



Centre de Recherche sur le Savoir Local

Programme Point Sud 2012-2013

**“South-South-Relations and Globalization – Chinese Migrants in Africa,
African Migrants in China”**

Dakar (Senegal) – 20th/24th of January 2013

Report

1 Organisers

Dr. Karsten Giese (Sinology/Soziology), GIGA Institute for Asian Studies

Dr. Laurence Marfaing (African Studies/History), GIGA Institute for African Studies

2 Themes and Objectives

This workshop was intended to provide a forum for discussing new unpublished and “work in progress” research on the Chinese presence in Africa and the African presence in China. We were particularly interested in putting together presentations and discussions focusing on the rapidly growing numbers of entrepreneurial Chinese migrants that have literally reached every corner of the African continent independently from interstate relations and the activities of big economic players. Insights gained from empirical studies should be discussed and contrasted with parallel findings on African entrepreneurial migrants in China.

The workshop was intended to focus mainly on two topics, which were addressed by the participants on the basis of own empirical studies: 1) Quotidian experiences of migration, including the social reality of interaction between migrants and host society; 2) issues of social and economic organisation, of mutual perceptions, social integration and exclusion, of participation, and of potential economic and social conflicts. We aimed at discussing the political dimension of these issues as well as both the impact Chinese migrants and their activities have on the host societies in West Africa and the stimuli West African migrants in China carry back into their home countries with regard to social change and innovation. We aimed at engaging in a constructive multi-faceted dialogue informed by a great diversity of disciplinary approaches in order to advance our understanding of the phenomena under discussion.

We also aimed at providing an opportunity for making new contacts and for international networking between scholars at different stages of their academic careers and hoped to strengthen understanding and future cooperation through a micro field work that was jointly conducted by mixed small groups of participants in Dakar as part of the conference. With this conference we wished to enhance the nascent Sino-African scholarly dialogue through the participation of Chinese and African colleagues and to contribute to a better understanding of the perspectives of both African and Chinese actors in Africa.

3 Methodology and Results

For this 5-day workshop we received more than 60 paper proposals and we were able to accommodate almost 30 presentations. The conference hall of Fasdef was chosen as the venue for the workshop and participants were greeted with opening addresses by Prof. Babacar Fall, director of Fasdef, Moussa Sissoko and Marko Scholze as representatives of the Point Sud programme. One of the conference days was reserved for a joint field work exercise, while the results of this micro field study was presented by speakers of the working groups to

informants, civil society stakeholders, local scholars and the interested general public on the last day.

As planned the presentations were delivered either in French or English; whenever necessary, participants volunteered as interpreters for those who were unable to follow a presentation or discussion. The whole conference was realized in a very cordial and supportive atmosphere of mutual understanding and assistance. Only three of the participants did not understand any French.

The workshop was organized in topical sessions plus a joint field research exercise:

- 1) Foreign entrepreneurs in African societies
- 2) Female migrants in China and in Africa
- 3) Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa
- 4) African entrepreneurs in China
- 5) Chinese-African business and employment relations
- 6) Between integration and conflict
- 7) Public presentation of empirical findings from the Micro field study

The Micro field work had been organized in four groups targeting different research questions, localities and informants. All groups were introduced into their fields by the organizers; appointments had been made in advance with key informants and representatives.

Group 1: Chinese entrepreneurs, local partners and employees: Interviews with Chinese traders, African employees of Chinese traders, African street vendors and small scale traders

Group 2: Chinese goods in the African markets of Dakar: Interviews with traders and customers, participant observation.

Group 3: Senegalese lobby groups (commerce, production, customers): UNACOIS Valmy (Sandaga), CNES, ASCOSEN

Group 4: Local entrepreneurs (producers) competing with Chinese importers and with goods imported from China: Production of aluminium window frames, solar panel import and production, fishery and related services.

We used the opportunity to visit the photography exhibition “Boulevard du Centenaire made in China” at Raw Material Company and attended the screening of the documentary “The Colony” followed by a very controversial discussion between participants of the conference and the local audience. After having jointly conducted the micro field research exercise, the conference participants from abroad and from Senegal particularly criticized the biased way in which the Chinese community was depicted within the documentary.

