of deportability and deportation in the everyday lives of Nigerians and their roles in community social relations and

associational life in China. More precisely, it established deportation as a social reality connected to the emergence of the Nigerian community in mainland China, as well as how fears related to possible removal intensify at the destination following visa expiration. Inside Guangzhou, undocumentedness contributes to the decision to overstay, sometimes in consultation with family members in Nigeria. The presence of deportability fears renders their lives unpredictable, exposes them to vulnerability, and makes their presence fragile.

Despite their fragile and unstable state, running and using canvas, as subjectively interpreted, become a means of resisting and suspending deportation. This shows evidence of the interwoven nature of "canvas" (shoes) in use and the subjective meaning attached to it by their migrant wearers. While evocative of Appadurai's (1988) "social life of things" on the move, the reliance on "canvas" as an object of both mobility and evasion in Nigerian migrants' imaginary and social practice of navigation accentuates a linkage between deportation research and "object biography." Popularized in museum and heritage studies (Schamberger et al., 2008) but gaining traction in the aftermath of recurrent fatal boat mishaps and dangerous journeying among African irregular migrants heading to Europe (Horsti, 2019; Şanlı, 2022), "object biography" in the context of Sino-Nigerian/African migration calls attention to the theoretical promises of things and objects around which migrants live with and build their lifeworlds.

Moreover, deportation as a state practice functioned as a tool of controlling, managing, and depopulating unwanted African foreigners, with a community leader clashing with and losing to the governmentality. Having embraced and evolved different means to interface with these situations, deportation and deportability emerge as an elemental form of social life in the Nigerian community in Guangzhou. This view further supports the idea that a Nigerian "deportspora" community exists in China.

A trend of thought in deportation studies is the perspective that deportation is a process that begins before forced removal and endures after the removal (Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015; Galvin, 2015; Khosravi, 2018). However, the extent to which deportability may be similarly imagined is unclear. Examining the experiences of Nigerians along the Sino-African migration corridor provides an opportunity to view deportability in this exact manner. Concretely, the explored situation revealed the possibility of deportability as being unbounded from the nation-state where migrants reside at a specific time, pointing out that it could begin at departure and continue while in transit. This finding is significant because it shows how deportation studies themselves may potentially navigate the problem of methodological nationalism, which has plagued migration research as an academic field and social sciences in general (Wimmer and Schiller, 2003).

Moreover, the study shows that deportation, viewed as part of the "state's arsenal of control" (Bloch and Schuster, 2005: 508) and used to expel foreigners considered unwanted (Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015), is an important phenomenon to

consider in understanding the making and unmaking of African communities in China. Deportation is revealed as critical in the governmentality linked to the regulation and management of the African population, further confirming the views of other scholars who have studied African presence and their clearing from Guangzhou (Lan, 2017a, 2017b; Wilczak, 2018; Huang, 2019). The seeming normalcy of deportability and deportation among Nigerians also reveals significant similarities in other Global South migration corridors where these realities are experienced as being "simultaneously disruptive and mundane" (Galvin, 2015: 2).

Beyond the normalcy of deportability and deportation that individual migrants experience, the normalization of this experience and practice should be woven into understanding the established migrant community structure and its ordering within a host society. More than its use in ordering individual migrants, deportation has been deployed in China to alter the functioning and stability of a migrant community through its instrumentalization in targeting "troublesome" community leaders, including heads of the well-organized migrant community. However, by living within the bounds of life set by deportability and deportation and responding to them, including through quotidian acts of resistance, Nigerians in China experience and respond to these realities as a contested realm (Sutton and Vigneswaran, 2011). For instance, where unpredictability and suddenness of deportation lead to loss of belonging, as documented among deportees in diverse settings (Ratia and Notermans, 2012; Khosravi, 2018), the Nigerian community evolved to mitigate losses to individual deportees. Fundraising and farewell rituals turn individual and often lonely removal into a community experience. They also use gift-giving during airport meet-ups to counter empty-handed return.

Understanding the Nigerian "deportspora" in China has contributed to contemporary deportation literature on two fronts, at least. The first pushes the concept of deportability and unbound it from the confines of a destination's nation-state. The second advances the perspective that deportability and deportation in the Sino-African context are a community experience, not just that of individuals. Deportation scholarship will benefit significantly from understanding the community context. For instance, we may explore how the observed embeddedness of deportation in the community process can be explained by variations in community social relations and patterns of associational life in different migration contexts. Further research into this question and other related ones will likely generate productive answers.

CONCLUSION

Deportability and deportation shape community life in the Nigerian community in Guangzhou. The realities of undocumentedness and overstaying, the social act of running, and the host society's instrumentalization of deportation to regulate, manage, or order the migrant community reveal the existence of a Nigerian "deportspora" in China. The import of this form of social formation makes deportability and deportation a fundamental part of social life in the African migrant community in the Chinese city. The article has opened a new space of inquiry in Afro-Chinese migrations where the reverse flows from China through deportation have not received as much attention as the inflow of Africans into Chinese cities. Future studies incorporating the views of African and Chinese government authorities and officials would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Africans experience deportation from China.

