

The Bridge is not Burning Down: Transformation and Resilience within China's African Diaspora Communities

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Abstract: Guangzhou, along with many other Chinese cities like Hong Kong and Yiwu where Africans visit, live, and engage in trading activities, is known for its ubiquitous pedestrian bridges. It is not uncommon to see many hawkers illegally displaying temporary stalls on these pedestrian bridges where they sell goods to mainly Africans and other foreign traders. From around 2012, the city security personnel, which has previously mostly turned a blind eye to these structures and activities, suddenly started clamping down on Africans on a regular basis as they became a prominent group of customers on these bridges in downtown Guangzhou—resulting in the sudden disappearance of Africans on these city center bridges and other prominent open door markets. This has led to some journalistic reports claiming that Africans were leaving China in large numbers. But if these Africans have all but disappeared from the pedestrian footbridges where are they now? Are they leaving China "in droves" or are they regrouping elsewhere in Guangzhou and other parts of China? How many Africans are in China and from which African countries do they come? What do they do in China? How are Africans responding to this and other unfavorable policy transformations such as an increasingly heavy-handed clamp down on illegal immigration? How resilient are African communities in China? This paper is built around, first, addressing these and other empirical questions towards an understanding of various categories of actors within China's African diaspora communities before turning to examine the theoretical implications of seeing these African diaspora communities as bridge communities for strengthening Africa-China linguistic, cultural, and trade relations.

Introduction

Since September 2016, several newspaper reports have claimed that the African presence in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong Province and the manufacturing hub in China, is fast diminishing and that Africans were leaving China "in droves."¹ According to a 2016 CNN report, "[O]ver the past 18 months, although concrete numbers are hard to come by, hundreds—perhaps even thousands—of Africans are believed by locals and researchers to have exited Guangzhou."² The report and subsequent discussions mention that Africans who used to be visible at many sites including the ubiquitous pedestrian footbridges in the city are nowhere to be found in large numbers. This initial report has been taken up by many media groups and reported and debated in several fora including social media, and at academic conferences. This

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focus has given the impression that somehow the African communities of Guangzhou and beyond are fast diminishing and that the Chinese “dream” has ended for many Africans.

Africans complaints and demonstrations against police brutality go back to 2009, with two prominent such demonstrations being first in 2009 and then in 2012, as contained in the following excerpt: “State-run Xinhua news agency said “more than 100” Africans protested and disrupted traffic on Tuesday in the capital of China’s Guangdong province after the Nigerian’s death.”³

Given these two kinds of facts or events in the African communities of Guangzhou, this article suggests that what is happening is not that Africans are leaving Guangzhou and China as a whole in huge numbers; rather, we are seeing a transformation of the African diaspora communities in reaction to the policies and practices of local authorities in Guangzhou and some other cities. Faced with attempts by the local authorities to prevent Africans from buying and selling goods on pedestrian footbridges or even just from congregating in public places, African community members are finding ways to survive this onslaught by doing most of their sales in-doors within the city center or even moving away to the outskirts of the city and founding their own markets or even moving away altogether to other parts of China, like Yiwu, Zhejiang Province.

It is shown in the paper that there is a certain kind of transformative resilience, not just in the way the Africans react and adapt to law enforcement brutalities but in the way in which Africans are tenaciously clinging onto and even expanding their businesses in the face of societal challenges. Frank Millen, a restaurant owner interviewed by the author on a fieldtrip to Guangzhou (in February 2017) is an epitome of this transformative resilience that is mentioned here. This is discussed later in the paper as well as other interviews and field observations.

The article’s theoretical basis builds on the metaphor of a bridge to argue for a bridge theory of migrant-indigene relations. It is proposed that the best way to approach a relative complexity that involves a blurring of geographical as well as academic boundaries within diaspora studies is to evolve a theory that bridges boundaries: i.e., a bridge theory of global, areal, and diaspora studies (the GADS theory). This GADS theory can be stated as follows: in an era of globalization characterized by constant movement of people, goods, and services, diaspora communities serve as bridges between geographical areas of the world, linking their areas of origin to their areas of domicile, a study of which then requires interdisciplinary insights from different areas of study.

The GADS theory, as mentioned above, is an extension of the author’s earlier bridge theory of migrant-indigene relations that was developed to account for the interaction between Africans and Chinese.⁴ It is not all scholars who see migrant communities as serving as bridges. Lyons, Brown, and Li, for instance, while not directly contesting the bridge theory, attempt to provide evidence to show that African communities in Guangzhou constitute an enclave, disconnected from their host communities because of tensions between these communities.⁵ While there are often tensions between migrant and host communities, these tensions do not always constitute counter-evidence for a bridge theory if we look beyond migrant-host relations. Some actors within the diaspora communities as a whole burn bridges through their actions but the bridge as a whole is not burning down. Whereas migration has often been looked at two-dimensionally, in terms of the migrant community and its relations with the host

community, the bridge theory proposes that migration is, at least, a three-dimensional phenomenon involving the target migrant community, its source community, as well as its host community. This seems to be a strength of the theory because when looked at in this way we can see that socio-culturally, socio-economically, and socio-politically, a migrant community, rather than being isolated, most often serves as a bridge that mediates relations, interactions, and perceptions of its host cultures to its source cultures. For instance, on the one hand, Africans visiting Guangzhou often get their initial insights about the Chinese society through the eyes of Africans already living in China, including insights about the good relations as well as the tensions between Africans and Chinese. On the other hand, Guangzhou people, whether or not they like or dislike Africans, get to experience certain African cultural mannerisms, such as bargaining habits in the market, from Africans living among them even before they know very much about Africa.

