

**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION OF CHINESE MIGRANT  
TRADERS IN THE CITY OF DURBAN**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Subashini Govender, hereby declare that the work submitted is entirely my own unless so indicated in the text and that no part of this work has been submitted for a degree at any other University.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **ABSTRACT**

With South Africa attaining democratic status in 1994 and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China a "new wave" of Chinese migration into the country began (Park, 2009). Although the Chinese migrants and their business enterprises are visible on the streets of Durban's city centre and surrounding towns, their lives seem shrouded with secrecy. This study was therefore conducted with the aim of understanding the social and economic lives of the Chinese traders living and working in the city of Durban. Interviews and participant observation methods were utilised in order to obtain qualitative data. The analysis of the data indicates that the main priority of traders is to grow their business in order to prosper; therefore their social and economic activities revolve round the activity of trading. Although crime and language barriers deter Chinese migrants from being more active within South African society, their 'Chinese shops' serve as spaces where they negotiate relationships with diverse people, including their workers and customers. Social, distribution and supply networks are also found to be imperative in order for migrants to effectively conduct their business. It was also noted that social networks, knowledge of the English language, positive experiences in the host country and length of time spent in the country contributes to traders adapting to South Africa. This study also indicates that the future of Chinese migrants in South Africa hinges on the micro and macro conditions of the host country, traders overcoming language barriers as well as maintenance of social networks that provide support to the migrant trader.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Objectives of study.....	3
1.3 Structure of dissertation.....	5
1.4 Conclusion.....	6
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Brief history of China and its relationship with Africa.....	7
2.3 South Africa’s political relationship with China.....	14
2.4 South Africa’s economic relationship with China.....	23
2.5 A brief history of Chinese in South Africa.....	25
2.6 Recent Chinese migrants to South Africa.....	28
2.7 Conclusion.....	29
<b>Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>31</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	31
3.2 Symbolic interactionism and language.....	32
3.3 The self in social interaction.....	34
3.3.1 Self, identity and culture.....	35
3.4 Joint action and structure.....	38
3.5 Conclusion.....	41
<b>Chapter Four: Methodology.....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	42
4.2 Summary of research questions.....	43

4.3 Qualitative methodology.....	44
4.4 Sampling.....	47
4.5 Qualitative interviewing.....	49
4.5.1 The interview process.....	51
4.6 Participant observation.....	54
4.6.1 Participant observation process.....	55
4.7 Settings.....	57
4.8 Analysis of data.....	59
4.9 Ethical considerations.....	60
4.10 Limitations of study.....	61
4.11 Conclusion.....	61
<b>Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis.....</b>	<b>62</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	62
5.2 The economic and social lives of Chinese traders in Durban.....	63
5.2.1 Obtaining wealth.....	63
5.2.2 Crime.....	65
5.2.3 Summary.....	68
5.3 Social interaction between Chinese traders their employees and customers.....	68
5.3.1 Interaction between Chinese traders and their employees.....	69
5.3.2 Chinese trader’s interactions with customers.....	76
5.4 Opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese traders.....	79
5.4.1 Opportunities.....	79
5.4.2 Challenges.....	84
5.5 Chinese traders adapting to South Africa.....	87
5.6 The future of Chinese in South Africa.....	90
<b>Chapter Six: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>94</b>
6.1 Recommendations for further research .....	96
6.2 Summary .....	97
<b>References.....</b>	<b>98</b>

## CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The significant rise in the number of Chinese traders and so called ‘Chinese shops’<sup>1</sup> in and around the city of Durban since 1994 provided the impetus for this research. Since nodes of Chinese shops have sprouted throughout Durban it is important to understand the factors that have allowed for their rapid increase. In addition, although the Chinese traders and their business enterprises are visibly noticeable in the city, there is limited information or knowledge of the lives they live in Durban. Considering the paucity of literature on this topic this research aimed to explore how the Chinese adapt economically and socially to trading and living in the city of Durban. In order to achieve this aim the macro structures as well as the micro-interactions between the Chinese migrant traders and their employees and customers were examined.