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A South-South Cross-Border Marriage Between Chinese Men and Ethiopian Women

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Abstract

This article develops an ideal type of South-South cross-border marriage. Based on an eight-month multi-sited ethnography in Ethiopia and China, I identified an unusual conjuncture of global forces, connections, and imaginations that facilitated cross-border marriages between Chinese men and local women in Ethiopia, which should be considered a novel ideal type. Its theoretical novelty is not only defined by the unique dynamics among Sino-Ethiopian spouses vis-à-vis the "segregated" Chinese documented in existing studies but also by these marriages' distinct formation mechanisms. Sino-Ethiopian marriage is not formed due to China being an attractive destination but is associated with China's incompatible hard and soft power as forces, Chinese factories and accumulated Sino-Ethiopian social networks in local communities as connections, and localized imaginations. Furthermore, this study calls for a paradigm shift in examining cross-border marriages between a developing South and a rising South in this dramatically changing global capitalist world system.

Keywords: cross-border marriage, China in Africa, global China, South-South

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of "China in Africa" is frequently reported by media and scholars with foci that remain primarily at the macro level with specific interests in the quantified economic facets (Siu and McGovern, 2017). Only a few studies have reported Afro-Chinese intimate relationships (see, for example, French, 2014; Driessen, 2019). Furthermore, Miriam Driessen (2019) found that Chinese men established intimate relationships with local Ethiopian women among Chinese road construction sites in the Tigray region (northern Ethiopia). However, she also found that Chinese managers tended to pull their compatriots back on track via a racial-distancing process to preserve the purity of Chinese identity. Those Chinese who "trespassed" the racial boundary were at risk of being transferred to other positions or sent back to China. Such Afro-Chinese dynamics presented in Driessen's work fit the broader literature on Chinese in Africa. Most Chinese maintained a working relationship with local Africans and no more, which gave little opportunity for Afro-Chinese marriage to emerge (Lee, 2017; Yan et al., 2019).

Understandably, Afro-Chinese marriage in an African country has been underreported and thus understudied. Most research on Afro-Chinese marriages has been conducted in Guangzhou, China, where African male traders married Chinese women (Lan, 2017; Mathews et al., 2017; Jordan et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023). These African men came to China for their academic or business aspirations and later met their Chinese wives.

This study focuses on a rare case of Afro-Chinese cross-border marriage that occurred in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and its neighboring areas. The spouses formed their families through socially recognized weddings or legal registrations, distinct from the image of isolated Chinese who disconnect from the local community. How were these Sino-Ethiopian marriages formed, and why were their dynamics so different? Solely employing a "cultural" (see Wang, 2014) or "racial" (see Driessen, 2019) lens cannot answer the puzzles above. These marriages should not be regarded as the products of encounters between "Chineseness" and "Ethiopianness." Instead, I explain these marriages through global China's expansion in Ethiopia, which facilitated and shaped the marriage formation in a specific time-space. Besides, I explore how global China's power was negotiated and challenged by the spouses, constantly regarding the West.

To use Charles Ragin's (1987) dichotomy, I adopt a case-oriented approach in this study rather than a variable-oriented one, through which "[r]esearchers examine cases as wholes, not as collections of variables" for uncovering "the variety of meaningful patterns of causes and effects" (52). Therefore, Sino-Ethiopian marriage is regarded as a theoretical case or an ideal type (Weber, 2012) that was caused by a conjecture of different variables. The relevant variables, including class, racial concepts, and gender, are considered with a changing world system (Wallerstein, 1979) disrupted by the emergence of global China. The "wholeness" of this case is achieved through the analytical tool of the "three axes," namely global forces,

connections, and imaginations, as formulated by Michael Burawoy (2000), which emphasize the interconnections between a microsite and its macro extensions when we contemplate globalization phenomena. This paper therefore follows the "extended case method tradition" (Burawoy, 1991). It analyzes China's presence in Ethiopia, not separately as a contextual background but with the specific connections it produced and its symbolic power to the spouses. Likewise, the imaginations of the spouses are regarded not merely as the individuals' agency but as agentive responses toward the macrostructures. Through the "three axes," this analytical tool serves a comparative purpose in conceptualizing and comparing the formation process of cross-border marriages in the existing literature and in this paper.

THEORIZING THE UNIQUENESS OF SINO-ETHIOPIAN CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE

Most studies of cross-border marriage are variable-oriented, and their scholarship has been dominantly micro-focused with highly descriptive and vaguely defined conceptual tools. For instance, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar (2001) argue that cross-border marriage is influenced by the spouses' "social locations" created through specific "socially stratifying factors" (445-446). Nicole Constable claims that cross-border marriages were established within various "marriage-scapes" (2005b). These landscapes of cross-border marriages are shaped by specific cultural, social, historical, and political-economic conditions, which determine who marries whom, through what means, and with what incentives. Not entirely excluding the structures – such as global capitalism, former colonial connections, and existing migration flow – these concepts fail to provide a causal framework to explain how certain structures affect individuals' exertions of agency and why agents act in accordance with or against the structures.

