Dragons in the Savannah
A Case Study of New Chinese Migrants
in Tamale, Ghana

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A case study of new Chinese migrants in Tamale, Ghana

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Artemisinin Combination Therapies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRTU</td>
<td>All-China Federation of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGOA</td>
<td>African Growth and Opening Act</td>
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<td>APRM</td>
<td>African Peer Review Mechanism</td>
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<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FOCAC</td>
<td>Forum on China-Africa Cooperation</td>
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<td>GBHWU</td>
<td>Ghana Construction and Building Material Workers Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Convention People’s Party</td>
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<td>GH</td>
<td>Ghana Cedi</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOE</td>
<td>State-Owned Enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress</td>
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China’s recent interest in Africa and its activities on African soil have not gone unnoticed. Not only has ‘China in Africa’ generated a lot of global media attention, but it has also become an increasingly popular topic of academic research.

As a result of China’s grand re-entrance into Africa, migration from China to Africa has intensified during the last decade. This recent migration trend is part of what Frank Pieke has defined as the new Chinese migration order: a fundamentally changed pattern of migration emanating from China that began to become visible in the late 1980s and is characterized by new flows and modalities of mobility. The new Chinese migration order is shaped by factors such as commercialization and globalization. Another important key feature of this most recent migration pattern is educational migration.

The representatives of this trend are known as new Chinese migrants: Chinese individuals whose profiles show new sending areas in the People’s Republic of China, new countries of destination, more diverse educational backgrounds, and a dominance of Mandarin over southern Chinese dialects. In addition, they show to have a greater access to China than earlier migrants.

However, current China-Africa scholarship focuses mainly on the geo-political and economic impact of China’s involvement in Africa by researching the relations and activities of the Chinese government with African governments or elites, and focusing on China’s interest in natural resources. Such macro-level policy analysis merely considers nation states as actors while overlooking the often interesting, human stories of the migrating individuals that are part of the greater ‘China in Africa’ discourse. This thesis focuses instead on the lives, perceptions, and experiences of a group of these new Chinese migrants who have made the long journey into Africa.

Furthermore, media reports often fail to distinguish between the political and economic activities of the Chinese government in Africa and Chinese people’s activities on the ground. As a result, global newspaper headlines accuse ‘the Chinese in Africa’ of all kinds of misdeeds, ranging from unfair competition and labour disputes to convict labour and pirate fishing. These stories lump together Chinese migrants with Chinese governmental actions and thereby create an incomplete, often negative and generalizing picture of ‘the Chinese in Africa’ that underestimates the differences within this under-investigated, scattered, and loose group of individuals.

Notwithstanding a few very interesting studies, not much is known still about the so-called ‘new Chinese migrants’ in Africa. There is a lack of information in terms of factual data and empirical research, but ethnographic research on the new overseas communities in Africa is also limited.
In this thesis I aim to understand the new Chinese migrants to Africa from the migrant’s perspective and hope to create a more complete profile of this group by conducting a case study of new Chinese migrants in Tamale, Ghana.

Ghana is one of the African countries that have a long-standing relationship with China, and Chinese have been migrating to Ghana since the late 1950s. Renewed economic ties with Ghana resulted in a relatively small but significant wave of new Chinese migrants that has become visible since the late 1990s.

Tamale is a diverse city in northern Ghana and is claimed to be the fastest-growing city in West Africa. It is also an increasingly important regional transport and trade hub. Tamale can provide new markets and less competition for traders, and due to its relatively undeveloped character, the city is in need of large infrastructure projects. Therefore, Tamale is likely to become one of the new frontiers for new Chinese migrants in Ghana.

My ethnographically inspired study explores the backgrounds and drivers of new Chinese migrants and attempts to provide insight into their daily African lives. Since the earlier Chinese migrants in Africa have been described as very much keeping to themselves and not integrating, I also aim to answer questions about the social relations between Chinese migrants on the one hand, and possible social interaction with Ghanaians or other non-Chinese on the other. In addition, I attempt to discover how Chinese migrants perceive Ghanaian culture and in what way their own cultural background and feelings of national identity play a role in their perception of ‘the other’.

A large body of the data used in this thesis has been gathered through fieldwork which I conducted in Tamale from October 2008 until January 2009 and is based on interviews with Chinese migrants who were working and living in Tamale, as well as on the information supplied by Ghanaian residents of Tamale. Aiming to provide the context in which my fieldwork on Chinese migrants was conducted, I analyzed several studies as well as international and Ghanaian newspaper articles that were relevant for my research topic. In addition, I looked at relevant Internet blogs, podcasts, and documentaries. The combination of these two research methods aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of the new Chinese migrant in Tamale.

I am well aware of the small scope of this research project and have not aimed to present quantitative data, nor have I strived to make any statistical claims. Nevertheless, with this thesis I hope to make a small contribution to the existing literature on the field of current transnational Chinese migration.

This thesis is divided into five Chapters. In Chapter One I outline the historical and economic aspects of China’s longstanding relations with Ghana. In Chapter Two I first discuss the main terminology of the overseas Chinese as used in this thesis. Following this, I outline the migration patterns that have defined Chinese overseas migration so far and provide a profile of the new Chinese migrant. In Chapter Three I give a historical overview of the four different waves of China-Ghana
migration and its most defining characteristics. In Chapter Four I provide a contextual analysis of public perceptions of China in Africa and a selection of the most striking examples of anecdotal evidence of controversies and tensions that relate to the new Chinese migrants in Ghana. Chapters Three and Four together provide the contextual framework for the questions laid down in my fieldwork. Finally, in Chapter Five I first illustrate how my fieldwork in Tamale was conducted, outline the methods that were used, and discuss the research limitations I encountered. Then I introduce the city of Tamale as new Chinese migrants’ area of destination, and I follow with a presentation of the findings that resulted from my field research. Finally, at the end of this thesis, I present my conclusions and provide answers to the questions that were raised in the previous chapters.
CHAPTER 1
Ghana-China Relations: Old friends, New Partners

In this Chapter I will discuss the longstanding relationship between Ghana and China from a political and economic perspective. I will first give an overview of China’s historical relations with Ghana and their political consequences. Following this, I will provide the economic context in which China’s relationship with Ghana has been revived in the last decade. Finally, I will briefly discuss the most important points of criticism that relate to China’s increased involvement in Ghana.

1.1 Historical aspects of China-Ghana relations

China and Ghana have been partners for a long but interrupted period. During the 1950s the People’s Republic of China (PRC) began spreading its influence gradually from North Africa to equatorial West Africa. At this time, the Chinese government was striving for strategic communist influence and international recognition whilst at the same time trying to remove itself from the tutelage of the Soviet Union. One of its strategies was connecting its own history of Western semi-colonization to the ‘Third World’.³

Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast, was a country of particular strategic importance for the PRC because Ghana’s native society, educated and based largely on a system of tribes and kingdoms, was more developed politically, economically, and socially than other West African countries.⁴ Furthermore, Ghana’s strong liberation movement led the country to become the first sub-Saharan territory to win independence in 1957.⁵ The land was known for gold and cacao and had a long history of commerce and trade—including slaves—with Europe and America. In addition, its location on the Gulf of Guinea was also regarded as strategic.⁶

The relationship between Ghana and the PRC was established as early as the late 1950s and began unofficially with China sending an art troupe to Accra in 1958 in honour of Ghana’s first anniversary.⁷ Nevertheless, official ties were still non-existent: just after Independence, Ghana and other countries were still inhibited in their interaction with China for fear of disapproval from their former European colonizers, who regarded communist China as a menace.⁸ However, encouragement to re-evaluate China also began to appear. William Dubois, the famous African-American scholar, civil rights’ advocate, and communist sympathizer, who moved to Ghana during the last years of his life, celebrated his ninety-first birthday in 1959 Beijing and gave a speech at Beijing University in which he told the new African governments to take notice of China by saying: ‘China is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood’.⁹
In 1960, Premier Zhou Enlai and Chairman Liu Shaoqi congratulated President Kwame Nkrumah and the people of Ghana on the instalment of Nkrumah as the first president of the newly founded Republic of Ghana and expressed their hope for further development of relations between the two countries. This public communication demonstrated the PRC’s intent to establish formal relations with Ghana and was soon followed by the establishment of full diplomatic ties: the opening of the Chinese embassy, headed by well-known Chinese diplomat, Huang Hua, who would later play a major role in Beijing’s diplomatic activities throughout the African continent. Ghana became the second sub-Saharan African state to recognize the PRC.  

Ghana had its own interest in the newly found friendship. President Nkrumah’s pan-African political vision involved him in the liberation processes and struggles of other African countries still ruled by European colonizers. In return for Ghana’s strong international support, the PRC conducted political warfare operations by training and arming sub-Saharan African freedom fighters on Ghanaian soil, which made Ghana the centre for political warfare in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s.

From an economic perspective Nkrumah was eager to break economic ties with former colonizers and halt dependence on foreign capital and goods from former colonial powers. Instead, he wanted to adopt a nation-independent industrial model. Therefore, in addition to political warfare support, China began making arrangements for providing economic aid to Ghana. Between 1964 and 1967 Ghana received $3.5 million in economic aid from China, while between 1967 and 1970 China extended $40 million in credits and grants to the West-African state. The two countries entered into an economic-technological cooperation and trade agreement, which saw China providing development assistance for the construction of the national theatre in Accra, the Afebi Irrigation Project, and other projects.

However, the close political friendship between the two states was put to the test in 1966 and failed, when Nkrumah was removed from power by a coup d’état while visiting China, a trip PRC leaders advised him not to take as they believed Nkrumah needed to attend to political matters in Ghana first. Following the coup, Ghana’s national and foreign policies were altered. In particular, Ghana’s relations with communist nations, which had a history of supporting Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP), were frozen. Within months all Russian, East-European, and Chinese citizens in Ghana, among them advisors, technicians, and military instructors, were expelled from the country. Rumours about China assisting Nkrumah to return to Ghana and stage a counter-revolution continued to circulate among Ghana’s new leadership. This suspicion towards the PRC led to Ghana’s unilateral suspension of relations between the two countries. Not amused by Ghana’s anti-Chinese policy, China decided to withdraw all diplomatic staff in late 1966. China’s political loss was substantial, but eventually time healed at least some of the wounds, and China-Ghana relations were restored in 1972. After the re-instalment of the Chinese embassy, the relations between the two countries proceeded smoothly in the years thereafter.

From the mid-1970s to the 1980s, Ghana experienced further political and economic
instability, including several coups that ended with the instalment of the second Rawlings government, leaving Ghana in a poor state economically. During the 1980s, China generally kept a lower profile in Africa, as Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform policy, *gaige kaifang* (Reform and Open), required foreign investment and technical assistance for which it opened up to the West. But the PRC did not totally disappear from the scene. For example, in 1983 Ghana and China entered into a cooperation arrangement which would remain in effect until 2004. Under this arrangement, the total value of contracts signed by Chinese companies for work undertaken reached $390 million. The projects included a bank building, a textile mill, school buildings, and a water supply project.

### 1.2 New economic ties & partnership

During and after the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, China’s response was criticized by the West, but the government received support from several African countries. As Ho pointed out, some African leaders at that time saw the growing Western discourse on human rights and promotion of liberal democracy as Western-centric and neocolonial. China used this opportunity to renew its relationship with African countries, including Ghana, to gain political support in order to marginalize the position of Taiwan. In the meanwhile, China’s economic reforms created a growing internal economy and a demand for oil-resources and trade markets that Africa could deliver.

In the 1990s, China began to revive its once strong ties with Ghana in full. The PRC, which now had more means than ever, not only increased its aid to Ghana but also showed interest in Ghana’s economic potential. Unlike resource-rich countries where China has used development finance as a gateway into the country, in Ghana the factors seem to be more complex. Ghana’s largest resource export is gold, although in 2006 this was eclipsed by cocoa exports. In addition, the country is one of the world’s largest bauxite suppliers. Other resources found in Ghana are timber and manganese. However, none of these are found in the same abundant quantity as in other African nations.

On the other hand, whereas Ghana’s neighbouring countries were involved in serious conflicts and experienced economic downturns, Ghana has been politically stable for more than a decade. In addition, Ghana has also demonstrated economic stability after undergoing the African Peer Review Mechanism process, being on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals and holding the chair of the African Union from January 2007 to January 2008. The country’s macro-economic indicators show signs of impressive growth. Therefore, Ghana is seen as exemplary for the future of West Africa and possible China involvement, and the country has therefore become a strategic and important partner for China.

Since the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in 2000, China has undertaken a series of projects aimed at assisting Ghana in its infrastructural needs. After the visit of
Premier Wen Jiabao and on the sidelines of the 2006 FOCAC Summit, the two countries agreed to maintain and nurture the current friendship and cooperation between the two nations. In addition, a Joint Communique with an emphasis on strengthening bilateral cooperation in economy and trade, telecommunications, culture, education, and health was issued. Furthermore, the Ghanaian and Chinese governments signed 12 agreements to boost economic and technical cooperation and to improve infrastructure, communication, and human resource development. In addition, $24 million of debt owed to China was cancelled.  

Social assistance to Ghana is given in the form of proposed schools and hospitals, medical centres such as a malaria centre, as well as the deployment of health workers and educators. Furthermore, as part of a cultural and educational exchange program, Ghana has been a recipient of Chinese scholarships since the 1960s. The number of these scholarships has been increased during the last decade.

Further assistance in the energy sector has also been provided by China and this has resulted in the construction of the Bui Dam project, which is Ghana’s largest aid commitment from the PRC to date. The building of a gas-fired plant in Ghana through a joint venture was also agreed upon. Such energy assistance is of great importance to Ghana because the country has experienced severe energy crises over the last ten years.

China’s infrastructural investments are assisting the Ghanaian government in improving the prospects for both inter- and intra-regional trade, as is improving the country’s technological ability. Chinese investments, in addition, help advance Ghana’s stable political and economic base towards becoming a regional hub in West Africa. Some projects of infrastructural development carried out by China can be regarded as a form of symbolic diplomacy in public infrastructure. Examples of such projects are the building of two new stadiums, in Takoradi and Tamale, for the 2008 Africa Cup of Nations to be hosted by Ghana.

A number of Chinese companies, large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and also smaller private Chinese entrepreneurs are now conducting business in China. Chinese companies with a visible presence in the Ghanaian construction sector include China State Hualong Construction Limited and the Shanghai Construction Group. Recently, China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation won a contract for a railway project in the western part of Ghana.

China and Ghana have also become good trading partners. China-Ghana trade has so far followed a classic North-South model: a trade situation in which the North (China) produces mainly industrial goods whilst the South (Ghana) produces mainly primary commodities. Ghana is currently the second-largest importer of Chinese goods in Africa, with Chinese goods representing 9.1 per cent of its total imports.

Renewed political and economic relations between China and Ghana have gone hand-in-hand with the increase of new Chinese migrants in Ghana. How this latest wave of migration fits in the
bigger Chinese migration patterns and by what characteristics these migrants can be defined will be discussed in Chapter Two.

1.3 Voices of criticism

Despite the fact that PRC regards Ghana as an exemplary case of their Africa policy, China’s involvement with Ghana has also received criticism. There are growing concerns that what China brings as development assistance is actually masking a more embedded approach of commercial interests. Although Ghana is not known for its abundance in resources other than bauxite, the country still has gold, timber, cacao, and oil. Some observers believe that China’s economic engagement could be directed at gaining access to these resources through development assistance and investments.35

Recently, Ghanaian criticism of China’s involvement with Ghana, including allegations against the Chinese migrants that now live and work in the country, has begun to increase. The specifics of these accusations, and if or how they can affect Chinese migrants in Ghana, will be further analyzed in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER 2

Chinese Migration & the Overseas Chinese

In this chapter I will introduce the main terminology of the overseas Chinese as used in this thesis and discuss the migration patterns that have defined Chinese overseas migration for the last two centuries. Following this, I will elaborate on the recent changes and trends that are found in overseas Chinese migration. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss Frank Pieke’s theory of China’s new migration order, and based on his theory I will present a profile of the ‘new Chinese migrant’, which formed the starting point for the fieldwork I conducted on new Chinese migrants in Tamale.

2.1 Terminology of the overseas Chinese

The term ‘overseas Chinese’ (in Chinese, huaqiao) literally translates as ‘sojourners’, meaning Chinese nationals who temporarily live as aliens in foreign countries.\[^{36}\]

*Overseas Chinese* is often used in a general context to describe all people of Chinese ancestry living outside the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Some regard all those people of Chinese ethnicity that live outside the PRC as huaqiao, including the Hong Kong Chinese and Taiwanese. This is not correct; they are not huaqiao.\[^{37}\] Another term to address the overseas Chinese is ‘Chinese diaspora’, which has been in use since the early 1990s.\[^{38}\]

The definition of huaqiao as being sojourners is closely related to the Chinese tradition of sojourning: it has been the Chinese habit to treat every place outside China they live in as but a temporary home. This sojourning mentality has deep roots in Chinese culture.\[^{39}\] The sojourning tradition grew out of Confucian philosophy, adopted in government discourse, that it was disloyal to both family and empire to live permanently abroad.\[^{40}\] In Chinese culture, loyalty to one’s family is very important: not only is the eldest son expected to care for his aging family members, but family members are responsible for the well-being of their ancestor’s spirits. By making offerings and sweeping their graves, family members prevent the spirits of their ancestors becoming hungry ghosts. As for loyalty to the empire: China, more particularly north-central China, is historically known as the heartland of various dynasties and the cradle of Chinese culture, and therefore it has long been regarded as the political and cultural centre. Those people who assimilated into other cultures lived on the peripheries and therefore were looked upon as being less Chinese.\[^{41}\] Sojourning connects Chinese migrants to their home village or town, their ancestral home, and their extensive kinship connections, as well as to their country and its rulers. This helped to keep the sojourning mentality among overseas Chinese alive.\[^{42}\]
After World War II some Chinese migrants began to step back from the sojourning mentality by settling down permanently and even accepting foreign citizenship or nationality. As more and more Chinese migrants now saw themselves as settled foreign citizens or descendants of Chinese and no longer as sojourners, the use of *huaqiao* to address all overseas Chinese began to show its limitations.\(^{43}\)

Nowadays, those people who are ethnically Chinese but are nationals of countries over which China has no claim are referred to as *haiwai huaren*, which literally translates as ‘overseas Chinese’ but also translates as ‘foreign nationals’. *Haiwai huaren* is more commonly used in the PRC.\(^{44}\) Descendants of *huaqiao* are known as *huayi* or ‘Chinese descendants’.\(^{45}\) In addition, the terms *huaqiao* and *huayi* refer to two of the four different migration patterns that have been identified by Wang Gungwu. These patterns will be discussed in detail in the next section of this chapter.

Both the terms ‘overseas Chinese’ and ‘Chinese diaspora’ are used in this thesis to address those persons of Chinese ancestry that live outside the PRC, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The reasons behind this decision are the fact that both terms are internationally used and widely accepted.\(^{46}\) However, in cases of Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macau being the area of the migrant’s origin, this will be mentioned in addition.

### 2.2 Chinese migration patterns

According to Wang Gungwu, four major migration patterns have occurred during the last two centuries of Chinese migration.\(^{47}\) Each of these patterns is characterized by certain push and pull factors, different migrants’ background, choices of destination, or a certain period in which the pattern was prevalent.

The first pattern is that of the Chinese trader, the *huashang* pattern. This pattern is represented by adventurous Chinese merchants and artisans who move abroad in search of opportunity and eventually set up businesses. They are often joined by colleagues and male family members. Usually, this group of migrants consists of unmarried males who, over one or two generations, settle down and bring up local families. The pushing factor behind this migration pattern is the search for new foreign markets and profitable trading opportunities. This *huashang* pattern not only includes the first recorded overseas Chinese migration to other Asian countries mainly, but has also predominated in global Chinese migration throughout history, including the recent migration to Africa. Therefore, the *huashang* pattern is regarded as the most basic type of Chinese migration. Wang believes that for *huashang* migrants the more their businesses prosper, the more likely their families are to maintain their ‘Chinese’ characteristics, if not all of their connections with China.\(^{48}\)

The *huagong* or the Chinese labourer pattern is identified as the second migration pattern. This pattern occurred roughly from around 1850 through the 1920s.\(^{49}\) Many Chinese, mainly male and of
peasant origin, were pushed by war, famine, overpopulation, extreme poverty, and chaos to perform contract labour in the New World and Europe and its colonies, such as South Africa, where the industrialized powers were in need of cheap labour for their mines, plantations, and infrastructure projects. Because the Qing Empire was not in favour of overseas emigration, it had placed a ban on emigration. But after the Opium Wars in 1840, the Europeans forced the Qing court to lift the ban on migration, and thousands of impoverished Chinese saw migration as their chance of survival and new opportunities. In the beginning of this so-called ‘coolie’ or ‘pigtail’ trade, it was mostly labourers from southern China that went to work overseas, but later strong peasant men from north China, such as Shandong province, also joined in the labour migration.

Since the Chinese labourers were often forced to return home after their contract had ended, the huagong migration pattern has been characterized as a temporary form of migration. However, in reality some of the huagong migrants, impressed by the conditions and opportunities they found in their host countries, did decide to sojourn for longer periods.

The third pattern is the huaqiao or Chinese sojourner pattern. It is important to note that the group of migrants that represent this pattern is strongly comprised of well-educated professionals, such as journalists and teachers, who often brought their families with them. In addition, there were students, political refugees, and single women sent out to marry overseas Chinese men. After the fall of Imperial China in 1911, waves of sojourners followed in the footsteps of the huashang and huagong migrants. This migration was tied strongly to feelings of nationalism. For example, nationalist’s viewpoints on the importance of promoting Chinese culture and national salvation among the overseas Chinese pushed many teachers to go abroad to teach the children of Chinese migrants in South-East Asia.

According to Wang, the huaqiao pattern prevailed until the 1950s, when many huaqiao decided to step away from their sojourning mentality by accepting foreign citizenship. Nevertheless, some features of this pattern have survived in diffuse forms throughout all waves of Chinese migration, including the most recent.

The fourth migration pattern that Wang noted is the more recent huayi Chinese-descent pattern. This pattern has been prevalent since the 1950s and involves people of Chinese descent who reside in a foreign country but migrate or re-migrate to another foreign country. Pushing factors behind this (re-)migration pattern can be the lack of mobility and encounters with negative experiences in the host country. These experiences range from feeling unwelcome and being treated as second-class citizens to outright Sino-phobia. The promise of a better future, a better job, or more educational opportunities in more developed and affluent regions, such as Europe and North America, work as pulling factors for huayi migrants. The migration of the Chinese in South-East Asia to Western Europe in the last five decades is a good example of the huayi pattern.
2.3 Recent migration: trends and changes

In the last 25 to 30 years, migration from China has changed considerably. According to Frank Pieke, this change is so fundamental that he speaks about a ‘new Chinese migration order’. This new migration order is characterized by new flows and modalities of mobility that have changed the relatively ordered pattern of Chinese migration, with its reasonably well-defined flows and areas of origin and destination in the 1990s and 2000. The recent Chinese migration to Africa can be understood within the context of the new migration order.

After World War II and before the late 1970s, Western Europe and North America saw modest flows of students, business people, professionals, and hardworking, independent-minded peasants from Hong Kong, South-East Asia, and Taiwan. At the time, migration from the PRC was prohibited by the Communist government, making it almost impossible for average Chinese citizens to leave the PRC. The only exception were technicians, diplomats, and aid workers, who were sent abroad by the Chinese government to contribute to what Snow regards as Red China’s mission.

