Some Contemporary Forms of Chinese Transnational Mobilities in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

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Abstract

Chinese migrants in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, assemble highly variegated forms of transnational mobilities from practices unfolding at various scales—in China, Tanzania, and beyond. This heterogeneity in the constitutive processes and lived experiences of transnational mobilities is obscured when the practitioners of these mobilities are analyzed as, first and foremost, contributors to the aggregate phenomenon of migration flows from one nationally/continentally defined place to another. This is the effect when much of the existing literature on Chinese migrants in Africa analyzes them through a 'China-Africa' lens—thereby conjuring a coherent and discrete phenomenon. This framing contributes to a general fixation of research agendas with national-level questions, which in turn tends to flatten highly diverse flows and empirically and analytically segregate them from other, non-Chinese mobilities with which they may share close affinities. This article seeks to push against these effects of methodological nationalism by developing exploratory sketches of the forms of transnational mobilities practiced by three Chinese migrants in Dar es Salaam.

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Introduction

The subjects of this article are three Chinese women, Xie Fen, Shen Mei, and Huang Shu,[1] who, in the mid-2010s, had been living in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for a varying number of years. One analytical lens for thinking about them is 'international migration.' This lens' most immediate effect is to cast the three women's experiences as instances of a single phenomenon, constituted around the common fact of a physical border-crossing from one nationally delineated space to another.

Thus framed, Xie, Shen, and Huang are interpolated into a history of previous China-Tanzania/Africa connections that, in Tanzania, prominently featured significant flows of temporary migrant labour from China to Tanzania in connection with the building, under the guiding principle of socialist and anti-colonial solidarity, of the Tazara railway in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Monson 2009). Likewise, the three women are readily inscribed into a more recent 'wave' of Chinese independent businesspeople and employees of state-owned as well as private companies arriving in Africa since the turn of the millennium, reaching unofficial[2] numbers in the 30,000 to 70,000 range in Tanzania (Sheridan 2018: 239)[3] and in the order of 1 million across the African continent (Park 2016).

This article seeks to push against this aggregation of 'Chinese migration to Tanzania/Africa' into a singular, nationally/continentally delimited phenomenon. On one level, the methodological nationalism, common in migration studies (Wimmer/ Glick Schiller 2002; Xiang 2016), underlying such a framing does, of course, afflict the present study, too—insofar as it samples its subjects on nationality. However, methodological nationalism reaches deeper than sampling. More fundamentally, the framing of migrants as, first and foremost, contributors to an aggregate phenomenon of migration flows from one nationally/continentally defined place to another prompts a particular set of questions about them while neglecting others. This is most readily apparent when this framing leads to a flattening of migrant projects into a singular, seemingly coherent phenomenon whose overarching logic, drivers, or effects can then be

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

[2] Where (even) an official estimate of the total Chinese population in Angola in 2012, for instance, jumped from 70,000 to 259,000 overnight (Schmitz 2014: 42), any such numbers should be read as indications of rough orders of magnitude.

[3] Merli et al.'s (2016: 195) attempt to sample Dar es Salaam's 2013 "hidden population" of Chinese migrants suggests that the presence of about 30% of that population is tied to state-owned enterprises, with the rest operating independently. At around 10% and 20%, women made up a small proportion of these two groups respectively. Among independent retailers—often operating as family businesses, some of them female-headed, as discussed below—the proportion of women is much higher.

discovered. Emblematically reflected in the title and thesis (if not in the much more nuanced empirical material) of Howard French's prominent *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa*,[4] this is perhaps the inevitable effect of treating migration simply as a dimension of the bilateral economic or geopolitical relations that remain the primary focus of much of the 'China-Africa' literature.[5]

But even where monolithic coherence is not assumed—indeed, even where it is explicitly questioned and variations 'within' the phenomenon are acknowledged —the nationally/continentally (and implicitly racially) delineated phenomenon nonetheless often fundamentally shapes research agendas. Thus, this phenomenon is the central object of interest when studies chart 'its' history and extent, investigate relations between Chinese migrants and African host communities in workplaces and other settings, explore African assessments of the Chinese presence, or analyze the internal structuration of Chinese expatriate communities in various African countries.[6]

Of course, recognizing that many questions worth investigating may not be centered on 'China-Africa' does not imply that nationality has no relevance. Indeed, 'Chineseness' and 'Africa' do operate as categories of practice that, to varying extents and in various ways, are at play in the field. The forms and functioning of these categorical practices therefore deserve to be analyzed.[7] But this does not imply that "uncritically adopting [such] categories of practice as categories of analysis" (Brubaker/ Cooper 2000: 5) is justified.

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[4] Compare Michel/ Beuret (2009) and Cardenal/ Araújo (2013).

[5] See Kinyondo (2019) and Makundi et al. (2017) for discussions of Sino-Tanzanian relations from this perspective. Asongu (2016) presents a synoptic overview of a large sample of this voluminous literature. Alden/ Jiang (2019) and Martuscelli (2020) are two recent contributions to it.

[6] See, for instance, Mohan et al.'s (2014) broad overview contemplating whether Chinese migrants are "new imperialists or agents of change;" Huyng et al. (2010) on the constitution over time of a heterogeneous Chinese presence in South Africa and Postel (2017) and Merli et al. (2016) on the size and composition of the Chinese migrant populations respectively in Zambia and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Wang (2021) on the economic drivers of Chinese migration to Ghana, Cook et al. (2016) on the activities, objectives, and situation of Chinese migrants in Ghana's and Ethiopia's agri-food sector, and Carling/ Haugen (2005) on the trajectory of the Chinese shop-owner presence in Cabo Verde; Park (2013) on Southern African perceptions of the Chinese, and Petersen/ Ali (2018) on the effect of migration on Chinese perceptions of Africans; Mayer et al. (2017) on relations between Chinese employers and African employees in Tanzania, Arsene (2014) and Gukurume (2019) on the same in, respectively, Uganda and Zimbabwe, Lampert/ Mohan (2014) on the class-inflected Nigerian and Ghanaian perceptions of Chinese traders and employers, and Schmitz (2014) on perceptions of the 'other' emerging within a shared Angolan social world and economic setting.