Influenced in one way or another by these concepts, scholars on cross-border marriage often enter specific sites to explore the grounded experiences of the spouses (as exemplified by these two volumes of collected essays: Constable, 2005a; Yang and Lu, 2010). Instead of focusing on the interconnections between structures and marital practices, these studies present the agency of spouses and their family members. In doing so, structures often retreat as a background without questioning how these structures are produced and how they reproduce certain marriages and affect motivations.

ESTABLISHING IDEAL TYPES WITH THE "THREE AXES"

In this paper, I consider Sino-Ethiopian cross-border marriage and the cross-border marriage documented in previous studies as two different ideal types. The former is a South-South type, and the latter is a South-North type, as outlined in Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory (1979). This dichotomy does not suggest a unified set of configurations within each ideal type or exclude other

types in the real world. Rather, I use existing literature on cross-border marriage as metadata to draw a comparison – as a theoretical type – with the Sino-Ethiopian marriage discussed in this paper.

South-North cross-border marriage

Global North countries are the major destinations and constitutive of global forces affecting cross-border marriage. Scholars have observed a feminized cross-border marriage flow in which women from less-developed Asian, Latin American, and Eastern European countries married men in Western Europe, North America, Australia, and developed East Asia (Constable, 2005b). Besides the push-pull incentives, cross-border marriage formation also depends on local and transnational "marriage-scapes" (Constable, 2005b). Although marriage migration flows from the Global South countries to the Global North remind us that the core-periphery world system (Wallerstein, 1979) still applies globally, the assumption of cross-border marriage being hypergamous socioeconomically is misleading (hypergamy refers to the migration destination's socioeconomic and symbolic power). For instance, Russian and Filipina women marry men from America and Japan for both material and nonmaterial desires (Faier, 2007; Suzuki, 2007; Patico, 2009). Also, scholars use transnationalism to conceptualize cross-border marriage (Williams, 2010). Through the three transnational social spaces – kinship groups, transnational circuits, and transnational communities (Faist, 2000), women cross borders to marry men with similar cultural roots or ethnicities (Constable, 2003; Charsley, 2013). But these marriage migration flows are still from the Global South to the Global North, reminiscent of the global hypergamy of locations.

Shaped by the world system, two primary connections link prospective spouses. Among the population with transnational ties, family networks are naturally their means to marry across borders (Thai, 2005; Charsley, 2013). Where this does not apply, the profit-driven brokerages and the governmental regulations compose an institutionalized marriage market globally (Park, 1996). Both connections play multiple roles in facilitating marriage migration flows and sustaining the connections themselves. For instance, Singaporean marriage agencies profit from the business niche by promoting the country as an attractive option. Through various "discursive strategies," agents present Singaporean men and Vietnamese migrant women as ideal marriage partners by "reconstituting" these marginalized men and women as "busy working men" and "humble, hardworking, and caring spouses" (Yeoh et al., 2017: 237-238).

According to previous research, global imaginations among cross-border marriages usually compound pragmatic expectations with immaterial desires that were primarily reproduced by the current global order through promotions and repackaging by global connections. Men from the Global North seek to marry Global South women to fulfill their reproductive needs and cultural obligations (Liaw et al., 2010; Yang and Schoonheim, 2010; Statham, 2020). They also fantasize about their

potential foreign spouses being "traditional" with family-oriented values (Constable, 2005b; Thai, 2005; Statham, 2020) or as being the exotic "others" (Manderson and Jolly, 1997). Economic betterment is critical for women from the Global South, especially when cross-border marriage is a family strategy (Williams, 2010). But these women's agency also goes beyond the material calculations. They may expect to escape from their patriarchal home countries (Constable, 2005b; Thai, 2005) and wish to attain citizenship connecting them with cosmopolitanism and modernity (Faier, 2007). Also, these considerations do not necessarily preclude love and other forms of intimacy (Freeman, 2005; Patico, 2009).

South-South cross-border marriage

Hardly any of the previous studies reflect what I observed in Ethiopia. China emerged as a global power less than two decades ago. Despite its rising economic power, the attractiveness associated with soft power needs time to accumulate. Whether China has attained a similar level of desirability to become a marriage migration destination is in question. Besides, there is no transnational family tie between China and Ethiopia to serve as global connections. International marriage brokerage is banned in China and generally does not exist in Ethiopia, where the thriving agencies are for labor migration (Adugna, 2019). I also found that the imaginations of Sino-Ethiopian spouses were diverse and complicated, as also reflected in the existing studies. However, migration to China was irrelevant to those Ethiopian wives. I met no Ethiopian during my fieldwork who thought China was an ideal destination to reside in. So, the case of Sino-Ethiopian marriage is theoretically different from the cross-border marriages documented in previous studies, as the marriage formation mechanisms diverge. Therefore, the case of Sino-Ethiopian marriage requires a new theorization.

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF SINO-ETHIOPIAN CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE

From 2018 to 2020, I conducted an eight-month ethnographic fieldwork stint in both Ethiopia and China. The pilot study took place during one month in 2018. With the network I built and the social media apps, I maintained and expanded my connections among Sino-Ethiopian couples. In 2019, I spent half a year on the subsequent fieldwork in Addis Ababa and its surrounding areas. During early 2020, I conducted a follow-up study across China, visiting several families after they had moved to China.

