

Beyond “Neocolonialism”: Understanding the Sociocultural Impacts and Exchanges Between Chinese Migrants and Kenyans in Nairobi and Kirinyaga County

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Abstract

What factors explain the negative and positive exchanges between Kenyans and Chinese migrants in the past ten years and what are the sociocultural impacts of Chinese migration in Kenya? Over the past ten years, scholars have primarily examined Sino-African relations through political and economic lenses. However, the social and cultural impacts of Chinese migration in African countries have not been given sufficient scholarly attention. With the surge of Chinese migration to Africa in the past ten years, advent of Confucius Centers in African capitals and the increase of Chinese sponsored educational scholarships for Africans, it is evident that China's influence in African states such as Kenya, extends well beyond the country's economic and political spheres. The purpose of this study is to identify the specific social and cultural impacts from Chinese migration to Kenya, determine what factors influence them and contextualize Chinese migration to Kenya by focusing on the experiences of migrants, the local responses and perceptions they illicit. A claim that the study advances is that important demographic factors such as educational level, class level (socioeconomic background) and regional proximity influence the quality and degree of the interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants. Through a qualitative field study conducted in Kenya, this research relies on a thematic analysis to develop a more nuanced narrative of Chinese migration to Kenya at the grassroots level. The results of this study will hopefully shed light on the socio-cultural dynamics between ordinary Africans and Chinese migrants and create avenues for more strategic partnerships led at the micro-level to drive transformative social and technological change for Africans and the entire continent.

Keywords: Sociocultural impact, Chinese migration, Kenya

1. Introduction

In just the span of ten years China has supplanted the United States and several European powers as Africa's largest trading partner, making Africa the fourth largest destination of Chinese investments.¹ Presently, much of the literature on Sino-African relations heavily focuses on trade, aid, resource extraction and political cooperation.² When examined even closer much of the discourse and rhetoric primarily associates Chinese migrants in Africa with colonialism and exploitation.³ Such arguments which tend to originate from the West, vilify most of China's activities on the continent and portray African countries as lacking agency and powerless.⁴ Thus, one of the goals of this research project is to explore a different narrative and shed light on the vast majority of Chinese migrants in Kenya, provide a richer picture of the advantages, disadvantages and opportunities they present to their African hosts. Chinese migration is not only a “state driven phenomenon but rather the story of individuals”, individuals who operate independently searching for better opportunities.⁵ It is important to distinguish the immigrants from the state as they follow two separate agendas. Secondly, this research will look beyond the economic and political implications of Chinese presence in a country

such as Kenya and instead try to uncover the cultural and social interactions occurring at the grassroots level. For instance, how Kenya as a host society adapts to Chinese migrant communities, what cultural norms are Chinese migrants importing to Kenya? Which aspects of Kenyan culture are they embracing? How do factors such as gender, age, education level, class, occupation and regional proximity influence China's sociocultural impact in Kenya?