[7] As Schmitz (2018) has observed, the ubiquity of the 'China-Africa' framing in academic research and broader public discourse now constitutes a terrain in response to which 'Chineseness in Africa' is performed and articulated. See especially Sheridan (2018, 2019, 2022b) for analyses of this kind.

One immediate effect of ignoring this warning is that the 'China-Africa' framing keeps adjacent phenomena out of view, not infrequently to the effect of surreptitiously imputing unwarranted analytical relevance to reified notions of 'Chineseness' (and 'Africa').[8] More broadly, however, the prevailing fixation on the aggregate, national phenomenon leaves questions that do not pertain to it underexplored.[9] With its close-up focus on the lived experiences of three Chinese migrants, this article aims to shine a spotlight on such questions. Thinking of the 'Chinese migrants' discussed in this article instead as practitioners of distinctive forms of 'transnational mobility' productively opens a wider perspective and analytical focus. Like migration, mobility involves movement—but not only of a spatial kind. This makes mobility an especially appropriate lens for observing how re-*locating* geographically interacts with movements of other kinds—in economic, social, spiritual, or temporal dimensions, for instance. While it is doubtful (Randell 2020) that 'mobility' offers a paradigm for the study of society (Sheller/ Urry 2006), it thus does offer a useful heuristic.

Thinking about one of the three subjects of this article, Huang Shue, for instance, as a figure inhabiting a particular form of transnational mobility shines a spotlight on how she grapples with the implications that various geographical emplacements (in Tanzania, China, and elsewhere) have for how she connects to different flows of time (slow or rapid), and what this may in turn imply for her geographical, social, and economic im/mobilities in the future as well as, more broadly, her subjecthood. Likewise, the lens of mobility readily makes visible how, for another migrant, Xie Fen, socially valorized geographical mobility itself, and not just its not-always-realized economic rewards, intimately connects to movement in status, social recognition, and self-worth.

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[8] Thus, Hairong et al. (2019: 40) have argued that "Chinese ethnocentricity is typically offered as an explanation for the putative non-interaction [of Chinese and Africans]. Meanwhile Chinese are not compared to other non-indigenous people in Africa, implying unique Chinese self-isolation," of which they find no evidence. Hairong/ Sautman (2013) likewise attribute the highly questionable notion that Chinese ownership was responsible for poor working conditions in a mining business in Zambia to the lack of a broader comparative horizon. Sheridan (2022a: 14) productively grapples with the same conundrum in reflecting on how to study the semiotics of 'race' among Chinese migrants in Tanzania, ultimately calling for "setting aside the concept of 'Chinese racism' as a discrete phenomenon" that can be studied outside a "context that is already racialized."

[9] Notable exceptions include Sheridan's exemplary work, utilizing ethnographies of Chinese migrants in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, that moves beyond its 'China-Africa' empirical point of entry to analyze processes like the racialized ordering of local labour markets (2022b) and the making of moral claims about global inequalities (2018). The close attention Driessen (2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021) pays both to the deep socio-economic embeddedness of specific forms of Chinese migration to Africa and to how migrant workers make sense of and negotiate their situation likewise yields insights into processes that are not primarily located at the national, aggregate level.

This article draws on recorded, loosely structured interviews soliciting life story narratives and reflections on migrants' lives in Tanzania, supplemented with notes on other informal conversations and participant observation.[10] It presents three exploratory sketches of the distinctive forms of transnational mobility lived by Xie, Shen, and Huang. While this exploration is structured around three individuals, utilizing them as empirical anchors and points of entry, this does not imply a theorization of the individual as an ontological prior. On the contrary, with its focus on how subjecthood is constructed amidst various materially, structurally, ideationally, and socially conditioned mobilities, this article aims to observe precisely how mobilities "influence the practices, experiences and perceptions of place, subjectivity and identity"—how, in other words, "spatio-temporal and contextual practices create and re-create a sense of self" (Jensen 2009: 144, 146). In a similar vein, thinking of mobilities as 'transnational' challenges the analysis to investigate scales other than that of the nation-state, look for such scales not just within a taxonomical grid but as the emergent properties of scale-making practices (Xiang 2013: 284-5, 291), and remain alert to more complex directionalities than 'place of origin to destination' (Portes et al. 2017: 1486). Like 'mobility,' 'transnational' is thus used as "a mid-range concept" that helps to "highlight a previously neglected patch of reality and to guide and encourage its investigation" (ibid: 1489).

Becoming a Braver Person on the Path of Economic Migration

In 2016, Xie Fen, a mother of three in her mid-40s, had, together with her husband, been running a small clothing shop in Dar es Salaam's Kariakoo market area for about three years. In her coastal home village near Fuzhou, Fujian, it had been leave or die: people like her, she explained, "must go out [abroad] to make money, otherwise, the family will starve to death."[1]

Her family had learned this the hard way. Having invested most of their pooled savings in a family-run oyster, sea-cucumber, and seaweed farm, and "working so hard that we were almost half-dead,"[2] a typhoon had wiped them out in the late 1990s. Their "labour had been infertile,"[2] and the loss of life the typhoon inflicted in the area brought home the lethal risks in this line of work. Other local options had been dwindling. Farmland had been taken by the government for

development, and employment in the fast- industrializing economy was out of reach: "For those who have a *danwei* [work unit/employment], they just get a pen and write something, and then they have a salary every month. But being a peasant, it is really hard."[1] For her, illiterate, with no formal schooling, picking up a "pen" was just not an option: "No one would hire us."[2]

Insofar as these economic motivations are rooted in the dramatic changes of China's economy since the 1980s, the story of Xie's migration certainly has a national dimension. But this broader national context is also crucially refracted in socially embedded processes and practices at regional and local scales, all of which feed into a distinctive configuration of transnational mobility.