I collected data through formal and informal interviews and participant observation. I interviewed 14 Chinese husbands and 15 Ethiopian wives (N=29). Besides, I interviewed the Ethiopian parents of several of these couples while visiting their natal families. I conducted the interviews with Chinese men in Chinese, while the interviews with Ethiopians were conducted in Amharic, except for two Ethiopian wives who used mainly English during the interviews. I audiotaped and transcribed

verbatim all 45 in-depth interviews (I interviewed several spouses more than once). I sought informed consent before each interview. Furthermore, I conducted the participant observation mainly during home visits, family dinners, parties, and other social gatherings. I wrote extensive field notes and subsequently analyzed the data thematically (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

I sourced the interlocutors through a snowball sampling with an active membership. The Sino-Ethiopian spouses gradually acknowledged me as a jack-of-all-trades in the community. Besides being a researcher, I was a translator, a consultant for family on legal and financial issues, a wedding organizer, and the best man at a wedding. I was with the Sino-Ethiopian couples when they were fighting, negotiating dowry, marrying, and navigating different governmental institutions for travel documents. The reciprocal relationship between me and the Sino-Ethiopian spouses made it easy for them to open up to me and refer me to further interlocutors.

Also, given the complex configurations of the research participants, my positionality was carefully balanced throughout the fieldwork. I am an ethnic Han Chinese man from Southwestern China. Through shared gender, ethnicity, and language, I naturally picked the quickest and perhaps easiest way to enter the field through Chinese husbands. The rapport between us was built through a choreography of working-class masculinity, including but not limited to binge drinking and smoking, and talking loudly. However, I had to control the level of masculine bonding as such scenarios combined what the Ethiopians disliked the most. Furthermore, I did not want to be fixed with these Chinese men, especially being one of them. Studying marriages will inevitably reach the most private parts of people's life experiences, which requires trust and closeness. I gained Ethiopian wives' trust as an understanding outsider who cared about the women's experiences and opinions without potential conflict of interest. When helping them with their travel documents, I had deep conversations with them and only about the women themselves. I am not sure if I succeeded in winning every wife's trust. But there were some moments I could feel I made it. One Ethiopian wife told me, "You know, you are the only Chinese man who cares about us. You ask how we feel."

Most interlocutors (27 out of 29) are from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, which resembles the general configuration of Sino-Ethiopian spouses. The Chinese husbands are often from rural areas or small townships and received a limited education. Many found themselves unvalued in the domestic marriage market. The Ethiopian wives are primarily from rural and other underprivileged backgrounds too. Compared to their husbands, these women usually received higher education and were much younger than their husbands. They married at a very young age, several of whom were under 18 when their weddings were held. For the samples' diversity, I interviewed a Chinese husband and an Ethiopian wife with higher socioeconomic status from two different families, which was used to examine whether China was better known and thus more attractive to spouses of higher class. They, of course, had a courtship and marriage distinct from other Sino-Ethiopian

spouses in this study. However, persuading their wives to move to China was still difficult and under negotiation when the data was collected.

HOW CHINESE MIGRANT MEN MARRY ETHIOPIAN WOMEN

The path of how Chinese men marry local women is distinct from what has been reported by previous studies. Like the conceptualization of existing literature, I also present marriage formation through the "three axes": global force, global connection, and global imagination.

Global force: China is visible in Ethiopia, but not loveable

"Look! You Chinese people built that." A taxi driver pointed at a skyscraper under construction. "You know, Chinese are everywhere. They work very fast. If for us to build, God knows how long it takes!" The 206-meter building is the new landmark of Addis Ababa. It is said to be the tallest building not only in Ethiopia but in East Africa.

If we only look at the economic statistics, China is powerful in Ethiopia. China's investment in Ethiopia in the recent 20 years has contributed to Ethiopia's economic takeoff. Since 2004, Ethiopia has maintained 8% or above gross domestic product (GDP) growth (IMF, 2018) until COVID-19 and the civil war began in 2020. Adopting a developmentalist approach, Ethiopia has become the powerhouse of the East African economy (Oqubay, 2015). This eastern African country has often been portrayed as "the next China" or "China's China" with extensive Chinese official financial support and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Chakrabarty, 2016; Nicholas, 2017). China's state investment and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) focus on infrastructure, while China's private FDI concentrates on manufacturing (Chakrabarty, 2016). Infrastructure building and industrialization have boosted urbanization in Ethiopia (Fitawok et al., 2020). Besides, job vacancies created by the manufacturing and service industry have led to internal rural-urban migration, which involved many of my Ethiopian interlocutors.

During the same period, numerous Chinese employees came with construction projects and replanted factories. Many of them are men who found themselves uncompetitive in China's domestic marriage market due to the marriage squeeze (Muhsam, 1974). Therefore, China's expansion in Ethiopia has created meeting opportunities for potential Sino-Ethiopian spouses.