Kenya is one of the biggest recipients of Chinese investments in Africa, seeing a surge in trade and political cooperation amongst both nations has propelled a rise in the number of Chinese migrants in Kenya, the number between 7,000-10,000 in 2007 and growing.⁶ This research project demonstrated that the quality of interaction and the level of socio-cultural impact between Chinese migrants and Kenyans is significantly determined by one's class, occupation, education level and region. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups with Kenyans who live in Nairobi and Kirinyaga county and a thematic analysis of those interviews, the results showed interesting differences between how lower-income Kenyans interact with Chinese migrants compared to higher-income Kenyans. There are also differences in how Chinese culture influences Kenyans that live in cities such as Nairobi and those that live in more rural regions such as Kirinyaga county. The most identifiable cultural mechanisms in which Chinese migrants were using to spread their traditions were through food, language and interracial relationships with Kenyans. The implications of these findings are twofold. First, they help to dispel common portrayals of all Chinese migrants as neo-colonial or in stark dichotomous terms.⁷ This is significant as it allows room to further examine Chinese migrant experiences within the African context and to understand its role in the rapid socio-cultural developments occurring in African countries such as Kenya. Secondly, grasping the impact of Chinese migration on Kenya's social and cultural fabric will facilitate the creation of future partnerships driven from the grassroots level that benefit the social and technological development of Africa.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly research, commentary and media publications pertaining to China's involvement in Africa overwhelmingly discuss China's attraction to Africa's natural resources and export markets, the investment and capital flows from China to Africa, China's neoclassical approach in African countries and the effect of the West and China's competing agendas throughout the continent.⁸ Three prominent themes found in the literature relevant to this study are (1) China's soft power techniques and the economic and political implications of Chinese aid and investments to African countries.⁹ (2) The characterization and description of the unique experiences of Chinese migrants' in African countries by focusing on push and pull factors that have propelled Chinese migrants to Africa.¹⁰ (3) An examination of how African host countries have in historic and contemporary times responded to immigrant populations within their borders, in order to identify the exact factors that influence local responses to immigrants.¹¹ The theories or factors that immerge from this third category will be used as the foundation of this study's analysis in determining if they can be applied or not to the specific case of explaining Kenyan responses to Chinese migrants.

The idea of Chinese business, economic and political internationalization into Africa is a common theme that is observed in the literature.¹² Mario Biggeri and Marco Sanfillippo explain the fundamental determinants of China's rise in Africa. Together they argue that China's 'going out campaign 'into Africa is driven by strategic interaction among three channels (FDI, trade and aid) as they are an effective strategy for increasing the PRC's influence in developing countries.¹³ Similarly, Joseph Onjala, examines the significance of Chinese investments specifically within the Kenyan economy. He tries to determine who are the winners and the losers within these transactions by looking at the extent of china's trade, FDI's, and aid in Kenya¹⁴. Several studies also seek to categorize the nature of China's relationship with Africa under the win-win or win-loose paradigms. Scholars such as Yin and Vaschetto have argued for the mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Africa.¹⁵ Contrastingly, Jauch has pushed the idea that China is Africa's modern-day colonizer as it seeks to exploit cheap labor markets and Africa's vast natural resources.¹⁶ The latter sentiment is what seems to be shared by most western scholars who research China's involvement throughout the continent.¹⁷

On the other hand, there are few number of scholars who have sought to depict the Sino-African relationship positively. For instance, Jason Yin and Sofia Vaschetto have rejected the idea of Chinese neocolonialism in Africa¹⁸. Instead they have argued that compared to western business strategies, China's "well-coordinated trade, investments, and their strategy of noninterference and mutual growth, has been largely successful and instrumental in building the infrastructure needed for sustainable economic growth in Africa".¹⁹ Proceeding to the the cultural effects approach, a group of scholars: Rui Yang, Anita Wheeler, and Peter Kragelund are in agreement that China is using various soft power strategies in Africa to internalize and internationalize its practices, values, culture and position toward African countries.²⁰ Through the use of language as a cultural diplomatic strategy, China bolsters its culture and helps shape

perceptions among African publics²¹. Furthermore, through his study of Confucian institutes in Cameroon, Cölln believes that “China’s educational aid is based on a set of principles that are characteristic with its wider engagement on the continent”.²² In this framework, there seems to be a general consensus that China is influencing Africa beyond the economic and commercial sphere.

Shifting to the second theme, researchers such as Yoon Park, Terence McNamee and Heidi Haugen look at the independent experiences of Chinese migrants to Africa and try to connect their trajectories and motives to global migration patterns in the world.²³ Just like most migrants across the globe, the vast majority of Chinese migrants to Africa, leave their homes in hopes of finding better economic opportunities and increasing their standard of living. As Terence McNamee uncovers from his interviews with Chinese migrants in South Africa, Lesotho, Zambia and Angola, “90% of interviews cited that it was easier for them to make money in Africa than in China”.²⁴ Gregor Dobler and Antoine Kernén in separate articles analyze the lives of Chinese businessmen and discuss how they navigate their personal lives and businesses in different African countries. For instance, in his study of small and medium sized Chinese Businesses in Mali and Senegal, Antoine Kernén, looks at the diverse factors that can explain Chinese presence in Africa. He differentiates the Chinese businessman in Mali and Senegal from other segments of the Chinese presence for instance: expatriate workers of Chinese multinational enterprises and people working for embassy or cooperation programs.²⁵ This demonstrates the importance of studying the impact that the range of Chinese migrants that settle independently have in African communities.