### 1.1 Background

Accone (2006:257) indicates that the Chinese in South Africa are not a homogenous group but are diverse in “race, ethnicity, language and culture”. A firm distinction is therefore made between South African Born Chinese (SABC’s) whose ancestors have shared a long and tumultuous history in South Africa (Yap and Man, 1996) and Chinese people who have recently entered South Africa from the year 1994 onwards who have been termed ‘new Chinese migrants’<sup>2</sup> (Accone, 2006; Park, 2009; Park and Chen, 2009).

The opening up of South African markets to the rest of the world after the fall of apartheid, marked an increase in the flow of Chinese commodities and people into South Africa. Trade agreements in 2000 with the People’s Republic of China<sup>3</sup> (PRC) also provided the necessary means for Chinese to enter the country (Accone, 2006). The result of this agreement was noted in 2006 when the South African government made an announcement concerning the increasing ‘wave’ of Chinese entering South Africa (Wilheim, 2006). Park (2009:157) states that there are no accurate or official statistics of Chinese migrants in South Africa, however the Chinese embassy estimates that there is about 200 000 Chinese in South Africa. Wilheim (2006:325) indicates that “the biggest inflow is from the new generation of migrants from

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<sup>1</sup> In this study ‘Chinese shops’ are seen as “Chinese owned shops that sell Chinese made goods for the everyday South African consumer” (Laribee, 2008:355).

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this study is on these ‘new Chinese migrants’ and not on SABC’s. Henceforth when reference is made to Chinese people it is in respect of the new Chinese migrants, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>3</sup> In this study China is used to refer to the PRC, while Taiwan is referred to as the Republic of China (ROC).

mainland China ... it is estimated that between 100 000 and 200 000 legal and illegal immigrants have settled in South Africa”. Thus the total number of new migrants in South Africa is yet unknown as many have entered, and continue to enter, illegally.

Wilheim’s (2006) statement is also significant as it depicts a large increase of migrants over a short period of time. Accone (2006) also states that the number of Chinese migrants is likely to increase considering the South African governments strategic partnerships with the PRC. A case in point is the opening of the China Mall in Durban which is seen as a business initiative to promote Chinese entrepreneurship. This was initiated by the Progressive Business Forum (PBF) [a branch of the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party in South Africa] which promotes business between China and South Africa (website 1).

The recent Chinese migrants often penetrate the commercial markets by trading in various types of goods ranging from clothing and footwear, to electronic goods and everyday household items. The city of Durban in recent years has witnessed the increase in Chinese migrants and their business establishments. The Chinese traders tend to set up their commercial enterprises at key trading areas where it is most convenient to trade with local and, most noticeably, foreign African migrants. Although the Chinese traders, and their business enterprises, are highly visible to the public, little is known about them and their lives seem to be shrouded in secrecy. The intention of this research therefore is to shed some light on the Chinese migrants who have come to share a ‘home’ with the people of South Africa.

Research on the recent Chinese migrants to South Africa is limited, with only a few articles being published (such as Park, 2009 and 2012; Park and Chen, 2009; Laribee, 2008; McNamee et al, 2012). The research undertaken in most of these articles is based primarily on the Chinese traders who reside in the rural areas of the Free State who own ‘Chinese shops’ in these areas. The majority of these ‘Chinese shops’ are family owned. They usually hire help from extended family members who reside in the same village as them in China. Larger shops, however, hire help from local South African’s to assist in the daily running of these stores. Park and Chen (2009:35) indicate that some male respondents in their study assume the role of apprentices to an uncle, male relative or fellow villager before they are able to purchase their own business while older relatives that have established businesses may pursue bigger business enterprises in towns or other regions. This indicates that with the help of relatives the Chinese traders are able to establish their own businesses thereby



resulting in an increase in ‘Chinese shops’ in rural areas. Some Chinese traders also have a wide-ranging network of family and friends in the Free State stretching to KwaZulu-Natal. These networks offer support, information, and they are also able to build a closed community by celebrating Chinese festivals together. Studies thus show that this occurs in rural areas, however how social networks help businesses in cities are yet to be conducted. In addition no research has been undertaken on the new Chinese migrants in the urban areas and none has been done in Durban. As a result of this, a key intention of this study therefore is to add to the body of knowledge in this area.