However, China's presence and influences were time-space specific. As I found in Ethiopia, China's visibility was limited to the newly developed urban districts, infrastructure construction sites, industrial zones, and Chinese restaurants. Leaving Bole International Airport, numerous billboards of China's construction companies stood along the road. In the most developed areas of Addis Ababa, huge logos with Chinese characters are hung on unfinished buildings. But when I walked to the old town, such as Piazza or Kazanchis, China's symbols almost disappeared. They were

replaced by Coca-Cola or HBO, which reminded Ethiopians of the final season of Game of Thrones.

Ethiopians were after the West. Kaleman is a local taxi driver hired by Lu when we applied for Christina's (Lu's wife) immigration documents. He is a university graduate who can speak four different languages. He was applying to work for the US embassy at the time and said:

> Honestly, the pay is not that tempting. I earn more driving this taxi. But if I get the job, maybe after six or seven years, my whole family will have the chance to move to the US. We will have US nationality.

The West was also the source of fights between Sino-Ethiopian spouses, especially when Chinese husbands persuaded their wives to move to China. For instance, Zhu's wife Anny always responded with references to America whenever Zhu, my Chinese gatekeeper, brought up how modern and developed China was.

> Zhu: She always mentions America. Like last night, she trashed me, "What is good about your China? I'd rather go to America. Even just mopping floors or cleaning toilets. They have a minimum wage of 30 or 40 dollars an hour. I work eight hours a day. I can live a good life!"
>
> Anny: He told me that China is developed. They have everything. They are modern. He always compares [China] with my country. ALL THE TIME! And I told him, "Don't compare them. It's [Ethiopia] in Africa. China is a big country. Why don't you compare it with a big country?"

Western countries are the migration destinations when Ethiopian women marry foreign men. Cross-border marriages in Ethiopia are mainly formed through transnational ties between the local and diasporic communities (Adugna, 2019). The attraction of these Global North countries is usually built on more than its economic development (Thai, 2005; Faier, 2007; Suzuki, 2007; Patico, 2009) but connects to countries' "soft co-optive power" (Nye, 1990).

China's leaders, including Xi Jinping, are fully aware that China is yet to become "loveable" (Myers and Bradsher, 2021). The government is keen on promoting China's soft power, which is expected to make China more desired. The establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) worldwide started in 2004 and is regarded as one such endeavor (Zhou and Luk, 2016). However, Maria Repnikova (2022) found that many students attended CIs in Addis Ababa only for "China's tangible offerings" and went to learn the Chinese language "to secure employment" (54). Their efforts were made for future job opportunities offered by Chinese enterprises in Ethiopia instead of their passion for Chinese culture.

Like these CIs' students, the Ethiopian wives did not find China attractive, and it was a predicament for them when they faced the option of going to China.

> Emily: I have lived my whole life so far in Ethiopia. China, I don't know about it. I have a great place here with my family. When I go to China, I'm leaving behind all these, all my current life. I'm not happy at all.

Like Emily, most Ethiopian wives knew little about China, which gave them no ground to cultivate their desire for China. Nevertheless, China's economic expansion produced the international migration flow from China and Ethiopia's internal rural-urban migration flow. The convergence of these two flows has made Sino-Ethiopian cross-border marriage possible. However, bringing Chinese to Ethiopia does not necessarily produce an environment that facilitates marriages (e.g., Driessen's construction sites). As I demonstrate in the next part, private capital instead of the state capital and the manufacturing industry rather than infrastructure construction, created a more tolerant condition for the intimacies and marriages between Chinese and locals.

Global connection: Chinese shop-floors and sustained Sino-Ethiopian social networks

During the fieldwork in Ethiopia, I rarely found any Chinese private enterprise that upheld stringent and collective management (Lee, 2017) or racial distancing policies (Driessen, 2019). They were often small factories in the manufacturing industry whose shop-floor served as the primary meeting places for Sino-Ethiopian couples. These Chinese factories are often low-tech and labor-intensive, knocked out by China's industrial restructure and upgrading since the 2000s. Many of these enterprises are from east coastal China that moved to Ethiopia to enjoy low labor costs and lenient regulation. Factory owners usually brought dozens of low-skilled workers from their Chinese branches to replicate their manufacturing models in China. Besides, they hired many untrained young Ethiopians. Many of them were women in their 20s. Courtship and flirting occurred on the shop-floors.

Lillian, an Ethiopian wife, met her husband on a rainy day:

> My shoes were broken. I asked him to repair my shoes. He threw my shoes and gave me 100 birr (ETB) … I was surprised, but I also knew that he was a kind person. After that, he started to bring me food and give me money for food. When I opened my lunchbox, he also brought his lunchbox. He sat beside me, and we ate our dinner together. So, the workers saw that we were having dinner together. They started to tell me, "He's in love with you."

This story is typical of how a Chinese man started a relationship with his Ethiopian wife. The management of these privately owned factories generally had no interest in interfering with employees' personal affairs. In fact, a chief manager of a textile

mill had several local mistresses for himself. In another trading company, a deputy manager married one of his Ethiopian colleagues. They thus had no legitimacy to keep their Chinese subordinates from cohabitating with or marrying locals. Also, the employers supported anyone who needed to arrange a wedding in Ethiopia. For example, a footwear factory in Addis Ababa offered salary advances and cars to Chinese employees who needed to organize their weddings.