In her book, Yoon Park describes how differences of language, culture, and values are the stumbling blocks to greater integration of Chinese migrants”.²⁶ In her analysis of Chinese migrants in South Africa, Park argues that “they will continue to occupy the in-between spaces, wedged between a majority of impoverished local Africans and a narrow elite, be they white or black”.²⁷ In a joint study Park and Anna Chen, highlight that for new immigrants in countries such as South Africa, their lack of English language skills creates communication difficulties, strain labor relations, and exacerbate their social isolation, as they are unable to socialize or make friends out of their migrant groups.²⁸ This isolation is manifested across various African cities such as Johannesburg and Nairobi with the rise of Chinatowns or clustered China shops, residences and restaurants in specific areas of cities²⁹. Overall, the researchers in this category agree that Chinese migration to Africa are connected to global migration patterns in the world and their experiences involving adaptation, isolation or integration within African societies deserve attention. However, the specific socio-cultural effects of Chinese migration to Africa or how demographic factors influence those effects aren’t given sufficient attention within this framework.

Contrary to the previous category, the analysis in this body of literature discusses host communities’ attitudes towards immigrants in various contexts and seeks to identify potential factors that influence local responses. The idea of indigeneity, conceptions of ‘us vs. them’ (how host communities choose to distinguish themselves from foreigners) and the role it plays in influencing perspectives, attitudes and the responses they have towards migrants within their borders is emphasized here³⁰. In the African context, the vast majority of studies analyzing African responses to immigrants and immigration where based on data from South Africa. In her longitudinal study of attitudes towards foreigners in South Africa, Caitlin Schipperris, examines South African attitudes towards immigrants and uses variables such as gender, race, employment status, education, perceived social class, generalized trust and financial satisfaction to determine the influence each has on attitudes and responses³¹.

The current literature also touches on the overall responses to Chinese migrants in Africa, most scholars conclude that they differ based on individual countries.³² However, the combination of salient factors such as negative western media portrayals of Chinese immigrants, cultural differences, isolationist tendencies among Chinese immigrants and the twofold economic effects of cheap Chinese goods contribute to the complexity in perceptions and responses of Chinese migrants in African communities.³³ In South Africa, the inability to distinguish between groups of Chinese, the stereotypes that have emerged and continuous reference to China as a new colonialist have affected local responses to Chinese migrants.³⁴ In Zambia in 2006 and Lesotho in 2007 the increasing numbers of Chinese engaged in retail trading activities caused the outbreak of anti-Chinese violence³⁵. However, despite the excess media and scholarly focus on the negative African responses and attitudes towards Chinese migrants, a good amount of Africans have very favorable perceptions of China and Chinese migrants due to their increase purchasing power and the broad range of affordable consumer goods.³⁶ The factors explored within this category will be critical in evaluating if those factors equally apply in the case of Kenya and how they contribute to the positive and negative interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants within the country.

3. Methodology

This research project aims to analyze the sociocultural impacts of Chinese migration on Kenyans and the factors that explain the quality and degree of exchange between local Kenyans and Chinese migrants. As there are different waves of Chinese migration to Kenya, the scope of analysis was limited to migration trends in the past 10 years. Based on the literature review, it was established that different sociocultural and demographic factors such as gender, education, class, age, ethnic spaces, media and ideas of identity, can influence the responses that locals have of different foreigners. This project explores if such factors equally hold true in the case of Chinese migrants in Kenya and the exact ways that they influence perceptions of Chinese migrants amongst Kenyans.

