

Bodies that divide and bind: tracing the social roles of associations in Chinese communities in Pretoria, South Africa

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Introduction

- Challenge of immigrants: social interaction and adjustment
- Hypothesis of the study: an existence of an institutional affiliation (or the lack of it) would impact on immigrants' social interactions and levels of adjustment.
- Why Pretoria?
 - The majority of Chinese in SA studies have examined large and dense Chinese communities, eg. JHB.
 - Scattered and smaller settlement areas remain much more invisible in literature;
 - Hypothesis 2: the nature of the location could present more and different challenges to immigrants' social interactions and levels of adjustment.



Literature on Chinese in Africa/SA

- 3 main foci in general literature on China and Africa: 1) China's political involvement in Africa; 2) China's economic engagement and impact in Africa; and 3) migration and identity issues – of which the last “remain[s] understudied and under-researched” (Carayannis and Olin, 2012: 16).
- Scholarship on Chinese in South Africa is limited—except for works from Yoon Jung Park and her colleagues since 2006 (mainly focus on Chinese communities in JHB and Free State), as well as Karen Harris, Yap and Man.
- The role of associations in the literature on Chinese in South Africa is also seldom systematically explored—no single SA Chinese study looks specifically at Chinese associations and their roles in these immigrants' lives.

Literature on Overseas Chinese associations

- Limited literature on Chinese associations in South Africa; yet many studies of Chinese associations elsewhere.
- These studies take a number of forms (historical, structural, or functional); and focus either on the ways in which associations facilitate the integration of, and/or promote opportunities for new Chinese immigrants, foster a Chinese identity, or promote transnational linkages.
- An under-researched area: how individuals and/or specific groups of Chinese – based on place of origin, date of immigration, status, and/or age – relate to the associations established by overseas Chinese communities.

Methodology

- Venue: Pretoria and Bronkhorstspuit areas
- Method: in-depth interviews with 27 individuals + document analysis.
- Sampling method: snowball (interviewees identified through personal contacts, organizational web pages and desktop research, and further referrals were then requested).
- Challenges:
 - Referrals were mostly to individuals within the same groups; potential bias towards those with some form of social affiliation
 - Limited access to traders and business people
 - Limited access to Taiwanese, as well as PRC province-based (e.g. Fujianese and Beijngese) associations
 - Limited access to officials from the embassies
 - Sample size

3 Chinese communities in SA

- Three distinct Chinese communities in SA: a tradition set by previous studies:
 - 1) the Chinese (mainly from Canton) who arrived in the late 1870s and now consists of 3rd or 4th generation South African-born Chinese (SABCs or Chinese South Africans);
 - 2) the Taiwanese who were first lured to SA in the late 1970s and 1980s under the apartheid government's industrial development policy; and
 - 3) the newer migrants arriving since the mid- to late- 1990s, mainly from the PRC (consisting of both middle managers and professionals who arrived before 2000, and small traders primarily from Fujian Province arriving after 2000).
- These three communities are divided by “generation, culture and ethnicity, language, legal status, education, residential space, class, occupation and identity” (Park 2009: 153).

Chinese associations in Pretoria

- **Religious:** Pretoria Evangelical Chinese Christian Church (PECCC), Nan Hua Buddhist temple, Pretoria Fu-qing Fellowship
- **Educational:** Pretoria Chinese School (PCS), Chinese Saturday School, Nan Hua Temple
- **Political:** Chinese Embassy, Taipei Liaison Office in Pretoria, Chinese Association of South Africa (CASA)
- **Cultural:** Pretoria Chinese Association, Pretoria Chinese School, Chinese @ Tuks (a cultural association for Chinese students at the University of Pretoria), Saturday market
- **Social and commercial:** Saturday market, sports clubs, Northern Gauteng Chinese Sports Association, Beijingsese Association, Fujianese Association
- **National:** Southern Africa Chinese Sports Association (SACSA) (which runs the annual Easter tournament), CASA

Findings: political associations

- **Political:**
 - None of the interviewees from any of the three groups discussed associations in terms of their political functions today;
 - Embassies are viewed as administrative only; they only support the Chinese community via other institutions (not individuals); Taipei Liaison Office facilitates donation of books to the schools;
 - Political function of associations seems to be less relevant today; some question the continued legitimacy of CASA as a national body working to defend Chinese rights

Findings: SABCs

- **Pretoria Chinese School:**
 - The Chinese School (1934) is very important socially and culturally for older SABCs; it was integral in maintaining Chinese identity;
 - Younger SABCs view the school as mostly educational; many don't have a strong attachment to Chinese language/culture, view themselves as South Africans and prefer local schools;
- **Pretoria Chinese Association:**
 - Pretoria Chinese Association (1931) members are mostly SABCs, and membership is waning; older SABCs are involved in organizing cultural events and fundraisers;
 - Younger SABCs mostly attend annual events and do not engage as a community outside those events;

Findings: Taiwanese

- **Nan hua Temple:**
 - Taiwanese utilise the temple for religious purposes, social and economic opportunities (e.g. employment, volunteer work, social interaction, accommodation).
- **Pretoria Chinese School/Saturday School:**
 - Teachers and most Saturday school students are Taiwanese, although benefits vary: for some Taiwanese the PCS is only a place of employment, for others it is also their social world;

Findings: new migrants

- **Local churches, local schools**
 - New migrants utilise local schools for social and practical purposes (e.g. need to learn English, transport difficulties)
- **Social/commercial:**
 - Social and/or commercial associations among new migrants: Beijinese Association, Fujianese Association;
- **Pretoria Chinese Association:**
 - Sometimes new migrants approach established associations (e.g., the PCA, and Nan Hua temple) to acquire advice and assistance (i.e. how to purchase a house or how to register a business);
 - engagements seem to be temporary and rarely result in the formation of long-term friendships.

Conclusions

- Participation in associations is motivated by a range of tangible and intangible benefits, e.g. new social and economic networks, employment, religious fulfilment, education, Chinese/English language learning, preservation of culture and identity, belonging to a community.
- The benefits that motivate participation do not always coincide with the primary functions of the associations.
- The primary benefits across all three groups seem to be social and economic, with interest in cultural and political benefits waning.

Conclusions

- Participation often varies between the three Chinese communities, as well as between older and younger Chinese.
- Often, work and family demands, as well as limited mobility, were cited as reasons for non-participation.
- Use of local (i.e. South African) institutions (especially religious and educational) suggests that modes of engagement and adjustment are not necessarily “identity-driven” but, again, rather pragmatic.

Conclusions

- Reasons for participating or not participating vary in complex ways and are informed by a multitude of factors, which makes it difficult to generalize, and which the life stories of the individuals interviewed in this study confirmed.
- The unique experiences and strategies illuminated through this study is also evidence of the plurality that characterizes the Chinese immigrant experience.



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