The Sino-Ethiopian social networks served as another critical connection for marriage formation. Several Chinese husbands I interviewed have lived in Ethiopia and worked for the same Chinese companies for over ten years. Such a bond accumulated through the stable living arrangement further offered other Chinese single men opportunities. Zhu met Anny during another Sino-Ethiopian couple, Zhang and Sara's wedding. The groom was Zhu's colleague, and the bride was Anny's high school classmate.

> Zhu: My wife was their bridesmaid. Then Zhang introduced her to me. He probably wanted me also to marry a local woman, and then he wouldn't be the only one here. I felt she was a decent person, not a casual one. I'm not casual too. Zhang told me, a woman like this would help me in the future.

> Anny: Then the next time he visited them, he asked my friend to invite me. Later, he went back to China and called me from China! He told me he wanted to be with me. Otherwise, he didn't need to come back to Ethiopia. I told him, "Ok. Come. We'll try."

Besides connecting the potential spouses, such social networks also played a critical role in convincing the spouses if they hesitated initially. Most of the spouses organized their weddings a month or shorter after their first encounter. There was a need for an established credit that these spouses could rely on. For example, when Zhu asked Anny to move in together, she turned to Sara for advice: She [Sara] married a Chinese man, and she once worked with him [Zhu] too. Then Sara said, "He's Ok. You can try. After you try, then you can decide if you want to marry him." A while after Zhu married Anny, Sara's mother convinced her niece to marry one of Zhang's colleagues and later convinced her niece's sister to marry another Chinese worker. When Zhang returned to China, Zhu assumed the position of marriage negotiator. He then helped several Chinese men find Ethiopian wives.

Similarly, in Zhao and Nancy's matchmaking, Zhao's boss, Dong, was a key figure. Dong came to Ethiopia several years before Zhao and had built up his reputation among the local people. He bought a piece of land from Nancy's uncle to build his carpet factory. Furthermore, he hired several members of Nancy's extended family. One of Nancy's cousins, Ahmed, talked about his boss with gratefulness, indicating that Dong was "xin hao" (goodhearted). He told me that Dong not only appointed him as a team leader with a decent salary but also helped him to build a

new house. With the vouch from Dong, Zhao was confident about getting Nancy from the beginning.

> Zhao: I kept going. Why? I got back up. Her uncle and aunt really looked me up. I knew her uncle already. He kept telling her I was a really good guy. Then I got support from my boss. I was confident and kept pursuing her.

Global imagination: Localized material and nonmaterial desires

The motivations behind these Chinese men's and Ethiopian women's marriage decisions were unsurprisingly complex pertaining to material and nonmaterial desires. Sometimes, the courtship could be very romantic.

Katherine's husband is an engineer in an Italian team that manages a dam in a remote area of Ethiopia. When they started dating, the man had to find excuses to return to Addis Ababa from his remote workplace.

> Katherine: The company policy was very strict. So, he had to make an excuse to come to Addis to see me. The excuse was he had a problem with his teeth. The company had a connection with the Korean Hospital. But they also had an Italian doctor there. But he said, "No, no, no. I have to go to Addis to the Korean hospital." They sent him to Addis. He came here, and he lost one [good] tooth [couldn't stop laughing] … He had to take one tooth out.

For Katherine and many other Sino-Ethiopian spouses, love and intimacy are important in their marriages. But their marriages were also driven by practical concerns. For many Chinese husbands, marrying Ethiopian women was primarily for social expectations. Like Zhu always told me, marrying his wife was the last chance for a man like him, a divorcee in his 40s, to be "completed" as a Chinese man: a beloved husband, a filial son, and a caring father.

The marriage decisions could sometimes be carefully weighed. Before Liang decided to marry his wife, he had more than ten hours of soul-searching dialogue with Zhu. He hesitated to marry a Black woman and was afraid his children would be "too Black." Zhu finally convinced him to settle down regardless of compromises, as he did for himself. Once, he fought with Anny during dinner. Zhu was too angry to organize his broken Amharic. Then he turned to me and pointed at Anny, "You tell her! Tell her straight! If a man has any other option, who would marry a woman here?" Anny somehow got the meaning. She replied with contempt, "I know your Chinese men. If you guys have good options back home, you wouldn't have to come all the way here." Like this dispute, the marriage was often a settlement and a Plan B.

Christina was Lu's Plan B as well. While he was with Christina, Lu always thought about getting back with his Chinese ex-wife. After hearing about Christina's pregnancy, his first reaction was to fly straight back to China to seek the last chance of reconciliation with his ex-wife.

> Lu: [After I went back], I couldn't get along with her (ex-wife) anymore. So, I called Christina not to get the abortion. I will come back in 3 or 4 months. Then I was here again. My son was born. Now, with this son, I was determined to walk down this road. My road back home was blocked. She told me clearly we wouldn't get back together again. I took the option in Ethiopia. A bit choiceless.

Ethiopian women are reportedly reluctant to establish intimacy without getting financial support in return, as there is less chance for women to be financially self-sufficient in Ethiopia (Mains, 2013). Among the wives from rural areas, their incentives to marry Chinese men are driven by the logic of the local marriage market. Nancy left her hometown after failing high school exams. She came to work in a textile mill near Addis Ababa. But she found the working environment unbearable: "The machine was too loud and noisy. I couldn't stand it. I left in one day." She chose to marry this Chinese man who promised to treat her well.