## **1.2 Objectives of study**

The objective of this study is to explore how Chinese migrant traders adapt socially and economically to living and working in the city of Durban. The following research questions are formed to meet out this objective:

1. What are the economic factors that have allowed the new Chinese migrants to adapt to trading in the city of Durban?
2. How have social networks and interaction contributed to the new Chinese migrants’ ability to adapt economically and socially?
3. What micro-level social interactions occur between the new Chinese migrants, other foreigners and South Africans at trading zones?
  - 3.1 How do trading zones, that the new Chinese migrants inhabit, serve as spaces which allow for intercultural exchange?
  - 3.2 How do these interactions assist or hamper the ability of the Chinese to adapt economically and socially?
4. What are the key economic, social and cultural challenges faced by Chinese migrants living in Durban?
5. What is the future of Chinese migrants in South Africa, specifically in urban areas?

The research questions posed above required both a macro and micro structural<sup>4</sup> investigation of the phenomena under study in order to be adequately answered. Thus in conjunction with understanding the macro structures, this research also explored the micro context in which the Chinese migrants adapt to the South African social environment. Two aspects of this micro context were analyzed. The first dealt with the social networks that the migrants have created that have allowed for support both economically and socially, as well as assistance in promoting business, and even the establishment of a sense of belonging amongst the Chinese in the host country. The second aspect under analysis was the social interactions between the Chinese migrants and other groups that operate within the trading zones. It aimed to establish whether the Chinese traders, from their point of view, are socially accepted by wider society, and in turn how they have adapted as a result of this to South Africa. In investigating how the Chinese adapt socially, it is also important to explore the micro-level interaction<sup>5</sup> between the Chinese shopkeepers and others that occur within the trading zones of these businesses. This is important as the Chinese traders are situated in a host environment where the culture and society are significantly different from their own. Their interaction with, and the reaction of, the 'outside' community is significant as in recent times there has been evidence of, xenophobic attacks on foreigners from African countries; derogatory language used to describe foreigners, and stereotypes of African foreigners which make it challenging for them to adjust to living in South Africa.

With this negative discourse around foreigners prevailing, it is important to investigate how and why the new Chinese migrants have not been drawn into it. Furthermore, it is important to understand these micro-level interactions in order to attain a holistic view of how the Chinese traders have come to negotiate their relationships with varying groups of people. This interaction is also significant in that it influences how the Chinese traders adapt to the social environment in which they live and work, which in turn influences the economic, social and cultural milieu of the city. It was important to explore the interactions, tensions and negotiations that occur within trading zones as it enabled us to understand the challenges

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<sup>4</sup> According to Neubeck and Glasberg (2005:82) macro structures "entail large-scale mechanisms that organise social relationships within and between entire societies. Micro-level social structure refers to social relationships based on interaction between small numbers of individuals".

<sup>5</sup> Layden (1994:1) describes micro analysis or 'microsociology' as the "personal and immediate aspects of social interaction in daily life". This means that "focus is given to the actual face-to-face encounters between people" (Layden, 1994:1). Micro-level interaction therefore indicates the personal face-to-face interaction that occurs between individuals. In this study attention is given to the actual face-to-face relationships that occur between the Chinese, locals and foreigners within and around the Chinese shops.

and opportunities faced by the new Chinese migrants, in adapting. This, in turn has future implications for trade in South Africa.

### **1.3 Structure of dissertation**

Chapter two of this dissertation focuses on the literature surrounding the relationship between China and Africa with particular emphasis on South Africa's rapport with the PRC. The first section of the literature review centers round Africa's political relationship with China. It looks at how China's ties and policies with and towards African countries are shaped round its variable relationship with the United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union. Thereafter emphasis is placed on South Africa's political and economic ties with China. A brief history of Chinese migrants and recent migrants is also examined as they form the focal point of this research.