There exist scholarly works that have used network theory to analyze the African presence in Guangzhou.⁶ This network theory, which tries to account for the relationships and interactions between different individuals in the community, may be thought of as similar to the bridge theory, but it is indeed different and can only be a subset of bridge theory. Networks cannot exist without socio-political, socio-economic, and social-cultural bridge building among community members and between their host and source communities.

Having stated the GADS theory, the article turns to providing background information about the African communities of China, especially that in Guangzhou. This information is based on both quantitative and qualitative interviews, involving some in-depth one-on-one interviews with community members in order to address questions such as: how many Africans are in China and from which African countries do they come to China? What do they do in China? How do they communicate with Chinese? How are Africans responding to this and other unfavorable policy transformations such as an increasingly heavy-handed clamp down on illegal immigration? How resilient are African communities in China? Answers to these questions should give us a fairly good idea of the everyday lives of Africans in China and their experiences living there.

Following the background information section 4, we then try to make sense of it all, returning to the GADS theory introduced earlier and using the empirical data to support the theory advanced. Tying all these issues together is a concluding section, which also includes a discussion of the future of the African presence in China given these rapid transformations.

Background of the African Diaspora in China

The African presence in China and other parts of Asia is not new. There are accounts of very early interactions between Africans and Chinese, especially the voyages of a Ming era Chinese Admiral, Zheng He, to the east coast of Africa in the early part of the 15th century.⁷ However, the formation of diaspora African communities, especially by African traders, is a new, 21st century phenomenon. This was triggered by the Asian financial crises of 1997 and China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. African traders who were in neighboring Southeast Asian regions adversely affected by the crisis began to move into the markets of Guangzhou and other southern Chinese cities to escape the financial crises and to take

advantage of market opportunities for cheap goods such as clothes, mobile phones, and building materials, as China's economy became more and more open. There were approximately half a million Africans in China as of 2012, with Guangzhou hosting the largest community.⁸

The African presence in China is only one aspect of burgeoning relations between Africa and China. As China steadily developed into one of the world's most important economies it needed raw materials to fuel its own rapid growth. It has pivoted toward Africa in an intensified manner since the turn of the millennium, and this has resulted in very close government-to-government relations between China and various African countries. These government-to-government links led to growing people-to-people relations, with Chinese visiting and settling in Africa and Africans visiting and settling in China in substantial numbers. There are now more than two million Chinese in Africa compared to half a million Africans in China.⁹ Official figures about the Chinese presence in Africa and the African presence in China are non-existent or hard to come by and researchers are left to make educated guesses as in this case. In the case of Chinese in Africa, for instance, French puts the figure at one million, but this author thinks that the figure is much higher.¹⁰ With an average of thirty to forty thousand Chinese in each of the fifty-five countries of Africa (they would likely be far fewer in smaller countries like the Gambia but much more numerous in larger countries like Nigeria), a figure in the range of two million is a realistic guesstimation. Africa-China relations as sketched here has been the subject of many studies that cover various socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects.¹¹

In this section and subsequent sections we provide a general background of this African diaspora in China in the form of socio-cultural facts and statistics describing the community in broad terms, derived from fieldwork lasting over five years in six main cities in China (2006 to 2012). While these data may seem dated they are so far the first and most comprehensive we have of the African communities in China. This discussion then leads to a discussion of specific issues such as linguistic repertoire (language use and language choices in specific contexts).

Methodology

An important question is how best we can research a new, emerging diaspora, where there is quite a bit of fluidity in terms of contacts with the host communities.¹² In more established diasporas, one would have more permanent sociocultural structures and organizations to rely on during the field research.

The research results reported in this paper are part of results derived from a study lasting over five years by the author and his team of African and Chinese research assistants. This methodology consisted of administering questionnaires, doing focus group interviews, and general participant observation. To address the main theme about the everyday lives of Africans in China, i.e., what it is like to be African in this country, we had to pose and try to answer empirical questions about this community such as who these Africans are, where they came from, why they came to Guangzhou/China, how communication takes place, how the communities are organized, and how they contribute to the economy of their adopted country of residence — we decided to do an empirically-based socio-linguistic and urban anthropological

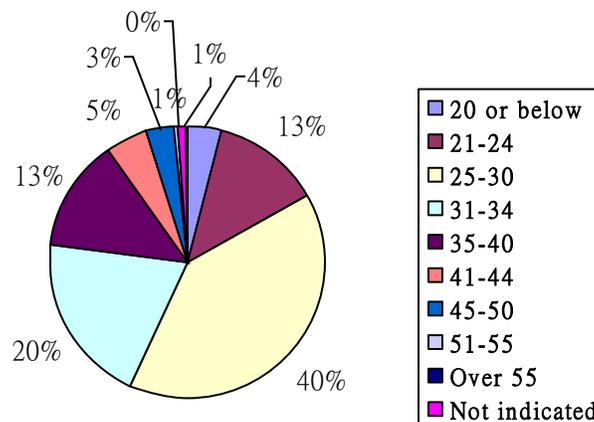
survey of six main cities in China: Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, Yiwu, Shanghai, and Beijing. In terms of analyzes, the focus is more on Guangzhou in this article.¹³

General Statistical Profiles

Collating the statistical profiles of the various cities together, we had 736 returned and valid responses, though our research team interacted with between 800 and 1000 Africans during this research project over five years.¹⁴ As mentioned above the statistics are based on questionnaire surveys administered within the African communities after interacting with them and getting the consent of various community leaders and key personalities within the communities.

In terms of gender distribution, 82 percent of the Africans in China we surveyed were males. At the beginning of the African influx into China between 1997 and the turn of the millennium, African women were hardly seen among the trader populations. A salient socio-cultural feature of the African family system is that, in the average family business structure, it is usually the husband who travels to look for new sources of supply for the business, but with time the women begin to travel out as well. As African men got to know China better, more and more women began to arrive and, as shown, approximately 18 percent of the survey population were women, including some rather young women who are yet to marry and establish a family business. This number has steadily risen since around 2011 as more and more females come to do business and to study, showing once more that we are dealing with a more and more established diaspora, rather than just a group of itinerant males coming to Guangzhou and going back to Africa on a regular basis.