In the West the relatively modest Chinese migration was generally quietly accepted and almost ignored, as Chinese migration did not threaten or create the kind of problems seen with some other larger immigrant groups. Overall, the Chinese migrants were regarded as a model or invisible minority.

According to Pieke, the initial migration flows that formed the precedent for the new migration order of the 1990s and 2000s began to become visible in the late 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms led to resumption of Chinese migration out of the PRC. The gradual relaxation of China’s emigration law first inspired migrant groups from traditional areas such as Guangdong and Zhejiang to migrate to the existing overseas communities in the US and Europe, and later to other areas. They were soon followed by migrants from inner Fujian. The initial migration flows also included the new migration of Chinese post-graduate students to Europe, the US, Australia, and Japan. They often came on a Western scholarship or as part of an exchange program, as most Chinese could not yet afford overseas education.

In China, the term new emigrants (xin yimin) is used in official PRC discourse to refer to those people who have left China since 1978, since the reform and opening period, including students. During this period the first sign of adventurous PRC migration to Africa began to become noticeable, but numbers were tiny and insignificant. In terms of numbers the only exception in these years was the non-PRC migration of Taiwanese citizens to South Africa.

Pieke shows that in the 1990s and 2000s, important changes regarding countries of destination, areas of origin, and migrants’ profiles fundamentally reshaped the previous migration patterns and flows. The main drivers behind these changes were the developments in Chinese society on the one hand, and the consequences of ongoing migration for policy-making in the sending and receiving countries on the other hand. The most important of the latter policy changes has been the further
weakening of the role of central government in emigration, which led to the relaxation of emigration legislation and has made it legally possible for virtually all Chinese citizens to travel and work overseas.  

As for developments in Chinese society, in the early 1990s the economic and social reforms began to profoundly change life in urban areas. For example, more and more urban Chinese were no longer dependent on and restricted by the old communist danwei or work-unit system and experienced more mobility. Economic reform and foreign trade generated a spectacular economic growth that resulted in the increasing presence of a new entrepreneurial elite and salaried middle-class. The expectations of these new elite groups and employed middle-classes have risen, and they want the lifestyle and opportunities that match their class and growing disposable income. These lifestyles or opportunities include overseas activities.

Although social and spatial mobility have increased considerably in China, social and economic developments have not only created winners. For example, the closure of poor-performing state companies created mass lay-offs and large unemployment numbers. Emigration could provide urban workers a much-needed escape from unemployment. In addition, life in China’s rural areas also became more difficult. Rural dwellers that had already been engaged in emigration to urban areas as part of the floating population quickly availed themselves of the opportunities to go abroad.

In other words, migration is no longer limited to only a few groups in Chinese society and has become an option for many different Chinese, who make up what Pieke has characterised as ‘the new Chinese migration order’.

2.4 The new migration order

Pieke has listed several key features that characterize the new migration order of the 1990s and 2000s. One important key feature is the commercialization of Chinese migration. This commercial transformation has been illustrated by the occurrence of illegal migration, human trafficking, and asylum abuse. But it has also created economic opportunities such as the establishment of language schools, professional training centres to prepare for work and study abroad, emigration agencies, and newspapers and Internet advertorials, as well as commercial assistance for migrants. However, it is important to note that the negative aspects of this commercialization of Chinese migration have influenced Western public opinion on Chinese migration and government-imposed immigration restrictions. In the West, Chinese migrants are no longer regarded as an ‘invisible’ or ‘model’ minority.

In addition to the relaxation of emigration policies by the central government, China’s local governments began to become increasingly involved in encouraging and even facilitating migration. These local governments are keen on raising local Chinese living standards through migration.
example, there has been a significant de-regulation of labour recruitment and a visible growth in private labour contractors. These contractors recruit in populous provinces such as Sichuan, Hubei, or Henan and often for overseas projects. Other examples are emigration agencies that operate in full view of the local authorities and are often connected to the SOEs. They derive much of their emigration potential from former industrial areas like the north-eastern rustbelt provinces.

In regard to Chinese migration to Africa, an interesting though slightly controversial example of local government involvement are the ‘Baoding villages’ (also known as ‘Baoding farms’). In 1997 the head of the Baoding City Bureau of Foreign Trade in Hubei Province went to Africa as part of an economic delegation. In Zambia the government official Liu Jianjun met one hundred former Baoding residents who were previously working as builders on a dam project. After their labour contracts ended, the Chinese labourers felt that life in Zambia was easier than at home and decided to stay in Zambia, where they lived a comfortable life by growing vegetables, fruits, flowers, cultivating grains, and breeding poultry. Inspired by these people, Liu saw great opportunities for other impoverished Chinese or unemployed Baoding citizens and began convincing people to move to Africa and set up a special Baoding Africa council. This ‘Baoding story’ was widely covered in the Chinese and international media, and several reports spoke about thousands of successful Chinese migrants operating private farms in several African countries.

Unfortunately, the exact details and numbers of the Baoding villages remained vague, even to the point that it has been described as a complete hoax. Despite the mystery of the Baoding farms, it is a fact that new Chinese migrants are operating private farms in new frontier areas such as Africa and Latin America.

Thus, these different examples show that local Chinese governments function as a key agent in the new migration order by contributing to the creation of sending areas as well as promoting new types of migrants such as the contract-labourer or migrant farmer.

Another important feature of new Chinese migration, particularly in relation to the recent migration to Africa, is the aspect of globalization. According to Pieke, globalization of migration seems mainly driven by the commercialization of migration on the one hand, and the more intense competition for opportunities abroad on the other. This trend began with the Fujianese and Zhejiangnese, who expanded from their traditional stronghold in Europe and appeared in search of economic opportunities in new frontier areas such as Eastern Europe and Africa. They were soon followed by Chinese migrants from other PRC areas.

This globalization aspect is also a by-product of the rising educational migration. Chinese educational migration has increased dramatically, both in numbers and in the range of different backgrounds, destinations, and pursued degrees. Owing to the economic growth, foreign study is becoming a popular and possible choice for the children of China’s burgeoning entrepreneurial elite and salaried middle-class.

At the same time, the educational migration to the Western world has resulted in the increase
of professional Chinese migration. Many former students seek opportunities to stay and work in the country where they pursue their overseas education. On top of this, direct professional migration from China is also on the rise, primarily to traditionally popular destinations such as America and Europe but increasingly also to Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Among these professionals are engineers, managing directors, teachers, medical personnel, and entrepreneurs.

But not all types of the recent Chinese overseas professional migration can be regarded as a truly new phenomena. For example, the *huashang* migrants have been present ever since Chinese migration began, but this group has recently been choosing new destinations, which characterize the new migrant order. Furthermore, there are differences between the traditional Chinese overseas entrepreneur and what Wang Gungwu calls the ‘modern Chinese entrepreneur’. Well-educated Chinese entrepreneurs have a better understanding of local power systems and national cultures and have learned to work effectively in the environment around them. This is contrary to the traditional *huashang*, who stayed away from local politics and power structures. The modern traders do not have to assimilate to a new culture completely and do not have to neglect their links with China and other Chinese. Moreover, modern communication technologies help to maintain contact with different groups and business networks. The Chinese values concerning business methods and responsibilities are still useful, and modern entrepreneurs know how to use them in a way that can benefit their own business as well as their local host economies, which have a growing interest in doing business with China. Furthermore, the modern *huashang* have greater freedom and more options in the larger trading framework used in the more open international system.

In addition to the modern entrepreneurs, farmers, students, contract workers, and other ‘new’ migrant types, there is another emerging type of migrant: the transitory migrant. This transitory migrant type has been identified in Africa but is also likely to exist in other new frontiers. Transitory migrants often use African states as ‘soft locations’, where they can break their journeys on an ultimate quest to enter North America or Western Europe. Here they gather funds and documentation for the next stage of their journey. Their trading business is only meant to keep them solvent, as they have no interest in becoming embedded in African economies for the long term.
CHAPTER 3
Chinese in Ghana: From Colonial Labourers to Modern Entrepreneurs

Chinese people have been migrating to Ghana on a small scale since the late nineteenth century. During this period the characteristics of this migration have shown interesting and profound changes. In this chapter I will give a historical overview of the four different periods of Chinese migration to Ghana and discuss their main specifics in terms of drivers, migrant types, and local conditions.

3.1 Colonial period: Chinese labourers in the Gold Coast (1897–1912)

The first documented migration of Chinese people to what was then British Gold Coast dates back to the late nineteenth century. Although this early Chinese presence in the Gold Coast was, compared for example with South Africa, insignificant in terms of numbers or economic activities, colonial Gold Coast was among the first African countries that, at the behest of colonial administrators, began to propose the import of Chinese labour. However, just a few years before the large-scale ‘pigtail trade’ sent thousands of Chinese coolies to work all over the world, the question of importing Chinese labour into the Gold Coast was strongly opposed by local African intelligentsia and some colonial policy makers. This opposition was mainly articulated through the Gold Coast media and has been documented and researched by Kwabena O. Akurang-Prince. Various newspaper reports provide a tiny glimpse of the very first Chinese people that set foot on Ghanaian soil, as well as an impression on the way they were perceived. The following paragraphs, therefore, serve as a primer to the history of the Chinese in Ghana.

In the aftermath of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and domestic slavery in Africa, the new colonial world powers were confronted with large labour shortages both at home and in their colonies. In the Gold Coast, where Britain following its annexation abolished slavery in 1874, labour scarcity had also become a problem. In order to resolve the labour question, colonial policy makers decided that former unfree labour had to be transformed into wage labour. This was easier said than done since local wage labourers rejected the existing poor working conditions and low wages. Moreover, they were supported by the African intelligentsia who stood up for them and expressed their concerns. At the same time, there was a common belief among colonial authorities that African labour was inferior, both in terms of race and productivity. Asian labour, on the other hand, was considered racially superior, hardworking, and productive.
Thus, labour shortages remained a problem, and when in the mid-1890s the Wassa and Akyem Gold Coast gold fields began to attract the interest of colonial and mining companies, the need for skilled mine labour increased even more. In addition to recruiting labour from neighbouring West African countries, both colonial policy makers and mining companies began to become interested in Chinese labour. In one of the early proposals on using Chinese labour, H. Brackenbury suggested that ‘the imported Chinese would breed in with the natives and infuse some energy into the Fanti races’ and that this would eventually lead to ‘trade, the building of roads and opening of the country all over’. In 1895 the Gold Coast Governor William. E. Maxwell not only believed that using Chinese labour would lead to the development of the goldfields, but he also expected the Chinese miners to be ‘more industrious and better instructed than local negro’. He hoped that with Chinese labour ‘the making of gardens, the keeping of cattle and a number of industries would be introduced’, and that the British resident would then ‘find his dwellings more comfortable, his table better supplied, and the condition of life generally improved’. Furthermore, Maxwell thought that ‘the presence of Chinese labourers would force the local African workers to work harder under the spur of competition’.

Maxwell designed a pilot labour scheme in which he opted for importing a Chinese labour force into the Gold Coast. The scheme was based on a Chinese-settler community instead of the periodic import of Chinese labour, because Maxwell thought that if the Chinese workers lived longer in the Gold Coast they would acclimatize better.

But Maxwell’s ideas on the use of Chinese labour were heavily opposed by the African intelligentsia. In various newspaper articles they agitated against colonial racist ideologies and the colonial perception of African labour and productivity by stressing that African labour was just as good as Chinese labour, if not better. In addition, it was pointed out that bringing Chinese labourers into the Gold Coast would lead to chaos and that Africans and Chinese labourers could not co-exist. They went as far as implying that the possible endemic animosity between Africans and Chinese would result in political instability. Another argument against Chinese labour migration was the fear of religious intolerance in the Gold Coast, arising from the fact that the Chinese were followers of Confucius. The arguments of the African elite were agreed upon by some of Governor Maxwell’s fellow countrymen. Mineral engineer Shelly, for example, wrote in the *African Review* that local Gold Coast workers were just as good as the Chinese. In regard to foreign labour, he expected Indian labour to be more beneficial, since Indians would adapt to the climate more easily and they were more likely to be accepted by the natives than the Chinese. A well-known British miner opposed Maxwell’s plans by stating that Chinese labour would be ‘ruinous’ to the Gold Coast. He believed that the Gold Coast would not benefit from Chinese labour because the Chinese had the habit of sending their wages back home.

But whereas organized labour in Britain and the white population in South Africa strongly opposed the import of Chinese labour into the Transvaal colony, the capitalist interests of the
development of the Gold Coast goldfields inspired both British business concerns and the colonial government to explore all labour options, including the use of Chinese labour. This eventually resulted in the support of Maxwell’s labour scheme. In July 1897 Governor Maxwell succeeded in bringing a small group of Chinese miners to the Gold Coast, but few details about these men are known. Their number has been estimated at between 16 and 30 persons, and they are said to have arrived, after a long journey from Singapore via Liverpool, in the Gold Coast port of Winneba. Weeks after their arrival they were sent to the eastern goldfields of Akyem Swedru, where they engaged in mining operations.

According to various newspaper reports, the Chinese labourers experienced difficulties in adjusting to the local circumstances such as the tropical climate. It was said that many, if not all of the Chinese labourers, became ill and ended up in Victoriaborg’s (Accra’s) hospital, where their presence created quite a stir among local residents. Others reported that the Chinese ‘did very little work’ and ‘wished to return home’. Apparently, the Chinese did work side by side with local African labourers, as one source described them as ‘unable to hold their own with the natives’.

Unfortunately, further information is unavailable. One of the reasons for this is that the first Chinese labour scheme in the Gold Coast turned out to be short-lived. Governor Maxwell died during a sea voyage in September 1897, and as a result of his death the scheme came to a sudden halt because the newly installed Governor declared the pilot scheme not viable. The Chinese labourers were sent home in November that year.

Despite the fact that the 1897 scheme was widely regarded as a failure and even called disastrous, the employment of Chinese labour did not come to a permanent halt. In 1902 and 1914 Chinese labourers were again brought into the Gold Coast, but the data on these Chinese migrant workers are scanty. The number of the 1902 contingent is said to be ‘a few’. The number of the 1914 group has been estimated between 26 and 30. Unlike the 1897 scheme, both the 1902 and the 1914 schemes were initiated directly by the Abontiakrom Mines instead of the colonial government. It is unclear how long the 1902 contingent stayed in the Gold Coast. According to one newspaper, all the men had died ‘under suspicious circumstances’. Although their death was not confirmed, this report implied that the Chinese had been unpopular amongst the locals. As for the 1914 group, they arrived via Germany in Sekondi, and they stayed in the Gold Coast anywhere between three months and three years.

Interestingly, the arrival of later contingents of Chinese workers did not receive as much opposition as the first contingent. This time the African intelligentsia was willing to accept the Chinese as long as their number remained limited. Moreover, they seemed to respect the work of the Chinese labourers.

According to Wang’s migration classification theory, these early Chinese migrant workers in the Gold Coast fit in the huagong (Chinese coolie) migration pattern. Therefore, it is likely that the Chinese labourers, similar to many other huagong in this period, were pushed to leave China in order
to escape war, famine, and poverty and in search of a way to earn a living or to simply survive. Given the fact that the 1897 contingent was sent from Singapore, it can be speculated that the men originated from the south-eastern coastal regions of China. As for the 1904 and 1914 groups, their area of origin is difficult to determine because in this period Chinese migrant labourers from north China were also leaving China to work overseas. Given the fact that the Gold Coast was particularly in need of skilled labour, the Chinese labourers in all three contingents were probably semi-skilled or perhaps skilled labourers.

Overall, the early Chinese presence in Ghana was extremely small, and there is no documentation of permanent Chinese settlements in the Gold Coast in that period. During World War I, Britain is said to have recruited Chinese mariners to dispatch them to various posts on a temporary basis. However, there are no figures or other details available. After the World War I, labour needs in the Gold Coast declined and the labour migration from China to Ghana halted completely. Chinese statistics estimate the number of Chinese in the Gold Coast in 1931 at just one. It would not be for another couple of decades that a more significant wave of Chinese migrants became visible in Ghana.

3.2 First period: from Nkrumah and Independence into the early-1970s (1950–75)

The first significant wave of Chinese migration to Ghana began in the late 1950s, a few years before Ghana’s independence from Great Britain, and lasted until the early 1970s.

Ethnographic research shows that, according to Chinese migrants with a longer history in Ghana, the Chinese presence reaches back to the late 1940s and early 1950s. Among this group of early migrants, origin stories with mythological overtones about how the Chinese first learnt of Ghana are widely known. In general these stories describe how several Hong Kong Chinese men were sailing around the Gulf of Guinea in the early 1950s when their ship ran into mechanical problems and they had to go ashore. This turned out to be the west coast of what was then British Gold Coast. The Chinese men found the country beautiful, the weather good, and the native people friendly. Moreover, they realized the land had economic potential. The Chinese reported their findings back to China, which subsequently led to small-scale Chinese migration to Ghana.

Indeed, most migrants in the 1950s and 1960s did come from southern China and Hong Kong in particular. This group of migrants consisted mainly of entrepreneurs and industrialists who were looking overseas for new markets. During the late 1940s many industrialists from the Shanghai region began moving their factories and businesses to Hong Kong in order to escape civil war and rising communism. Many of them contributed to the successful development of Hong Kong’s cotton textile industry. As a result of the influx of new businesses, however, Hong Kong’s market became overcrowded, pushing industrialists and entrepreneurs to seek new markets elsewhere. These new markets were found mainly in nearby South-East Asia, but some industrialists pioneered a bit further
and ended up in places as far and unknown as Africa.¹²⁸

British Gold Coast, soon to be independent Ghana, promised to be an interesting market as the country had hardly any industries. Trading business between China and Ghana began in the early 1950s with the establishment of a trade company that sold enamelware and cigarettes, among other products.¹²⁹

When the Gold Coast was on its way to become independent Ghana under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, it was looking for opportunities to break away from its colonial past. By transforming itself into an industrial country, Ghana would no longer have to rely on colonial trade. Therefore, investments from non-colonial countries were preferred over investments from colonial Europe.¹³⁰ This development created opportunities for Chinese entrepreneurs to set up industries and businesses in Ghana. As one of Conal Ho’s¹³¹ Chinese informants explained: ‘We had the knowledge for factories and they had the labour, they were just becoming independent and I don’t think they were that keen on aid from Europeans’. In addition to the economic pulling factors, the friendly, non-racist character of the Ghanaians and the ethnic stability were also mentioned by Chinese migrants: ‘You know, Ghanaians are very friendly and not racist, no ethnic wars, not like Togo or Ivory Coast. And they were very tame, easy to work with, and welcomed foreigners’.¹³² Furthermore, the British connection and the use of English made doing business in Ghana especially convenient for businessmen from Hong Kong.

The very first Chinese factories in Ghana manufactured enamelware. Industrialists reckoned that a developing country like Ghana could have a market for enamelware or ‘the poor man’s cooking utensils’, and they were proven right.¹³³ At the height of their existence in Ghana, metalwork and cotton textile factories dominated the Chinese industries. In addition, smaller industries that made glass lamps, paper, pencils, and hair-care products were also found.¹³⁴

Initially the Chinese industrialists and entrepreneurs settled on Ghana’s west coast. The city of Takoradi, 200 kilometres west of Accra, was the only deep-sea harbour in Ghana at that time, so industrial development, including Chinese factories, began there. When in 1961 the Tema harbour (near Accra) was developed, most Chinese businesses were established in the Tema-Accra region.¹³⁵

It was after the establishment of their factories that successful Chinese directors often returned to Hong Kong to conduct other businesses. They visited Ghana infrequently and employed foremen and managers from Hong Kong to take over daily business operations.¹³⁶ These employees were males, often bachelors who saw moving to Ghana as an adventure, a chance to see the world or a way to earn a better salary, while other men had left their families back in Hong Kong.¹³⁷ In the 1960s, families or wives from Hong Kong were eventually brought over to Ghana. Some of the bachelors returned to Hong Kong to get married and moved back to Ghana with their new wives. Interestingly, virtually none of the Chinese migrants viewed their stay in Ghana as permanent.¹³⁸

In addition to Chinese migrants from Hong Kong, from the early 1960s onward a small number of Chinese from the newly founded PRC began to arrive in Ghana.¹³⁹ Following the
establishment of political and economic ties between Nkrumah’s Ghana and the PRC in 1959, the first Chinese embassy was opened in 1960 in Accra by Ambassador Huang Hua. This embassy quickly became an important regional centre for communist China’s activities in Africa. China supported the Ghanaian government economically by providing aid such as loans and, more practically, by sending Chinese advisors such as agricultural experts, technicians, medical personnel, and educational staff. For example, in 1964 a Chinese professor of history worked in Ghana for half a year. He was the only Chinese lecturer that appeared on an African campus in the 1960s and the following decades.

Politically, the PRC supported Nkrumah’s ideology of pan-Africanism and shared his ideas on using political warfare. In 1960 two military training camps for African freedom fighters from all over the continent were set up with the help of Russian and Chinese agents. These camps, the first one in Half Assini, deep in the bush near the border with Ivory Coast, and a second one in Obenemasi, were operated, respectively, by 5 and 17 Chinese military instructors, including 3 colonels. Training included guerrilla warfare, the making of explosives and the use of weapons, and telecommunications and battlefield first-aid.

During the second half of the 1960s, Ghana’s political situation deteriorated and eventually resulted in the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966. China’s help and influence were no longer accepted in Ghana. Consequently, all embassy staff withdrew from Ghana in 1966. The aid workers and advisers were expelled from the country. Some were even attacked, as happened to a group of Chinese technicians.

In order to determine to which migration pattern the Chinese migrants of this first period belong, one needs to draw a distinction between the migrants that came via Hong Kong and the Chinese expatriates from the PRC. The first group of industrialists and their staff fit in the huashang (Chinese trader) pattern, since they predominantly migrated to Ghana to pursue business and trade activities. The idea of considering their stay in Ghana as temporary, however, does correspond with the Chinese huaqiao mentality. The expatriates from the PRC can best be considered as huaqiao (sojourner) in the broadest sense of the term. They share some of the characteristics that are related to the huaqiao pattern. For example, the diplomats and advisers can be regarded as educated or skilled professionals. Similar to the huashang, the huaqiao from the PRC intended to stay in Ghana on a temporary basis. This intention, however, was not based on their own decision but on the fact that they were sent by the government to periodically serve the ideological and political objectives of communist China in Africa.

Unfortunately, there is not much detailed information for this period available in terms of the Chinese migrants’ personal experiences, perceptions, intercultural communications, and relations with Ghanaians. General reports on Communist Chinese embassy staff in Africa show that they tended to
confine themselves to the compound and avoid mixing with local people.\textsuperscript{149} However, Ambassador Huang Hua enjoyed a good reputation as an effective informal representative with good local contacts and great communication skills. According to Bruce Larkin, Communist Chinese representation in Africa during the 1960s included a number of people with linguistic and diplomatic abilities as well as journalists working for the New China Agency.\textsuperscript{150} Explicit data on these \textit{huaqiao} is lacking.