Deviations from original plans

Unexpectedly it was very hard to identify scholars who are doing research on historical phenomena that are comparable to the recent Chinese presence and economical activities of Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa. As a reaction to this situation we formed a panel on female

migrants, which proved very successful. We were able to put together a number of presentations on the varying experiences of female migrants and entrepreneurs, both Chinese and African, a topic that seems to be largely neglected and under-represented so far.

It proved almost impossible to engage in a meaningful comparison between Chinese and other foreign entrepreneurs in Africa. Although this comparison bears some potential from the perspective of cultural sociology or history, the Chinese presence in Africa is too recent to draw any conclusions from comparing their activities and host societies' reactions with, for instance, Lebanese, European or Indian entrepreneurs with a much longer history across the continent.

Although research on Southern Africa seems to be dominating still, we were able to accommodate a larger number of presentations on western Africa than we anticipated.

Regarding organisational problems, it proved difficult for Chinese citizens to apply for a visa for Senegal. In two cases (one Chinese colleague in China and one residing in Canada) it was impossible to get a visa, although official invitations were issued and all parties involved were trying hard contacting officials on the ground in Dakar.

Main Results

Until very recently the scholarly knowledge on Chinese-African interaction seemed to cover only state-to-state relations or the impact the economic engagement of large Chinese state-owned companies in Africa. The reaction to our call for papers as well as the presentations of the conference participants, however, revealed that there is much on-going research on the Sino-African interaction beyond those macro topics. Young researchers in particular concentrate in case studies, qualitative research and actor-centred approaches. The presentations showed that local perceptions of and reactions to the foreign other vary considerably depending on social group membership and socio-economic positioning.

But it remains a problem for these researchers that studies are conducted in isolated ways without much opportunity to share data and insights with other researchers. All participants agreed that this workshop provided one of the very scarce opportunities to learn from each other and to put own research into a wider perspective. Research on China-Africa relations tends to focus exclusively one side. Africa experts usually do not have access to the Chinese actors in their field, while experts on China usually concentrate on the Chinese. This bias often results in biased research results, since it is hard to identify what is fact and what stereotype when only statements of one group are recorded and analysed. Without the voice of the other and informed cross-checking, we run the risk to perpetuate biased and instrumental discourses without noticing. The workshop has strongly raised the awareness for this problem among all participants. The participants declared that they will strive for joint research designs and teamwork involving mixed groups of researchers with different regional expertise and disciplinary backgrounds in order to push quality research.

The workshop resulted in a much more differentiated picture of Chinese-African trade relations and interpersonal exchange than has been published so far. The large variety of involved disciplines and qualitative rather than quantitative research methodologies made this

possible. Qualitative and actor-centred research, all agreed, is able to counter the discourse of politico-economic power relations that has dominated in macro studies of China-Africa relations relying on IR theories and quantitative data. Many of the presented studies demonstrated that the picture of a powerful China vis-à-vis a powerless Africa is incomplete and that on lower levels of abstraction and data aggregation often the opposite is the case.

All participants regarded the micro field research exercise as particularly helpful to overcome biased perspectives deriving from the restrictions of individual expertise. The fruitful and close cooperation of researchers from very different disciplinary and regional backgrounds opened ways to new insights and interpretations taking into account the huge variety of possible interpretations of social phenomena depending on the researcher's disciplinary and theoretical approach. Many of the participants were enabled to engage in meaningful comparison of their own case studies with first-hand data gathered in the different context of Senegal for the first time. Generally speaking, awareness for different perspectives on the research subject was raised. Cooperation between English speaking and French speaking researchers was another added value, since language barriers usually also set limits for field research within Anglophone or Francophone Africa.

It has become very clear that all researchers engaging in the topic of China-Africa relations are in dire need for additional quantitative data of reliable quality in order to position qualitative studies within the greater factual reality. Unfortunately these required sets of data are scarcely available. Moreover, it was called for an exchange of data as well as information on legal and regulatory frameworks of individual countries in order to open up comparative perspectives.

Last but not least the younger researchers were full of praise for the opportunity to be able to present and discuss their work at an early stage of their career with more seasoned international scholars in a constructive atmosphere of cooperation and amicability. Established scholars similarly enjoyed this exchange with the “youngsters” and were very positive in their reactions to the “disturbance of their routines” by the fresh approaches presented by the young academics. As organizers we had planned to create an atmosphere of exchange that should be free of hierarchies and power differences. The reactions of the participants and the many newly established friendships and working relationships that could be created within these few days convinced us that we were successful.