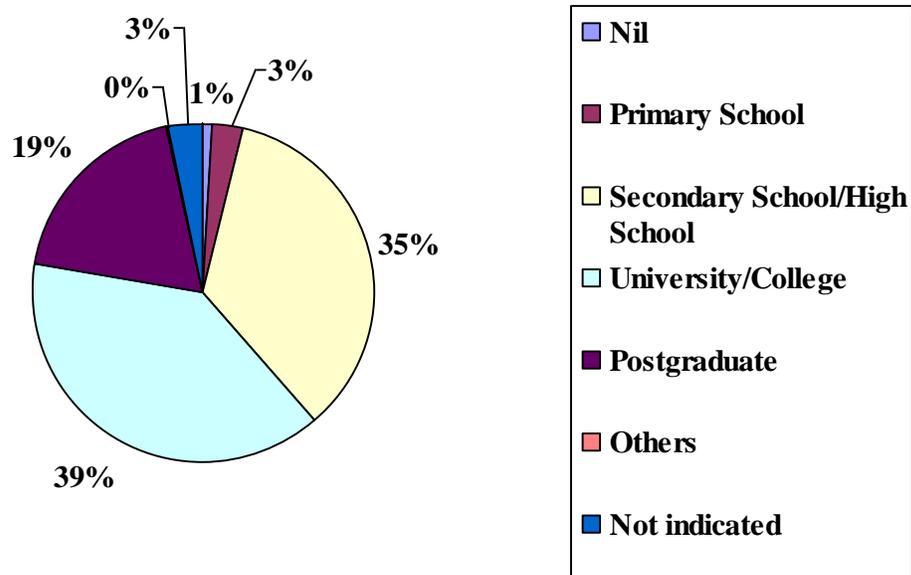
Figure 1: Age Group of Respondents



Age-wise, more than 60 percent of Africans in China are between the ages of 25 and 34, as shown in Figure 1. These figures indicate that this is a relatively young population that is in one of the most economically productive age brackets, which may vary from place to place but

which can be said to be between the ages of 20 and 55, especially with regard to work involving physical strength.

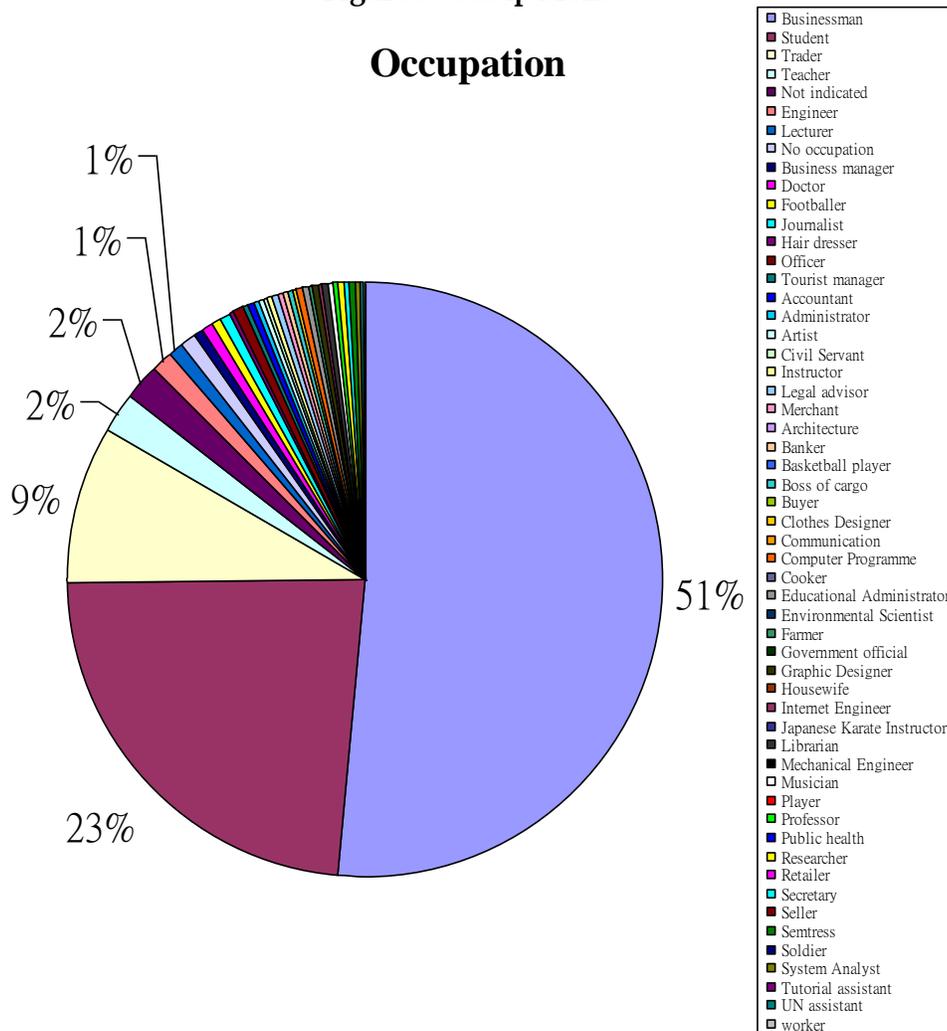
Figure 2: Level of Schooling



With regard to levels of education, most of the respondents (683 out of 736, or 93 percent) have at least completed secondary education; 288 had completed university/college, and 139 had completed postgraduate study, as can be seen in Figure 2. Most of the respondents (60 percent) chose to identify themselves as businessmen or traders. Figure 3 shows that, in terms of occupation, there are more traders or businessmen in China among the African migrants than any other profession, with more than 60 percent of them reporting their profession as such. The second largest group is comprised of students (more than 20 percent).