A little more is known about the experiences of the Cantonese-speaking migrants in Ghana. For example, Zhu Yinian, a 63-year-old Chinese industrialist from Shanghai remembered the stories from his father, a pioneer in seeking business opportunities in Ghana before Independence. According to Zhu’s father, the Chinese migrants experienced many difficulties with the colonial government, as the British were not willing to issue work permits. He also told his son about the arduous living conditions in Ghana and how hard it was to bear the terrible heat on a daily basis, as well as other untold hardships. Nevertheless, Zhu’s father succeeded in establishing several flourishing businesses such as a trading company and enamelware factories.\textsuperscript{151} Some online sources mention the Chinese in the region being flown into Accra for Christmas parties hosted by the Fujianese spouse of a Hong Kong \textit{huashang} migrant. It is stated that this lady was very active in voluntary work and set up several foundations aimed at helping economically deprived Ghanaians.\textsuperscript{152}

As for the numbers, these are somewhat conflicting for this period. In Ho’s work, the total number of Chinese in 1957 is estimated at 100.\textsuperscript{153} Chinese statistics give the Chinese migrants in Ghana as 250 in 1969 and over 300 in 1975.\textsuperscript{154} Other sources state that, in the wake of the coup in 1966, 430 Communist Chinese were expelled from Ghana, though it is unclear if this number included the contingent of 207 technicians.\textsuperscript{155}

\section*{3.3 Second period: coming and going: political unrest in Ghana (1975–92)}

After the political coup that overthrew Nkrumah, Ghana entered two decades of political instability. Several coups and various governments eventually resulted in the establishment of the Jerry Rawlings government and his National Democratic Congress party in 1992, after he seized power for the second time. These political changes impacted the Chinese diaspora in Ghana.

During the late 1960s most of the \textit{huaqiao} expatriates from the PRC had to leave the country, and the once warm friendship between Ghana and China was frozen. Even though the Chinese embassy was reopened in 1972, they kept a low-key profile.\textsuperscript{156} Moreover, as China was absorbed in dealing with the aftermath of its destructive Cultural Revolution, it had no time, means, or will to engage in foreign affairs.

For the industrialist migrants who came to Ghana during the first period, Ghana’s political unrest meant that the economic tide was turning. The young and troubled nation saw years of economic mismanagement, and new government policies were introduced aimed at industries
becoming solely governmental or one hundred per cent Ghana-owned. These national policies left little room for the long-term establishment of Chinese companies.\textsuperscript{157}

As mentioned above, most—if not all—Chinese \textit{huashang} migrants viewed their stay in Ghana as temporary, and many regarded this period of political and economic change as the right moment to leave Ghana for new beginnings, either at home or in the Western world. According to Ho, this resulted in a ‘dramatic population decrease among the Chinese in Ghana’.\textsuperscript{158} Nevertheless, some Chinese migrants were unwilling or unable to leave Ghana, because they had, for example, fewer economic and social resources to relocate. Those who stayed often continued to be employed by the remaining Chinese factories or became independent entrepreneurs in either the restaurant business or in smaller factories for household items or metalwork.\textsuperscript{159}

For some of the owners of the Chinese factories that continued operating in Ghana, the new political and economic climate turned out to be financially lucrative as they saw opportunities to change national policies to their benefit.\textsuperscript{160} Until the 1990s, Ghana controlled foreign currency by allowing only certain companies to use foreign currency for purchasing equipment or resources required for operating their factories. Any surplus of foreign currency could be traded on Ghana’s black currency market, where foreign currency was exchanged for Ghana Cedis at a higher exchange rate, as much as three times the official value. Then these Cedis were exchanged for foreign currency at government banks, where they were given a high rate. Consequently, in order to generate profitable foreign currency, factories misstated the required amount of foreign exchange by over-invoicing or bringing in fewer goods than they reported. According to Ho’s research, this was considered a normal and widespread practice of doing business in developing countries at the time.\textsuperscript{161}

Owing to the government policies, long-term investment in Ghana was considered risky. Lack of investment and the manoeuvre for foreign currency often led to factories that operated on a minimal level without renewing equipment and updating forms of production. As a result, the Chinese workers at such factories did not get the necessary training to develop their skills in a way that they could use outside the developing countries. Moreover, some of the Chinese factories that were no longer profitable were financially supported by the Ghanaian government in order to remain open. The reason behind this help was purely political: the Ghanaian policy makers were afraid that shutting down factories would lead to worker unrest and chaos.\textsuperscript{162}

Thus, national Ghanaian policies created both mobility and immobility for the Chinese migrants in Ghana and functioned therefore as pull and push factors. Despite the lack of mobility for some, those migrants that remained in Ghana continued to view their stay in Ghana as temporary, just as they did in the previous period.\textsuperscript{163}

Before the 1980s the Chinese population in Ghana was dominated by the presence of Hong Kong Chinese, but in contrast to the Hong Kong Chinese expatriates that left Ghana during this period of uncertainty, the first signs of Chinese migration out of the PRC to Ghana began to appear. After Deng Xiaoping introduced his \textit{kaige kaifang} economic reform, a few Chinese from mainland China
slowly began entering Ghana. They were often *huashang* migrants, interested in exploring the economic opportunities of Ghana and its market.\textsuperscript{164}

For this period, the number of Chinese migrants is again indefinite. The *Encyclopedia of the Overseas Chinese* gives a total number of 300 in 1975.\textsuperscript{165} Taking into consideration that many of the first-wave migrants left Ghana and only a few newcomers from the PRC arrived, the total number of Chinese in Ghana is likely to have remained several hundred until the mid-1990s.

### 3.4 Third period: new Chinese migrants in Ghana

From the mid-1990s the most recent and so far most visible wave of Chinese migration to Ghana began to gather speed. The people that make up this group of migrants can be categorized as new Chinese migrants and are therefore likely to share—at least in part—those characteristics that have been described in the previous chapter. Generally speaking, three types of new Chinese migrants are the main source of new Chinese faces in Ghana today: migrants who works as traders or entrepreneurs; skilled professionals such as technicians, engineers, aid workers, and medical staff; and those who are employed by private companies or SOEs with multinational aspirations, often on a contractual basis. However, aside from this kind of general information, there is very little detail available about the so-called new migrants who now live and work in Ghana.

The total number of Chinese living and working in Ghana remains uncertain. One source stated the total number of Chinese migrants to be around 1,000 in 1999, including 60 Taiwanese merchants.\textsuperscript{166} Sautman & Hairong estimated the Chinese presence to have been 500 in 2001 and to have risen to 6,000 in 2006.\textsuperscript{167} In 2009 the Chinese ambassador stated that according to his information the total number of Chinese in 2009 would be approximately 10,000.\textsuperscript{168} The reason behind this uncertainty is found in the inability of the Chinese embassy to keep track of the number of Chinese entering Ghana, as there are many illegal entrants and not all migrants choose to register.\textsuperscript{169} Other factors are misidentification and the often temporary or transitory status of Chinese in Ghana.\textsuperscript{170}

Unlike the Cantonese-speaking *huaqiao* migrants who arrived in Ghana throughout the 1980s,\textsuperscript{171} some of the new Chinese migrants are moving beyond the Accra-Tema region. The reasons for this are likely to be found either in the search for new markets or in the contracts for large construction projects that are not confined to the Accra region, especially since the less developed regions that are often the recipient of infrastructure projects lie in more remote areas of Ghana. From a broad perspective these new Chinese migrants in Ghana are likely to be influenced by the push and pull factors analyzed by Pieke: emigration legislation and social-economic reform set in motion subsequent emigration from the PRC and pulled Chinese migrants to new frontiers such as Africa.\textsuperscript{172} But on a micro-level there is little information about personal incentives for China-Ghana migration: What does a Chinese person hope to find in a country as far away and culturally different from China
as Ghana is? Furthermore, we know almost nothing about the individual backgrounds of the new Chinese migrants in Ghana. For example: where in China do they originate from? One of the characteristics of the new Chinese migrants is that they are likely to originate from areas different from the traditional migrant areas such as Guangdong and Fujian. However, precisely which areas can be defined as new areas of migration can only be determined through fieldwork.

Furthermore, much is unknown about the personal experiences and the lifestyles of the new migrants. Research on Chinese contract workers in Tanzania during the late 1970s mentioned sacrifices that were made in relation to traditional Chinese food-culture while living in Africa, in terms of not having access to Chinese ingredients. Do new Chinese migrants from the reformed and economically more developed China experience similar problems, or can they adapt to local lifestyles more easily? Dobler showed that in Namibia Chinese traders often live frugal lifestyles and use family labour. Do Chinese traders in Ghana live a comparable lifestyle?

Chinese are often regarded as a mono-cultural and rather xenophobic people with limited knowledge of and interest in cultures other than their own. In terms of integration and social interaction, the often-described communication problems caused by language barriers are likely to create difficulties for new Chinese migrants in Ghana. This raises questions about how they work with or around these language problems.

New Chinese migrants in Africa, in particular personnel living in compounds, are also portrayed as having relatively little contact with local African communities. Hsu, for example, pointed out that in Zanzibar there were regulations that required Chinese medical workers to spend the evenings indoors and not to mix with the local population outside working hours. Are similar restrictions also imposed on new Chinese migrants in Ghana? And, if they are, how do they feel about this?

Furthermore, Ho showed that Chinese migrants from the previous period see their stay in Ghana, regardless of its length, as temporary. Do the new migrants in Ghana view their migration as just temporary, or do they have different ideas about creating a possible future for themselves in Ghana? From the late 1990s, when Chinese traders and retailers began to appear in Africa, one finds an increasing number of negative stories and rumours about the Chinese in Africa reported by the media or through the grapevine, despite Ghana being known as relatively open and accepting towards Chinese migrants. Such stories began to appear in the Ghanaian media in the early 2000s. These stories raise questions about Chinese migrants in Ghana: questions about labour disputes, about living conditions that can either be luxurious or basic compared with local standards, about unfair competition in business and accusations of convict labour, and about criminal activities and fathering babies.

A large and relevant body of these news headlines, accusations, and questions will be analyzed in the next chapter. Other questions and theories that have been described in this section will be addressed through the results from my fieldwork in Tamale and are presented in Chapter Five.
C H A P T E R 4

Criticism, Conflict & Controversy

As fairly noted by the Afrobarometer report, the existing literature on Sino-African relations is highly polarized both inside and outside Africa. On the one hand, scholars, African politicians, and policy makers praise the increased Chinese investment as a means of stimulating economic development in several African countries; on the other hand, opponents (often Western) caution over the potentially disadvantageous repercussions of such investments with their inevitable political consequences.

According to theories originating from the former, sympathetic literature, China’s ‘oil-for-infrastructure’ contracts, despite the surrounding controversial business practices, are providing Africa with what it needs: ‘quality capital that actually funds investment, jobs for its people and economic growth’. These are, as Dambiso Moyo observes, ‘things that (Western) aid promised, but has consistently failed to deliver’. Or, as the Sierra Leonean ambassador to Beijing put it: ‘If a G8 country had wanted to rebuild our stadium, we’d still be here holding meetings. The Chinese just come and do it’.

Counter voices have been stressing the damaging effects which are brought into African markets under Chinese influence, the substandard working conditions practiced by many Chinese firms, and the fact that China is disregarding human rights. Elizabeth Ohene, Ghana’s former Minister of State in the Kufuor Administration, warned that ‘the methods of the Chinese might be slightly different from those we have been used to from the Western nations we have been dealing with for the past 300 years, but the Chinese I have come across are as ruthless in business as any “master of the universe” on Wall Street.’ She urges readers not to ever forget that ‘the Chinese are here and everywhere else to make money’.

In addition, an increasing number of popular media reports and individual online blogs show similar contrasting opinions, opinions in which the disapproving ones tend to have the upper hand. Having said that, systematic analyses of the ordinary African public’s perception of the rapidly growing China-Africa links and their underlying determinants are difficult to find in the academic literature. However, the limited number of these types of studies does suggest that the largely negative rhetoric emanating from much of the literature and popular media may be exaggerated. For example, a recent survey of 250 university students across nine countries, including Ghana, found that respondents in all countries were on average ‘satisfied’ with Chinese companies that work on large projects in their respective countries. The 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Survey entitled Global Unease...
with Major World Powers had a similar outcome: 75 per cent of those surveyed in Ghana hold an approving view of China and its investments in Ghana. Further research by the Afrobarometer showed that, overall, Africans, including Ghanaians, regard the Chinese in a rather positive light.

Notwithstanding these overall positive public perceptions, caution is needed when analyzing the results from these research projects, as these results can by no means be interpreted as suggesting overall African approval for the Chinese. Moreover, in Ghana there is a growing body of evidence, albeit anecdotal, that tensions related to the growing presence of Chinese involvement in Ghana are increasing. According to Giles Mohan, many of the tensions relate to economic factors but are expressed in terms of cultural difference.

Related to this, of course, is the perception of the growth in the number of Chinese migrants and expats in Ghana. Some of the increasing tensions seem founded on older prejudices while others are born mainly out of contemporary circumstances. In order to distinguish between facts and rumours, in this chapter I will discuss the most striking examples of anecdotal evidence of controversies and tensions that have attracted considerable attention in Ghana. Subsequently, these findings on the general reputation of the Chinese in Ghana, in combination with the previous chapter, will provide the contextual background for the questions laid out in the Tamale fieldwork in Chapter Five.

4.1 Conflicts & cases: example cases of conflicts and tensions in Ghana

Controversial infrastructure projects

One of the most controversial project types China is involved in on the African continent is the building of hydropower dams. In Ghana, the 400-megawatt Bui Dam is one such controversial and debated project. As part of its development assistance, China has provided low-interest loans to the Ghanaian government to dam one part of the Black Volta River in the Bui National Park, which lies in remote western Ghana on the border with Ivory Coast. The contract for this project was won by Sinohydro in 2005.

The Bui Dam project is controversial for several reasons. Firstly, dams of this type are seen as ecologically damaging and socially disruptive. The Bui Dam is being built within the Bui National Park, and it is estimated that about one-third of the park will be lost to the project, including its land and wildlife. In addition, local farmers and inhabitants risk losing their houses and farms. Secondly, some voices contend that, considering the natural circumstances, a project like this is simply impossible and certain to fail, stressing it is only about economic gain and political games between two governments. Lastly, there have been several reports of Sinohydro not respecting local labour laws and conditions (this topic will be addressed in detail later).
As for the need for such a dam on a continent where only nine countries have fewer than fifty
days with power-cuts each year, the potential for hydropower is enormous. Mohan correctly states that
since Ghana lacks infrastructure and experiences severe problems with electricity, projects like the Bui
Dam therefore can be seen as absolutely vital for Ghana and countries like it.

In regard to ecological issues, apart from some Internet activism, Mohan found that not one
NGO in Ghana has opposed the building of the Bui Dam. Furthermore, Peter Bosshard, policy
director of advocacy group International Rivers, declared that China has recently been changing its
attitude towards environmental issues significantly. For instance, in 2009 the first dialogue between a
Chinese SOE and an international advocacy group resulted in a Chinese commitment to protect the
environment and consider implementing a world-class environmental policy. Despite these
optimistic views, it seems inevitable that some costs will be incurred at the expense of the
environment. As Deborah Brautigam stressed, Europe and North America built their dams before there
were many concerns about resettlement and the environment and had the same effect on land,
communities, and livelihood. Socially, the Bui Dam project seems less disruptive than expected:
according to James K. Habia’s extensive fieldwork in and around the Bui project site, all of the
relocated citizens expressed satisfaction with their compensation and were pleased with their new
houses.

*Labour disputes, working conditions, and accusations of maltreatment*

In 2009, during an official visit of a Chinese herbal medical company to the presidential palace, the
newly elected President, John Atta Mills, advised Chinese companies to consider the interests of their
workers and the people they deal with in their business operations. Indeed, in the past few years
Ghanaian media has increasingly reported labour disputes between local workers and their Chinese
supervisors. In some of these newspaper articles, the Chinese are accused of maltreatment and
violence.

For example, many reports have given attention to the labour disputes prevalent at the Bui
Dam. Ghanaian workers have complained about salary, poor safety, and the lack of security
measures. Some casual employees at Bui expressed anger about their assigned accommodation. They
felt that the former abandoned classrooms or makeshift cubicles used as shared, 14-person
dormitories were too cramped and lacked sufficient protection against mosquitoes and the notorious
debilitating black flies, while their Chinese expat supervisors lived very comfortably and healthily
in air-conditioned mobile homes. In addition, Ghanaian labourers at Bui stated that the Chinese
management did not care about hard-hats and generally failed to provide protective gear.

Similar accusations regarding safety were articulated by the workers of a Chinese plastic-
sandal factory, who in 2005 stormed the office of a local newspaper in order to express their
In 2009 The Ghanaian Chronicle reported on casual employees working on the construction of the Sofoline Interchange near Kumasi, who went as far as taking over the construction site by placing the Chinese management under siege and burning car tires while chanting war songs amidst drumming and dancing. This was all in protest against poor working conditions, meagre salaries, and harsh treatment at the hands of their expatriate employers. They accused the Chinese expats of violating local labour rights and expressed their anger at being categorized as casual employees even after years of working. That these situations can get seriously out of hand was illustrated by a media report about a labour dispute between Ghanaian employees who were dissatisfied with their continued status as casual workers and their Chinese supervisors. This dispute apparently ended in violence, and two Chinese managers were arrested for physically attacking Ghanaian employees. Sadly, Chinese companies disrespecting local labour laws are recorded throughout the African continent. Having said that, the Chinese companies seem to be attacked for practices that are by no means exclusively Chinese and can also be found in local companies and multinationals.

First, the casualisation of employment. Large Chinese companies operating in Africa usually offer local labourers casual positions or fixed-term contract jobs without pension or security. These casual workers are entitled to lower housing, medical, and educational allowances than permanent workers, something that in several African countries is regarded as unfair by local labourers and is often in violation of local labour law. The driver behind casualisation of employment is the capitalist logic of accumulation and is basically used to cut costs. This is not a uniquely Chinese modus operandi; in fact, as Liu puts it, it is a global problem, even affecting the advanced industrial world. In Africa, Western and African companies also make use of casual labour.

Salary is another one of the topics that has led to many protests at Chinese companies operating in Ghana. According to the Baah & Jauch report, Chinese employers tend to be amongst the lowest-paying in Africa, and wages above the national average are found only at those Chinese companies with a strong local union presence. From the Chinese perspective, one of the reasons for low wages is that China’s own development began first with similarly low wages that allowed more people to find more jobs; hence, cutting labour costs will help the development of future generations. At the Bui Dam, construction workers get paid GH 3.00 per day and drivers GH 4.00. This is just above the minimum wage of GH 2.25 daily. While nobody would regard this work as particularly well-paid, it certainly is not much more than, for example, the wages local employees receive at European-owned and -run coastal resorts. Moreover, schoolteachers and medical personnel working for the government receive even less, if they get paid at all. Unfortunately, there are indications that some employees at Bui, such as cleaners, earn less than the national minimum wage.

Leaving basic salary aside, problems of Chinese companies not paying overtime taxes and bonuses or skimping on food or material are also heard. For example, at a Tamale secondary school construction site, local workers angrily complained about not receiving their end-of-service gratuity
after an agreed period of work and believed that they were taxed unfairly twice. They also accused the Chinese management of selling leftover building material at the local market and keeping the profit for personal use.\textsuperscript{219}

Some of the Ghanaian news reports lead one to believe that Chinese expats live luxuriously and in very different circumstances from local labourers. In contrast, other sources from the continent have indicated that the Chinese migrants and expats are respected by Africans for their frugal lifestyle, especially when compared with their Western colleagues.\textsuperscript{220}

In regard to safety, Chinese companies in both China and Africa have a notoriously bad reputation, and standards are often simply not met.\textsuperscript{221} Studies in many African countries have consistently shown that there is a very high tendency for Chinese companies to ignore local labour laws and safety regulation,\textsuperscript{222} although some African companies can also be blamed for this. Chinese companies in Africa generally seem to apply the same low-level standards that have been common in many parts of China, particularly in the ‘town and village enterprises’.\textsuperscript{223}

Baah and Jauch’s 2009 labour report showed that workers in Chinese companies usually work long hours and receive lower pay, compared with their counterparts in other companies within the same industry. Some workers are even forced to work overtime without being paid for these hours.\textsuperscript{224}

In Africa, unions are generally weak, and employers, including the Chinese, undermine collective bargaining. Trade unions have encountered many problems when trying to organize workers, as many workers fear for their jobs and thus are forced to endure highly exploitative conditions. According to the previously mentioned labour report, Chinese businesses in Africa are unfamiliar with independent unions, because the Chinese national union (AFRTU) is directly controlled by the Chinese government. As a result, they tend to see trade unions as ‘troublemakers’ and prefer to determine wages and working conditions for their staff unilaterally. In addition, communication problems caused by language barriers between local unions and Chinese companies have also been mentioned.\textsuperscript{225} However, in the few cases where collective bargaining occurs, wages and working conditions tend to be improved in line with conditions elsewhere in the country. In Ghana there are significant differences noted between the conditions of employment of unionized and non-unionized Chinese construction companies. At Bui, for example, the Chinese management refused to sign employment contracts with all the Ghanaian workers until the Construction and Building Material Workers’ Union (CBMWU) of the Ghana TUC (Trades Unions Congress) stepped in to unionize the workers.\textsuperscript{226}

Baah and Jauch have also pointed out that in many instances Chinese businesses appear to be openly or indirectly supported by host African governments who defend Chinese investments against the demands of labour. Therefore, regarding the case of the Bui project, Habbia ultimately held the Ghanaian government responsible for regulating and monitoring labour issues on site and concluded that they failed to do so correctly.\textsuperscript{227}
Chinese Casanovas

In recent years some complaints by African (including Ghanaian) female employees about sexual harassment by Chinese supervisors have been reported.\textsuperscript{228} Even though up until the time of writing no official charges have been pressed, the topic remains sensitive and difficult. Closely related to sexual harassment by Chinese expats are the rumours about Chinese Casanovas who are fathering African babies. These stories are heard all over the continent and even made it back to China and Europe through the online media.\textsuperscript{229}

A similar story circulated in the Tamale region during and after the building of Tamale’s soccer stadium in 2006. According to various sources, two Chinese construction workers got sexually involved with local girls, resulting in the pregnancy of these two young females.\textsuperscript{230} When the pregnant girls were sent by their families to the construction site to confront the alleged fathers with their deeds, the Chinese workers were forced by their management to stand in line in order be identified. But as it turned out, the girls were unable to recognize the men that had made them pregnant. Apparently, this was because the features of the Chinese struck them as too similar. None of the Chinese construction workers revealed themselves as a possible father either. The girls’ families were unwilling to confirm the accusations to the press and did not press any charges. As one media report suggested, this may have to do with the cultural and religious traditions of the predominantly Muslim Dagbani people in Tamale.\textsuperscript{231} The same report linked the pregnancy story to a Chinese-manufactured aphrodisiac sold widely in Ghana, for which the authors believe the Chinese are well-known, implying Chinese men have high libidos.\textsuperscript{232} Eventually the widespread rumour and gossip resulted in a warning, broadcast by a local radio station, to local families to keep their daughters away from the stadium construction site.