3.1 Data Source & Participants

The data and analysis in this research project was based on a qualitative field study in Kenya conducted between the months of August 2017 to December 2017. For five months in-depth interviews and two focus groups with 28 Kenyans based in Nairobi and Kirinyaga county were conducted. The participants had varying ages, education levels, occupations, genders and came from different socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity in the participants allowed for a wide range of perspectives and a more nuanced picture of how Kenyans were responding to Chinese migrants and the daily interactions amongst both groups. Interviews were especially crucial in this study as they provided a myriad of personal experiences to pull from in determining key trends and patterns in the data analysis. Furthermore, interviews and field work are extremely useful methodologies to use when studying Chinese migrants in Africa and migration within the continent. Scholars such as Yoon Park³⁷ and Claire Adida³⁸, conducted field research with migrants in Africa examining different factors that influenced integration and local responses, in some ways this research sought inspiration from theirs but looks specifically at the case of Chinese migrants in Kenya, which is relatively unexplored.

The sampling technique for this study included a mixture of quota and snowball sampling.³⁹ This is because participant quotas were preset prior to sampling and at the same time additional participants who could contribute to the study were referred along the process. I had selected a pool of participants based on the following criteria: must be between the ages of 18 and 60; must be Kenyan; must either be residing in Nairobi or Kirinyaga county; can be either male or female; can be a student, unemployed or employed; must have some knowledge of Chinese migrants in Kenya. While I had already identified participants from my networks in Kenya based on my outlined guidelines, I actively included more participants as I continued my study and also relied on past participants to introduce me to new potential interviewees on the field. This guaranteed that the sample and subsequent analyses were representative of the varying identities and perspectives of the participants.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the integrity of my results and analyses, necessary precautions were taken in order to maintain the confidentiality and protection of the participants. First, I gained certification to experiment with human subjects through the International Review Board at American University. Then, I followed all guidelines linked to ethical human subjects research which involved gaining verbal consent from all respondents, their responses have been recorded and stored. As discussed with the individual respondents, I will not be identifying them by name but using common social and demographic identifiers such as age, occupation, gender and the region they reside in.

3.3 Procedure

A total of ten interviews were conducted and two separate focus groups: one with ten rural women and one with three city girls. Interviews and focus groups were conducted using a mixture of formal and informal procedures. In terms of the interview process itself the goal was to get as much information from respondents between the 45 minute to one-hour time frame. Thus, the open-ended questions sought to understand the ways different Kenyans were relating and responding to Chinese migrants, the social and cultural impacts taking place in Kenya due to Chinese migration and the specific factors that explain these events. Broadly the interviews began with getting to know the participants, gauging the feelings they have towards Chinese migrants, understanding why they had those feelings and explicitly identifying the social and cultural impacts of Chinese migrants in their lives and communities. Measures in order to remain as impartial as possible such as retaining an open-mind, never forcing an issue, practicing clear questioning

and sensible interpretation of participant answers were implemented to allow the participants to openly express their individual experiences.

3.4 Data Analysis

Once data collection and the partial transcription of interviews were completed, a thematic analysis was conducted. This analytical method was used in order to systematically identify common factors and themes that seemed to have a significant influence on the responses and interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants. This method was also useful in examining recurring sociocultural impacts that were identified during the course of the analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, the transcription of the audio recordings were partial as only broad themes and distinct patterns noticed in the data were given the most attention. As I followed an experience-focused methodology, I identified the main areas of interest that were pertinent to answering my research question, coded main patterns, then summarized the rest of the content with carefulness and as much impartially as possible in order to maintain the integrity of my results. My main areas of focus were the factors that play a role in host community responses to migrants, alongside the social and cultural impacts Kenyans experience due to Chinese migration. Thus, I made sure to extensively transcribe any data relating to such. The bulk of my analysis section moved between case and cross case analysis. These methods allowed me to put my participants' individual experiences into context and highlight the similarities and differences between interviews and participants.