One of the questions we had to address early on in our research was that of which countries these Africans came from. As can be seen in Figure 4, the top ten countries of origin of those in our survey group were Nigeria with 125, Ghana with 87, Mali with 51, Guinea with 43, Senegal with 42, Tanzania with 36, Congo with 34, Kenya with 33, Cameroon with 21, and Niger with 20 respondents, respectively. This list suggests that there are more West Africans in China overall, with Nigeria having the largest number by far.

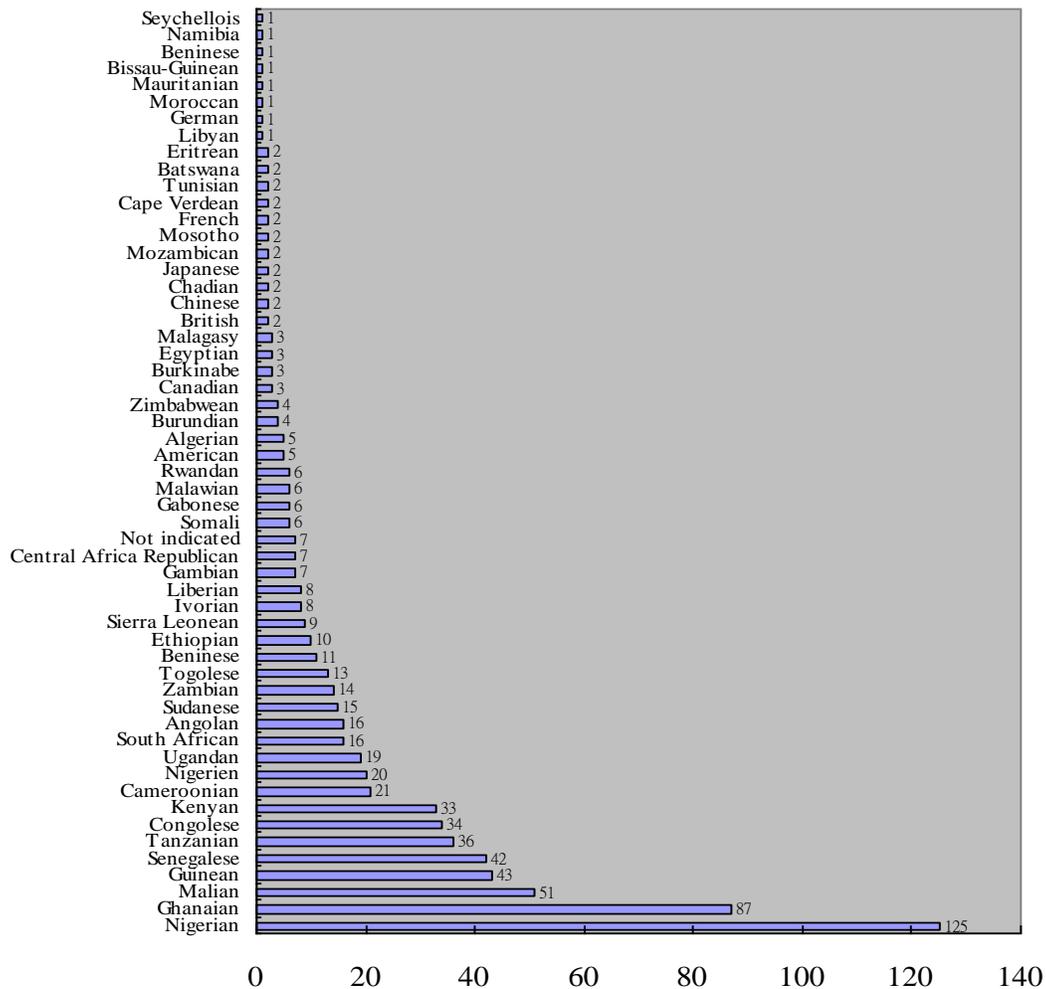
Figure 3: Occupations



Linguistic Repertoire

With the above broad characterization of the community, let us analyze the linguistic repertoire of Africans in China, especially that of African traders. The term linguistic repertoire refers to the gamut of languages that a community (such as the African community in China) speaks, reads, and writes and the choices members of this community make in the use of these languages in various communication situations. The term has been defined more broadly as "...a fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identities."¹⁵ As we do more and more linguistic analysis of diaspora communities in what may be termed "diaspora linguistics," terms such as linguistic repertoire will become more and more salient, and indeed feature prominently in sociolinguistic interactional studies.¹⁶

Figure 4: Nationality of Respondents



There were ninety-eight home languages spoken by the respondents; this figure may have increased over the subsequent years as Africans came from more diverse regions of Africa. The top ten were: French (133), Igbo (91), English (72), Swahili (55), Hausa (29), Twi (28), Arabic (28), Bambara (17), Mandingo (17), and Yoruba (15). In addition to their home languages, most of the respondents (577 out of 736) also spoke English and 173 French. Fewer spoke Chinese (139), and those who were proficient were even a smaller number, as Figure 5 illustrates.

How long the respondents have been staying in China this might influence the make-up of their linguistic repertoire, as for instance, that longer term Africans would speak Chinese more fluently and therefore become more functional in the market community. It was found that many only stay in China for a short period of time. Some 229 respondents (32 percent) have lived in China for just one month or less. 158 respondents (21 percent) have been staying for one to three years, as indicated in Figure 6. At the time of the survey not many respondents had stayed in China for more than three years; this fact indicates that the community is a newly establishing diaspora, rather than just a transnationally linked community. This tendency for short stays is a result of restrictive immigration rules.