This story, although it was locally well-known, did not seem to have much influence on the attitude of the local Tamale population towards the Chinese expats.\textsuperscript{233} It appeared that the unprecedented building of a modern stadium in their city carried more weight. However, stories about Chinese Casanovas do raise a topic that is often neglected within China-Africa studies: marriage and relationship customs of Chinese migrants. How do Chinese migrants deal with marriage and personal relationship customs when adapting to a new life in Ghana? Since marriage and building a family is a crucial component in the structure of Chinese society, migrating or expatriating without a family will have consequences. Is marrying or forming a relationship with a local Ghanaian at all an option and, if so, what about communication and cultural differences?
Importing convict labour

A different criticism regarding the Chinese involvement in Africa is that the large-scale import of labour from China does not provide the much-needed employment opportunities for local workers. Concerning imported labour, Brautigam explained that the widespread idea of Chinese who bring over planeloads of their own workers and do not employ Africans is simply incorrect. The actual number of imported labourers depends on the companies, the types of projects, and the agreements made between Chinese companies and various African governments. 234

Ghana in general is much stricter in applying both its investment code, which sets a high minimum limit for investments, and its immigration laws, which limit labour importation. For example, at the Bui Dam project site, around 250–300 Chinese and around 2,000 Ghanaians are employed. 235 In Tamale, a large secondary school was built by more than 200 local workers supervised by a team of only 8 Chinese construction engineers. Ghana also has projects where larger contingents of Chinese workers filled most jobs. For instance, the total workforce of 230 persons at the Tamale Stadium project consisted of 150 Chinese and 80 Ghanaians, but in this case the Chinese company had employed more Chinese because of their technical expertise and the time limit imposed for the completion of the project.

Closely related to imported labour is the very persistent and controversial rumour, heard all over Africa and beyond, that part of China’s imported labour is sourced from convicts. 236 In Ghana these rumours are also circulating. When the stadiums in Sekondi-Takoradi and Tamale were built by large contingents of Chinese workers, word went out that they were ex-convicts. In Tamale, this rumour quickly spread around town and reached the local media. Even though there has been no evidence to prove that China is using convict labour in Ghana or anywhere else, 237 and the Ghanaian Minister for Sports and Education made an effort to debunk these rumours on a radio show, 238 the Chinese convict stories remain persistent. Needless to say, these rumours are potentially damaging for the reputation of Chinese construction companies in Ghana and their Chinese employees.

Inferior goods & unfair competition

In Ghana, just as in many other African countries, shops and market stalls are increasingly filled with Chinese-made consumer goods. From shoes to toothpaste and from motorcycles to medicines, and even African wax cloth—it is all Made in China.

In addition to Africans selling Chinese products, there are more and more ‘China shops’ to be found, partially owned and/or run by Chinese migrants. 239 The import of Chinese products as well as the presence of Chinese traders is an increasingly criticized phenomenon on the African continent, Ghana included. The reasons for criticism can be found, on the one hand, in the quality of the Chinese
products and, on the other hand, in the unfair competition these products generate. In addition, the Chinese are accused of being swindlers and having a shady way of dealing with local laws and regulations.240

As far as quality is concerned, many of the Chinese products that are sold in Africa are not of the same quality as the Chinese products exported to Europe and the U.S. Many sources believe that Africa receives from China the bulk of B-grade goods which are unsuitable for other markets.241 Furthermore, the scandals about fake or toxic products from China reached news headlines in Africa just as they did in the rest of the world. Headlines on toxic Chinese produce have inspired local Ghanaian opinion-makers to call for overall tighter control of products, criticizing not only Chinese but also African companies and governments for making products that do not meet safety standards.242 In practice, the Chinese-imported products in Ghana consist of both high- and low-quality merchandise. The products for sale in Ghana’s larger cities and rural areas resemble the quality of those sold in China’s less affluent urban neighbourhoods and rural villages.243

Considering the proliferation of stories about inferior Chinese products, it is important to distinguish between genuinely inferior quality and exaggerated stories that create misperceptions244 of all Chinese produce, thereby unfairly damaging the Chinese reputation.

For example, in 2009 it was reported that the majority of the 400 Chinese-made Yaxing buses operated by Ghana National Metro Mass Transit (MMT) bus services were grounded. Oral stories and reports in popular media about the inferior quality of the Chinese buses, presumably a gift from the PRC, and the unavailability of spare parts to local mechanics spread quickly around the country, creating outrage among locals affected by discontinued services. In addition, it was said that the Chinese company had been unwilling to send Chinese technicians, and hence the technical problems.245 However, it turned out that there was much more to this story than just another report focusing on the inferiority of Chinese products. According to Mr. Visschers, the Dutch manager of MMT, the lack of spare parts and the absence of trained mechanics and Chinese operating manuals translated into English were the main causes of the standstill. In addition, he stated that the buses were not suitable for a tropical climate. Other sources noted that the vehicles were actually procured by the former Ghanaian NPP Minister of Transport, who stressed that the buses were not of the inferior quality portrayed. He also stated firmly that Chinese hands were indeed available to offer training to Ghanaian mechanics. Furthermore, he noted that the buses were ‘tropicalized’ by modifying windows and shock absorbers to deal with the prevailing climatic conditions in Ghana.

Somewhat later, a Ghana News Agency (GNA) inquiry reported problems between the management of the MMT and the Chinese engineers who had actually been in Ghana since March 2004 in order to maintain the buses. According to the report, the Chinese and the MMT management worked cordially until a new management was appointed, which purchased a fleet of non-Chinese buses. From that point on, the Chinese engineers were no longer welcome at the yard to participate in the maintenance of the buses, leaving the buses un-serviced and unmaintained. In 2008 a team of
Chinese technicians, sent by the bus manufacturer, reported to the Ghana Ministry of Transport that tap water instead of coolant was being used to fill the buses’ radiators, often leading to rust, overheating, and blockage of the cooling system. Unauthorized modifications to engines, the removal of parts, and the improper operation of the buses resulted in damage to the pedals and the clutches.  

Despite the fact that some of the Chinese articles sold in Africa are indeed of inferior quality and often ready for improvement, the import of cheap Chinese products at the same time offers local customers a chance to buy new consumer goods at competitive prices, which gives them the opportunity to improve their standard of living and has, according to the ACET report, enabled savings for the average Ghanaian consumer.

In addition, there are Chinese-made products that are good value for money and becoming increasingly popular among the Ghanaian population. Examples are Chinese traditional herbal products and medicines such as anti-malaria ACTs (Artemisinin Combination Therapies), which is widely praised for its usefulness by both local and Western medical practitioners.

Regarding unfair competition, China is often accused of forcing Africa into the role of raw materials’ supplier. For many, the influx of Chinese imports means undermining local production and contributing to the decline of local industries. An example of such an industry is the local Ghanaian furniture-manufacturing industry, which is believed to have collapsed owing to low-cost imports from China. However, the largest and most talked-about example in the context of unfair competition is Ghana’s textile industry.

A Chinese tsunami or invasion of cheap Chinese textiles, including copies of wax-print cloth, is said to have seriously hit Ghana’s textile industry, which once functioned as the first and most important player in the post-Independence Ghanaian industrial sector. For almost two decades after Independence the Ghanaian textile industry contributed significantly to employment and economic growth and was a main source of foreign exchange. However, during the 1980s and 1990s the industry dramatically declined, with employment falling from 27,000 in the mid-1970s to 5,000 in the year 2000. During the heyday of Ghana’s textile industry, several textile mills were owned and operated by Chinese huashang migrants (Chinese sojourners), who came to Ghana during the first period of China-Ghana migration. Whereas the earlier presence of Chinese in the textile industry was not viewed as a threat and was mainly welcomed, the later trend of importing and manufacturing textiles is increasingly viewed as trespassing. Furthermore, the Chinese are accused of illegal import of textiles, particularly wax-prints. Strong words are used in a growing number of newspaper reports, with titles such as ‘Textile Workers Declare War on Chinese Importer’.

But is the collapse of Ghana’s textile industry to be blamed solely on Chinese-imported textiles? According to Peter Quartey, during the early 1980s it was the shortage of foreign exchange for importing raw materials that resulted in Ghana’s textile sector operating at extremely low capacity. Consequently, most of these industries went out of business and the situation deteriorated further under trade liberalisation. The reforms led to increased importation of textiles and other used apparel,
which facilitated the death and closure of many textile industries in Ghana just as it did in other African countries, making it a sector-related problem. Over the past few years, the sector has shown considerable interest in increasing production for the local market and also taking advantage of the opportunities provided under AGOA (The African Growth and Opportunity Act), but the threat of cheap imports, including smuggled items, form a major challenge to the survival of the few existing industries.\textsuperscript{255} Indeed, the steep rise in imported textiles all over Africa is, as Brautigam also showed, very real.\textsuperscript{256} Nevertheless, the competition for textile industries in Ghana is not limited to Chinese textiles but also comes from neighbouring Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and increasingly from Pakistan and India.\textsuperscript{257}

**Chinese criminals**

As mentioned above, there have been signs that the Chinese in Ghana are increasingly accused of violating local laws when doing business. Lately, various incidents of Chinese who are evidently involved in serious criminal activities have been reported throughout the media. These criminal actions include, among others, human trafficking, sex trade, prostitution, illegal mining, and pirate fishing.\textsuperscript{258} One particular case of pirate fishing received considerable attention from the national press when it came to a violent clash between local canoe fishermen and Chinese trawler fishermen who were accused of pirate fishing and using dynamite.\textsuperscript{259}

Despite the fact that pirate fishing with large trawlers or dynamite fishing is a serious threat to the local Ghanaian fishing industry, an industry which many inhabitants of coastal regions depend on, such criminal practices, like the other crimes mentioned earlier, are by no means an exclusively Chinese practice.\textsuperscript{260} Furthermore, misidentification with Japanese, Vietnamese, or Korean fishermen has also been common. Nevertheless, the media coverage and oral spreading of such stories could contribute to a negative perception of the Chinese in Ghana.

**4.2 Concluding questions**

Being portrayed in the Ghanaian media as job-stealing labourers, Casanovas, unfair competitors, textile smugglers, traders and manufacturers of inferior goods, and even criminals, it would be interesting to discover the reaction of the subjects of these stories.

Are the Chinese who are working and living in Ghana aware of their reputation, and how do they think the Ghanaians perceive them? What does it mean for a Chinese expatriate to see exotic African market stalls filled with products from their home country? Do they regard these imports as unfair competition, and what are their opinions of the quality of these Chinese products, in particular
when they are trading them themselves?

Considering the many stories of problems in Chinese companies in Africa, it would be fascinating to hear the other side of this story from Chinese managers and supervisors. What are their experiences with working in Ghana? How is their interaction with Ghanaian employees, and what is it like to work in local conditions? And after work, what about personal relationships and spending leisure time? All these bigger and smaller questions and more will be addressed in the next chapter, where the fieldwork containing stories from the Chinese living in Tamale should contribute to the creation of a better picture of new Chinese migrants in Ghana.
CHAPTER 5

New Chinese Migrants in Tamale

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in Tamale city and greater Tamale, Ghana from 25 October 2008 to 28 January 2009. In this chapter, I will first discuss the methods that were used for this research. Then, I will outline the limitations and difficulties that were met during this fieldwork and give a general introduction to the city of Tamale and Ghana’s Northern Region. Finally, I will present the results of my fieldwork.

5.1 Methodology

The methodology used for this fieldwork contains elements of the theoretical perspective of ethnography. In this research I have not aimed to interview a statistically representative group of respondents, since the ethnographic approach allows research subjects to be selected and guided by significance rather than statistical representation. For this research project the factors of significance are Chinese nationality in combination with transnational acts of mobility such as expatriating or migrating to Ghana.

During this micro-level research, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted in Tamale with 9 different informants that hold Chinese nationality. These form the main body of the fieldwork. In addition, 7 interviews were held with Ghanaian residents of Tamale. I also conducted short, unstructured interviews and random conversations with European volunteers, a Dutch and Ghanaian doctor, European resort owners, and Ghanaian schoolteachers, in and outside the Tamale region. These are not listed in the tables and are used only to provide extra context.

The majority of the interviews took place at jobsites, but I was also given the privilege to visit private quarters in order to interview participants. Two of those private houses were Chinese migrants’ living quarters and one was a Ghanaian house. One interview was held by telephone, 9 interviews were conducted in English and 12 in Mandarin. Only 2 informants gave their permission to record the interviews, as the other participants were not comfortable with having their answers and opinions recorded. All interviews with the Chinese informants lasted between one and three hours. Those that were held with Ghanaian informants lasted from twenty minutes to one hour. The following tables list the Chinese and Ghanaian interviewees.
Table 1. List of Chinese interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hui Ling</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Interpreter, Translator</td>
<td>Works as translator for a Chinese SOE and thereby functions at the right hand of manager Wang. In Ghana 2.5 years; in Tamale &gt; 1.5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu Wei</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Civil &amp; Agricultural Engineer</td>
<td>Works for Chinese SOE, is in charge of borehole projects in rural Ghana, and is privately experimenting with shea-nut extraction. University-educated. Part-time in Tamale &gt; 9 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ke Hua</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>Works for Mrs. Zhang. Does a lot of repairs and maintenance of motorbikes, sometimes on location. In Tamale &gt;1 year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Chang</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Construction Engineer</td>
<td>Works for a Chinese SOE and is in charge of carpeting and finishing. In Ghana for 5 years; in Tamale &gt;1.5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Gu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Construction Engineer</td>
<td>Works for a Chinese construction company. Specializes in electrical wiring. University-educated. In Ghana for 2 years; in Tamale &gt;1 year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Liao</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Construction Engineer</td>
<td>Works as engineer for a Chinese SOE, specializes in construction procedures and design. University educated. In Tamale &gt;1 year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Liu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Reverend, School Principal</td>
<td>Works as reverend and as principal, teacher, coach, financial and HR manager at his self-established computer-school. In Ghana for 21 years; in Tamale &gt; 5 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Zhang</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Managing Director, Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Works as managing director of her own motorcycle company that imports and retails Chinese motorcycles and tricycles. University-educated. In Tamale &gt; 2 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Zhao</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Construction Engineer</td>
<td>Works for a large Chinese SOE and is in charge of planning and structure design. University-educated. In Ghana 2 years; in Tamale &gt; 1 year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang Peng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Executive Construction Manager</td>
<td>Supervises the building of a multi-complex secondary school and is in charge of human resources, planning, and finance. University-educated. In Ghana for 2 years; in Tamale &gt; 6 months.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. List of Ghanaian interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ghanaian informants*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Isaiah</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Farmer, Driver, Gatekeeper</td>
<td>Works as assistant and fixer. Friend of Hu Wei. Tamale resident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Works as a cook in a small guesthouse. Used to cook for Mr. Liu. Tamale resident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwame &amp; Agdan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20s/30s</td>
<td>Casual Construction Workers</td>
<td>Work as unskilled casual construction workers for the Chinese construction company building a secondary school complex, led by Wang Peng. Tamale residents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Tamale-based informants only.

A topic guide and list of questions in both Mandarin and English, with a broad focus on personal experience and perception of the host-society, directed the interviews for the Chinese informants in a semi-structured way. The use of a separate English topic guide elicited personal experiences of the Ghanaian informants, who had all been in relatively close contact with the Chinese participants, and also evoked a general perception of Chinese in Tamale. The advantage of the semi-structured approach used for all interviews was that it also gave my informants the opportunity to address other topics and insights.

This research deals mainly with people’s experiences and perceptions. I am aware of the fact that as a research topic, perception is subjective. However, when conducting research on people’s perceptions, experiences and opinions carry as much weight as facts. It is also important to distinguish those factors that are likely to influence my informants’ perceptions prior to the fieldwork. These factors include the following: age, education, place of origin, language skills, and time spent in Ghana. Many middle-aged and older Chinese from mainland China who grew up in the turbulent times of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath have little knowledge about other cultures, and often they have not been in contact with foreigners. Furthermore, they do not have the computer skills that the younger generation has, in terms of being able to use Internet and social media to gather information or
communicate. As a result, they are likely to have less access to China than one would expect from the new Chinese migrant type. Such cases of limited sources of information can affect migrants’ perceptions of the host culture and people.

The level of education is likely to influence the accessibility of information on Ghana, as well as the level of English language skills. Since this research focuses on experience and perception, it is important to take note of the fact that the informants’ knowledge, experiences, and perceptions of Ghana, its culture, and its people depend upon the length of time of their placement in Ghana. For example, most Chinese construction workers or technical experts stay in Ghana only for two or three years and return to China after their contract finishes, whereas traders often plan to stay longer to build their business.

Mainland China is a vast area with many regional differences. These regional differences have an impact not only on the cultural but also on the socio-economic background of its inhabitants.

In general, the level of English spoken by Chinese people is low. To make matters more complicated, despite Ghana being an English-speaking country, for most ordinary Ghanaians English is not their mother tongue. Many Ghanaians speak poor or basic English and have a limited vocabulary. All this contributes to a widely acknowledged language barrier between Chinese and Ghanaians. Not being able to communicate properly is likely to influence experiences and perceptions profoundly.

During this fieldwork, I gathered as much background information on my informants as possible. These data were used to determine in what way and to what extent the factors mentioned above influenced the information I received.

5.2 Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. Although I have tried to diminish the effect of these limitations through the in-depth micro-level approach of my project and the use of different types of Chinese migrants, I nevertheless mention them here in order to give a complete summary of the research process and the outcomes of this fieldwork.

First and foremost, finding Chinese informants turned out to be the most difficult component of my fieldwork. Based on Internet-search and on a review of the most important studies on my research topic, I composed a profile of my informants: the new Chinese migrant in Ghana. This group is represented by people working in various professional fields—mainly construction, trade, education, food-industry, agriculture, and aid.

Before and during my stay in Ghana I contacted the Chinese embassy, which unfortunately did not reply to my request for information on Chinese businesses, infrastructure, or aid-projects in Tamale or the Northern Region. Prior to the fieldwork, I was informed that there was a large
contingent of Chinese construction workers building the Tamale Stadium. Unfortunately, these Chinese construction workers suddenly left two weeks before my arrival in Tamale and had handed over the stadium to local management, leaving only their compound behind. Various attempts to get in contact with one of the Chinese managers of the construction project, known as Accra-based Mister Andy, failed.

Without the visible presence of Chinese migrants in Tamale, getting access to new Chinese migrants turned out to be very difficult. I therefore had to rely on tips from local informants and fixers as well as expats and volunteers in order to trace and get access to Chinese migrants.

The problem with relying on local informants can be complicated, since a lot of misidentification takes place. For example, a group of Japanese aid workers was mistaken for a team of Chinese, and a couple of German doctors of Chinese descent were regarded as being Chinese migrants from the PRC.

Widening the physical area of research to greater Tamale, as far as the city of Bolgatanga on the border with Burkina Faso, did not help either. Tips about the new hospital supposedly built by a Chinese construction company could not be confirmed, and no Chinese doctors were found working in the hospital. A tip about Chinese construction workers building a gas pipeline near the remote village of Saveligu, some twenty kilometres outside Tamale, led only to an already-finished gas pipeline construction that turned out to have been built by Koreans. The small houses near the site were apparently constructed by a Chinese firm, but no trace of either of the groups was found. According to the local guards, the construction workers left without leaving contact details or information about a possible return. This confusion points to the distinct likelihood that perceptions of the ‘Chinese’ may actually be composed of both experiences with real Chinese and experiences with non-Chinese Asians. In some cases, it is possible that informants have had no contact with ‘Chinese’ at all but only with non-Chinese Asians.

I also visited several construction sites in the greater Tamale area in order to see if there were projects carried out by Chinese migrants. Because my informants were not aware of other Chinese migrants’ presence, they could not help me with suggestions about possible other participants.

Furthermore, the current situation on the ground is likely to be subject to change, and much information is still unknown. This makes it difficult for the informants to reflect, and it opens the way for speculation. However, all this translated to a relatively small but interesting—and most importantly, very diverse—number of informants that I believe are representative of the group of new Chinese migrants in Tamale.
5.3 The city of Tamale: dust, heat & development

The city of Tamale is the regional capital of Ghana’s Northern Region, a vast and relatively thinly populated savannah country. Historically and culturally, northern Ghana differs from the southern and central regions. The ethnic group that predominates in the Northern Region is the Mole-Dagbani people, who generally follow patrilineal lines of inheritance and are believed to have migrated in the twelfth century from the Lake Chad region. In Ghana’s Northern Region, cultural and trade links with the Islamic world predominate over connections with the Christian Europeans who settled along the Gold Coast.261

In Tamale, the previously mentioned cultural north-south divide clearly becomes visible in the Muslim predominance, the Sahel-style architecture, and a cuisine based on various meats such as beef and lamb, usually more associated with Francophone territories further north.262 Despite this northern
atmosphere, Tamale has been a city of diversity for more than a century.

In the early 1900s, Tamale—without any political, geographical, or pre-European political relevance—was conceived by the colonial British administration as an important regional centre of trade. In 1906 an administrative headquarters was built. Various reasons have been given to explain why the colonial administration selected Tamale as an administrative centre rather than other settlements within British jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{263} Recent research by Sebastian Soeters has shown that the incentives for building an administrative headquarters at Tamale were at least as much about commercial aspirations as they were about administrative ones, since the colonial administration anticipated trade was to form the bedrock of the northern economy of British Gold Coast.

As early as the 1915-1930 period, trade, gold mining, and cacao farming attracted casual migrant labour and traders to Tamale. In addition to regional African labour migrants and demobilized African World War I soldiers, traders from Syria began to set up businesses in Tamale.\textsuperscript{264}

Nowadays, Tamale is the fastest-growing city in Ghana and by some even regarded as the fastest-growing city in the whole West African region. In 2007 Tamale’s population was estimated at 350,000. The city is also Ghana’s northern economic centre and the main transport hub in the region.\textsuperscript{265}

In terms of population, modern-day Tamale is an increasingly diverse city. People of different ethnicities with different religious beliefs and opposing political preferences coexist relatively peacefully. In addition to regional migrants, there are madrassah’s funded by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that have regular exchanges of students and Islamic teachers, and there are Pakistani businessman, Lebanese entrepreneurs, and the occasional Indian restaurant owner.

In 2006 the construction of the new Tamale Stadium was the source of a number of new Chinese faces in Tamale. In addition, Tamale has a relatively large and very visible presence of aid workers and volunteers from various countries. Most of these come from Western Europe or North America, but Japanese volunteers also work in Tamale.

Geographically, Ghana’s proximity to the Equator gives the country a tropical climate without strong seasonal changes. Rainfall and \textit{harmattan} winds\textsuperscript{266} are the only two noteworthy seasonal factors. In northern Ghana, rainfall figures are the lowest in the country, making the Tamale region dry and dusty. In the winter, \textit{harmattan} winds which blow from the northeast during the dry season, bring dust from the Sahara and reduce visibility to as little as one kilometre. Temperatures in and around Tamale are regarded as very hot by Ghanaians from other regions and vary from 38 degrees Celsius during summer to 29 degrees in winter.

Compared with the central and southern regions, Tamale and the whole Northern Region have been underdeveloped. However, during the last decade Tamale’s infrastructure has been changing rapidly: dusty dirt roads were tarmacked with grit and more multi-storey concrete buildings have appeared in the city centre. The newly built stadium is the largest and most eye-catching contemporary construction the city has ever seen. During the period of fieldwork for this thesis, two new banks were
opened in Tamale’s centre and one more was being built. Furthermore, a large supermarket-style shop filled with all sorts of mainly Chinese goods, from complete men’s suits to shoe polish, was opened. Based on its initial popularity, the shop successfully offered an alternative to the many traditional market stalls.

Tamale’s rapid development and related infrastructure projects, the city’s economic potential and promising new trade markets, as well as the aid-recipient status of the less developed hinterland of greater Tamale and the Northern Region, make Tamale a city where new Chinese migrants are likely to be found.

