

**Modes of engagement and adjustment: the changing
roles of associations in Chinese immigrant communities
in Pretoria, South Africa**

**Modes d'engagement et d'adaptation: role changeant
des associations dans les communautés d'immigrants
chinois à Pretoria, Afrique du Sud**

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Introduction

- The challenge of social interaction and integration is inevitable for immigrants.
- In a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (Pretoria, South Africa) on Chinese in South Africa, we hypothesized that an existence of an institutional affiliation or the lack of it would impact on immigrants' social interactions and levels of integration.
- Site of the study: Pretoria, South Africa: small, scattered Chinese community; most studies on large, dense Chinese communities.



Methodology

- This paper is based on a pilot study of Chinese associations in the Pretoria and Bronkhorstspuit areas and consists of a series of in-depth interviews conducted with 27 individuals in 2012, as well as document analysis.
- A snowball sampling method was utilized whereby interviewees were identified through personal contacts, organizational web pages and desktop research, and further referrals were then requested.
- Challenges:
 - Referrals were mostly to individuals within the same groups; potential bias towards those with some form of social affiliation
 - Limited access to PRC province-based (e.g. Fujianese and Beijngese) associations

3 Chinese communities in SA

- We followed the tradition set by previous studies that differentiate three distinct Chinese communities in SA:
 - 1) the Chinese who arrived in the late 1870s and now consists of 3rd or 4th generation South African-born Chinese (SABCs or Chinese South Africans);
 - 2) the Taiwanese who came to SA in the late 1970s and 1980s under the apartheid government's industrial development policy; and
 - 3) the newer migrants arriving since the mid- to late- 1990s, mainly from the PRC (middle managers and professionals before 2000, and small traders after 2000).

Chinese associations in Pretoria

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

Findings: SABCs

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

Findings: Taiwanese

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

Findings: new migrants

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

Conclusions

- Participation in associations is motivated by a range of tangible and intangible benefits, e.g. new social and economic networks, employment, religious fulfilment, education, Chinese/English language learning, preservation of culture and identity, belonging to a community.
- Use of local (i.e. South African) institutions (especially religious and educational) suggests that modes of engagement and adjustment are not necessarily identity-driven but rather pragmatic.
- The tangible and intangible benefits that motivate participation do not always coincide with the primary functions of the associations, thus associational bodies should adapt to the changing needs of the Chinese communities.
- The primary benefits across all three groups seem to be social and economic, with interest in cultural and political benefits waning, although each individual story is unique.