Figure 5: Proficiency in Chinese

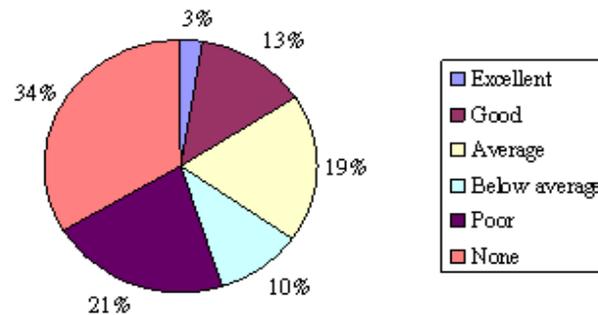
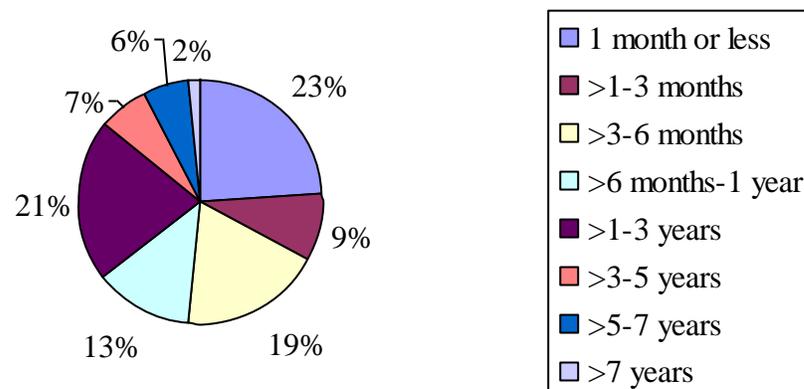


Figure 6: Duration of stay in China

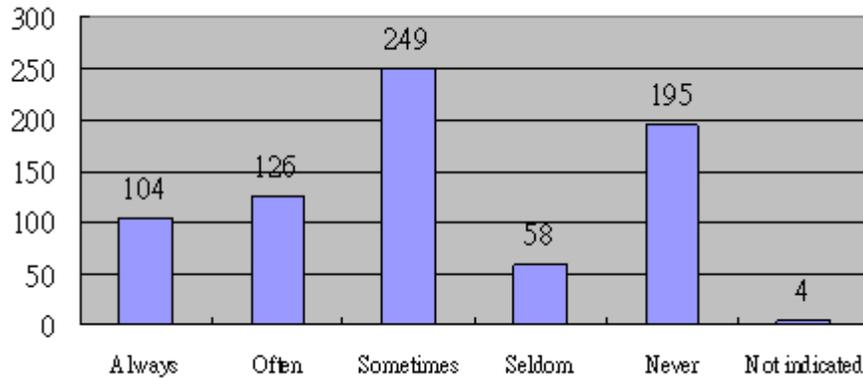


Proficiency in English is another important issue in this market community where communication is very important. Some 254 respondents (35 percent) claimed that their English proficiency was excellent, 304 (40 percent) thought it was good, and 125 (17 percent) claimed average proficiency. It is a common feature among Africans in China to embellish their proficiency in the former colonial languages, English and French, even though the latter is not spoken in China. Some Chinese in the markets of Guangzhou, however, consider it a prestige language, hence the tendency of some Africans to overstate their proficiency in French. We also wanted to seek the respondents’ opinion on whether English is a common language in China around their business district. Some 498 respondents (68 percent) think that English is a common language in China (32 percent did not) and indeed often insist on the Chinese learning “their” language, i.e. English in the case Africans from Anglophone countries and French for Africans from Francophone country.

As Figure 7 illustrates, less than a third of the respondents have come across significant communication problems, while over a quarter of them claimed they have never had problems

with market communications. This issue is related to the phenomenon of calculator communication.¹⁷ Most Africans think that even in the absence of an effective lingua franca, they can still communicate with their Chinese customers in the markets of Guangzhou by the use of their calculators.

Figure 7: Frequency With Communication Problems



One set of questions aimed at investigating how the respondents perceived their identity, whether and to what extent these people of African origins would identify themselves as Chinese. Some 278 of them (38 percent) said categorically that they would not identify themselves as Chinese, as shown in Figure 8. Still on the issue of identity one question investigates whether and to what extent the respondents think they are different from Chinese people in terms of their culture and the way they transact business in the markets. Some 225 respondents (31 percent) think that they are different from Chinese people to a very large extent, as shown in Figure 9. The survey also investigated to what extent the respondents think they are connected to the local Chinese community. Many people (21 percent) thought they have no social connection to the local Chinese community. Some 202 respondents (another 27 percent) thought that they are only connected to a small extent (given the limited communication between them beyond the market place), as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 8: To What Extent Do You Identify Yourself As Chinese