5.4 Chinese migrants in Tamale: fieldwork

Drivers and personal backgrounds

A Chinese historian once told me that the pull factor for new Chinese migrants to Africa did not need any research as it was simply economic, or as he put it bluntly: ‘They just go for the money.’ Indeed, economic factors have been functioning as pull and push factors since the early days of migration; but during this fieldwork in Tamale, it became clear that regarding motivations for migrating to Ghana, there is more to it than just money.

As a start, I will introduce Mrs. Zhang. Zhang is a Shanghai-born-and-raised Chinese entrepreneur, who in 2007 moved to Ghana with her husband to start a trading business in Chinese motorcycles. After earning a PhD in Biology from London’s Imperial College, 47-year-old Zhang worked as a scientist in London for the last decade, just like her husband. When a London-based Ghanaian friend suggested the possible business opportunities to be found in Ghana, she became more and more interested in taking a different path in her life. As she explained, it was not only the promising investment opportunity but mainly a sense of adventure combined with the feeling of having arrived at a certain point in her life:

I always liked to learn new things and business was something totally new for me. After my daughter went to university I had a little more time on my hands and started to realize that if I was ever to change my life, start something new and take on a new challenge, this was going to be my last chance.

After they spent some time in Ghana as tourists and researched Ghana’s market, this academic couple decided to begin importing and retailing Chinese motorcycles. A Chinese friend of Mrs. Zhang, who owned a motorcycle factory in Jiangsu province and was interested in exploring the Ghanaian market herself, was willing to export the motorcycles. For scientist-turned-entrepreneur Zhang, the combination of Tamale’s rising economy, strategic position, and growing population promised to be a
lucrative one. Moreover, the fact that prices and competition are lower than in more developed cities such as Kumasi and Accra made Tamale an attractive place for the starting entrepreneur.

In 2007 Mrs. Zhang and her husband opened a modest shop and office on Tamale’s main road, the only highway in the region. Zhang’s business concentrated on both retail and wholesale of motorcycles at competitive prices. Repair services were also offered. Since business was going well, Mr. and Mrs. Zhang opened a second branch in 2008 in Accra. Initially, Zhang hired two mechanics from the PRC and a number of local workers. The Chinese mechanics were hired because they had previous experience with the type of motorcycles sold and therefore they could train and supervise local mechanics. After opening the second branch, Zhang and her husband spent most of their time in Accra where they also began living part-time. At the end of the week, Zhang often travels north to work in her Tamale business. In November 2008 the Tamale branch was operated by one Chinese mechanic and four Ghanaian employees. The daily management was carried out by a Ghanaian sales manager.

In contrast to western-educated and cosmopolitan Mrs. Zhang, the construction engineers Mr. Chang, Mr. Liao, Mr. Zhao, and Mr. Gu, who are working on the construction of a secondary girls’ school complex, did not come to Ghana looking for adventure, change, and prosperous business opportunities but simply in need of a job in their field of expertise. The engineers originate from Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province in remote western China, where the job market for relatively well-educated professionals is seriously limited. Since many SOEs closed down, large numbers of staff had to be laid off, and despite its recent economic growth and improved infrastructure, Gansu is still considered to be one of China’s poorest provinces. In 2008 its nominal GDP per capita was 12,110 RMB, or 1,870 USD.267 Gansu is also one of the regions where unemployment drives large numbers of people to work as migrant workers in China’s more affluent cities and industrial zones. Thirty-two-year-old engineer Liao, who received an education from the university of Wuhan in Sichuan and has been in Ghana for over a year, explained:

*We are from the interior provinces and our local economy is not as good as in the coastal regions. It is very difficult to find a job there and there are many lay-offs. People travel cross-country to find work. If I hadn’t taken this job somebody else would have taken it. It really is a great opportunity.*

For Mr. Chang, who is in his early fifties and has been working in Ghana for five years in a row, it was the combination of being able to earn a better income and a chance to ‘go overseas’ (*chuguo*) that inspired him to become a contract worker in Ghana. Similar reasons counted for university-educated engineers Mr. Gu and Mr. Zhao, who are both in their early forties and had worked in Ghana for two years at the time of research. Mr. Zhao proudly spoke about the two-storey house his family was building in Lanzhou with money he brought back from working in Ghana. The engineers are all employees of a Chinese state-owned construction company. According to the engineers, it is a
privilege to get an expatriate job. Firstly, one needs to be selected by the management. Secondly, the candidate is given a short preparation course, and only those candidates that pass the concluding examination with a mark higher than eight get the overseas position.

Their supervisor, executive construction manager Mr. Wang Peng, who led the school project, had been working in Ghana’s Northern Region for six months when the first interview took place. He previously worked in Accra and the Ivory Coast. Manager Wang emphasized the differences between the salaries within the different regions of the PRC. And he also stressed the financial benefits of working in Africa:

In Gansu you earn very little money, but as an expatriate your costs are much higher so the wages are better too. If you then try to keep your costs low, it is possible to save money while working overseas.

For these men, who all have families to support in China, it is clear that their motivations are economically inspired. For their fellow Gansu colleague, Hui Ling, this was not so much the case. This 25-year-old interpreter, also known by his English name, Jack, had a different reason for beginning to work in Ghana. Hui Ling, who used to guide foreign tourists around Gansu’s famous tourist sites, saw working in Ghana as an opportunity to improve his English language skills. Since many Chinese only speak a few words of English, Chinese-English interpreters are in high demand, especially in the more remote areas such as northern Ghana. In practice, this means that Hui Ling is able to work for two or three different companies at the same time, which gives him the opportunity to earn two or three times as much as he would earn when contracted by just one company, let alone work as a tourist guide in Gansu.

Young mechanic Ke Hua comes from a small town in west China’s Guangxi province and has been working for entrepreneur Zhang since 2008. He had similar reasons to Hui Ling for moving to Ghana: the 22-year-old had a great desire to learn English and to experience a little bit of the world beyond China. As he explained:

In my native city in Guangxi province there are few opportunities, and going overseas is something I have always wanted to do but never had the means for: to see different people and get to know other cultures. But what attracted me in this job even more is that if I return home I will be able to speak English, and this will make me stand out from the crowd. None of my friends can speak English, but they all want to. I will be the only one! This is a big opportunity for me and I believe it will contribute to better options for me back in China.

His daily tasks consist of repairing motorbikes and preparing the new ones for sale. When Mrs. Zhang is not in Tamale, Ke Hua is responsible for opening and closing the shop. When rural customers need their motorcycles fixed, he sometimes travels on his own bike to remote villages and works on location.
Agricultural engineer Hu Wei has been dividing his time between Ghana and his hometown Beijing for the past decade. He works six months in Tamale and returns to his family in Beijing for the other six months. The 44-year-old agricultural engineer, who holds a university degree in water engineering from Chengdu University, has been working for a large China-based water company that funds and constructs borehole projects in rural West Africa, including Northern Ghana. Over the years he has also visited Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso. His main reason for becoming a part-time migrant in Africa was his career, combined with a personal interest in foreign countries. From the late-1990s onward, Hu Wei became very interested in Ghana’s agricultural business potential, such as the processing of shea nuts, on which he began experimenting with oil-extracting machinery at his house.

Compared with the other informants, Mr. Liu had a very different motivation for his migration to Ghana, which had nothing to do with money or economic prosperity. Twenty-one years ago, former factory-worker Liu and his wife moved with their two-year-old daughter from Hong Kong to Ghana to join an evangelical mission in West Africa.

As expected from a reverend, Liu’s motives for joining the mission were predominantly religiously inspired as he felt being ‘called by God’ to spread the gospel in Africa. In addition, he wanted to help African people in ‘building their character’ and help them develop skills that could be used to improve their lives. Being from Hong Kong, the choice of host countries was limited to the Anglophone African countries, and there were vacancies available for Liu in both Ghana and Liberia. Since Liberia was engaged in a civil war, Ghana became his country of destination.

In Accra, Reverend Liu and his wife, in addition to their work for the Accra International Evangelical Church, began to teach basic reading and writing to illiterate Ghanaians. When in the following years the use of computers became more and more common, Liu decided to start a computer school where lessons in basic computer skills as well as in marketing and business administration were offered. As a former blue-collar worker, Liu lacked expertise and experience in both computer technology and business. Availing of the opportunity of the rising computer market and his connections in Hong Kong, where many computers were manufactured at the time, he nevertheless succeeded in setting up one of Accra’s first computer schools. He is also said to have used the Teach Yourself in 21 Days books extensively.

In 2003 Liu was asked by an international Evangelical church planting organization to build a computer-training centre in the northern city of Tamale. Northern Ghana was chosen because it is much less developed than the southern regions of Ghana. The fact that in Tamale the Muslim population outnumbers the Christian was another important reason to start doing mission-related work in Tamale. At the time of research, Reverend Liu was in charge of almost everything related to the computer business school, from designing the school plan and the curriculum to the daily management. In the kindergarten, his wife, Emily Liu, was responsible for training and supervising the teachers.
5.5 Living and working in Tamale: expectations, experiences & perceptions

Preparations & first impressions

As pointed out earlier, China’s renewed interest in Africa is a rather recent phenomenon. Before this enhanced relationship, Africa was both physically and mentally far away from the average Chinese household. Since the early 2000s the renewed relationship between China and several African countries has been reflected in the effort of the Chinese government to incorporate cultural diplomacy towards the African continent and also to communicate parts of this diplomacy to its own Chinese citizens. This has occurred in the form of cultural exchange such as holding fora and symposia like the New Century China-Africa Cultural Exchange Symposium, and, more directly aimed at the public, by mounting a nationwide exhibition tour of African art (2004) and broadcasting the popular television series, A Passage to Africa (2003). In addition, there are more and more popular media-reported stories about Africa.

Nowadays, Africa has become increasingly popular as a travel destination for affluent urban Chinese. At the same time, the number of Africans in China such as traders and students has increased during the last decade. They form a small but visible minority in only the largest and most cosmopolitan cities, in particular in Guangzhou, which is now referred to in China as ‘chocolate city’ (qiaokeli shi).

Despite the increasing efforts of cultural exchange and African migrants, the vast majority of Chinese people, including the relatively well-educated, are still unlikely to have much knowledge about Africa. This can be illustrated best by a massive billboard along Beijing’s highways in the wake of the 2006 Beijing China-Africa Summit that showed a Papua New Guinea man in traditional attire, with the phrase: ‘Africa—land of myth and mystique’.

Taking into account this potential lack of knowledge on Ghana or Africa, all informants were asked about their general expectations of Ghana and in what way they prepared themselves for their stay. As it turned out, all informants gathered some sort of information prior to their departure. Former scientist-turned-entrepreneur Zhang sought most actively for information, whereas manager Wang and engineer Hu, who both had some previous Africa experience, did not spend much time looking at information about Ghana. According to Zhang, up-to-date, accurate, and practical information on living in Ghana remained insufficient, despite her efforts. In her opinion, regarding Africa there can never be enough information.

In Lanzhou the selection process to which the engineers were submitted included a short course of general knowledge on the host country and its customs, although the content of this remains of questionable quality. Engineer Zhao explained that, in addition, he had bought and read a book or two about Ghana. Chang, Liao, and Gu said they had done the same. The use of Internet was not mentioned by Chang, Liao, Zhao, and Gu as a source of information or preparation, and the older age
of these men contributed to their not being very skilled or comfortable using Internet, email, etcetera. But Hui Ling did use the Internet frequently in order to get an overall idea about Ghana. No one had watched the previously mentioned television series or seen the art exhibition.

Engineers Chang, Zhao, and Gu, who all worked in Accra and Cape Coast region before, described their overall first impression of Ghana as ‘pretty good’ (bucuo). Mr. Zhao and Mr. Gu found Ghana to be better than they had expected. Back in Gansu they imagined Ghana to be an impoverished, desert-like country with lots of sand and exotic animals. Even though some men expected Ghana to be more economically deprived than it is in reality, all the informants from Gansu said they felt that Ghana is a country in need. They agreed that it was both strange and sad that Ghanaians have so little production of their own and need to import almost everything. In particular, the import of foodstuffs such as rice struck them as a sign of deprivation. Being a construction engineer, Zhao was particularly surprised about the local housing and the lack of materials the Ghanaians seemed to have:

In China most people live in multi-storey, large buildings built with modern materials, but here in Ghana you hardly see those kinds of buildings. Most Ghanaian houses are very traditional: only one storey and constructed with natural materials, just like they made them 100 years ago!

All men found Ghana’s infrastructure to be in a very bad state. As Zhao puts it:

The roads are very bad in Ghana and therefore it is very dangerous. Nowadays, China is developed but we used to have bad infrastructure as well. The state of Ghana’s infrastructure shows that this really is a Third-World country.

Manager Wang Peng stated that from his point of view the overall impression of Ghana is a personal matter. In a private interview, he called the Ghanaian cities very ‘dirty’ (zang) and the countryside and villages around Tamale were considered rather ‘desolated’ (nei) and ‘primitive’ (yuanshi). He had expected Ghana to be a ‘backward country’ (luohou guojia) and said his expectations had been met.

In contrast, engineer Gu and interpreter Jack appeared to like the feel and look of the northern savannah countryside as opposed to busy and crowded Accra. For engineer Liao, who had been in Ghana for one and a half years, the first impressions of Tamale, its surroundings, and climate were not particularly good. Liao had no experience working in other regions of Ghana or Africa, and he stated that, in general, he simply did not like it, referring to the overall surroundings and feel of his host country (bu xihuan, bu shufu). Manager Wang considered the absence of different seasons undesirable and boring.

Young mechanic Ke Hua had not known what to expect from his host destination. He had imagined finding a hot and dry desert and also expected poverty. He was surprised by the rural conditions around Tamale, such as the fact that some villages do not have water amenities. He also used the word ‘backward’ (luohou). However, he pointed out that in rural China similar conditions can
also be found. In addition, he found Ghana generally quite expensive for a Third-World country, and like the Gansu engineers he regarded it as strange that there is hardly any industry.

At the time of their arrival in Ghana the only information missionary Liu and his wife had access to was some general information from books and the stories of other Chinese church-planting volunteers. In practice, they did not really know what to expect and, according to Liu, experienced a total culture shock. What struck them first was the lifestyle of the Ghanaians, the low level of education and the dirty, littered streets, and how different all this was from the Chinese society in Hong Kong. After all these years, Liu now has a balanced opinion about Ghana and stressed that he likes to distinguish between the country, its people, and the national policies.

Entrepreneur Zhang also mentioned this initial culture shock. When she began working in Tamale, this culture shock was particularly related to work ethics and conditions, but also to the economic situation of Ghana, which she illustrated by relating the following:

One day a client from a village in the rural savannah travelled by local transport day and night and arrived in traditional dress with a big safari flask of water under his arm at my shop to buy a motorbike, for which he paid with piles and piles of small currency. What have I got myself into, I thought? It wasn’t until then that I truly realized the economic state rural Ghanaians are in.

Agricultural engineer Hu Wei, who had some previous Africa experience, did not have high expectations of Ghana nor experience a large culture shock. Even though he stressed Ghana’s economic problems, such as its dependency on imports, he nevertheless first used the words ‘very interesting’ (hen you yisi) to describe his general view of Ghana. Mr. Hu mentioned agricultural opportunity in particular and praised the fact that Ghana is politically stable compared with its neighbours.

Interestingly, all informants with the exception of the men from Gansu felt that some of Ghana’s first impressions relating to economic underdevelopment can also be found in modern-day rural China, whereas the Gansu informants, who themselves came from an economically rather undeveloped part of China, believed that their country had surpassed that stage.
Figure 2  Street life in Ghana

Figure 3  Gumani, a ‘suburb’ of Tamale
Figure 4 Bolgatanga Road, Tamale

Figure 5 Mrs. Zhang’s motorcycle company
Figure 6  Engineers Zhao, Liao and their assistant working at the construction site

Figure 7  Engineers Zhao and Liao in their office barrack at the construction site
Figure 8  Engineer Zhao and his assistant

Figure 9  Recently built classroom of Technical Girls’ School, Tamale
Figure 10  Nearly finished auditorium of the Girls’ School

Figure 11  Agdan, Kwame and colleagues working at the school construction site
Figure 16  Hu Wei’s agricultural machinery

Figure 17  House and garden of Hu Wei
Figure 18 Chinese-built Tamale Stadium

Figure 19 Inside Tamale Stadium
Daily life: living conditions

When visiting some of the actual living quarters of the Chinese informants in Tamale, it became clear that all informants lived in modest-to-basic conditions. For example, the construction engineers from Lanzhou and their interpreter, Hui Ling, lived together in a one-storey house in the remote and rural outskirts of Tamale city. Being the manager, Mr. Peng was the only one in the house to be privileged with a private bedroom, which doubled as his office. His small bedroom was provided with a single bed, a desk, two chairs, a television, and a personal computer. His colleagues had to share bedrooms. These rooms contained a couple of single beds with mosquito nets and two desks. The communal living room was also sparsely furnished: two sofas, a small table, and some tea sets, all centred around a large television. The true luxuries in the house were air-conditioning, Internet, and satellite TV, all to be enjoyed only when the power works properly. This type of house functions as their living quarters for as long as the project runs, which can be up to a year.

Compared with the average living standards in Tamale, the Chinese engineers lived very comfortably. In comparison with their Chinese colleagues working at the Tamale Stadium, who had to live in shared makeshift cubicles with bunk beds and basic amenities for two years, they are also much better off. However, in relation to the lifestyle of a similarly small group of European expats who were living and working in Tamale during the time of research and who also shared a house, the men from Gansu lived at a very basic level. The Europeans lived in a large house with private bedrooms and a swimming pool, equipped with in-house digital entertainment and a constant supply of imported European food, often directly flown into Tamale from Europe.

At first sight, the living quarters of engineer Hu Wei, a small villa surrounded by a large garden and a gated fence, resembled the housing conditions often provided for Western expatriates by their companies. However, a closer look revealed less luxury than expected: the overgrown, untidy garden was filled with unused agricultural machinery, scrap metal, and junk, in the midst of which a couple of goats were grazing. The villa was not well-kept. Since the interviews took place in the garden, there is no information about the interior of the house; but when it comes to comfort and amenities, Hu Wei explained that he takes his laptop to a local Internet café, as he has no Internet connection at the house.

The missionary couple like to live comfortably but nothing more than that, according to Mr. Liu. Now that they are getting older, they want to pay attention to their health and therefore they rent a simple but comfortable house near the computer school.

The Chinese mechanics that work for Mrs. Zhang live in a basic, small, shared apartment behind the motorcycle business. According to Zhang, the Chinese mechanics did not understand the importance of keeping it clean regarding African living conditions such as dust, dirt, and insects. She mentioned eventually having hired a cleaner as she became concerned about the health of her employees. Despite the basic features, the apartment has Internet access, if there is power.
Surprisingly, entrepreneur Zhang herself, used to a comfortable lifestyle in London, had also been living rather frugally, especially when she was in the process of starting up her motorcycle business in Tamale. Although she had anticipated living conditions in Ghana would be basic, the actual situation nevertheless took her by surprise:

When we decided to start in Tamale, I thought that the living conditions would be basic but acceptable enough because I knew there were many Western people and Koreans living in Tamale as well. However, even though it was fascinating and inspiring to live in such new and different surroundings, the actual conditions were much more basic than expected: for months we slept on the ground and had to shower with pure water sachets because the place we rented turned out to be without water and electricity.

In order to save as much money as possible, she travelled during her first months in Ghana regularly by local tro tro. With a low voice and a big smile she revealed that she had even eaten street food once in a while—to save money, but also out of curiosity. For Mrs. Zhang, more luxury comes with better business results, and she lives economically by not spending money on things she does not really need:

I’d rather spend my money on an air-conditioner than a T.V., so we don’t own one.

As her business has progressed, she now does not need to use public transport any more, and she and her husband have bought a second-hand car.

Daily life: food

The fact that Mrs. Zhang revealed that she had sometimes eaten street food says a lot about the general ideas foreigners have about Ghanaian food. Generally speaking, most expats or volunteers from Western countries have difficulties getting used to Ghanaian food, and it is also a topic of conversation that can be overheard frequently in the bars where Western volunteers spend their evenings. It must be noted also that the WHO has raised health concerns about Ghanaian street food. In traditional Chinese culture, food is much more than a daily necessity: it is an important part of their national and regional identity. Food is especially important for Chinese workers during holidays such as Chinese New Year, and it reflects home when feeling far from home and one’s loved ones.

The importance of food is best illustrated by a remark of engineer Zhao from Lanzhou. During a group interview at their house, the topic of Ghanaian food quickly turned into a long and lively conversation on the qualities of Chinese food in general and preparing jiaozi, the steamed dumpling with vegetable and pork filling that is traditionally eaten during Chinese New Year in particular. When I was asked if I had ever eaten this snack and confirmed that I had, Mr. Zhao sighed:
Good then, because if you haven’t eaten jiaozi, you don’t know China.

Considering the importance of food in Chinese culture and daily life, the informants were invited to share their eating habits. In addition, they were asked about their opinion of and experiences with Ghanaian food.

All the Gansu informants were agreed on not liking Ghanaian food. While nodding his head, manager Peng put it like this:

Their food is really not good. We can’t eat it. It really is not an option for us.

Only dishes such as fufu and rice balls (omo tuo) were considered by all the informants as edible, though for some only if there are no alternatives. For their daily meals, the engineers from Gansu rely on their own cooking skills and all meals are eaten at their living quarters, to which they drive back at lunchtime. Meals are eaten together as communal dining is a common practice at Chinese construction work sites.

Food is bought at the local market and shops with the help of interpreter Jack and their Ghanaian driver-gatekeeper. The basic ingredients used in Chinese cooking, such as ginger, garlic, spring onions, rice, and cabbage are widely available in Tamale, which makes it easier to improvise Chinese-style dishes. For example, with the Chinese New Year around the corner, the men explained in detail how to make jiaozi with local Ghanaian ingredients. Pork, another Chinese favourite, is hard to come by in Muslim-dominated northern Ghana, but chicken, beef, and mutton are considered to be good replacements. For engineers Chang, Liao, and Zhao it was especially difficult to understand that the Ghanaians hardly drink any tea:

The Ghanaians don’t like tea, but we are Chinese and we like tea very much. We don’t understand it. How can they not like tea? Chinese tea is the best, but it is very hard to find here so it needs to be imported from China. Chinese people cannot live without tea. Tea is also good to drink when the weather is hot. It would benefit Ghanaians too.

Local bottled beers such as Star were considered fine, and based on the empty bottles of local whisky in the corner of the living room, spirits were also acceptable.

The engineers were not aware of the ‘Chinese’ restaurant in Tamale, nor had they eaten Chinese-style dishes in the more up-market restaurants and hotels. They told me not to believe that these restaurants were anywhere near capable of cooking Chinese food. Learning that many citizens of Tamale cannot afford to eat rice made the men feel very sorry for them.

For Reverend Liu and his wife, the health factor is most important when it comes to eating in Ghana. Liu explained that food is one of the biggest problems he had to overcome when migrating to Ghana and makes a clear difference between health and taste. Vegetables are particularly important for the Chinese diet—and as for health factors, he was not impressed with the Ghanaian diet:
We believe the Ghanaian food is not healthy: most things are deep-fried or overcooked, and they eat very little fresh vegetables. Local food is very high in salt as well. Chinese food is much more balanced and healthy.

Convinced that Ghanaian food in local restaurants is not only unhealthy but also often prepared in an unhygienic manner, the Liu family always hire a cook for the preparation of their meals, cook themselves, or eat in the more up-market restaurants. During their 21 years in Ghana, Liu and his wife have never eaten at a local *chop shop* as he believed that it would make them so sick that they would have to return to Hong Kong.