Next, I produced a list of overarching, distinct and well defined themes which enabled me to show how different ideas and subcategories within those big themes related to each other. I represented this through a hierarchal chart which would allow a third party to visualize the relationship between the different social factors and the cultural interactions between Chinese migrants and Kenyans. Lastly, in order to ensure the validity and reliability of my data, I used data triangulation and methodological triangulation. These are exhibited within my data through my inclusion of a diverse Kenyans with different backgrounds and the use of two separate methods to collect data: interviews and focus groups. These triangulation methods will be vital in cross-examining my data and making sure that this study is more comprehensive.

4. Data Results

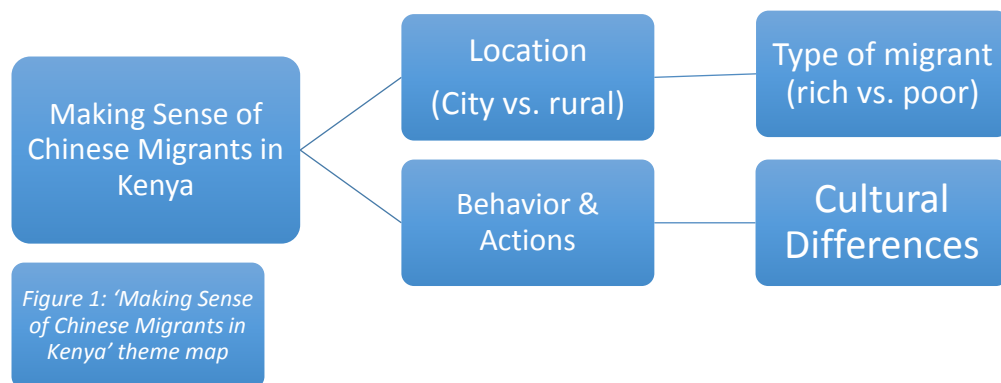


Figure 1: 'Making Sense of Chinese Migrants in Kenya' theme map

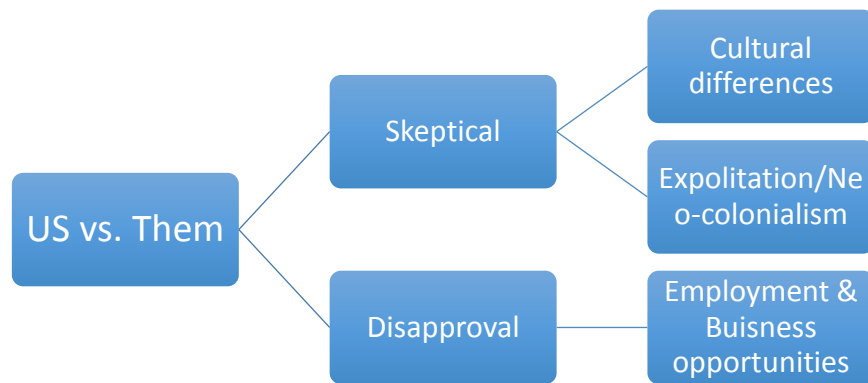


Figure 2: 'Us vs. Them' theme map

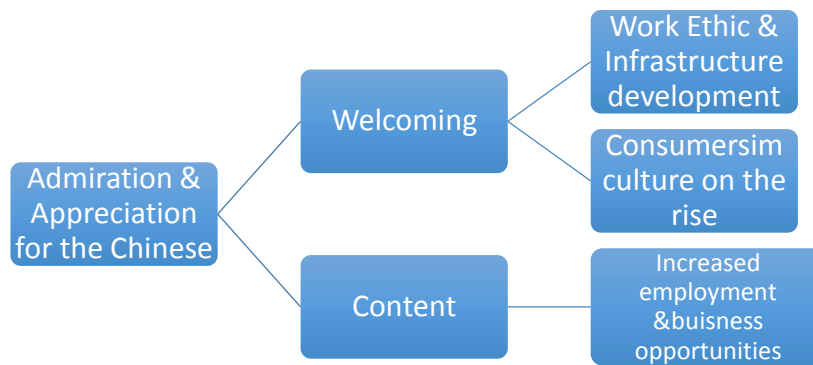


Figure 3: 'Admiration & Appreciation for the Chinese' theme map

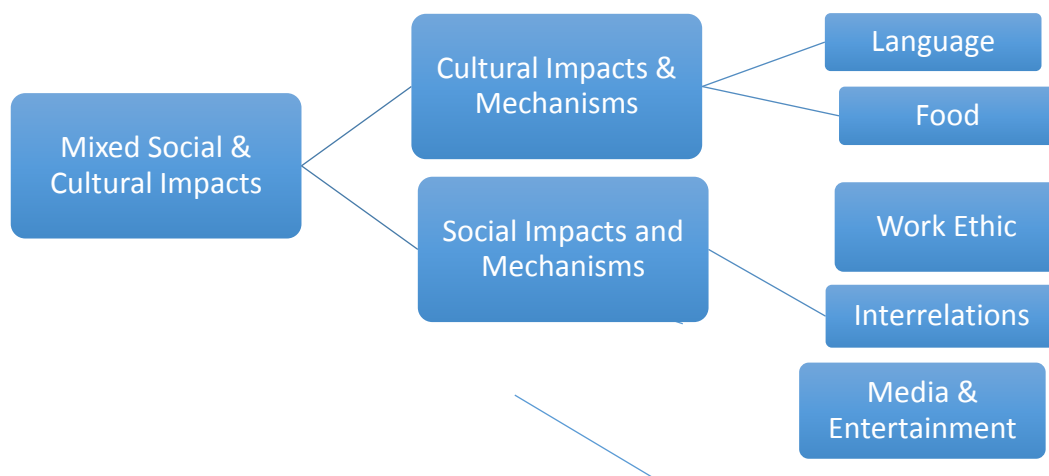


Figure 4: 'Mixed Social and Cultural Impacts' theme map

5. Analysis

Based on the data results, the majority of respondents confirmed initial observations that Chinese migrants in Kenya are impacting their host community through different social and cultural means. In addition, the results also support that key demographic and social factors such as regional proximity, socioeconomic background and education level play important roles in determining the degree and quality of sociocultural impact between Chinese migrants and Kenyans. The thematic analysis that was applied to the interview and focus group transcripts generated key ideas and patterns that were supported by my data. These themes were critical in determining the most important social factors that explain the negative and positive interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants in recent years as well as the sociocultural impact of Chinese migration to Kenya. My analysis identified four important overarching themes: (1) Making sense of Chinese migrants in Kenya (2) Us vs. Them (3) Growing admiration and appreciation (4) Mixed social and cultural impacts. Through the examination of these main themes below, I sought to highlight the essence of each individual theme, provide a narrative description then include quotes and summaries from my interviews and focus groups. Despite efforts to separate the different themes, there were instances of overlap and participant responses that fell within two categories instead of just one. This demonstrates the complexity of the relationship and sociocultural impact between Chinese migrants and Kenyans.

5.1 Making Sense of Chinese migrant's in Kenya

This theme encapsulates each of the respondents attempts to understand and explain the motivations and behaviors of the rise of Chinese migrants coming into Kenya. At the beginning of most of the interviews, respondents would attempt to trace the time frame that describes the advent of Chinese migrants into Kenya, while a few discussed their unfamiliarity with Chinese migrants or their activities, most associated them to infrastructure and development projects within the country.