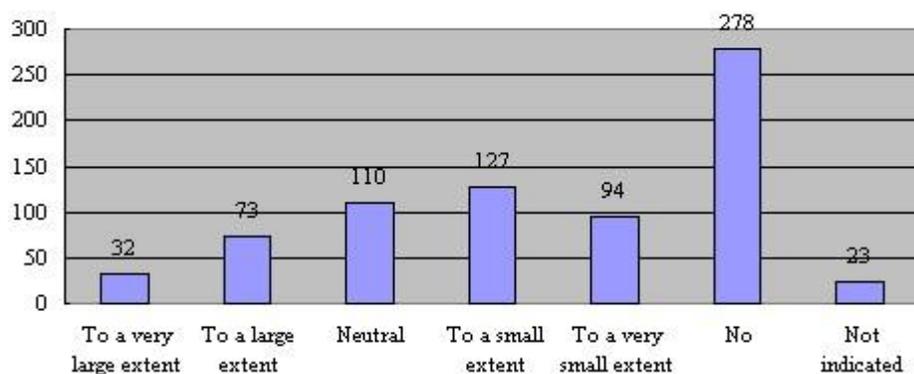


Figure 9: Degree Of Difference From Chinese People

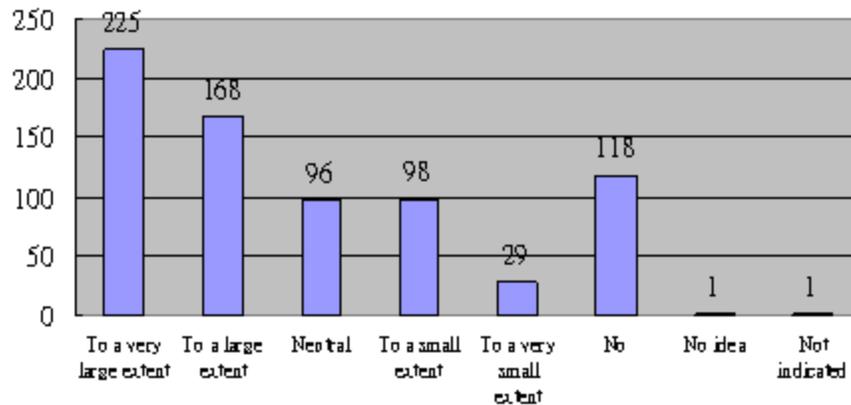
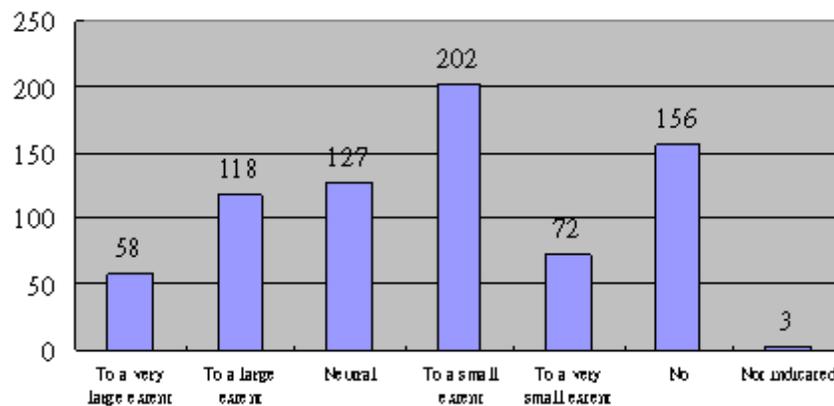


Figure 10: Social Connection To Chinese Community



In terms of analysis, this last set of questions were seeking a broad answer to the issue whether Africans in China would like to integrate into Chinese communities in China or they just want to be on their own. The answers here indicate that, at this point in their China sojourn, Africans in China did not try or even strive to fit or “integrate” into Chinese communities. This is not currently happening to any appreciable degree except maybe for those Africans married to Chinese, but even they hardly do this. The conclusion from this research project is that Africans are just happy to interact businesswise and cross-culturally in markets and workplaces, but not to integrate into Chinese culture and family settings. Among other reasons is that Africans cannot straight forwardly acquire Chinese citizenship.

Everyday Life in Guangzhou

Having provided a background of Africans in China and more particularly in Guangzhou, and having looked specifically at their linguistic repertoire, we supplement these quantitative studies with qualitative studies comprising in-depth interviews with three people (selected

from many in our research archive and discussed here due to reasons of space and brevity): an African man from Ghana, an African woman from Zimbabwe, and a Chinese woman from Jiangxi Province.

Frank Millen

In February 2017, the author interviewed Frank Millen (who gave permission to mention his name and even show his photo).¹⁸ Frank is a Ghanaian of mixed parentage who at the time of the interview, together with his Chinese wife, had opened an ultra-modern African restaurant in the heart of Guangzhou called The African-Pot. He told the author in the excerpt below about the challenges he faced due to the societal transformations mentioned at the beginning of this paper and how he is resiliently facing up to the challenges of law enforcement and other issues. One particular issue was police harassment. Police and security officers would come to the restaurant to check on the identity papers of African customers, while not doing the same at other nearby eateries like McDonald's or KFC. He and his Chinese wife, Jessica, eventually managed to persuade them to stop.

The biggest test, however, came when two Chinese journalists, a male and a female, tried to write negative reports about their restaurant. They enlisted two unsuspecting Africans in front of the restaurant and convinced them to buy a meal for them. While the Africans were eating their *fufu*, naturally with their hands, the journalists carefully photographed them. When the restaurant staff protested that photos were not allowed in the restaurant, the journalists had a good excuse in saying there is nothing wrong with taking pictures of their friends eating. A few days later the journalists published a negative report about The African-Pot restaurant in which they reported that Africans eat with their hands like animals. As Frank mentioned: "Four, five days later, there is this website in Chinese for food and so on. There is a review with African-pot and they said: '...you should see how they eat with hands like animals.'" His wife Jennifer was furious and called the woman journalist to protest: "...how could you write this?" But it was to no avail, so they had to persevere and do damage control. Their perseverance references back to the notion of transformative resilience, as the couple did not just give up but resolved to try and counter the attempt to tarnish the image of their business.