Zhang and her husband used to cook not only for themselves but also for the Chinese mechanics who, according to Zhang, did not eat Ghanaian food. Indeed, Ke Hua did not like the local food at all. Moreover, he does not have the desire to taste different types of local dishes, as they do not look attractive to him. Zhang herself did not have this problem with Ghanaian food but was also not particularly impressed by it. She was aware of the Chinese dishes served at the fancy Mariam Hotel, had tried them during business dinners, and regarded them as adequate.

Mr. Hu Wei explained that he feels that food in stalls, in general, is in unhygienic circumstances. Having said that, he added that he does eat local food once in a while.

Remarkably, only entrepreneur Zhang was aware of the Chinese restaurant on Tamale’s Hospital Road, while other informants were amazed to learn there was a Chinese restaurant in Tamale. Not one of the Chinese informants had eaten there or showed any interest in eating there when they heard there were only Ghanaian chefs.

**Daily life: working**

Work is for the majority of my informants the main incentive for being in Tamale and by far the activity to which they dedicate most of their time. Therefore, the Chinese informants were asked about their experiences with working in local conditions. Since all of them worked closely with local employees, they were invited to share their opinions regarding working with Ghanaian colleagues or employees.

Before starting her business in Ghana, a Ghanaian friend warned Mrs. Zhang that human resource management was probably the most difficult part of doing business in Ghana. Indeed, this turned out to be a valid concern. Mrs. Zhang explained:

> Human resource management is truly a very big problem; I found it hard to find skilled staff and even harder to instruct them to do their work the way I expect them to.
These opinions were shared by construction manager Wang, school-director Liu, and agricultural specialist Hu. As supervisors, they expressed frustration with workers, whom they feel are incompetent. Hu stated that during the nearly ten years he spent in Ghana, he has seen little improvement:

*There is chronic lack of skilled staff and this is the result of the education system; it is totally insufficient. It seems to be changing but so very slowly that I sometimes think the Ghanaians are just not interested in development.*

At the construction site, the teaching-by-example principle is used. As a result, all the engineers from Lanzhou, with the exception of manager Wang, work daily with local employees and sometimes side-by-side. Interestingly, they have a more nuanced opinion about Ghanaian workers. As Zhao reported:

*Yes, In general it is hard to find skilled staff but we teach them and some of the workers here learn very fast and are really clever.*

For mechanic Ke Hua, who often works alone with four or five local mechanics, the experience is even more different. In fact, it is more the opposite, as he feels he is the one being taught:

*They [the local mechanics] are really tough and clever [hao lihai]. They are able to repair any part of the motorcycle and do everything themselves. I learn a lot from them, every day!*  

Another topic of frustration was the Ghanaian work ethic, which is described by Hu Wei as opposite to China’s labour culture. Manager Wang Peng’s opinion followed the stereotype of the lazy African worker as he bluntly described the Ghanaian workers in terms of ‘being slow’ (*duoxing*) and ‘lazy’ (*landuo*). In addition, he accused Ghanaians and Africans in general of short-term thinking and being interested only in self-enrichment:

*The moment they [Ghanaian employees] get paid or receive money, they disappear or just stop working.*

Based on his previous working experience in Ivory Coast, he mentioned that these attitudes are to be found at all levels of society, but especially among higher cadres and at administrative levels.

Mrs. Zhang picked her words more carefully and showed a more balanced point of view:

*I experienced that some of the Ghanaian workers have a different work ethic than what I am used to, and it almost seems opposite to the work ethic of the Chinese, who, in my opinion, can work really hard. I don’t want to call Ghanaians lazy because they aren’t, but it is a different mindset. For instance, Chinese people will take on extra jobs and work as many hours as possible if needed or if they want something. I haven’t seen that here yet.*
To illustrate her opinion, Zhang shared the following anecdote:

*One day an employee did not show up for work. When I later heard his excuse, I just could not believe it: he actually said he could not come to work because it was raining and he didn’t have a rain coat!*

Similarly, the differences in work ethic have not gone unnoticed by the other informants. Mechanic Ke Hua described the work attitude of his Ghanaian colleagues as ‘less serious’ and ‘very different from Chinese’. The construction engineers feel that the Ghanaians workers at the site appear to be more relaxed and seem to feel less ‘pressure’ (yali) than construction workers in China would feel, especially when there are deadlines to be met.

Reverend Liu, who has by far the most experience with working in Ghana, contributed significantly on this topic. The Lius work closely with local employees and use the ‘learning on the job’ principle at both the kindergarten and the computer school. Teachers at the computer school are graduates from that same school and have been trained by Liu himself. Liu’s objective is to develop a basic system of standards and regulations to operate the schools. In this way, the schools should be able to hand over to local management after several years.

Reverend Liu believes that many of his work-related troubles, in particular human resources, are rooted in cultural differences, which he explained as follows:

*It is not that the Ghanaian employees are bad in organizing because they are not, but it all depends on what you ask them to organize. If it is a funeral or local dance performance, something that relates to their own culture, then they do an excellent job. But if they, for example, have to organize a graduation ceremony at the school, it becomes difficult for them and will take a long time because they don’t know what is expected from them.*

Another example of cultural differences that created problems for the Lius is the use of violence by Ghanaian kindergarten teachers as a means of communication:

*It is hard to make the teachers understand they can’t hit the children, because many teachers and students are used to domestic violence. But we can’t accept it. We have to set a standard.*

He admitted to finding it difficult to stay close to his standards but persists in doing so. This persistence gave him a reputation of being ‘far too strict’ and ‘rigorous’ among some of his former employees, such as his former cook Anna, who was happy to begin working for a Ghanaian boss again.

In terms of setting standards about the appearance of her shops and living in an environmentally friendly way, Zhang explained that she was not prepared to give up her own standards and felt the need to set an example for her staff. Therefore, she has explicitly placed dustbins on the premises.

Other aspects were mentioned as making working in Ghana difficult.
For example, Mr. Liu specified the obligation for foreigners to have a local Ghanaian business partner in order to set up business in Ghana:

It is hard to find a partner you can trust, and you find these people who just sell themselves as partners. This makes doing business risky and difficult. With this policy, the government is preventing foreigners from integrating into the professional levels of society.

Another large annoyance for Liu is the fact that he has not been given the opportunity of applying for permanent residency. The Lius have to go through the lengthy process of applying and registering every year:

The government does not welcome foreigners, at least not of my kind. I don’t ask to become Ghanaian…just to become a resident.

The engineers have different kinds of practical difficulties. Since they work on a rural construction site with small wooden cabins as their offices, without any form of luxury, they experience climatic conditions that can make their work extremely difficult. Baking-hot temperatures and extreme dust during harmattan275 season can make the rural construction site a rather uncomfortable workplace. When asked about these working conditions, the men responded in a way that expressed their lack of options; in other words, the job has to be done. Engineer Zhao added the following explanation:

Sometimes I work in a way I did not know I was capable of, you know. We just cross our own boundaries.

Mechanic Ke Hua explained that, being from southern China, he is used to some heat. He thinks the climate is acceptable (hai keyi) but still finds it very hot at times and agrees that it makes working harder some days.

Power-cuts are another almost daily recurring annoyance. After the ending of Ghana’s energy crisis in 2007, the nation began experiencing intermittent power outages during the last quarter of 2008. The situation worsened during the election period, when there were constant power outages throughout the country, much to the frustration of every participant. But it especially bothered Wang Peng, who works from his bedroom-office. Despite his previous experience with working in Africa, Wang reacted angrily when a power-cut occurred during an interview. He did not seem to understand that nobody in Tamale knows when power outages are repaired, as he kept asking local informant Ebene when the power would return.

For agricultural specialist Hu Wei, who seemed to have adapted to local conditions quite well, the unsafe travel conditions are a large problem. After surviving a domestic plane crash where several people died and he was injured himself, he now travels by bus. Hu regards travel by bus as a better but still not a very safe option. He therefore tries to limit his long-distance travel in Ghana as much as he
can. Ke Hua, who sometimes had to ride his motorcycle deep into the rural savannah in order to offer motorcycle repair service to rural customers (farmers), hated the road conditions:

_It is just terrible: potholes, ridges, and dirt roads make it difficult, dangerous, and extremely time-consuming to go anywhere. And going into the countryside is even more difficult, in particular after rain. They put animals everywhere: I have seen goats and sheep being transported by motorbike, including two people! I also believe the Ghanaians don’t follow the traffic rules. It is just one big mess. How dangerous!_

For globally-orientated and Western-educated Zhang, time efficiency is another troublesome aspect of working in Ghana. But it is not just the Ghanaian work ethic that seems to move at a different pace; in Zhang’s opinion, the whole society moves rather slowly:

_Please view image here._

Both Mrs. Zhang and manager Wang mentioned corruption as the second-largest problem. Zhang said that the level of corruption and the importance of money in many aspects of Ghanaian life ‘totally surprised’ her. In her experience:

_Everything seems to be about money here and I still find it unbelievable that I am expected to pay extra commission or baksheesh on nearly everything. It just doesn’t stop! Corruption really is sky-high in Ghana and this upsets me. It feels like they are pushing my boundaries. You know, we are all human beings working hard for our money and I am not prepared to just give it away._

Moreover, the indiscrete manner of the corruption being carried out was both baffling and hard to understand for Zhang:

_Asking for commission is done here in a very bold manner. I don’t believe this is necessarily related to the poor living conditions and lack of income, though I find it even more noticeable in the north in Ghana. But thirty, twenty years ago in China we had more or less the same living standards as the Ghanaians have now, and despite the fact that corruption has always been present in Chinese society as well, the relation with money seems so different. Money was always discussed in a very discrete, almost secretive way, like the Chinese were almost shy of money._
The habit of asking for money is also very familiar to Reverend Liu. He pointed out that his position as school principal makes him an attractive potential source for people in search of help and funding. Besides shortage of time, this is the reason why the school in the winter of 2008 still did not have a website. For the recruitment of students, he relied on his personal network and word-of-mouth spreading of information:

I can’t have people coming here all day to ask me to provide things for them. This is already happening to some degree, so I don’t want to attract more of them.

Generally speaking, very few new Chinese migrants in Africa speak any local languages and have rudimentary English at best. Agricultural specialist Hu Wei has some but still rather limited English skills. Entrepreneur Zhang and Reverend Liu are exceptions in the way that they speak English fluently (Zhang) or very well (Liu). As for the other informants, interpreter Hui Ling speaks reasonable English, which makes him the voice and ears for the other engineers, including manager Wang. If Hui is not around, communication occurs in the form of sign language, combined with a mixture of some English words and Chinese words. At the site, the engineers taught their local site assistant, a friendly and soft-spoken young Muslim lady, some Chinese words since she was able to greet and say thank you in Mandarin.

It is not that the men were not trying to communicate. Engineer Zhao, for example, was seen making jokes with the students that studied at the finished sections of the school. But despite the good intentions, the girls and Zhao could not really understand each other’s pronunciation, which made the whole joke attempt a painfully slow exercise. In addition, the work schedules of engineers do not allow much time for practising English at the jobsite. Furthermore, the majority of the people that make up the unskilled local workforce speak Dagbani as their first language and only speak a couple of English phrases themselves.

Not being able to communicate and being dependent on an interpreter who is 15 years his junior was very frustrating for Wang Peng, who could only speak some French. In Tamale he tried to pick up English by studying a 1980s Chinese-English course book by himself—unfortunately, and much to his annoyance, without much progress. But even for those Chinese migrants who have the advantage of speaking English and therefore being able to communicate directly with their staff, communication needs effort and time. As Mrs. Zhang explained:

I try to be as clear as possible to my employees. My voice is soft and I use a friendly tone, but my words are hard underneath it. They know this and accept it, but it took quite some time to arrive at this point. I’ve learnt that, in the end, being straightforward pays off.

According to Liu, communication is, even after all these years in Ghana, still difficult and very time-consuming. Hu Wei, who also works with locals on a daily basis, mentioned the language barrier being a problem for him as he often misses out on elements of conversation.
For Ke Hua, communication was slowly improving: he is learning English in Tamale word by word, day by day, as he began without any basic knowledge. When visiting the motorcycle garage, it was very clear that, as a result of his insufficient English skills, it was difficult for Ke to understand his colleagues, especially when they made jokes. He cannot follow them and is certainly not able to give a quick reaction. This is even more difficult when the jokes are aimed at or about him.

Besides this long list of difficulties that are experienced by the Chinese migrants when working in Tamale, there were positive aspects to be addressed as well. Hu Wei, for example, loves the freedom he has as a one-man freelance specialist in Ghana. He is allowed to design his own schedule and work in a way that suits him.

After overcoming the initial challenges and setbacks, entrepreneur Zhang likes the way working in Ghana has pushed her to become more efficient and creative. Reverend Liu also believed that his grassroots work in Ghana helped and challenged him to develop skills and qualities he did not know he had. Furthermore, the type of work that focuses on helping Ghanaians develop is in many ways much more fulfilling than his factory job in Hong Kong ever could have been.

**Daily life: leisure time**

As most of the Chinese informants work six long days a week, there is little leisure or personal time. Nevertheless, how is this scarce personal time used? Do they go out to drink and dance in local bars like the contracted Chinese stadium builders? And how are short holidays or national holidays spent?

For Reverend Liu, his work is his life since it is part of his mission. He and his wife have always worked many long hours, and during the weekend, church life flourishes and brings about other tasks. However, they have a passion for travel and their devotion to their church and church planting organization brought them to visit many different countries. They have also travelled around Ghana extensively. When not working, Reverend Liu is a keen gardener who knows a lot about plants and herbs.

When she was setting up and running her business in Tamale, entrepreneur Zhang felt that she did not have time for leisure because she was working seven days a week to make her business successful. Since she began working in Accra, she once in a while likes to go shopping on Sunday in one of Accra’s shopping malls, where she can buy Chinese-imported products for cooking. Recently, Zhang also began to learn French. Although this is inspired by possible business opportunities, she said that she enjoyed learning a new language. Zhang tried to travel once a year to Europe and once every two years to China, where she combines business with visiting relatives.

The construction engineers put in long days of at least ten hours. At night they spend their spare time at the shared household in the rural outskirts of Tamale. When I visited them in the evening, the older engineers were watching a 1980s movie on the China state television channel via satellite TV,
while some of the younger men were using their laptops to send emails and download Chinese pop songs. Interpreter Hui Ling was working on his computer to improve English language skills.

If they are not watching television or chatting, the men like to gamble and drink. Although the latter was not directly expressed, the remains of such pastime practices were clearly visible in a corner of the room. The men also explained that they regularly have local Ghanaians ‘friends’ over to hang out.

Ghanaian informants reported that the Chinese construction workers that built the stadium had the habit of going out drinking and dancing in one particular bar in central Tamale. When asked about going out, engineer Zhao said they would like to go to a bar but that they had not found any appealing place yet. According to Hui Ling, it is not easy to go out at night since they usually do such things as a group. Not only do they share a car, but as they do not have private transport, they have to ask manager Wang Peng for permission to use it. Wang Peng was not very keen on going into town, and in practice this meant they had to go together with him or they could not go at all. They lived near a small and isolated dirt road where there were no taxis. The men did not mention any regulation that advised them to spend the evening indoors and insisted it was just a matter of transport and time. The construction engineers did not have much time for vacation, and the annual summer holiday is usually spent in China. Some of the men, like engineer Gu, who worked on projects in Ghana’s coastal regions, were able to do a little bit of sightseeing in their spare time. Many migrants regarded this as the highlight of their work in Ghana thus far. For example, engineer Gu explained that a visit to Cape Coast Castle and learning about the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade made a very strong impression on him. By using his arms he tried to measure out the small dimensions of the slave dungeons for his colleagues. Chang described seeing the ocean and beach as his best experience in his five years of working in Ghana.

Ke Hua enjoyed a similar experience at the beach. For him, seeing the ocean and spending time at the beach had been the highlight of his stay in Ghana so far. Ke also works six days a week and spends most of his spare time alone or, when his Chinese colleague is in Tamale, together with him. He enjoyed leisure activities like playing computer games, using MSN Messenger, sending emails, learning English, and listening to or downloading Chinese pop music. Ke Hua explained that he is not interested in going out to bars and drinking, as groups of Chinese stadium workers were reported to do extensively:

*I don’t want to spend my time and money in bars. It is not what I came here for. I am here to work and learn English.*

Not all of the informants mentioned that they had experienced anything special during their time off. Many found it hard to name a highlight or positive personal experience outside the professional sphere, such as manager Wang Peng, who spends a lot of his time working, using the computer in his bedroom-office. Engineer Zhao described his life in Ghana as ‘numb’ (mamu):
I cannot think of any particularly positive experience—or negative for that matter. Every day is the same here. I feel numb.

Engineer Hu Wei spends only six months a year in Ghana and also put in long days. He used his spare time in reading and socialising with Ghanaian friends, with whom he enjoys drinking beer and chatting.

**Private life: relationships and social interaction**

It is widely known that Chinese companies, especially SOEs, in contrast to their Western counterparts, do not provide the opportunity for their employees to bring their families. In practice, this means that Chinese expats work for one, two, or more years overseas without their spouses and children. Exceptions are sometimes made for white-collar employees or high-level engineers, as it is reported that some companies bring over girlfriends to Africa, though not necessarily wives.

But how do these Chinese migrants deal with missing their loved ones? Moreover, what kind of other relationships or social interaction takes place in the life of these migrants?

All engineers and interpreter Hui Ling work for a Chinese SOE, with the consequence that they are in Ghana without family. According to manager Wang, ninety per cent of Chinese oversees expats are male and most of them have families back in China.

In the Gansu household, all expats were allowed to make one long-distance phone call a week. Once a year they are provided with a plane ticket and go back to China for a three- or four-week holiday. Despite working for a private company, mechanic Ke Hua has to deal with being without family and friends for an even longer period and will be given a return ticket to China only after two years of work.

The participants were all asked what it is like to live separated from their families for such a long time. It was apparent that not everybody was comfortable speaking about this private subject, and this was respected. Nevertheless, some, such as engineer Liao—who has a two-year-old daughter—were surprisingly open about it:

*I miss my family very much and this is very difficult for me. You know I have only seen my daughter twice since she was born and she is growing so fast now. I hate that I am not there to see her grow up. I try to call my family as much as I can.*

His colleague Zhao showed a more pragmatic vision:

*Before I signed the contract I spoke with my family, so we all knew the consequences and agreed on it. Therefore, we just accept the situation as it is. We mentally prepared ourselves. Besides, I go back home for holidays and I call my family every week.*
When Zhao expressed this viewpoint, Wang Peng and Mr. Gu nodded affirmatively.

Leaving Hong Kong for Ghana was not an easy decision for Reverend Liu either. As the eldest son he was not expected to move away from his family because this is against an important virtue in traditional Chinese culture: filial piety (xiao) prescribes that children, in particular the eldest son, take care of their parents and ancestors. This responsibility includes many duties, from material support to the performance of ritual sacrifices at the ancestral shrine. Initially, Liu’s parents were against him migrating to Africa, but after his brother agreed to take over Liu’s role as head of the family, they reluctantly agreed. Despite this solution, Liu has always found it difficult not to be in Hong Kong to take care of his parents, especially when their health became fragile. Nevertheless, for Liu and his wife, missing family and friends can only be overcome with the determination that is supported by their strong belief in the evangelic mission.

Hu Wei reported not having many problems with missing his family. Not only is he separated from them for just approximately six months, but his only son is studying at university and therefore not living at home, while his wife has a busy job working for the government.

For mechanic Ke Hua the first months in Ghana were tough in terms of missing friends and family, but he claimed to be over that now. He tried to communicate with China through email and especially MSN, but as a result of the time difference and slow Internet connections, it is difficult to stay in close contact. Nevertheless, he was not concerned:

My family will always be family. There is no need to speak to them every day. And if friends are good friends, then they will remain friends no matter how far away you are.

Since contact with the home front is limited, what other social interaction takes place regarding the Chinese in Tamale?

First, it is remarkable that in a city like Tamale, where there are very few Chinese, all Chinese informants had very little or no contact with other Chinese migrants. The reasons for this lack of interaction can be found in the fact that some informants simply are unaware of each other’s presence. With the exception of the Chinese construction workers who stayed in Tamale during the building of the stadium, the informants did not know each other.

For example, the engineers from Gansu lived geographically rather close to Reverend Liu’s school, but both parties were unaware of this. Only entrepreneur Zhang was aware that at some point there were Chinese people living in her neighbourhood but said she had not known them personally or talked with them. As it turned out, these people were Mr. and Mrs. Liu, who used to live in the vicinity of Zhang’s motorcycle business. This reveals another reason for the lack of communication: there seems to be little interest in socializing with other Chinese migrants.

To take mechanic Ke Hua as an example, he said he was not that interested in socializing with other Chinese because he would then just be talking Chinese all the time without improving his English language skills, which was his main incentive for being in Ghana. Reverend Liu and his wife
stated that they are not particularly interested in social contact with other Chinese because they came to Ghana for the Ghanaians. Liu has kept his contacts with other Chinese at a mainly professional level. During the building of Tamale Stadium he maintained a professional relationship with the management of the company that was responsible for the construction. Entrepreneur Zhang is not interested in much contact with local Chinese either:

*In regard to business and the local Chinese: we like to operate more independently. I do know some Chinese people in Accra but I am not a member of a Chinese community. Honestly, I haven’t even been to the Chinese embassy [for registration] yet.*

Long working hours and full schedules were another influential element. Mr. and Mrs. Liu explained that during their years in Ghana, with the exception of Reverend Liu’s involvement with the establishment of the Chinese church in Accra, they have always been too occupied with their mission work to become very active members in what they perceived as Accra’s Chinese community. Similar shortages of leisure time and an isolated work and living location make socializing with Chinese migrants other than their close colleagues difficult for the construction engineers from Gansu.

Since social interaction between the different Chinese migrants in Tamale is limited, what kinds of consequences does this have for interracial relationships and social interaction between the Chinese migrants and local Ghanaians? According to Solange Guo’s research in Zambia, interracial relationships between Chinese migrants and locals are inevitable.²⁷⁷ Based on the stories about the Chinese construction workers that built the stadium, it is certain some social interaction between locals and Chinese migrants takes place in Tamale.²⁷⁸

Indeed, despite the language barrier, some of the Chinese informants reported socialising with Ghanaians quite frequently. Engineer Hu, for example, said he has many Ghanaian friends, mainly male. He enjoys drinking beer with them and just chatting. With some of them he has even established a long-term friendship: Mr. Isaah, one of Hu’s local friends and neighbours, explained that he and Mr. Hu go a long way back. Isaah said that when he had worked for Hu as a driver and guard, they got to know each other very well and became friends. He called Hu his ‘Chinese brother’ and said his family members also know Hu very well. At the time of research, Isaah’s son was working as Hu’s gatekeeper and assistant.

The Lius also feel they have established good relationships with Ghanaians, but at the same time Liu experiences that being Chinese means they will remain outsiders in Ghanaian society. In his opinion, most Ghanaians will always keep some distance from foreigners.

According to entrepreneur Zhang, she has not made real friends yet, but she believes she has created good working relations with her staff and clients, who occasionally invite her to social events like weddings.