4 Sustainability of the Event

Based on this workshop an active network of researchers has been created. Feedback from participants over the last couple of months shows that they already used or are going to use various opportunities for follow-up meetings and discussions. Informal meetings of sub-groups have been organized at a number of international conferences. Moreover, this newly established network already merged with an existing virtual network of researchers engaging in related research. A number of participants have begun to explore possibilities of joint interdisciplinary research.

It has been decided to set up a systematic exchange of information on national laws and regulations that are setting the framework for Chinese economic engagement in African countries and for African entrepreneurs in Greater China.

All participants were enthusiastic with regard to a possible follow-up workshop in 2015 for discussing how their own research and this academic field has developed, although some of the young academics were not sure whether they would be able to pursue academic careers.

Publications under preparation:

- 1 One or two topical issues of the Journal of Current Chinese Affairs on case studies of Chinese presence in Africa to be published in 2014; peer review of manuscripts has started.
- 2 One topical issue of the Journal of Current Chinese Affairs on the Africans of the Pearl River Delta to be guest edited by Gordon Mathews, Chinese University of Hong Kong, also to be published in 2014; peer review of manuscripts has started.
- 3 Edited volume by Giese/Marfaing (French, English); proposal under review at Karthala, France.

4 Participants

1. Dr. Karsten GIESE, Modern China Studies, Senior Research Fellow, GIGA Institute of Asian Studies, Germany
2. Dr. Laurence MARFAING, History, Senior Research Fellow, GIGA Institute of Africa Studies, Germany
3. Anthonia AKHIDENOR, MA English, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana
4. Dr. Sylvie BREDELOUP, Anthropology, IRD Aix en Provence, France
5. Solange CHATELARD, PhD Candidate, Political Sciences; Research Associate, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Germany
6. Dr. Daouda CISSÉ, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
7. Dr. Ana Stela DE ALMEIDA CUNHA, African Languages, Instituto de Ciencias Sociais, Lisbon, Portugal
8. Romain DITTGEN, PhD Candidate, Geography, UMR 8586 Prodig (mixed research unit), Université Paris 1 (Panthéon-Sorbonne), Paris, France
9. Marwa EL CHAB, PhD Candidate, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales Paris
10. JIANG Qiuyu, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
11. Guive KHAN MOHAMMAD, PhD Candidate, Development Studies, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
12. Dr. Ben LAMPERT, Research Fellow, Development Policy and Practice Group, The Open University, UK
13. Vivian Chenxue LU, PhD Candidate, Anthropology Department, Stanford University, USA
14. Dr. Gordon MATHEWS, Professor, Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
15. Tanny MEN, PhD Candidate, Lund University, Sweden
16. Prof. Jamie MONSON, History, Macalester College, USA

17. Angelo MÜLLER, Dipl. Geography, PhD Candidate, Geographisches Institut, Christian-Albrecht-Universität Kiel, Germany
18. Dr. Amy NIANG, Department of International Relations, University Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
19. Ibrahima NIANG, PhD Candidate, University Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal
20. Heidi ØSTBØ HAUGEN, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Norway
21. Dr. Cheryl Mei-ting SCHMITZ, Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley, USA
22. Naima TOPKIRAM, PhD Candidate, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
23. Elme VIVIER, PhD Candidate, Department Democracy, Governance and Service Delivery, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa
24. XIAO Hai, PhD Candidate, Anthropology, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
25. Dr. Nicole YANG, Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China
26. Dr. Tanya ZACK, Visiting Lecturer, School of Architecture and Planning, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa
27. ZHOU Yang, PhD Candidate, Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Cologne, Germany

Guests from Senegal:

28. Prof. Boubacar Barry, UCAD, Dakar
29. Dr. Awa Yade, UCAD, Dakar
30. Prof. Babacar Fall, FASDEF, Dakar
31. Dr. Ebrima Sall, CODESRIA, Dakar
32. Dr. Salimata Soumaré, OSI West African office, Dakar
33. Assane Mbengue, entrepreneur, Dakar
34. Abdouale Ba, entrepreneur, solar panels, Dakar
35. Momath Cisse, Président ASCOSEN
36. Dr. Jerome Lombard, IRD, Paris
37. Brahim Haider, tax consultant, entrepreneur, Dakar