There often is, however, an unanticipated outcome to events. What was meant to be a negative report took on a rather different dimension, for it served as an advertisement of an exotic restaurant in the middle of Guangzhou. Many locals wanted to try out eating *fufu* with their hands, thus bringing many customers to The African-Pot. Frank and Jennifer catered to this increase in clientele by trying to adapt their dishes to suit Chinese eating habits:

So Jessica . . . decided to tailor-make the African food to Chinese ways of eating food: So she would have one dish, one plate where she would have a small portion of rice, fried fish, *fufu*, chicken, this, this, we called it Jungle Feast. So when people come and say we want to try *fufu*, we said we have regular size, and the other size is a little bit of *fufu*, a little bit of this, a little of that and so on. And everyone wants to try and it's not bad.

This extensive interview with Frank Millen speaks to the theme of this article—the resilience that African actors in Guangzhou and other parts of China develop to respond to or

counteract the prevailing social changes they face in their locales. This point will be further developed after summarizing two other selected interviews.

Our second interview was with an African woman who we met in the early days of our research, back in 2009, which shows that even in those early days Africans were already struggling with societal transformations.

Mrs. A.

Mrs. A., from Zimbabwe, told us that she had been an English teacher at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou and had been living in Guangzhou for more than three years with her family at the time of our interview. She no longer taught English, however, for she only had a one-year contract to teach at the university. At the time of the interview she was running a small import and export business. Here we see that when one job was lost Mrs. A. did not give up and return to Zimbabwe or elsewhere but instead went into trade. As a foreigner she found that it was difficult to obtain and hold a job in Guangzhou. That is why she was running her own business. Mrs. A. perceived that there are a lot of cultural differences between Africa and China, which make intercultural interaction difficult. She thought that people would not employ her if they did not even understand her, explaining why it was difficult for her to land another job. Mrs. A. added that she did not understand the Chinese either. For example, she did not understand why they spit on the floor, though she thinks that this is because they are not educated. Thus it is not their fault if they do so since they lack appropriate education. For the same reason she thought that the Chinese discriminate against Africans mainly because they lack education in matters of interracial sensitivities. Finally, Mrs. A. believed that, given enough appropriate education, someday there will be better intercultural understanding.

Ms. R.

Our third interview was with a Chinese woman who works closely with Africans in the markets of Guangzhou. Ms. R. came to Guangzhou from Pingxiang in Jiangxi Province two years before the time of our interview (2010) and had been working in the TianXiu Building, which was one of the earliest spots for Africa–China trade in Guangzhou, since then. She attended high school so thinks she speaks fluent English and therefore did not encounter communication problems with her African customers. It is clear that the ability to speak English is an advantage in the TianXiu Building and in any other African business places in Guangzhou. Nearly every shop in the building wants an English translator and sometimes a French translator. According to Ms. R. Africans in the TianXiu Building mainly came from West Africa. Ms. R.'s main job was to take orders and pre-orders as well as sustaining regular contact with the customers. However, Ms. R. had not been receiving many orders in the days before our interview. She mentioned that when she first came to the TianXiu Building, there were many African businessmen and hence more orders. Many African businessmen owned shops in the building, as was the case with the shop opposite to Ms. R.'s shop. She mentioned that some of them even owned factories in Guangzhou. By the time of our interview in 2010, however, many Africans had left Guangzhou, having sold their shops to Guangzhou residents. Although Ms. R. could observe all these changes involving African business activities in Guangzhou, she did not know much about why they were taking place. She lacked a strong connection with the Africans in Guangzhou, for

they were simply just her customers. Ms. R's statement that Africans were selling their shops to Guangzhou residents does not imply that Africans were leaving China. In fact, though this interview was prior to 2012, business was still booming in the TianXiu Building during the author's latest field trip in February 2017—implying again the notion of resilience: some may leave but more will arrive!

Besides these three in-depth interviews the author also participant-observed Africans in an African restaurant in 2013 and was able to get the following important complaint about the everyday harassment they feel subjected to at the hands of the Guangzhou immigration authorities:

You want to know what it is like for me to live in China?...Every day before I leave my house...to go to the markets...factories...or even to go eat...to come here for dinner...for African food in this restaurant, I spend about, what...ten minutes gathering all the documents that prove that I am legally resident in China; I cannot walk out of my house...my hotel without my passport, my room key, and anything that shows that I am legally resident in China. And I have done this for the past three years that I have been in and out of China.

What these interviews have in common is that African (and Chinese) actors persist and persevere in the face of adverse factors that threaten their success in the Guangzhou markets. Frank and his Chinese wife Jessica are struggling against security personnel and negative journalistic reports and succeeding. Mrs. A. did not give up and walk away because she could not hold down her job as an English teacher; she found a way to start a small trading business. Ms. R. was a bit aloof but even she was not walking away despite having fewer and fewer orders—she was staying put. All four and even those participant-observed are displaying a considerable amount of resilience in their day-to-day activities and interaction with security personnel. Even the man who experienced many identity checks for three years was not saying he would leave any time soon. In the face of mostly adverse transformations in the markets of Guangzhou and other parts of China, Africans are not leaving China “in droves.” Instead they are displaying considerable amounts of transformative resilience!

Making Sense of It All: Towards a Bridge Theory of Diaspora Interactions

From these quantitative and qualitative studies depicting the background of the African presence, especially the everyday life of the Africans in Guangzhou, and the general condition of what it is like to be African in China, what can one make of this in terms of area studies and related fields? This African presence has been dubbed Africa's newest diaspora because it is mainly a 21st century phenomenon, only barely twenty years old. It is a relatively complex diaspora community, and we need insights from many areas of study, including African Studies, Chinese/Asian Studies, and various fields such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and history to understand the community. As a specific illustration, to fully account for the relative complex linguistic repertoires and cross-cultural communication intricacies in the markets of Guangzhou one needs insights from African culture of buying and Chinese savvy business transaction skills, among many other issues. This kind of approach involves an interaction of different area studies to the point that it might be best to just talk of global, areal,

and diaspora interdisciplinary studies. There are already studies that point to area studies being geared “towards the study of larger scale society.”¹⁹

The bridge theory of migrant-indigene relations is essentially a theory that attempts to make sense of the confusing, blurring boundaries between global, areal, and diaspora studies. The theory is general enough to allow one to study Africans in China from the perspectives of all area studies, including African studies, and Chinese/Asian studies, from the insights of diaspora studies, and generally from the emerging preoccupations of global studies, as these market places that we see in Guangzhou and other parts of China have become global market places involving a mix of people from all parts of the world, including Africans, Asians, and Westerners.