The engineers from Gansu also appeared to interact socially with locals. They stated that they have many Ghanaian ‘friends’, but it is likely that they mean superficial contacts. At their house some
Ghanaian men are hired to help with ICT problems and often stay for a chat and even dinner (they once were invited to eat home-cooked Chinese fried rice). The engineers also have professional contact with their Ghanaian guard, who sometimes has a friend over.

At both the house and jobsite, most of the communication goes via interpreter Hui Ling, who gets along quite well with his Ghanaian peers as they share the same interest in computers and Internet. During an evening group interview at the engineer’s house, it also became clear that the engineers indeed had ‘friends’, as there were several young Ghanaian women in the house, though not in the living room and not participating in the interview. At one point engineer Chang excused himself, with a big smile on his face, for going to the bathroom after he was called away by a local female visitor with whom he went into a bedroom.

These kinds of relationships are likely to have a predominantly sexual aspect, but the atmosphere was friendly and relaxed and emotional relations of some sort should not be completely excluded. These sexual relationships between locals and migrants are not exclusively a Chinese practice in Ghana, and this kind of interaction is prevalent at any location where large communities of men live far away from home.

For those who are not yet committed, such as young men like Ke Hua and Hui Ling, could Ghana be a place to find a partner? So far there have been few marriages between Chinese migrants and Africans, and according to Ghaterlard’s research, such marriages are not yet fully accepted. Hui Ling, who is able to communicate much better than Ke Hua, did show interest in the local women, although he felt that so far local women often seem interested only in the material gain of a potential relationship. He believed that cultural differences could be a problem and, for that matter, a potential Ghanaian girlfriend would have to be willing to move to China in order to learn the Chinese language and culture. He thinks that in terms of acceptance, it would take time, but when his family saw his true happiness, he thinks they would accept such a relationship. Ke Hua explained that he regards some of the local women as very attractive. As an example, he praised the facial beauty of the Ghanaian manager of the motorcycle business. He also admitted that he had to get used to the more voluminous body shape many local women have and added that he learned that Ghanaians have a different idea about beauty from the Chinese idea. However, when asked if he could picture himself with a Ghanaian partner in the future, he hesitated and explained that even though he could meet someone, his parents would certainly not accept (fandui) such a relationship.

Perception of the other: Ghanaian culture

Culture is a complex concept as almost no single definition has yet been unanimously acknowledged in the literature. For most ordinary people, culture defines the basic elements in the mentality and behaviour of national or ethnic groups, such as language, art, tradition, values, ideology, and beliefs.
Despite the different interpretations of culture one may have, the Chinese informants were nevertheless asked to express their perception of Ghanaian culture based on their own experiences and ideas of what culture is. In addition, they were invited to share their perception of the Ghanaian people.

In the early 1960s, *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourner) industrialists described the Ghanaians as friendly, welcoming, and not racist. Similarly, all my Chinese informants regarded the Ghanaian people as friendly and welcoming (*shanren qingren*). Some of them, like engineers Zhao, Gu, Wang Peng, and Hui Ling also felt sorry for the economic hardship Ghanaians endure and used the word *xinku ren* (‘people with tough lives’) to describe them. Like the early *huaqiao*, Hu Wei mentioned the lack of racism and ethnic tension among the Ghanaians in comparison with other West African people. Mrs. Zhang felt that Ghanaians are very talkative and can be enthusiastic debaters, especially about politics.

However, the subject of Ghanaian culture brought conflicting remarks and contrasting perceptions. Most of the informants believed that Ghanaian culture is very different from Chinese culture. For construction manager Wang, these cultures are incomparable. He made it very clear that in his opinion Ghana does not have a culture (*meiyou wenhua*) because as a former colony there are too many foreign influences that have restrained Ghana from developing its own national culture. For him, having culture was synonymous with having a long and written history. He claimed the fact that Ghana has no script as evidence for his view. Zhao, Gu, and Chang agreed with him and used the word ‘primitive’ (*yuanshi*) to describe their opinion of Ghanaian culture.

Like his co-worker, Zhao simply stated:

*Compared with China, Ghana doesn’t have culture.*

However, from Reverend Liu’s perspective, oral culture is just as much culture as written culture. Moreover, he addressed what he felt were the positive and negative elements of oral culture:

*Their oral culture is just as important as our written one. Because of their oral traditions, Ghanaians have a really good memory. They like to memorize things just like us Chinese. We try to use this as an advantage for their studies. But on the other hand, as a result of this tradition, they are not used to learning from books, which is challenging for our work as teachers.*

Interestingly, Gansu construction engineer Liao explained during a private interview that those elements that his colleagues regard as primitive are precisely those that he began to appreciate as important aspects of Ghanaian culture: dancing, drumming, and their expressive ways of communication:
For me, getting to know the Ghanaian culture is the best aspect of my life here. At first I found it hard to adjust to the expressive attitude and different way of communication. But when I got used to it, I started to appreciate and understand it more and more. I like the way they sing and dance together, and the direct communication. They have a lot of fun as well. We, people from the East, are very shy, stiff, and afraid to express our feelings.

However, these expressive manners that are prevalent in Ghanaian culture and were admired by Liao were regarded as difficult by Reverend Liu:

When they [the Ghanaians] are happy, then they are really happy, and when they are sad, they are very sad. But we Chinese, we cannot express ourselves like that; we are very prudent because we have learned to be that way. For example, in Ghana it is normal for male friends to walk hand in hand, but culturally I am not used to this physical way of communication...so therefore I can do it but only for a short time because we [as Chinese] can try to understand this way of behaviour and pretend to behave in similar ways, but we won’t completely adopt it. We just can’t and therefore it won’t be real.

Most informants regarded the Ghanaian society and lifestyle as more relaxed than the Chinese. The construction engineers believe this is part of their nature and culture. Could these relaxed elements in Ghanaian culture be something to adopt and learn from the Ghanaians? Working six or seven days a week as a managing director had not given Mrs. Zhang enough opportunities to really get to know local Ghanaian culture, she stated. Consequently, Zhang’s perception of Ghanaian culture and people was based on the contacts she had with her staff, customers, and business relations and by taking the odd tro tro ride. Nevertheless, Mrs. Zhang believed that Ghanaian culture influenced her personal lifestyle:

I’ve learnt from the Ghanaians to be more relaxed and to live more day-by-day. I now try to take things as they come.

However, the Ghanaian customs and work ethic found at the construction site are unlikely to be adopted and transferred to China, as Zhao, Liao, and Chang explained:

We Chinese are used to working very hard and experience stress and time pressure. The Ghanaian people showed us how to be more relaxed, and gradually we started to adopt this a little bit. As a result, we feel less pressure and try to take things easy. However, what can we do with this acquired work style? The moment we are back in China, we are expected to work in our usual style; if not, we will be out of a job very soon!

Young mechanic Ke Hua felt that the Ghanaian culture was alien and hard to relate to his own. Despite the fact that he worked closely with locals and was invited to participate in cultural events
once in a while, the language barrier made it difficult for him to comprehend all that happened around him. This contributes to an overall impression of exoticism:

*I was invited to go to church on a Sunday and it was very interesting. Everybody was dressed really nice, so colourful, especially the women. It was very interesting to watch them dancing, singing, and listening for hours; but no matter how much I wanted to, I just couldn’t understand what they were doing, really.*

For engineer Liao, these alien aspects of Ghanaian culture are indeed to be adopted and could be a true learning experience:

*As people from the East, we have trouble expressing our feelings because we haven’t learned to be open about them. In my opinion, we can learn from the Ghanaians how to be more open, honest, and expressive.*

Despite the cultural differences, some informants also noticed similarities between Ghanaian and Chinese culture. Reverend Liu and Zhang named family structure, which in both countries is traditionally based on the extended family rather than the nuclear family:

*I know some of my employees have large extended families relying on them for almost everything. In Ghana, families take care of each other and they have huge responsibilities towards family members, even the ones they hardly know. Actually, I found this situation quite similar to the family relations in Chinese society and culture.*

Hu Wei, who at first addressed the differences between both cultures, later in the interview came up with the respect that older people receive in both cultures and the social and cultural importance of children and having children in Ghana and China.

According to Reverend Liu, the importance of ‘maintaining friendship’ (*guanxi*) in Chinese culture is another very important aspect shared by both Ghanaians and Chinese:

*In China and Ghana you need to have a network of relations in order to get things done; it is truly essential.*

Interpreter Hui Ling has noticed the obvious cultural differences but also felt that his Ghanaian peers are not that dissimilar. He believed that in both cultures young men have similar lifestyles as they like to hang out, be online, listen to music, drink beer, and look at girls. However, he added that, in his opinion, Ghanaian peers compared with young Chinese adults are much more interested in politics, and that young Chinese adults have better access to computers and the Internet. Being in Tamale, he noticed the presence of many Europeans and other foreigners and found it very interesting that the
Ghanaians seem to communicate and work with foreigners so easily, whereas he believed this is more difficult for Chinese people.

**Being Chinese in Ghana**

Ghanaian informants reported that during the building of Tamale Stadium many Chinese construction workers were seen in the city centre. It was the first time Tamale saw such a large group of expats so different from the other migrants or expats from Lebanon, Pakistan, and the large number of Western aid workers and volunteers. According to local informants, the Chinese construction workers were received with a lot of curiosity and often called to with phrases such as ‘Hey, Jet Li brother’, ‘Jacky Chan brother’, or ‘Bruce Lee friend’, sometimes accompanied by imitating martial arts’ moves. These are often their only source of information about China and the Chinese. According to the local informants, the Chinese would respond by making similar moves and saying ‘Hello’, as their English was too limited to have a conversation. When I saw mechanic Ke Hua walking home one day, a local man passing by on his bicycle shouted from across the road: ‘Hey, Chinaman’. Although it did not sound unfriendly, Ke Hua simply did not respond. When asked later, he explained that he had not even heard the cyclist. His understanding of English was so limited that it made him unresponsive.

In general, the language barrier and limited social interaction seem to have resulted in the overall situation that locals observe Chinese in Tamale mainly from a distance, which allows free rein to prejudice and rumours. At the same time, the social encounters of the Shanghai construction workers have led to stories that continue to circulate. Casual conversation with several local informants indicated that many believe that the Chinese construction workers they saw building the stadium were convicts. When asked why, they responded that they looked like convicts with their dirty vests and simple clothes, lived in a fenced compound, and worked day and night.

It even appeared that the stadium construction workers were also held responsible for the severe drought in the summer of 2006, according to a Canadian Chinese volunteer at Liu’s school:

*I was told that Tamale was experiencing the worst drought of the decade. Chinese construction workers at the soccer stadium were blamed for the drought. Rumours about Chinese witchcraft started spreading because there was no rain since the construction of the stadium commenced.*

Despite these negative stories, none of the Chinese participants has felt unwelcome or been treated with hostility by Tamale citizens. Moreover, it became clear that some of them are not at all aware of the rumours and possible negative reputation. What they did experience is a sense of unfamiliarity. The Chinese informants believed that local Ghanaians in Tamale have little understanding and knowledge of China, which is likely to be true. For example, one of the most social and well-educated
local fixers, who spent quite some time talking with Hui Ling, had no idea about China’s political system and thought it was a democracy like Ghana. Some of the informants such as Hui Ling and Mrs. Zhang felt that, much to their annoyance, they were regarded by locals as ‘white’ Westerners instead of Chinese. As Hui Ling explained:

> When I speak with a Ghanaian girl she expects me to buy her things, like a mobile phone for example, because she thinks I earn as much as a European expat; but I am Chinese, from western China, not European or American, and therefore I don’t have that much money. These girls, they just don’t seem to recognize the difference!

When I asked Ebene, the local fixer, why Hui Ling would be regarded as non-Chinese, he explained that he too was surprised to hear that Hui was Chinese, as Ebene and his friends believed Hui did not look like a Chinese person but more like an American or European. To underline this view, he referred to Hui’s shaved head, Chinese-brand, modern style, sports-type clothes and, most importantly, the fact that he was able to speak proper English. For Mrs. Zhang, being regarded as non-Chinese is also frustrating:

> In my experience, Ghanaians seem to regard Chinese people as white, Western people who give money away. Often I am asked for which NGO I work, so I keep explaining we are a private business and therefore not giving out money.

As pointed out in Chapter Four, in media reports the Chinese migrants in Ghana have increasingly been portrayed negatively. These accusations range from claims of unfair competition and inferior products to the accusation of using convict labour. The Chinese participants were invited to express their opinion of the larger China-in-Ghana topic and asked to share their experiences. However, during the interviews it became clear that not all informants were aware of a possible negative reputation. Mr. Liu stressed that he had always felt accepted and welcomed by the Ghanaian people, but in recent years, he noticed that in and around Accra the situation had changed. Chinese migrants are now viewed critically and with suspicion. He said he could understand the accusations about inferior quality, as he was convinced that the Chinese should stick to delivering to Africa what they have mastered themselves:

> I do believe the relation between Ghana and China is benefiting both countries. For example, the Chinese have a lot of experience with large infrastructure projects. This they do well. Ghana’s infrastructure is in a very bad condition, so the Ghanaians can benefit from Chinese knowledge and experience. As for other projects, I found the quality of the Chinese work often not good enough. If you look carefully at the interiors of buildings, doors are not set straight and electricity is done unprofessionally. This is not so much of an improvement in the long run for Ghanaians. It is better to teach them to do it right straight away; otherwise, the same
problems will recur. In regard to the growing amount of Chinese-made products in the shops, well, the whole world is buying Chinese-made goods, but those products that are sold in Africa are often just of inferior quality, and Ghanaians know this as well.

Mrs. Zhang, being an import trader herself, shared the following:

Some of the Chinese products are fine, but of course I also noticed some Chinese products are of terrible quality. This I found very unfair. I know of Ghanaian traders being ripped off by buying products of a certain quality at trade fairs in China, only to find out that when the container arrives in Ghana they have been sent products of inferior quality. This is just despicable. Ghanaians deserve quality, just like anybody else in this world.

For the engineers from Gansu, unfair competition and inferior quality is not a topic of discussion. In their eyes, the Ghanaians are buying Chinese products, just like the rest of the world, and since the Ghanaians have no industry whereas China does, they should buy from China. Ke Hua and Hui Ling were not that surprised to find shops and stalls in the far north of Ghana filled with China-made products. However, they do find the products too high in price in comparison with China. Wang Peng added that Europe and the US import many products from China and that nobody regards that as strange. When asked if he believed these are the same products, he confirmed and stressed that it is Ghanaian traders that chose what they want to import and not the Chinese. According to Zhang, Chinese traders have just as much concern about quality. During a telephone interview, she explained the difficult situation she was in:

At this moment it is very difficult. Not only is the global economic crisis helping the devaluation of the Ghana Cedi even more, but I have so many problems with the motorbikes. The motorbike parts sent to me from China are simply not good enough. I need stable quality; I can’t sell these bad-quality bikes. As a company, you have to be able to deliver; otherwise, you will lose customers. I have been in contact with the manufacturer several times and improvement was promised, but in reality the parts are increasingly being made at factories further away where there is little control over such practices. I feel deceived and, considering the problems I have, I feel for Ghanaian traders who can’t communicate directly. I am now planning a trip to China, which is a large expense, but I see it as my last resort.

Hu Wei noticed that there are some lower-quality products for sale but is convinced the Chinese agricultural machinery and tools are good value for money:

All the machinery we use in Africa is coming straight from China. Ghana has basically nothing, only very old and outdated material. The Chinese machinery is more affordable than Western or Japanese material. Since our machinery can help generate better harvests, lives will be improved.
He also continually stressed that importation will never be the cheapest option; but unless a country develops its own industry, importation will remain the only option.

Entrepreneur Zhang believed that traders like herself could be beneficial for the locals. Although she is honest about being in business for personal gain, she hopes to have a positive impact on the lives of local customers by selling motorbikes:

*The way I see it, in many cases customers don’t just buy a motorbike: they buy independence! One of my customers used to distribute water on a bicycle in a couple of remote villages without water facilities and was hardly getting by. But after purchasing a tricycle he was able to distribute water more often and could reach more villages. He now makes a good living and can support his family.*

In addition, Zhang employs local people and tries to take good care of her staff by paying school fees for their children as well as medical bills.

The topic of Chinese migrants being increasingly involved in criminal activities as well as rumours about convict labour turned out to be a controversial one, in particular for the construction engineers who took these allegations quite personally. Mr. Liu, who was involved as mediator during the situation with the Chinese stadium builders who impregnated two local girls, acknowledged the existence of these rumours of convict labour but denied this was the case with the Chinese construction workers that built the Tamale Stadium. Furthermore, he doubted strongly whether these rumours held any truth at all. Mrs. Zhang and Hu Wei believed that a general lack of local knowledge of China and the Chinese, in combination with large communication problems, was causing these rumours. Ke Hua and Hu Wei said they had never heard such accusations before.

None of the construction engineers from Gansu, including manager Wang Peng and interpreter Hui Ling, appeared to have heard about these accusations and were shocked to be confronted with them. Considering the importance of ‘face’ (*mianzi*) in Chinese culture, the topic had to be brought up very carefully, and interpreter Frank was asked to do some extra translation to make sure none of the informants would get too offended. Nevertheless, the reactions to the topic were both surprised and angry:

*How would any country be able to send their convicts to work in a foreign country. This is just impossible! This is bullshit!!*

Considerable interest was shown in the possible source of these rumours:

*Who says these things? From what country are these people, because they obviously don’t know China. People who believe and spread these nonsense stories will never be welcome in China.*
Consequently, none of the men believed rumours of Chinese convict labour were true.

During a private interview, I confronted manager Wang Peng with the accusations that were expressed by Kwame and Agdan, two of his Ghanaian staff, when I visited the construction site. They complained that the Chinese management was not paying the promised end-of-service gratitude and sold leftover building material on the local market for personal profit. Wang admitted having problems with the funding of the school project that was funded by the Ghana Educational Trust. These troubles with the early release of incomplete funds were also reported in a local newspaper. Wang emphasized his frustration with not receiving sufficient funds and said he was therefore unable to make payments and buy materials. He felt that the global crisis and devaluation of Ghana’s currency was causing even more delay. He denied selling leftover material for profit on the local market.

*Perspectives on the future*

Ghana’s economic relations with China have intensified during the past decade, and despite the growing body of negative representations in local media reports, there are no indications that this will change in the near future. The Chinese informants were asked how they thought China-Ghana relations would develop and, more importantly, whether their personal plans for the future would involve Ghana.

All informants stated their belief that the future of China-Ghana relations is bright. Mrs. Zhang felt that the economic relations between the two countries are beneficial for both countries. She also believed that the relations would become stronger, especially since oil has been found near Ghana’s coast, which could make Ghana a potentially wealthy and strategic trade partner. Hu Wei thought in exactly the same way. Manager Wang answered the question of future connections by repeating the Olympics’ phrase, *One world, one dream* (*tong yi ge shijie, tong yi ge mengxiang*), with a daring and simultaneously cynical facial expression. Engineers Zhao, Liao, and Hui regarded the economic and political relations between Ghana and China as part of a bigger picture that concerned more than just China. According to their opinion, globalization will result in stronger relations between different nations and such new ties will therefore be inevitable, including those between African nations and China. Manager Wang Peng and engineer Gu also stressed the fact that China has no history of colonization and slave-trade with Africa, something that contributes to the more equal character of the China-Ghana relations. Only Reverend Liu believed that the ‘politics of non-interference’ that China is using in Africa needs to be changed in order to develop satisfactory relations with Africa:

*When in the late 1980s Chinese migrants from Liberia and Sierra Leone wanted to flee the violence, Ghana opened her door and helped them find refuge. After this, the Chinese embassy washed their hands and closed the door. They never did anything to help in relation to that awful civil war and its African victims. In my opinion, this was wrong, and their ‘wash your*
hands of everything’ policy and disregard of local political and humanitarian questions won’t be sustainable in the future.

As for their personal future, the plans of the Chinese informants vary a lot. For entrepreneur Zhang, life in Ghana has so far been very interesting and an overall learning experience. Considering her future, Zhang plans to stay at least another couple of years in Ghana before returning to the United Kingdom for her retirement. She and her husband have been thinking about buying property in Ghana as an investment, and there are plans to expand the motorcycle company to other West African countries such as Cote d’Ivoire and Togo. However, Zhang’s biggest dream in terms of conducting future business in Ghana has nothing to do with the motorcycle industry:

My dream is to open a Chinese language centre in Ghana. This centre would offer interpreting services, Chinese language courses, accommodation, a Chinese restaurant, and a business mediation service. With the growing presence of foreigners and economic development, I believe the Northern Region could be an interesting place for such a school.

Some years ago the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Liu left Ghana to pursue studies in the US, and she now lives and works in Hong Kong. Despite their age—the Lius are in their early sixties—and the fact that their only child lives in Asia, the missionary couple do not have any plans to return to Hong Kong just yet. When the computer school and kindergarten are ready to be fully operated and managed by local staff, Reverend Liu and his wife will probably sign up for another project in Ghana. This project would start in the far and remote Northern Region that borders with Burkina Faso. Eventually, however, they expect to return home:

Well, we haven’t planned to die here, no, if that’s what you mean. In the end, we will go back to Hong Kong, but we want to stay in Ghana as long as we are needed.

Ke Hua was also not planning to return to his native Guangxi province any time soon. He signed a four-year contract and expects to return home after his contract ends. He hopes his English will be sufficient by then. He is not in a hurry, however: he stated that if his services are needed after the end of his contract, he would consider staying longer in Tamale. He is also becoming interested in other countries and their potential job opportunities.

Interpreter Hui Ling will stay another one-and-a-half years in Ghana on his contract. After that, he dreams about working for a European or American multinational in Ghana and eventually moving to the Western hemisphere. He would also be keen on working in different parts of Africa as long as it pays well and helps get him the experience that is needed for a Western-orientated job in business.

Engineers Chang and Gu would consider resigning after their two-year contract ends. Mr. Zhao has not decided on that yet. He first wants to finish this project and then discuss the options with his family. Manager Wang Peng, who still has time left on his contract, did not want to answer the
question and just smiled.

For engineer Liao, however, staying on—never mind a long-term future as an expat in Ghana—was not an option. He could not wait to return to his family and could not see himself returning for an overseas contract job any time soon:

_In the end it is just not worth it. I want to be with my family. I want to see my child grow up. That is more important to me than money or promotion._

Unlike Liao, Hu Wei, while comfortably sitting in his overgrown garden dressed in a local batik shirt and shorts, said he does see a future for himself in Ghana. Not only has he grown fond of Ghana and its people, but he has been exploring various business opportunities, from importing Chinese agricultural machinery and seeds to exploiting a farm himself. Hu was particularly interested in continuing his shea-nut processing business. By finding a way of exporting these nuts to China as raw material, in order to extract the oil efficiently in Chinese factories, Hu believed that the shea-nut oil could eventually be manufactured into all sorts of products that are suitable for the Chinese market. However, as a result of the global economic crisis that hit in 2009, Hu believed that it was not the right time for investment and planned to wait a couple of years more. Moreover, Hu Wei still needed to convince his wife to come and live with him in Ghana after her retirement.