In part because of previous policy choices, Xie's home region of Fujian was an agrarian backwater when coastal China opened to overseas investment starting in 1979.[11] Fuzhou city and the neighboring smaller city of Fuqing, the area where Xie's home village is located, joined this experiment somewhat belatedly in the mid-1980s. The economic transformation of such later joiners, which now quickly attracted large and sophisticated foreign investment, was especially dramatic (Thunø/ Pieke 2005: 489ff). The combination of these highly location-specific factors, argue Thunø/ Pieke (2005: 492), left peasant populations in such areas particularly ill-positioned to attach themselves to new economic opportunities. When this radically non-inclusive form of 'development' swallowed farmland and drove up the cost of everything in her home village, Xie's conclusion was one reached by many of her generation and class: those who used to farm or fish had to "go out [abroad] to make money."[1]

Or so one does when this kind of mobility is within the repertoire of accessible and attractive options. For her and her home area, transnational mobility had become such an option thanks to a variety of processes unfolding on multiple scales. At the national level, exit restrictions from China were relaxed and a new governance framework that enabled individual mobility within and beyond China was constructed. Passports, for instance, gradually become more widely and easily available between 1985 and the mid 2000s (Xiang 2014: 188).

That people in the coastal areas seized such openings with particular vigor has much to do with family-, village-, and municipality-scale processes and histories.[12] The coastal areas' longstanding history as China's overseas contact

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[11] Thunø and Pieke (2005: 489) point to security concerns over Taiwan as key to depriving Fujian's coastal areas of investments in the pre-reform era. Interior Fujian, conversely, boasted heavy industry. When 1980s and 1990s coastal development eventually outcompeted that sector, this in turn caused a distinctive kind of economic dislocation in the interior that spawned its own kind of transnational mobility.

[12] At the turn of the millennium, an estimated 80 percent of Chinese illegal migrants in Europe, for instance, originated from Fujian alone (Thunø and Pieke 2005: 487).

zone had made for a variety of pre-1949, locally differentiated links especially to Hong Kong and across the Strait to Taiwan, but also to Singapore and Japan. Thunø and Pieke (2005: 493f) trace how, in the mid-1980s, one village near Fuzhou initially drew on such connections to pre-1949 migrants who had settled in Singapore. By the early 2000s, it had become one of many "transnational villages" in the area, emptied especially of young men—at that later point mostly for destinations in Japan and Europe.

Just after the turn of the millennium, Xie's family, considering their own options, became part of these histories, configuring place-specific practices, infrastructures, and aspirational horizons. Some years prior, her brother-in-law was one of the first transnational migrants from her village. After hitting a dead-end in Russia, he took a circuitous route to Germany where, without a visa, he worked as a cook in a Chinese restaurant for eight years before returning to China and reuniting with his family. By 2004, when Xie and her husband's decision to go abroad took shape, the village's transnational network had expanded considerably to places including France and Algeria. Europe, a destination mostly tied to employment in ethnic-Chinese sectors of the economy, had come to appear less attractive. Work conditions were tough, and immigration regimes were hardening, driving up the risks and costs of increasingly professionally facilitated illegal migration (cf. Beck 2007). Different destinations began to appear more appealing. African destinations in particular were associated with opportunities for entrepreneurship, typically in trading; and 'being one's own boss' was perceived to be both more lucrative and also otherwise more desirable than employment. In contrast to Europe and North America, many African countries also maintained relatively open border regimes.

In the 2010s, national-level infrastructures facilitating transnational mobility in Tanzania, for instance, included three-month tourist visas readily available upon arrival at the airport. Representing a mirror image of the facilitation of migration from Africa chronicled by Piot (2019), several interviewees utilized the services of agents in China who arranged African visas and travel. In the mid-2010s, Dar-based fixers likewise offered services ranging from arranging visa extensions and work permits to handling customs and taxes for their Chinese clients.[13]

In line with these broader trends, one of Xie's mother's acquaintances suggested that Xie consider Algeria for a trading business. The acquaintance's son and his wife were selling goods at travelling fairs there and could show her the ropes.

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[13] While the 2015 election of John Magufuli to the Tanzanian presidency brought some tightening of immigration rules and options—Sheridan (2019: 137) reports the cancellation of a short-term work permit program and an early 2016 immigration raid in Kariakoo—this does not appear to have had a significant impact on shopkeepers' ability to come to and operate in Tanzania.

Financed by family and acquaintances, Xie's husband explored this lead and was soon followed by Xie, her younger brother, and his wife. Her younger sister and her husband joined them three years later. They stayed for about eight years before deciding to find new options. Finding Malawi too small and poor, they moved to Tanzania in 2012. Both places had again been suggested by people in her home village. In both, home-village contacts helped to set her up.

This trajectory features several noteworthy elements. One is the importance of local networks of information and facilitation that underpin the place-specific pattern of chain-migration Xie's story illustrates. In Dar, there were several other families from her home village who, like her, had arrived via Algeria—from where they knew each other. They had used the services of a fixer in her home village who specialized in procuring Algerian visas and arranging for travel there. As another Fujianese in Dar (E) put it, "Where I come from, going abroad is a group activity. Once one person goes out, he/she would bring the whole village, even the whole town out! …We are like ants moving their nests."[3]

Well-established practices of pooling money and extending informal credit are equally crucial, especially given the considerable sums involved in setting up trading businesses. (Interviewees cited several hundred thousand yuan in set-up costs and single shipments of goods in the 100,000-200,000-yuan range, roughly 15,000-30,000 USD.) As another shopkeeper from Xie's home village remarked on how she funded her own 2005 venture in Algeria: "The only way for me was to borrow from one household for 30,000-50,000, and another for 100,000-200,000.… They see you have a house in the hometown, and I and my husband look like good people.… We just sign a document agreement that says 120rmb each month for the interest for every 10,000 they lent to us."[4] Her subsequent Tanzanian venture was similarly funded by some of her own savings, credit that her daughter secured, and money from her four siblings.