> Nancy: You know that you don't always marry the man you love. I just don't give priority to love. I give priority to the longer good … Since I didn't achieve my goal when I was studying, I switched my goal to being a good housewife and a mother.

Lillian was a 17-year-old girl when she first met her husband. She was still in high school and worked part-time during the summer holiday. She almost dropped out because the family might be unable to pay her tuition fee. Her then-future husband paid for it for her. As Lillian told me,

> I didn't love him. I feel his kindness, not love, but his kindness. That's what attracted me. His kindness, his generosity. His generosity attracted me, not his love.

The motivations behind marriages differ from one to another. However, neither the material nor the nonmaterial desires are relevant to migrating to China. These wives' decisions often followed the local marriage market's logic regardless of whether they looked for a loved one, a caring one, or a capable one. Migration to China is not the means to achieve these women's expectations for marriage.

Eight years into their marriage, Anny and Zhu have not settled on whether they would move to China. Not only did she have concerns about life in China, but she also had an entrepreneurial vision for herself in Ethiopia. She set up a small business twice to sell different products from Chinese factories, both of which eventually failed. But she was still confident about the next opportunity.

> Anny: My husband's vision and mine are very different. He likes to live in a place and raise children with enough income. But not for me! This lifestyle is below the expectation that I envisioned for myself … If there is another opportunity, I have the feeling that I can do more this time.

Besides Anny's business ambition, Lillian had already accepted to be a housewife. In 2019, she gave birth to a boy, and in 2021, her daughter was born. To register their marriage legally in China, Lillian visited Bao's hometown. As she remembered, China was developed more than she could imagine, and Bao's family treated her as their daughter. However, Lillian still hesitated about Bao's plan to reside in China permanently.

> Lillian: I know I'll go to China. But I'm not sure I can stay there very long. What about my mother? What about my family? China is not bad at all. The people are so nice. But I'm worried about separating from my family.

This kind of motivation is aligned with what Paul Statham (2020: 3) calls "unintended transnationalism" that he found in Thailand: "Intercultural living with a foreigner is a byproduct of her aim to secure a better life by initiating a partnership." His case differs from mine because Thai women were actively searching for Western men. They expected Westerners to be more tolerant of their previous marital experiences or other "disadvantages." But most Ethiopian wives had no such fantasy about their husbands or the country they were from. These men happened to be available due to China's expansion in Ethiopia.

DISCUSSION: SINO-ETHIOPIAN CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE AS AN IDEAL TYPE

This research is built on the experiences of Sino-Ethiopian spouses who formed their marital relationships in Ethiopia. The mechanism and process of such marriage formations are considered an ideal type or a theoretical case. As John Walton (1992: 122) argues, "Cases are always hypotheses." To theorize the Sino-Ethiopian marriage, I did not directly dive into the complexity and entanglements of these nuanced and private relationships. Instead, I reformulated the "natural" case of these marriages into a theoretical case with a specific interest in how cross-border marriage was formed without the commonly seen global forces, connections, and imaginations. When the old model does not fit, this new phenomenon is "either a different kind of case or one that cuts across conventional boundaries" (Walton, 1992: 128).

Global China is powerful in Ethiopia. While China's state capital concentrates on infrastructure, Chinese private investors have set up numerous manufacturing plants. Yet China's visibility in Ethiopia has been limited. Its influence fails to penetrate ordinary Ethiopians' daily lives. Furthermore, due to China's incompatibility between hard and soft power, ordinary Ethiopians often find China lacking desirability,

especially compared to the Global North. China fails to perform one of the critical roles as the global forces that often shape cross-border marriage formation because China is not the desired migration destination.

Certain global forces produce connections that embody their creators and spread the influences of macro forces on micro individuals. As an emergent global power, China is new to Ethiopia. There has not been enough time for a transnational family network between China and Ethiopia, which often takes decades to accumulate, as compared to North America and Western Europe. Moreover, China lacking desirability to be a migration destination provides no incentives for the migration brokerage industry to grow. However, the rapid expansion of China's hard power in Ethiopia has brought around 60,000 Chinese to Ethiopia (eNCA, 2016), including many unmarried or divorced Chinese men under pressure and social expectations to form a family.

As previous studies showed (Lee, 2017; Driessen, 2019; Yan et al., 2019), Chinese-Ethiopian encounters alone did not automatically produce cross-border marriages. Therefore, the Sino-Ethiopian cross-border marriage I observed should not be simplistically explained as a cultural pattern that the Chinese or people from Eastern Asia are obsessed with the idea of family formation. Nor can it be interpreted as merely a supply-demand equilibrium in the marriage market. These unions are an emergence that was induced by a conjuncture of several grounded factors.