Besides the business potential, there was another important reason why Hu Wei liked Ghana so much. He stressed that he had become very interested in Ghanaian politics and that he watched the presidential elections closely. He explained that while living in Ghana he gained many new insights into politics, especially in regard to China’s political system. In Ghana he felt comfortable to speak his mind about Chinese politics in a way he could never do in China. Thus, in addition to business opportunities, a more relaxed lifestyle, and seeing the world, living as a new Chinese migrant could also offer a taste of political freedom.
Renewed ties between China and Africa have resulted in an increase of Chinese migration to Africa. Recent migration from China to Ghana is part of this larger trend—also known as ‘new migration order’—and its representatives are identified as ‘new Chinese migrants’. Since China’s activities in Africa and the actions of Chinese people are often lumped together, Chinese migrants are subjected to generalization and misunderstanding, while actual data on this group is very limited. The profile of new Chinese migrants in Africa therefore deserves more attention. In this ethnographically inspired thesis, I looked at the characteristics and personal stories that define the new Chinese migrants in Africa by taking one group of these migrants living in the city of Tamale, Ghana as an example. Here, the most interesting findings of my fieldwork are described. This work can contribute to a more differentiated, and therefore more realistic, insight into the characteristics of the new Chinese migrants in Africa.

**Different sub-groups of new Chinese migrants**

In Chapter Two I presented a broad profile of the new Chinese migrants and listed the different types that can be found within this heterogeneous group. During my fieldwork I was able to conduct interviews with nine people, who are representatives of four different sub-groups of new Chinese migrants:

First is the new entrepreneur (*huashang*). This type of migrant is clearly represented by Mrs. Zhang, who is highly educated, learning to work within the local environment, and trying to use the local circumstances to her advantage. She regarded herself as a global citizen with an international network of friends and family accessible through modern communication methods. For her, just as for all new entrepreneurs, there is no need to assimilate into the host culture completely.

A second group of migrants are the engineers. Gu, Zhao, Liao, Chang, and manager Wang Peng all represent the typical Chinese contract worker. These migrants were working on a fixed infrastructure contract for a Chinese SOE. One could say that this type of new Chinese migrant shows some resemblances to the late nineteenth century Chinese contract labour migrant, but this pattern is very different in terms of decentralized coordination, more highly educated migrants, and ideologies of development when compared with the nineteenth century *huagong* pattern. Three other migrants, namely Hu Wei, interpreter Hui Ling, and mechanic Ke Hua also represent the new Chinese contract migrant. However, their working terms were slightly different from the contract workers mentioned above. Hui Ling was able to accept multiple assignments at the same time. Hu Wei worked on a long-term, part-time contract instead of the usual two or three years’ fulltime contract. Ke Hua’s situation
was different because he was contracted by a small, private company. The variation in the personal stories from the engineers shows that even within one sub-group of migrants, there are large differences in their working conditions.

The new *huaqiao* (Chinese sojourners) are a third group. Reverend Liu shows characteristics of the *huaqiao* pattern regarding length of stay, bringing over family members, and originating from a traditional south-Chinese sending area. However, at the same time, Liu showed characteristics of an aid-worker migrant as he was working in a new frontier, which is typical for new Chinese migrants. From the story of Liu, we learn that generalization of the people into only one group of migrants does not do justice to the highly individual characteristics of the new Chinese migrants.

Another new Chinese migrant type is the transitory migrant. These migrants are interested in migrating to other countries or continents like North America or Europe after their contract has been terminated. The two youngest of my Chinese informants, Ke Hua and Hui Ling, also showed elements of the transitory migrant. Here, we can once more conclude that individual migrants can be representatives of more than one group.

In Chapter Three and Chapter Five I laid out several questions regarding the different backgrounds, personal drivers, and lifestyles of the new Chinese migrants in Ghana. In regard to backgrounds, I can conclude that the educational background of my Chinese informants was relatively high, with seven out of nine holding a university degree. As for age and gender, the average age group of the Chinese respondents was around forty—and with the exception of Mrs. Zhang, all the Chinese migrants I interviewed in Tamale were male.

As far as sending-areas are concerned, my fieldwork mapped new Chinese migrants’ sending areas to be either remote and less economically developed interior Chinese provinces like Gansu and Guangxi, which are also known as sending areas for internal Chinese migration, or modern and cosmopolitan cities like Shanghai and Beijing. Hong Kong cannot be labelled as a ‘new’ sending area as it has been a typical, traditional sending area for decades.

The personal drivers of the engineers from Gansu can be summarized as the combination of a much-needed career opportunity, earning a better salary, and seeing the world (*chuguo*). These incentives are similar to those that drove Chinese bachelors to Ghana in the 1950s and 1960s. For Ke Hua and Hui Ling, the two youngest Chinese participants, their main reasons for migrating to Ghana were learning new skills and seeing the world. Interestingly, these drivers correspond to the drivers of the large number of young Chinese that migrate within China. Entrepreneur Zhang chose to migrate because she was interested in a new career, in an adventure, and in making money. The story of Reverend Liu showed different motives for new Chinese migration, as he was driven by religious beliefs, the opportunity to spread these beliefs, and the idea of helping disadvantaged people develop. For Zhang, Africa seemed to be a challenge, whereas Liu saw Africa as a place where he could do good.
Everyday life in Africa

When looking at the personal lifestyles of new Chinese migrants in Tamale, I observed that all my informants lived or had lived basic lifestyles, meaning that they lived in simple and often shared living quarters without much comfort, that they had limited leisure time, and that they did not have much access to entertainment. Furthermore, similar to the earlier accounts of Chinese migrants working in rural Tanzania\textsuperscript{283}, sacrifices related to traditional Chinese food culture had to be made to various extents because the majority of my informants did not have access to Chinese food and did not like Ghanaian food. As a solution, they cooked most of their meals themselves. For the migrants from interior provinces who had not had much experience with other cultures and different eating habits, adjusting to Ghanaian cuisine was not an option. For these people, food is intrinsically a part of their culture. For those migrants that originated from large, internationally orientated cities like Beijing or Shanghai, food was less important as part of their Chinese identity. They were also more open to trying local Ghanaian food.

For Reverend Liu, food appeared to be very important for health-related reasons but not as a way of cultural identification and tradition. He believed that sacrifices related to Chinese food culture implied sacrificing his health. Regarding sacrifices during everyday life: for some of the new Chinese migrants in Tamale, all the previously mentioned conditions were compounded with large personal sacrifices. Contracts lasted often over a year, with very limited options for contact with friends and family in China. The contract workers were particularly strongly limited in their social contacts. My fieldwork discovered that most contact between local Ghanaian and Chinese migrants was related to work. On the other hand, interpreter Hui Ling and the Reverend Liu had established a number of superficial personal contacts with the locals. Hu Wei, the middle-aged agricultural engineer, was an exception as he said that he had made some true friends. The reasons for this limited social interaction are found in lack of time, lack of opportunities, and language barriers.

During my fieldwork, I discovered that the low level of English that was spoken by the majority of the new Chinese migrants was a large obstacle when building relations with Ghanaians, but not so severe as to stop all social interaction.
Perception of Ghanaian culture and people

In Chapter Three and Chapter Five, I addressed the topic of the new Chinese migrant’s perception of Ghanaian culture and people. Often being described as a mono-cultural people, I wondered how Chinese migrants looked at Ghanaian culture and people. Based on the answers I received when interviewing Chinese informants, I conclude that the new Chinese migrants have varied perceptions of Ghanaian culture. Their views were based mainly on their personal ideas about what culture is or should be, combined with the comparison that migrants made between the host culture and Chinese culture. For four informants from Gansu province, this combination led to the bold conclusion that Ghana, as a former European colony with an oral culture, simply did not have a culture. Other informants did not want to make such statements as they felt that their knowledge about Ghana’s culture was growing but still insufficient. For Ke Hua, who had very limited English language skills, culture was an interesting but large mystery. In contrast to the ‘Ghana has no culture’ perspective, positive experiences obtained after observing local aspects of culture and communicating with Ghanaians for a longer time had re-defined other Chinese migrants’ opinions of Ghanaian culture, as was shown in the interviews with Mr. Liao and Reverend Liu. In other words, my fieldwork demonstrated that the new Chinese migrants’ perception of the host culture depends on their perception of what culture is or should be, which in turn is based on the migrants’ own cultural background. Ideas of what culture is are often defined by what is taught at school, and in the case of China, what is imposed as national cultural discourse by the government. Those migrants who have spent a longer time abroad are therefore likely to define host culture in different terms.

All my Chinese informants shared a rather positive perception of Ghanaians as a people: they are regarded as friendly, welcoming, and social. Some also showed sympathy for the economic hardship which many Ghanaians endure. From a professional perspective, the migrants’ opinions varied. Those working as managers in charge of human resources had a generally less favourable view of Ghanaian people than those migrants who worked side-by-side with locals. I therefore conclude that direct contact with Ghanaian colleagues has a positive influence on the perception of the ‘other’ (the local Ghanaians).

Labour disputes

In media reports and academic literature, considerable attention is given to the labour issues associated with Chinese companies operating in Africa. Chinese management has been accused of disrespect for local labour laws, underpayment, casual labour, and unsafe working conditions. Without underestimating Chinese companies’ bad record regarding working conditions in and outside China, in my opinion these stories and accusations should be addressed individually. During my interviews I
encountered only one of the problems listed above, and it remains doubtful whether Chinese management should be blamed for all of these issues. Large infrastructure projects are frequently funded by local African institutions and governments, but these promised funds have often dried up before they reach the Chinese construction managers and long before completion of the project. This situation is beyond the control of Chinese managers. Moreover, the fact that Chinese companies have little experience in dealing with unions, combined with serious communication problems, hamper solutions. Furthermore, it should be noted that disrespecting labour laws and having dubious working conditions are not exclusively Chinese practices.

Reputation

In Chapter Four I addressed the increasingly negative reputation of Chinese activities and Chinese migrants in Ghana, as reported in the media. My fieldwork shows that the majority of the Chinese migrants were not aware of their possible negative reputation, nor had they experienced a hostile attitude from the Ghanaians in Tamale. This lack of consciousness is caused by their limited access to information and their inability to read newspaper reports in English. Mrs. Zhang and Reverend Liu were the only migrants who knew about a possible growing resentment towards the Chinese presence in Ghana, because not only did they have proficient English skills but also better access to information and international networks. Tamale residents on the other hand, as opposed to Ghanaians originating from more developed regions, have limited access to other than local media and almost completely lack knowledge about China. Overall, they have only just recently been exposed to this Chinese presence. This contributes to the accepting attitude Tamale residents show towards the Chinese migrants. Therefore, new Chinese migrants do not have a negative reputation in Tamale.

Future

Most overseas Chinese traditionally regard their migration as temporary and do not see their host country as their home. The new Chinese migrants in Ghana have similar feelings about eventually returning to China, but I found that within this extended transitory state, new Chinese migrants, in comparison with earlier migrants, seem to have more options as their life path is often not yet determined and can take many adventurous turns.

Considering my relatively small group of respondents and limited time, further research would be needed in order to gain a more profound insight into the new Chinese migrant in Ghana. For such a project, I would suggest focusing on an interesting group of migrants: Chinese women. The physical presence of female Chinese immigrants in Africa is far less than that of the Chinese males, but their
influence and the size of their projects seem relatively large. I have found only one female participant but her story was interesting, adventurous, and convincing. The executive manager of the Tamale Stadium project was also female. Solange Guo Chaterlard noted that in Zambia, Chinese women play an increasingly important role in business and migrant communities. It would be interesting to see if the same is happening in Ghana.
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3 Larkin in Ho, Conal Guan-Yow, ‘The Doing and Undoing of Community: Chinese Networks in Ghana’, China Aktuell 3 (2008), 47
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Chao, ‘Assistance’, 143; Snow, ‘The Star’, 89
12 Ho, ‘The Doing’, 55
13 Davies, Martyn, ‘How China delivers Development Assistance to Africa,’ (University of Stellenbosch: Centre for Chinese Studies 2008), 38
14 Snow, ‘The Star’, 103
15 Chao, ‘Assistance’, 152
17 Chao, ‘Assistance’, 154
18 Chao, ‘Assistance’, 155; Larkin, ‘China’, 132
20 Ho, ‘The Doing’, 47
21 Snow, ‘The Star’, xv
22 See note 13
23 See note 12
24 Ho, ‘The Doing’, 48
25 Ibid; Davies, ‘How’, 43
26 See note 13
27 Davies, ‘How’, 38, 43
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Idun-Arkhurst, Isaac, ‘China and Ghana, A Case Study Engagement,’ South African Institute of International Affairs (2008), 20
35 Davies, ‘How’, 43; see Chapter Four of this thesis for other sources of Ghanaian criticism.
37 Ibid. 1
38 Pan in Ho, ‘The Doing’, 51
39 Wang, The Chinese Overseas, 3
40 Ho ‘The Doing’, 51, 52
41 Wang, The Chinese Overseas, 4
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
45 Ho, ‘The Doing’, 51

105

Ibid. 631-3

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Ibid.

See for this topic the work of Wang Gungwu, Philip Snow, Conal Ho, and Yoon Yun Park.


Wang Gungwu in Mao and Yu, ‘The global’,

Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. 81

Snow, ‘The Star’, 69

Pieke, ‘Community’, 81

Pieke, ‘Community’, 84; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 598

Pieke, ‘Community’, 84


Ibid.

Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 598

Pieke, ‘Community’, 85

Ibid. 83; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 598

Pieke, ‘Community’, 81-4

Ibid.; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 598

Pieke, ‘Community’, 85

The term ‘floating population’ in China refers to people who have not in fact migrated, but who ‘float and move’ through the country looking for work and often originate from rural or less developed areas of China.

Pieke, ‘Community’, 85

Ibid.

Ibid. 86

Ibid. 82

Ibid. 86

Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 598

Pieke, ‘Community’, 85

See the interesting article of Hairong and Sautman in the *South China Morning Post*. After extensive research in different countries they conclude that China is not using convict labour in Africa. Hairong Yan and Barry Sautman, ‘Stirring Up Trouble: Claims That China Sends Convicts to Labour in Africa Are Unfounded,’ *South China Morning Post* (2010).


See, for examples from the field, the ‘Looking for Mr. Li project’ carried out by the VPRO; Metropolis documentary ‘Wereldchinese’.

Pieke, ‘Community’, 86

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

The term ‘pigtail trade’ refers to the trans-national migration of Chinese coolies in the late nineteenth century and was named after the queue or pigtail hairstyle, which all Chinese men were required to wear by the Qing authorities.


See for information on the South African opposition to Chinese labour, the work of Philip Snow and Yoon Jung Park.

See the work of Frank Pieke.

See Wang Gungwu’s theories, as described in Chapter Two of this thesis.

See note 135.

See the work of Chao, Larkin and Ho.
See the work of Chao, Larkin and Snow.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ho, ‘The Doing’, 60


Larkin, ‘China’, 133

Ibid.

Ho, ‘The Doing’, 59

Ho, ‘Living Transitions’, 10

Ibid.

Ho, ‘The Doing’, 58

Ibid. 59

Ibid. 58

Ibid.

Ibid. 59


Ho, ‘The Doing’, 60; Liu, Jing Jing, 185

Liu, Jing Jing, 185; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 17

See both works of Conal Ho.

See Chapter 2, Sections 3 & 4.

Ibid.

See Monson’s very detailed and interesting account on the building of the Tan-Zam railway as mentioned in note 2.


Ibid.

Hsu, ‘Zanzibar’, 115; Mohan and Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese’, 19

Hsu, ‘Zanzibar’, 115

Ibid.

Ho, ‘Living Transitions’, 11; Ho, ‘The Doing’, 72

Ibid.


The list of such conflicting literature is long, but to name a few: Naidu, Davies; Gill & Reilly and Michel.

Moyo, Dambisa, Dead Aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa, (New York: Farrar, Stauss and Giroux, 2009), 111

Quoted in Gadzala, Aleksandra and Hanusch, Marek, Afrobarometer 2.


See, for examples of popular media and blogs: Economy; Kokutse; Nyarko; Thomson.


See note 183

Mohan, ‘Dams, development and the Nation’.
Mohan, Giles and Kale, Dinar, ‘The Invisible hand of South-South globalization: Chinese Migrants in Africa’, A report for the Rockefeller Foundation prepared by The Development Policy and Practice Department, The Open University, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, October 2007, 15

Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 302

Sinohydro is a major Chinese multinational known for being one of the main contractors on the Three Gorges’ Dam in China, which is another controversial project.

Mohan, ‘Dams, development and the Nation’.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 302


Bui National Park is a high-risk area for contracting onchocerciasos or river blindness, an infectious disease that can severely damage the eyes.

Habia, 103-7

Ibid.

Modern Ghana News, ‘Workers decry unsafe working conditions’.

Ghanaian Chronicle, ‘Construction Workers Run Amok’.


Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 299

Lee, 651

Lee, 648, 650

Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 300; Baah & Jauch, 101

Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 301

2.25 GH (Ghana Cedi) is approximately 1.59 US Dollars; 3.00 GH is 2.17 US Dollars.

This information is based on interviews with local schoolteachers and principals in Tamale, conversations with European resort owners, and the experiences of orthopedic surgeon Paul Rompa and his local colleagues affiliated with the Saint John of Good Hospital in Nsawam. November-December 2008.

Baah & Jauch, 101

Based on interviews with local construction employees Agdan and Kwame, who were working at the Chinese-run construction site of a Tamale secondary school, Tamale, December 2008.


See notes 13, 186, and 202

See for example the work of Gong; Alden; Brautigam and Baah & Jauch.

Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 300

Baah & Jauch, 11-15

Baah & Jauch, 71-4

Baah & Jauch, 98-109

Habia, 117-19


See for example the Vanguard Documentary, ‘Chinatown Africa’. Spreading of these rumors on the Internet can be read on the weblog of a Belgian volunteer (www. kristinlangendries@waarbenjij.nu.) who posted that ‘in Tamale a new stadium is build by Chinese prisoners who get all the local teenage girls pregnant and then leave the girls unable to point out the culprits since the Chinese workers all look so similar’.

The Daily Guide article on Chinese Casanovas (see next note ) was picked up and reposted on the Shanghaiist and Danwei.org websites.


Tamale has a predominantly Muslim population. For more information on Tamale, see Chapter 6.
See note 232. Further information on this matter is based on interviews with Ghanaian informants and the interview with Mr. Liu in Tamale, December 2008.

Brautigam, 'The Dragon’s Gift’, 154-7

Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 614


See the interesting article of Hairong and Sautman in the South China Morning Post: After extensive research in different countries they conclude that China is not using convict labour in Africa. Hairong & Sautman, ‘Stirring Up Trouble: Claims That China Sends Convicts to Labour in Africa Are Unfounded’.

Cook, Nicolas, China’s Foreign Policy and “Soft Power” in South America, Asia, and Africa (2008), 119; ACET Ghana Case Study (2010), 8

For example, Chinese-made mosquito coils containing DDT in ACET Ghana Case Study 2010, 8 and the opinion piece by Ofusu-Appiah, ‘Beware of Fake and Dangerous Imported Chinese Products’.

See, for more information on the products encountered during the fieldtrip, Chapter 6 of this thesis.


Kwado, Assante, ‘Former Transport Minister denies MMT MD’s Assertions’; Daily Graphic, ‘Yaxing Buses on the Road’.


Some of these anti-malaria and anti-viral are now produced locally by a Chinese-Ghanaian joint venture. See Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 224 and African Business Review, ‘Danadams Pharmaceuticals company report’. Dr. Paul Rompa and Dr. Prosper Moh, Nswam both expressed positive experiences with Chinese malaria drugs during several interviews during November-December 2008.

See note 68 and Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’; 215


Ibid.

Ho, ‘Living Transitions’, 9-11

The Independent, ‘Textile Workers Declare War on Chinese Importer’.

See note 251

Brautigam, ‘The Dragon’s Gift’, 215

See also notes 70 and 251.


Ibid.


Ibid.
Harmattan is a dry and dusty West African trade wind. It blows south from the Sahara into the Gulf of Guinea between the end of November and the middle of March.

The Shea tree grows wild in the equatorial belt of Central and West Africa. The oil extracted is used in rural areas in the making of foods, soap manufacture, and cosmetics. Shea is mainly exported as kernels and can be used as an extender in chocolate as its properties are similar to cocoa butter.

In a ‘sharing’ or web-review on an international Evangelical website, Reverend Liu is described by a former volunteer at the Tamale computer school as a self-made man who used the well-known American do-it-yourself book series, How to...in 21 days, in order to learn how to set up schools and businesses. See, for this information, the web-sharing of volunteer Raymond Lau.

In Ghana and neighbouring countries, tro tro are privately-owned minibus vehicles that travel fixed routes, leaving when filled to capacity. They are often overloaded and involved in traffic accidents.

Fufu is a thick paste usually made by boiling starchy root vegetables such as yam in water and pounding with a mortar and pestle until the desired consistency is reached. Rice balls or Omo Tuo: this is tenderly cooked rice that is molded into balls (baseball-size) and eaten with palm-nut soup or groundnut paste soup.

A chopshop is a Ghanaian slang word for food-stand; chop means eating.

Podcast: ‘Chinese Relationship and Marriage Customs in Africa’, by Solange Guo Chaterland. Solange Guo Chaterland is a PhD Candidate in Comparative Politics at Science Po in Paris and a Research Associate at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle.

See note 265

See Chapter Four of this thesis.

See note 76

See Chapter Three of this thesis.

See note 19


Monson, Jamie, Africa’s Freedom Railway.

This thesis aims to understand the new Chinese migrants to Africa from the migrant’s perspective by conducting a case study of new Chinese migrants in Tamale, Ghana. Since the late 1990s renewed ties between China and Africa resulted in an increase of Chinese migration to Africa. The recent, small, but significant wave of Chinese migrants to Ghana is part of a larger trend—also known as ‘new migration order’ and its representatives are identified as new migrants. However, actual data on these new Chinese migrants in Africa is very limited.

Current China-Africa scholarship focuses mainly on the geo-political and economic impact of China’s involvement in Africa and merely exists of macro level policy analysis. Hereby, the stories of the migrating individuals that are part of the greater ‘China in Africa’ discourse are often overlooked. Furthermore, global and African popular media tend to lump together Chinese migrants with Chinese governmental actions and thereby create an incomplete, often negative and generalizing picture of ‘the Chinese in Africa’. As a result, the reputation of Chinese migrants reputation is increasingly colored with accusations ranging from unfair competition and labour disputes to convict labour and Chinese Casanovas who father African babies.

In order to create a better understanding of Chinese migrants in Ghana and distinguish between facts and rumours, this study provides a contextual analysis of literature, public perceptions of China in Ghana as well as an selection of anecdotal evidence of controversies. Through fieldwork, conducted in the city of Tamale, this ethnographically inspired research uses a micro level approach to show that Chinese migrants in Tamale have varied backgrounds and relatively high levels of education. For most of them, migrating to Ghana is an opportunity to “see the world beyond China” and is not merely driven by economic profit.

In regard to personal lives and daily life experiences this study demonstrates that all the Chinese informants lives or had lived very basic lifestyles without much comfort. In addition, sacrifices towards the traditional Chinese food culture as well as personal sacrifices are made.

It appears that the majority of the Chinese respondents is not aware of their possible negative reputation. Moreover, most Chinese informants hold a favorable view of the Ghanaian people and, despite media reports and oral stories, fieldwork shows that in Tamale the Chinese do not have a negative reputation. Therefore, as Tamale can offer new markets and the city remains in need for infrastructure projects, this work argues that Tamale is a frontier destination for new Chinese migrants.

Often working side by side, a language barrier influences the level of social interaction between Ghanaians and Chinese migrants, but not so severe that it stopped the building of social relations completely.

In conclusion the findings of this research can contribute to a more differentiated, and therefore more realistic, insight into the characteristics of the new Chinese migrants in Africa.