Conclusion

Africans in Guangzhou and other parts of China are facing a myriad of problems but they are not giving up yet and packing up to return to Africa or going elsewhere in the world. In the face of changing rules and attitudes about where African traders should operate and how they should do it or whether or not they should even be in China altogether, in the face of all these administrative transformations, Africans in China are finding innovative ways to adapt and exist in China. They are finding resilient ways to continue plying their trade and taking advantage of the market and educational opportunities that China affords them. There is a certain amount of transformative resilience within the African communities living in China, even in the face of sometimes irresponsible, racist official pronouncements, such as this one from Pan Qianlin of Tianjin:

Black brothers often travel in droves; they are out at night out on the streets, nightclubs, and remote areas. They engage in drug trafficking, harassment of women, and fighting, which seriously disturbs law and order in Guangzhou... Africans have a high rate of AIDS and the Ebola virus that can be transmitted via body fluids... If their population [keeps growing], China will change from a nation-state to an immigration country, from a yellow country to a black-and-yellow country.²⁰

Africans in China are digging in and are not going to disappear from China in the near future. As long as the Chinese continue to be interested in Africa, Africans will continue to be interested in China. As long as Chinese are present in Africa, Africans will be present in China.

To fully account for what it is like to be an African in China, to understand the everyday experiences of Africans in the markets of Guangzhou, one needs empirical, methodological, and theoretical insights. The GADS theory proposed in this paper has such a theoretical insight, which comes from disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas of study such as African studies, Asian studies, diaspora studies, and, ultimately, global interdisciplinary studies. Africa’s newest diaspora constitutes an exciting new territory for area studies in the era of globalization. Indeed, the study of Africa in an Asian context is more meaningful when we draw in comparative angles between Africa and China/Asia from various perspectives including the historical, the cultural, and the political.

The paper has argued that, faced with challenges that make it difficult for Africans to ply

their trade in China, Africans have shown resilience in the face of these transformations. Evidence for this argumentation is based on empirical, quantitative, and qualitative surveys of more than seven hundred Africans in China, located mostly in Guangzhou, to produce a profile of this community and to depict the everyday lives of these migrants from Africa.²¹ Even though these figures may not reflect the latest composition since they are six to seven years old, they have been supplemented with recent interviews and participant observation based on recent fieldtrips (February 2017). Moreover these figures remain the most comprehensive available, as they have not been supplanted by any other published survey. This profile indicates a complex sociocultural diaspora community and thus necessitates a careful study of African and Chinese political, economic, cultural, and linguistic systems in order to make sense of this complexity. The study has thus proposed a bridge theory of global, areal, and diaspora studies (GADS) as a theoretical, methodological, and interdisciplinary platform to analyze Africans in China and to understand the future dynamics of this diaspora community.

Notes

- 1 For example, Marsh 2016 and Liu 2017. Many scholars have written about Africans in Guangzhou, including Bodomo 2010, Lyons, Brown and Li 2012, Bredeloup 2012, and Haugen 2013.
- 2 Marsh 2016.
- 3 Lin 2012.
- 4 Bodomo 2012.
- 5 Lyons, Brown, and Li 2012.
- 6 See, for example, such as Cisse 2016 and Marfaing and Thiel 2016.
- 7 Li Anshan 2016, Wyatt 2009, Rashidi and van Sertima 1995.
- 8 Bodomo 2012.
- 9 Bodomo 2012, 2016.
- 10 French 2014.
- 11 For example, Brautigam 2003 and 2011; Brautigam and Tang 2011; He Wenping 2009, 2010; Holslag 2011; Li Anshan 2005; Li Pengtao 2010; Li Weijian, Zhang Zhongxiang, Zhang Chun, and Zhu Ming 2010; Liu Hongwu 2008; Meng Deli and Nie Dianzhong 2011; Michel and Beuret 2009; Mitton 2002; Park 2009; Prah, Kwesi and Vusi Gumede. 2017; Rotberg 2008; Sautman and Yan 2007; Song 2011; Strauss and Saavedra 2010; I. Taylor 2006, 2008; M. Taylor 2011; Zhang Zhongxiang 2011; and Zhao Minghao 2010
- 12 In many fora, there are often discussions as to whether the African situation in China should be referred to as only just a transnational networked community or a real diaspora. My answer is that it is certainly a diaspora, albeit a new one, in the senses in which studies like Vertovec 1999 and Bodomo 2012 see diaspora as a social form, diaspora as type of consciousness, or diaspora as a mode of cultural production. The cultural productions in African communities in China such as food, linguistic communication norms, and patterns of clothing make it a rather distinct community from those of their Chinese hosts. They are not just some groups that come and go transnationally, they are there to stay and they have clear modes of cultural productions in China!

13 Bodomo 2012.

14 Ibid.

15 Benor 2011, p. 142.

16 For example, Gumperz 1962; Hillery 1955; Hymes 1972; Labov 1972; Ochs 1993; and Patrick 2002.

17 The phenomenon of calculator communication is extensively discussed in Bodomo 2012.

18 Frank Millen interview, Guangzhou, Feb 18, 2017.

19 Looser 2012, p. 97.

20 Pan Qinglin, member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Council, China's top political advisory body, quoted in Chiu 2017.

21 Bodomo 2012.

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