Chu (2010) has shown how such financing practices are embedded in thick "cosmologies of credit" that have emerged in the context of transnational mobility in Fujian. One dimension of these cosmologies is the valorization of migration itself, as *the* not only economically but also morally desirable choice. In a coastal Fujianese village with ties to overseas Chinese going back to the pre-1949 period studied by Thunø/ Pieke (2005), for instance, donations from those migrants for village cultural institutions had long tied transnational mobility to ideas of both economic success and cultural and community leader-ship. In a variation on this theme, in a study village in the interior that lacked such long-standing connections, newly emergent transnational mobility none-theless swiftly came to be associated in the 1990s with aspirational notions of

civilized and modern personhood. A broad pattern of conspicuous consumption and an embrace of leisure culture were manifestations of this (Thunø/ Pieke 2005: 503f). So was the culture of remittance-financed, competitive house-building showcasing 'modern' and foreign flourishes that Chu (2010) documents.

This culture of valorized transnationalism shapes horizons of economic aspirations and creates an acutely felt sense of competition and pressure to keep up. "One person built a house in the hometown after going out. Then the whole town knows about it and wants to go out with him/her,"[3] explained one interviewee [E], illustrating the centrality of the house in both demonstrating opportunity and establishing an index of success. Xie herself gives a similarly embedded and processual account of ambition: "Before a person went abroad, (s)he thought to him/herself, I'd be happy if I could make more than 100,000 RMB. But later, 100,000 is not enough, (s)he feels that (s)he should get 200,000; and later, (s)he thinks (s)he needs 300,000. One's heart can get bigger slowly. When you see other people are making money, you also think that you should try to find ways to do business and make more money."[2]

These narratives indicate how material motivations are constituted *amidst* a state of transnational mobility that is both a social and personal condition involving global, provincial, and village-level scales. This reality is elided when such motivations are conceptualized as the driver *behind* international migration—as if they existed independently of their constitutive context of transnationalism.

But paying attention to the social constitution even of financial objectives also reveals them as more than simply an expression of some disembedded materialism. They have broader valence. Thus, Xie explained that her growing financial ambition—her "heart getting bigger"—was not a question of becoming greedy, but about becoming a "braver person"[2]: ambition had implications for her moral personhood.

Indeed, achieving financial success or growing her ambition were not the only ways in which transnational mobility contributed to her realization of 'high-quality' personhood. The transformative effect of her transnational mobility, she was eager to point out, brought her a new recognition. This was the message of a story she was eager to convey about a Beijing Airport customs official who insisted that she had to be lying when she told him that she was not an educated person: "You have been abroad for so many years, and I see you are very outgoing. I feel you are a person who is educated. The way you speak is very civilized."[1] Her transnational mobility had transported her—cultivating her ambition, but also more broadly her agency and worldliness. The specific

opportunities her Algerian and Tanzanian destinations offered her had positively contributed to this. Unlike her brother-in-law who had worked in a Chinese restaurant in Germany, she was "doing business [in which] you practice and you get smarter.... Before [going out], I was fishing in the sea. I knew nothing about things happening in the outside world. When I started to go abroad, people in my village think that I am very amazing. Wow, she knows so many languages! She knows how to do business! She knows which cities to go to. Before ... I knew nothing about the outside world.... I did not even know how to sit in a car. Not to mention the car brands like Mercedes-Benz.... Anyway, I had minimum experience."[2]

That she would imbue her transnational mobility with such broad valence is in a sense surprising. After all, Xie paints a picture of her life in Dar as exclusively dedicated to her commercial venture, a focus also reflected in the spatial scope of her daily activities. She rarely ventures outside the few-hundred-meter radius within which her shop and apartment are located. "I never have been to anywhere to have fun in Tanzania. I am here every day in Kariakoo [the market area]," she declared. The only exception was an occasional outing to a Chinese-owned casino and bar. "When several people are available, we go there to have a little fun, and then come back."[1]

This extreme narrowness of her spatial and social scale-making in Dar calls to mind Haugen's (2012) notion of a "second state of immobility" that Nigerian migrants experience in Guangzhou, China. While the priority Xie accords her financial objectives—she is not in Dar for anything else—explains some of this immobility, it is also shaped by her local context and her perception of it. Similar to what Haugen finds in Guangzhou, Xie's limited local scale-making is shaped by her acute sense of exposure to arbitrary immigration and taxation enforcement, crime, and what she describes as the general unfriendliness of Tanzanians. While Xie puts some of the blame on corruption and arbitrary rules ("this country is not reasonable"[1]), she is also quick to veer into a racialized perspective on her Tanzanian situation. Drawing a contrast with being treated as an honoured guest by her customers and officials in Algeria, she had found that in Tanzania "'black people' [*Heiren*] all have black hearts.... Whatever you do, even just asking a little water, they would ask you to pay. They won't help you.... *Heiren* look at you and want to steal your stuff."[1]

In this, Xie is participating in a broader discourse by which (at least some: see below) "Chinese migrants in Tanzania ... construct an African other though the use of the word Heiren (black person/people)" in ways and to effects that are, as Sheridan (2022a: 3) has argued, discursively "complicit with global anti-black

racism." The generalized sense of unease and insecurity—of which this racial-ized lens on her everyday is both a reflection and a product—has obvious, severely limiting implications for the kind of scale-making Xie feels comfortable engaging in in Dar. This nexus, of a sense of insecurity and a racializing perspec-tive on her surroundings, is significantly shaped by her economic and occupa-tional position and factors like her very limited Kiswahili and non-existent English that make the inevitable close-up encounters with customers, employees, or officials in the shop difficult to negotiate in more nuanced ways. Because such specifics matter, Xie's participation in this particular idiom of stereotyping is neither generalizable to all Chinese migrants in Tanzania, nor particular to them, nor unique to the Tanzanian (or African) context.[14] The resulting im/mobilities of Xie's life in Dar are only one particular form that the local scale-making practices of (Chinese) migrants in Dar take. This militates against reading Xie's story as a case in point of the essentializing notion of a Chinese tendency to self-segregate.[15]