First, a fair amount of Chinese investment entered Ethiopia's manufacturing sector and was lured by the competitive price of labor. Unlike the construction sites where employees were often without gender balance, the shop-floors of textile and footwear plants need both male and female workers. Chinese factory owners normally brought along a team of experienced Chinese male workers who used to work for the same owners in China. Although these workers were often low-skilled with limited education and needed their employers to forge the expertise certifications to pass Ethiopia's labor immigration requirements, they were invited to operate machines in the production line for the new plants in Ethiopia. Also, due to Ethiopia's low level of industrialization and vocational training (Oya and Schaefer, 2021), there was not enough supply of well-trained local workers for the influx of Chinese factories. Thus, the Chinese male workers were asked to repeatedly renew their short-term contracts despite their salaries usually being 20 times higher than their local colleagues. It provided the time and opportunities for these Chinese men to accumulate local social networks and connections. As presented in this study, the local networks, instead of random encounters, played a critical role in convincing Ethiopian women to marry their husbands.

Given China's unbalanced hard and soft power as global force and Chinese shop-floors and Sino-Ethiopian social networks as global connections, the global imaginations of the spouses were largely localized. The seemingly contradictory term of localized global imaginations means that the spouses were clearly aware of the transnational nature of such marriages, as men and women are of different

races, ethnicities, languages, nationalities, etc. However, the marriage incentives for both Chinese men and Ethiopian women were locally brewed. The Chinese men did not anticipate or plan to find a local wife before arriving in Ethiopia. Their ideas for marriage were either a byproduct of long-term socialization of the local society or developed from sexual partnerships. For the Ethiopian women, the localized incentives were even clearer. Initially, they had extremely limited knowledge about China except for some vague ideas. Through familiarization and interactions, a few Chinese men, among others, have become acceptable and even attractive to these Ethiopian women. They later dated, cohabitated, and eventually married. But marriageable Chinese men did not bring about the kind of desires that we often observed among Global South women toward Global North men or the Global North countries. In this study, migration to China is not the core incentive for Sino-Ethiopian cross-border marriage. Rather, these Ethiopian women experienced what Paul Statham (2020) calls "unintended transnationalism."

CONCLUSION: SOUTH-SOUTH CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE

Sino-Ethiopian marriage in Ethiopia can reveal an understudied side of China-Africa engagement. Unlike studies primarily with macro foci, this study explored the private and intimate interaction between Chinese nationals and local Africans. Also, this study's findings of vibrant interactions between Chinese men and local women are contrary to the puported images of segregated Chinese in Ethiopia. Despite insufficient soft power in Ethiopia, the lack of common connections for marriage migrations, and thus the motivation of migrating to China, most of these Chinese men eventually secured a local Ethiopian wife.

While using the theoretical device of ideal type, I distance this research from the studies equipped with several widely applied concepts, such as "social locations" (Mahler and Pessar, 2001) or "marriage-scapes" (Constable, 2005b). Instead of describing how different variables influenced the formation of Sino-Ethiopian marriage, I allowed a certain level of abstraction within each category of the "three axes." The previous studies of cross-border marriages acknowledged individuals with structures. But they often failed to explain how specific structures affected individuals' exertions of agency and why agents acted accordingly or against the structures. By merely listing various "marriage-scapes" (Constable, 2005b) or individuals' "social locations" created by "socially stratifying factors" (Mahler and Pessar, 2001), the structures were often treated as backgrounds that only appeared in articles' introductions and not mentioned thereafter. Moreover, the scholars equipped with such conceptual tools would expect structural factors to be scattered and thus reflected respectively in micro-practices or narrations, which risks overlooking the structures that are seemingly absent or that indirectly influence the field. For example, being unfamiliar with China does not mean that Ethiopian wives are out of touch with the world. They mostly know about Europe and America. When she was in high school, Nancy even dreamed of going to the United States for a college

education. Two other wives also worked in the Gulf region as domestic workers. The existence of the Global North was a constant reference even when the couple's negotiations and bargains were cloaked in a Sino-Ethiopian context.

Therefore, emphasizing the "China factor" is not enough to understand the uniqueness of Sino-Ethiopian marriages in this study. The Sino-Ethiopian intimacy showed different dynamics in Chinese construction sites in northern Ethiopia (Driessen, 2019). Likewise, defining these marriages as an ideal type of South-South cross-border marriage does not only indicate that both husbands and wives are from Global South countries. This novel ideal type should always be explained through a conjuncture of macro-micro interconnections of global forces, global connections, and global imaginations. This paper explains the novelty of the specific time-space constituted by China's incompatible hard and soft power as global forces, factories, and Sino-Ethiopian social networks as connections, localized imagination without migration incentives. A similar type of marriage formation process can emerge between another rising South (Dargin, 2013) and a developing South.

After 20 years of "going out," China has begun to turn itself from a marriage-migrant-sending country to a receiving one. The occurrence of Sino-Ethiopian marriage calls for a paradigm shift in understanding and researching this novel ideal type of cross-border marriage. China will not be the last rising South. Countries with large manufacturing shares in their economy and dense populations will walk on a similar path after they experience the crisis of overaccumulation that China did during the turn of the twentieth century. After rapid development and urbanization, a marriage squeeze would occur in emerging economies like India, Vietnam, and Thailand. There will be a resembling story when they expand to a preindustrial Global South.

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