The Chinese started coming here in large numbers around 10 years ago. The previous government Moi kibaki whose mandate ended in 2013, he was the one who started turning us towards the East so our interaction with the Chinese and the Japanese went up at time. Previously, as a nation our interactions were mostly with the British those were our colonizers. But I can say that a few of them own small shops in the town and have other small businesses where they employ Kenyans so they aren't always construction workers or even associated to the government (Male, 43, rural)⁴⁰

A key element of this theme is that the characterization of Chinese migrants and the type of interaction between them and Kenyans depended significantly on the socioeconomic status of Chinese migrants and which region in Kenya they found themselves in, specifically city vs. rural. For the most part there are two types of Chinese migrants that settle in Kenya: those with higher socio-economic status that tend to seclude themselves in different sections of the capital city of Nairobi and those with lower socioeconomic status that can't afford the higher standard of living in Nairobi and typically live in either slums or rural regions in Kenya. The demographic of the Chinese migrants that flocked Nairobi constituted of either expatriates who had previously worked on a state-related project and chose to stay afterwards, project engineers, restaurant owners or big retail store owners. While the occupation of those in slums or rural regions ranged from farmers to small business owners and private entrepreneurs. This goes to show the diversity in Chinese migrant populations in Kenya that clearly have different motivations and experiences from each other.

5.2 Us vs. Them

This theme was particularly prevalent among respondents in the city compared to the rural. The Kenyans in this category were mostly middle and upper class; lived in the city and where at the bachelor's level or above in terms of education. During my interviews it was usually such Kenyans that attempted to distance themselves from Chinese migrants, lumped them all and their activities in one group and argued for restrictions on Chinese migration to Kenya due to various social and economic reasons. The idea of indigeneity plays a critical role here. The respondents that contributed to this theme were filled with skepticism, disapproval and worry for the growing Chinese presence in Kenya. They frequently used words and phrases such as 'exploitation, unfair treatment, racist and job takers' when describing Chinese migrants. For instance, a renowned international Kenyan artist, who has done extensive artistic work on Chinese involvement in Kenya described some of the Chinese migrants that he had interacted with as racist.

I have interacted with Chinese people but on a very superficial level... Chinese people are very racists they are extremely racist. They don't value black people, they don't see us as equals and they don't care. They don't pass knowledge to us Africans, they are trying to create a dependency, they don't want Africans to be self-sufficient. Africa is China's blank canvass. (Male, 45, Artist, City)⁴¹

Recently there was a restaurant here in Nairobi, where only Chinese were allowed in and not Kenyans, it became a very big issue until the Kenyan government shut it down. So they usually isolate themselves they live in very specific estates, like Upper hill, they are secluded, they rarely make friends, you can rarely see a Chinese with a Kenyan here in Nairobi (Female, 26, Lawyer, City)⁴²

5.3 Growing Admiration and Appreciation for the Chinese

In Kirinyaga county however, most teachers, farmers and business people pertaining to a lower socioeconomic class or without higher education, expressed a mixture of appreciation and admiration for the Chinese. There was an emerging perception that Chinese migration was ushering in new economic and educational opportunities that had been previously unavailable to them. Whether it be employing locals to work in their small stores or the advent of inexpensive consumer goods that were being bought for personal use or for business ventures. While this was not completely absent in urban areas such as Nairobi, through interviews it was evident that the disposition or appreciation towards Chinese migrants was much higher in rural areas such as Kirinyaga county among lower-middle income Kenyans. Lastly, all of these reasons, including admiration for Chinese migrants' rigorous work ethic and their highly productive business ventures were contributing factors to the friendlier dynamics between Kenyans and Chinese migrants' in Kirinyaga county than in Nairobi.

I would say that they are hardworking, this is something that we [Kenyans] are learning, being aggressive. I haven't heard of any complaints...so I think the interaction must be good. They look comfortable when they are working with the Kenyans. In terms of the flood of goods into our economy..To the contrary it has helped to boost the local Kenyan that sells Chinese products in large numbers. It is us Kenyans who are selling Chinese goods so we have the opportunity to buy cheap then sell at higher amounts. So in poor communities such people gain. In our local town here in Kirinyaga you find so many Chinese goods but its not Chinese selling them its Kenyans. So I wouldn't say they aren't taking away jobs if anything they are providing jobs for people and giving people more opportunity. (Female, 53, School Principal, Rural)⁴³