How should one then read Xie's story of transnational mobility? On the surface, Xie's heavily financially-oriented and in other respects highly limited mobility in Dar resonates with Xiang's (2014: 186) interpretation of the forms of migration he studies in northeastern China as a mere "instrumental means" in a context "of postsocialist primitive accumulation." Likewise, it seems to fit Driessen's (2016: 2503) related characterization of the transnational mobility of Chinese workers on infrastructure projects in Ethiopia as "a mere means to a future" back in China. As one Fujianese trader [E]—in Dar to assess business opportunities—bluntly put it, his purpose was to "earn some money and go home!" Yet, Xie's story (and that of other similarly positioned Chinese in Dar) differs from Driessen and Xiang's picture in some crucial respects, highlighting the impor-tance of staying attuned to variations in the forms of mobility practiced by Chinese migrants.

One key divergence concerns the constitution of the material pressures and objectives at play in these mobilities. With their focus mostly on young men, Driessen and Xiang highlight a particular set of social expectations that the set of migrants they write about aim to meet through migration. These migrants' material needs are centrally shaped, Xiang and Driessen argue, by a form of neo-familial life-course normativity that emerged in the context of the reform-era's

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[14] Yu (2016), for instance, observes very similar, likewise resource-inflected dynamics shaping the spatial and social ambit of Chinese migrants in Flushing, New York.

[15] Compare Hairong et al. (2019) on the fraught nature of this notion that substitutes essentialization (and generalization) for careful consideration of the conditioning context of such practices when they do occur.

"monetization of critical preconditions of social reproduction, such as marriage, housing, and education" (Xiang 2021a: 42). It is especially the need to purchase an urban apartment, a vital step toward founding a family and securing a desirable education for future children, that "drive[s] young men to Africa" (Driessen 2021: 339).

But, as Driessen (2021: 331) acknowledges, whole families with long, entrepreneurial time-horizons are not young bachelor men on—at least envisioned to be—limited-term work contracts abroad. Xie's material motivations are thus shaped differently by her different demographic characteristics (gender, generational, life-stage, class). At the same time, they are also constituted amidst different social processes operating at scales other than just the national level stressed by Driessen and Xiang.[16]

What we know of these formative processes shaping Xie's motivations also raises a deeper conceptual question about Driessen and Xiang's interpretation of such motivations as *"Chinese dreams*, … always China-rooted and China-oriented" (Xiang 2014: 192, emphases in the original; compare Driessen 2016: 2497). This formulation is premised on being able to treat China and Africa as separate, discrete, and self-contained places. But such a premise is problematic when the ever-present reality of transnationalism has profoundly conditioned aspirations in China—or, at least, in coastal Fujian. The 'China' in the lives of Dar's Fujianese shopkeepers is not some discrete pole in a story of spatial migration from a place of origin to a (temporary) destination. "Place," argues Jensen (2009, 147), "is constituted within a relational geography": "mobility makes place." It is precisely in this sense that the Fujianese village is "transnational" (Thunø/ Pieke 2005) and that, likewise, "the [African] continent … exists only as a function of circulation and of circuits … [as] fundamentally in contact with an *elsewhere*" (Mbembe/ Nuttall 2004: 351; emphasis in the original). Like the Fujianese village, Dar es Salaam—transnational in a variety of ways long before a new influx of Chinese migrants added another wrinkle to this history in the new

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[16] Xiang and Driessen pick up on migration flows that differ from those typical of coastal Fujian. Even within Fujian, an interior village Thunø/ Pieke (2005: 498f, 504ff) studied saw migration much more actively promoted by local government than was the case in the more bottom-up, family- and village-based coastal pattern that could draw on personal connections to overseas Chinese. That interior pattern was subsequently replicated especially prominently by China's three northeastern provinces where, from the early 1990s, and accelerating around the turn of the millennium, state-sanctioned recruitment agencies began funnelling rustbelt workers into overseas work stints with Chinese enterprises and guest-worker/trainee programs, with Singapore, South Korea, and Japan being the most early prominent destinations (Xiang 2003: 33ff; Xiang 2012). Chinese construction workers in Africa fit into this latter trajectory.

millennium—is a case in point.[17] This relational constitution of place is elided in Driessen's thesis that Chinese migrants in Africa inhabit a state of "suspension" between Africa and China—based as that imagery is on a static conception of place.

The notion of suspension also tempts Driessen and Xiang into overdrawing its qualitive effect in the lives of migrants. Being suspended between Africa and China, Driessen (2021: 338, emphases in the original) argues, amounts to a "suspension [simultaneously] *of* and *for* social reproduction": in Africa, young men earn the money necessary for social reproduction that itself is deferred until an anticipated return to China. The implication, suggests Driessen (2016: 2503), is that "African time has no inherent ethical or moral value." Xiang (2021b: 240), elaborating on the notion of suspension, similarly makes the broader claim that because many thus suspended migrants are "at a loss in establishing a content life within" a "near future," their "'nearby'—the immediate social surroundings such as the workplace and neighbourhood—is also hollowed out."

'African' time may be read as different from 'Chinese' time, and being in one place while one *may* feel beholden to another can create tensions. But, as is visible already in Xie's case, which on the surface seems a close fit with the picture that Driessen and Xiang draw, such tensions within states of transnational mobility are generative of more than a mere skipping over a present that is meaningless apart from its material and instrumental value. In Xie's own telling, her time in Africa has implications for her moral personhood much beyond its material rewards. More broadly, time in Africa is replete with moral dimensions —as is indeed evident from some of Driessen's (2016, 2020) own rich material. Sheridan's (2019: 146) illuminating discussion of how Chinese migrants' everyday, mundane practices in Dar—such as exchanging greetings and negotiating the moral economies of small bribes—involve "performing or enacting different possible kinds of global Chineseness," and as such involve "moral evaluations of global order, and of the proper relationships that should exist between differentially situated actors," (Sheridan 2018: 261f) makes this point forcefully. Precisely such moral negotiations are, for instance, at play when Xie attributes a demand for payment for 'water' to the *Herein*'s "black heart."