Chapter three elucidates the theoretical framework used in this research. Social constructionism is posited as the approach most suited towards providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic as well as answering the questions asked. Under the social constructionism theoretical approach, symbolic interactionism was chosen as the key theory as it was seen the most appropriate in understanding various dimensions and experiences of the Chinese migrant trader's life in South Africa. Both micro and macro aspects are taken into consideration under this theory so as to form a detailed understanding of the lives of migrants trading in Durban.

The methodology used in this study, which forms the basis of Chapter four, provides a specific and detailed account and how the study was carried out. The research questions provided a guide as to the kind of methodological approach required in this study. Therefore a qualitative methodological approach was used which was based on how the research questions could be most appropriately answered. This chapter details the non-probability purposive sampling technique that was used in order to elicit participants, as well as describes how data was collected using the interview and participant observation methods. In addition attention was given to the setting in which the research was conducted, how the collected data was analysed, ethical issues considered in this study as well as the limitations of this research.

The answers to the research questions are explicated in Chapter five. Five major themes emerged which shed light on the socio-economic aspects of the Chinese migrant traders lives in South Africa. Interaction with local customers and workers; opportunities and challenges faced; how they adapt to living in South Africa as well as the future of Chinese migrants in South Africa are analysed and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter six, the conclusion, signifies the closure of this dissertation by providing a comprehensive summary of the steps taken in this research with an emphasis on the results obtained. Recommendation and suggestions for further research is also presented in this chapter.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This introduction outlined the motivation for researching Chinese migrant traders in the city of Durban and provided a background against which this study took place. In addition, the research questions and objectives were highlighted. Lastly, the structure of the dissertation as well as a synopsis of chapters were provided. As suggested from above the chapter that follows focuses on providing a comprehensive literature review.

## **CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

China's relationship with Africa and in particular South Africa has historically been limited. With the change of political and economic policies of both countries (as will be discussed later on) this soon changed, with China becoming ever more involved in the South African economy. The establishment of diplomatic ties has also seen the increase of Chinese migration to South Africa.

The aim of this chapter therefore is to highlight China's fluctuating relationship with the African continent and bring to light the reasons for China initiating certain policies in Africa. In order to do so a brief historical account of China's relationship with Africa is examined. This discussion entails how China's interaction with the Soviet Union and the USA had an impact on its policy and relationship to African countries for a substantial period of time. Thereafter a shift from China's political policy to economic policy and its influence on Africa will be discussed. This chapter then moves on to focusing on South Africa's political and economic relationship with China. Subsequently the focus shifts, from the broader political and economic relations, to a deeper social and historical understanding of the Chinese people who migrated to South Africa during different time periods including the present Chinese migrants. Here the focus rests on the reasons behind Chinese migration to South Africa as well as how they negotiate their lives in a new country in accordance with the political and social events within the country.

### **2.2 Brief history of China and its relationship with Africa**

To understand China's early political relationship with Africa, it is imperative to look at China's ideology and political relationship that it had with Russia (Soviet Union<sup>6</sup>) and the USA. China was profoundly affected by these two countries, and in turn formulated policies towards Africa based on its relationship with the Soviet Union and the USA.

In 1949 a civil war between Chiang Kai Chek's nationalist and Mao Zedong's communist armies broke out in China. It was a difference in political ideology that started the war. Kai Chek wanted China to be a democratic liberal state while Mao Zedong favoured communism.

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<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991 (Boilard, 1998:26).

During the civil war in 1949 Kai Chek and thousands of his followers fled to the island of Taiwan to escape persecution. Kai Chek formed the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan. Mao Zedong renamed mainland China as the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Eglin, 1991).