5.4 Mixed Social and Cultural Impacts

Learning Mandarin is one of the most popular activities among middle and lower income Kenyan youths. With China's growing political and economic presence in the country, Kenyan youths who have been primarily affected by the stagnant unemployment rate, are now looking to China for employment opportunities. From becoming a translator and working for a Chinese company in Nairobi or in Beijing to studying abroad on a scholarship to China, a small but growing number of Kenyan youths are looking east instead of west as a possible alternative for professional and academic success. Regarding food, with the sprawl of Chinese restaurants from Westlands to Ngong road, most of the Kenyans in Nairobi agreed that the growing consumption of Chinese food was the most visible cultural impact of Chinese migration to Kenya. Another popular response predominately among women in both the city and rural, was their growing willingness to integrate Chinese spices into their own cooking.

"They have adjusted the local taste and the local way of cooking so now you find us using the little sachets of soy sauce when we make our pillaus" (Businesswoman, 47, Rural)⁴⁴

"Chinese food is much more appreciated, food is affordable and there is a lot of it. I can even say that it is much more appreciated than Indian food that is pricier. On Sundays in Nairobi you can't find a free Chinese restaurant its all packed after church. They have really adjusted the local taste, local way of cooking so you find their different spices in local Kenyan cuisine now" (Male, 55, University Professor, Urban)⁴⁵

Another distinct social impact that was observed significantly in rural regions such as Kirinyaga county was the surge of bi-racial relationships and off spring between Kenyans and Chinese migrants. Chinese migrants that had either come independently or through large state projects were slowly setting up small business, building their web of networks and integrating within local communities. This integration in forms of interracial marriages, was particularly prevalent in Kirinyaga county more than Nairobi. While this was not completely absent in Nairobi, Chinese migrants in Kirinyaga county were making efforts to integrate and embrace Kenyan culture by learning local languages such as Swahili or Kikuyu, eating local foods and creating bonds through marriage and children. Their efforts to integrate seemed to be more visible in rural regions and did not go unnoticed by the local community.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study reveal four main findings (1) Contrary to the perception of all Chinese presence in Africa as a neocolonialist strategy led by the Chinese state, this study shows that not only is the Chinese migrant population in Kenya diverse it is characterized by different independent actors with personal and economic motives separate from the Chinese government. (2) Chinese migrants are having a growing impact on Kenya's social and cultural fabric, this is evident with the proliferation of the Chinese language, food, work ethic and rise in interracial relationships in regions such as Nairobi and Kirinyaga county. (3) While Chinese migrants are exporting their cultural heritage to Kenyans, they are also embracing Kenyan culture and integrating within Kenyan communities, this was mostly prevalent in rural regions such as Kirinyaga county where cases of intermarriage were more prevalent. (4) Key social and demographic factors such as socioeconomic background, educational level, region and occupation play greater roles in explaining the negative and positive interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants within the past 10 years or why there was a variance of sociocultural impact compared to other determinants such as age or gender. For instance, while perceptions of neocolonialism and exploitation were present about Chinese migrants among the urban elite, Kenyans that were lower-middle income and had lower education levels in rural regions, had more positive experiences with Chinese migrants. A possible explanation for this phenomena is that Chinese migration signals to this group of Kenyans the advent of new opportunities in fields such as health care, business, education and employment that were previously unavailable to them.

Ultimately continued social interaction, cooperation and growing cultural understanding amongst Chinese migrants and local Kenyans can be leveraged to tackle rampant youth unemployment, poverty, health concerns and used to push for knowledge sharing and technological change at the grassroots level. While it is important to question and examine the Sino-African relationship from the state level it is also key to understand the nature and impacts of the rapid developments and exchanges that are occurring at the micro-level. Analyzing the daily interactions between Kenyans and Chinese migrants combined with the unique experiences of Chinese migrants in African countries, allows us to not only focus on migrant experiences within Africa but to gain a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the relationship between both groups and to formulate an alternative narrative that not only portrays the complexity of the relationship but also its potential to develop into mutually beneficial cooperation between Africans and the East.

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