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[17] Compare Sheridan's (2022b) productive interpolation of Chinese migrants with the 'Indian' population in Dar, Brennan (2012) on the history of debates around this and other populations' belonging in the city, Bertz (2018: 144) on how 'Indians' and 'Africans' "historically co-produced the social fabric of daily life in Dar es Salaam," and Brownell (2020: 72) on how "transnational modernist style sensibilities" influenced 1960s and 1970s public infrastructure projects, including the design of Kariakoo covered market, at the heart of the area where many Chinese shopkeepers would be located in the 2000s.

One way or another, migrants inhabit their states of mobility. They do not remain suspended in an ethically meaningless present of a 'never quite here and not yet back there.' Likewise, 'China' and 'Africa,' far from being discrete poles, are enmeshed with one another in transnational mobility.

An Émigré Making a Tanzanian Home in Transnational Mobility

That 'Dar time' is all but socially and ethically empty for Chinese migrants is brought home especially poignantly by the example of another shopkeeper family. The couple, from Zhejiang, is more highly educated than many of the Fujianese traders in Dar. Likewise, their route to Tanzania did not follow the family-, village-, and region-based Fujianese circuitry explored above. Shen Mei, the wife, first came to Tanzania on the invitation of a friend connected to the Chinese embassy in Dar. The two had first met at an export fair in Las Vegas where Shen's civil service job had taken her. She eventually moved to Dar in 2005 to establish a car parts shop. About two years later, her husband also abandoned his civil service job in Zhejiang to join her with their daughter.

What they made of their transnational mobility was unusual within the milieu of shopkeepers with whom they shared an economic niche. A key vector in this unusual trajectory was the family's conversion, in Dar, to Christianity. They had become active members of a multi-racial congregation led by an American pastor, thus attaching themselves to circuitries that are decidedly not nationally delineated, even if they also hosted Bible-study groups for Chinese migrants at their apartment. At church services, the daughter, who attended an international school in Dar and is tri-lingual in Mandarin, Kiswahili, and English, assisted with simultaneous translation. In 2015, she embarked on an undergraduate education at a Christian college in the USA. At the family shop, long-term Tanzanian staff connected to the congregation appeared to be accorded a much greater degree of autonomy and responsibility than was evident in other Chinese-owned shops. Along multiple dimensions, the family had evidently cultivated a thick 'nearby' in Dar es Salaam.

With the daughter's school education taking place in Dar, the generational configuration of this family's transnational mobility is obviously different from one in which a typically young male migrant goes abroad to generate the resources that will then enable reproduction 'back home' and 'in the future.'

Among the broader set of Dar's Chinese shopkeepers, too, social reproduction is not typically a deferred objective. Social reproduction is instead an integral part of family-based projects of transnational mobility, even if—with children often left with grandparents and relatives in Fujian—its typical spatial configuration

differs from Shen's family's. In fact, however, this, in the early 2010s, still typical configuration appeared to be undergoing some significant changes in the mid-2010s. The pioneering generation of parents was now being joined by their left-behind children—who tended to arrive in Tanzania sometime between finishing middle school and starting their own families. Thus, in 2016, Xie's 14-year-old youngest son flew to Dar to learn the business. This held the prospect of leaving the ongoing operation in Dar for him to manage and freeing his parents to explore other possibilities elsewhere. Another family from Xie's hometown was likewise joined by a teenage son when he finished middle school and by a daughter in her early twenties who brought her toddler with her.

Thus, the intergenerational dynamics of these transnational projects were both driving changes in the configurations of transnational mobilities—extending their time horizons and reconfiguring intra-familial spatial configurations—and reinforcing these mobilities. As Hanisch (2020) shows for the case of Fuqingnese shopkeepers in Lesotho, left-behind children may be driven to join their parents' foreign ventures—often with the same mixed feelings that are also evident among this cohort in Dar—because having gone through schooling without their parents' presence disadvantaged them in terms of their educational, and hence economic, prospects in China. In addition, there were now often no grandparents back in China to take care of this next generation's own children, who, therefore, accompanied their parents at a young age. The prior model, in which at least schooling was a life-phase conducted in China, appeared to be waning. In this regard, Shen's family's experience, exceptional in Dar in the mid-2010s, may thus be a harbinger of broader trends already underway.

Broadly speaking, Shen's story is not a story of mere re*location* from China to Dar. Transnational mobility had profound effects, beyond dynamically reshaping the family's spatial ambit of social reproduction and opening up new horizons beyond China and Tanzania. "Because I was educated in China," Shen explained, she had been inculcated with a "value system [that] favours people who make the most money…. But my daughter won't think like that." Had the daughter, too, "grown up in China, she would be a sophomore in university, the same as many of my friends' kids. But she is different from them. I can tell. The way she thinks….": "Tanzania has become part of [her]."[5] Transnational mobility had reshaped Shen herself as well. If she did return to China—an open question for her—she might do so only for some time, and, perhaps, as a Christian missionary. Needless to say, this would not make her a returnee after a period of mere 'suspension' abroad.

In Shen's narrative of her own and her daughter's becoming, 'China' does not function as a source of migration's purpose. Instead, it is a point of reference whose meanings are worked out from within transnational mobility. Thus, Shen describes herself as having outgrown 'China'—in particular with respect to the materialistic value-system she attributes to it. Indeed, this is a point to which she attaches a far-reaching social and political critique shaped by her experience of transnational mobility. In China, "all the public opinion is in the hands of one party, it is way too much influence on our mind. ... When we go out [abroad] and realized that there are things that are not like what we were told, then we have thoughts: why it would be like that?" A lack of access to different ways of thinking, and in particular Christianity ("the CCP has removed the religion part from our lives"), explained why "in China ... a person's value is measured by how much [money] they can make."[5] Originally, this outlook had also shaped her own move to Tanzania. Like "many Chinese" who were there "for some years to buy a car and build a house and pay for their kids' education," as she surmised, she, too, had only thought "about making my own family well and earning money so that I would have a good retirement.... When I came here, I realized that, oh, actually there are people who are suffering." She "had changed a lot" in realizing that one had "to take the local surroundings and local people into consideration. ...You need to consider ... your circle, things surrounding you."[5] Reflecting the key local and global circuitries to which her family's life in Dar is attached, these framings of her life there—particular Chinese inflections notwithstanding—resonate with discourses that have broader currency in the world of Christian missionary expatriates in the Global South.[18]

Hers, then, is a very different outlook on her Tanzanian surroundings than Xie's, whose complaint about the avarice and unhelpfulness of "*Heiren*" is indicative of a self-positioning vis-à-vis Tanzanians in which they are othered. Shen, aided by her command of Kiswahili and English, and finding direction and purpose in Christianity, has connected to her Dar surroundings differently, recognizing "suffering" and reacting with empathy. This has brought her to a point where she can declare that "our home is here.... I don't feel the urgency to earn some cash and go home. I am doing a long-term commitment."[5] Shen's scale-making in Dar es Salaam, in other words, far exceeds the inevitable day-to-day entanglements with her nearby: It is guided by an explicitly articulated moral project of cultivating a "home."

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[18] Personal communications, Dr. Andrew Ivaska, November 27, 2022.

An Expatriate Professional Grappling with Transnational Im/mobilities

Even among a set of Chinese migrants occupying the same narrow economic niche, transnational mobility thus takes quite varied forms. Looking beyond this set, another pattern of transnational mobility is discernible among some of the typically university-educated Chinese migrants arriving in Dar as expatriate professionals employed by Chinese companies. Their entry point into transnational mobility is not the thick familial networks and the home-area cultures of transnationalism of Fujianese shopkeepers. It is rather China's multi-faceted participation in global capitalism and the flows of labour attached to it. Thus, Huang Shu was recruited out of university to work on the administrative side of a Chinese construction-focussed conglomerate with operations in Dar. Three male employees of the globally operating Huawei conglomerate, one of them with a wife working in Poland for a Chinese bank, were, in 2014, anticipating being transferred elsewhere after a three-year stint in Dar. A female friend of Huang Shu had arrived in Dar to work for a Chinese company in logistics but then changed jobs to a Belarussian-Turkish importer of building materials.

What was Huang making of her transnational mobility? While she had not sought it out, the job in Dar, when it came along, was a financially attractive opportunity. But it appealed in other ways as well. Had she been offered a choice between equally well-paying jobs in Beijing and Dar, she surmised, she would still have come to Tanzania for the "chance to go abroad. And Africa. I was very intrigued by Sanmao [the popular Taiwanese writer, most notably of a 1976 travel memoir about her life in Western Sahara] when I was at university."[6] While Africa was not unique in this, as a foreign destination it was attractive because it promised new experiences. As she explained, reflecting on a visit to Flushing, New York, "I found it's just a small Chinese town. You go there and if you send the picture on WeChat, it is just like you had gone back to China.... If I want to go to America, I want to try something different. Not like you stayed in China."[6]

Tanzania did offer such novelty for instance in the shape of a trip to Zanzibar, the archipelago off the coast of Dar, which she had visited shortly after her arrival in 2009. It had been the first time she had stayed on the ocean. When she began organizing trips for a subsidiary of her employer that focused on tourism, she also got to see other staples of Tanzania's tourist circuit—Mount Kilimanjaro and wildlife safaris among them. But a sense of discovery could also be found in her daily work routine: "I saw lots of things when I was outside of the office.... I found it is interesting."[6] Explaining why she posted links to "local foods" on WeChat, she declared, "I like local culture."[6] A walk in an area in the North of

the city, undertaken with a friend "to find something interesting"[6], was similarly documented and shared on WeChat.

Beyond simply providing entertainment, these activities, how Huang frames them, and their place in her online self-representation suggest that her transnational mobility is at least in part constructed around a cosmopolitan "appreciation of cultural diversity" (Landau/ Freemantle 2010: 381). Tanzania thus becomes not just a site for accumulation, but explicitly a site for making a particular kind of self through the *experiences* it may offer. At the same time, such experiences—sought out, embarked upon, evaluated, and mediated with an ever-present audience (at least some of it in China) in mind and on her phone—also configure a particular Dar es Salaam and Tanzania in relation to that elsewhere.[19]

Huang's Dar es Salaam and Tanzania overlap far more significantly with the geographies, activity spaces, and valences of broader expatriate topographies (cf. Smiley 2010) than with either Xie's or Shen's. Thus, Huang took salsa lessons at one of Dar's gyms catering to expats and well-to-do Tanzanians. One of her female friends had taken up kitesurfing. An outing to the Pugu Hills area outside the city, a popular expat destination, had been organized by a multi-racial photography club that a Facebook friend had recommended. A fashion show at a waterfront shopping and dining complex—part of Dar's archipelago of expat spots centered on upmarket hotels, restaurants (with several recent Chinese additions), and shopping areas—provided an evening's entertainment.

These "lifestyle-consumption" aspects (cf. Liu-Farrar 2016) of Huang's transnational mobility are enabled by economic and cultural resources that she shares with many similarly endowed expats of Chinese as well as other origins. "We Chinese here," she ventures, "all have cars...: Cars are our transport." (None of the Chinese shopkeepers interviewed had a car.) Whereas Xie's felt need, in the absence of a car, to minimize potentially dangerous street-level encounters severely confined her spatial ambit, Huang's car allowed her to circumnavigate such impediments to her spatial mobility in the city. Likewise, her and her friends' passable to excellent English (most Chinese shopkeepers don't speak any) broadened their access and created a greater sense of security. Language skills and, more generally, higher education levels—Xie, like several other people of her set, had very limited literacy—also enabled different uses of online infrastructures. While there was general and wide-spread use of the Chinese-

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[19] Martin/ Rizvi (2014: 1016) have made this point in a different context, arguing that the Melbourne and Australia that the migrants they study "inhabit is fundamentally conditioned by the fluctuating mediated co-presence of home."

language platforms QQ and WeChat to stay in touch with family and friends and to receive information, much of what was circulating among the set of shopkeepers appeared to center on warnings about crime and immigration or tax officials' activities (cf. Sullivan/ Chang 2018). In reinforcing a sense of Dar as a hostile and dangerous environment, online infrastructures thus constituted an important site in which Dar was configured as a particular kind of place—one where one was well advised to restrict one's physical mobility. Huang's different networks, including on different platforms such as Facebook, immersed her in different content, at least some of which broadened her scale-making in Dar: Social media is how she learned about fashion shows, photography outings, and salsa lessons. Her posting activities furthermore suggest that for her, more than appeared to be the case for most shopkeepers, these infrastructures were sites not only of configuring place but also of representing and fashioning a particular self.[20]

Still, Dar, configured as a particular place through such practices and infrastructures, presented Huang with a difficult terrain for enacting a form of transnational mobility marked by cosmopolitan aspirations. Thus, she lamented—against the backdrop of her declared liking of local culture—that, after years in the country, "I don't have one local friend." Authentic "local" friendships were out of reach when she frequently encountered, and had thus come to assume, ulterior motives: "It is just very difficult to be friend with [local people]. Every time I want to be friends with someone, they will... ask for something."[6] Limited opportunities to meet people outside the context of her work played into this as well. Her company, like many others, required Chinese employees to live in company-compound dormitories. As a result, "many Chinese men and women living here have a very small circle. Their company is like a small China.... They probably work from Monday to Saturday, and stay home on Sunday, or they go out with the people in the group."[7] Part of the reason why there was no social contact even with the Tanzanian employees of her company, she ventured, may be that "perhaps Chinese have prejudice towards local people."[7] Even if her 2014 idea "to stay with a local family for one week, living with them"[7] and her 2016 plan to rent an apartment in town pushed against these strictures, Dar was a fraught place whose racialized patterns of interactions she experienced as socially immobilizing.

Where transnational mobility had been transformative for Shen and elevating for Xie, Huang assessed its effects on her "personal development"[6] with ambiva-

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[20] Sullivan/ Cheng (2018: 1181) note such "me-casting" as one use to which Chinese-language online forums focused on Africa are put.

lence. While new experiences were enriching, she also saw what Dar and Tanzania had to offer as limiting. A friend who had visited from Istanbul, for instance, had felt that while "she liked the whole environment," she "could go to galleries, concerts if she was in *other* countries—the kind of activities through which she could improve herself."[7] Having found such opportunities of a "high cultural level"[7] lacking in Dar, the friend had returned to Istanbul.

Mere difference and novelty, then, only went so far. Truly enriching experiences also had to meet a yardstick of high quality that Huang tended to index to levels of 'development'—though 'authenticity' could also confer value. In terms of Dar's architecture, for instance, "the quality and the design of the buildings is not good. There are no buildings with local characters, nor shops with good decoration. I mean, there is a lack of things that will enrich your knowledge. But I think in a developed country, there are many things like that."[6]

Huang felt similarly ambivalent about the changes she saw herself undergoing in Dar. On the one hand, she appreciated "less pressure at work"[6] than either in China or what she had witnessed among tour guides on her trip to New York. But she also worried about the effects of this environment on both her professional prospects and her personal growth. "The pace of life is super slow.... Like a koala, living here one will slow... especially people who are employed here like me.... Compared to people who work in China, I feel their changes in six years [the time she had spent in Dar] are very evident.... My colleagues from university, they developed very fast in these six years, in terms of their mindset, in all aspects. The way they think about things, their expectation about life—they have a goal, and I am still like who I was six years ago, nothing changed."[6] In terms of its material implications, the peril of a "life [that] is too at ease," she explained, was that she might end up like the "boiling frog": life might feel comfortable, but she would ultimately be left immobilized and stuck working for "this company forever," being able to "only work here [in Tanzania]: if you want to work in other places, you cannot survive."[6]

While she thus felt that she "need[ed] to make some changes,"[6] her entanglement in transnational mobility made a clear direction hard to make out. A simple return to China was not likely. Having returned there for a period of a little over half a year in 2015, she had not actively looked for a job. She had no professional network there and, small as it may be, her strong social circle in Dar had exerted its gravitational pull. Yet, returning to the same employer, if in yet another role, left her with a sense of drift—switching jobs several times within the company had her "just moving horizontally."[6] In 2016, she was thinking about turning a personal passion for interior design into a more entrepreneurial career for

herself, perhaps taking advantage of what she perceived to be an untapped potential market in Dar. An advanced degree in another country could be a steppingstone, although there was no concrete plan. Transnational mobility, in other words, was the field that would continue to condition what Huang would fashion from it.

Conclusion

"The new flows and modalities of migration ... are so diverse that one may legitimately ask whether it still makes sense to talk about Chinese migration as one empirical phenomenon," Pieke (2007: 87) has noted. Turning the focus from the aggregate phenomenon of 'China-Africa migration' to how three Chinese migrants fashion distinctive forms of transnational mobility in Dar es Salaam underlines this point. Assembled from variegated practices operating at a variety of scales, these mobility constellations are bound up with different projects of 'making selves.' Thus, transnational mobility is a vector that elevates Xie Fen both materially and by constituting her as a braver, more worldly, and, therefore, more fully realized person. For Shen Mei, transnational mobility has brought a personal and spiritual transformation that leaves her feeling settled, having left behind the frenzy for material advancement she sees in her own past and a 'China' she has left behind. Lastly, Huang Shu's experience of transnational mobility as a state of ambivalent drift harbors both opportunities for growth and the danger of stagnation and regression—directionalities that are themselves engendered from within Tanzania's and China's entanglements in Huang's life.

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