During the fifties the USA (who was against the PRC's communist regime), continued to give support and defence to the Taiwanese Nationalist regime by applying certain policies to isolate and contain the Chinese 'menace' (Hutchison, 1975:13). China's key supporter and alliance partner at this time, the Soviet Union, provided assistance to China<sup>7</sup> (Hutchison, 1975; Taylor, 2006). China's alliance with the Soviet Union and conflicts with the USA largely influenced Chinese foreign policy (Taylor, 2006: 18; see also Hutchison, 1975). In addition Mao Zedong conceptualised the term 'intermediate zones' which was seen as an area where the economic systems of capitalism and socialism competed for control. (Taylor, 2006: 17). Mao envisioned the world to be divided into those countries that pursued capitalism as an economic system - such as the USA, Great Britain, France and their colonies - and those countries that favoured socialism. The 'intermediate zones' were places that could be contested for either system. China thus pursued an anti-hegemonic, anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist doctrine towards other countries, especially to those who occupied the intermediate zones (Taylor, 2006).

According to Hutchison (1975:6) only four African countries namely, Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa were independent in 1949 when the Communist government came into power. China had scant relations with Africa prior to 1955 (Hutchison, 1975; Larkin, 1971; Taylor, 2006). On 28 June 1954 the Prime Minister of China Chou En-lai visited India in order to establish diplomatic relations. Chou En-lai and Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru signed the 'Five Principles of Mutual Coexistence' which guided foreign policy between the two countries. The principals entailed having "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence" (Ogunsanwo, 1974:7; Taylor, 2006:18). According to Ogunsanwo (1974) these principals become important in light of the Bandung Conference and were later extended to other developing countries, and it was not until the Bandung Conference that China initiated diplomatic

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<sup>7</sup> According to Hutchison (1975:13) the Soviet Union provided China with 'aid' which China had to pay back. (Since the Soviet Union charged a low interest rate they considered it to be aid).

contacts with African nations. This Asian-African Conference which was held in Bandung Indonesia in April 1955 brought together twenty nine countries, six of which were African namely Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Liberia, Libya and Sudan (Hutchison, 1975; Larkin, 1971; Taylor, 2006).

It has been argued that En-lai did not intend on establishing a relationship with Africa when he went to Bandung (Hutchison, 1975:14). However, En-lai seized the opportunity to establish relations with Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Egyptian Head of State (Ogunsanwo, 1974). Ogunsanwo (1974) comments that En-lai decided to extend a hand to Egypt as he wanted to impress the other Africa delegates while Hutchison (1975:15) argues that since Nasser was the only other Head of State (apart from Nehru) he was seen as equals to En-lai and his “interest in Egypt was also probably roused by her position as an Arab as well as an African country”. China could not establish ties with either Liberia or Ethiopia as they had a close relationship with the USA. Diplomatic relations between Egypt and China were formally established in May 1956 which also led to China being exposed to the rest of Africa and for potential ties with other countries to be established (Hutchison, 1975:15).

After the Bandung conference China became more involved in Africa (Hutchison, 1975; Taylor, 2006). China divided the status of African countries into three broad areas, i.e. African states that were politically independent and were considered ‘progressive’ and ‘pro-imperialist’ formed the first category; colonial countries that were seen as ‘advanced’ formed the second category; and the third category constituted colonial countries that were growing in political awareness (Ogunsanwo, 1974:18). China divided its objectives in Africa into short term activities and long term activities. Short term activities with regard to countries that fell into the first category, mentioned above, included:

“breaking through the barrier of suspicion created by ‘imperialist’ propaganda, establish diplomatic relations [the PRC extended invitations to African countries to visit China and the PRC also made an effort to send Chinese delegates to African countries], extend trade and eventually aid, while trying to persuade the government to adopt an anti-western brand of neutralism” (Ogunsanwo, 1974:18).

China aimed to establish prominent links with independent countries through trade and aid. This could be seen when China negotiated a trade agreement with Egypt purchasing 15 000 tons of cotton while Egypt bought 60 000 tons of rolled steel (Hutchison, 1975:15). Taylor (2006) and Ogunsanwo (1974) indicate that China continued to establish ties with North

African countries. Cultural visits with Ethiopia, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia resulted in the latter three countries formally recognising China (Taylor, 2006:21). In 1959 ten Chinese delegations visited Africa, in 1960 this number increased to 25 and in 1962, 52 delegates visited various African states (Taylor, 2006:23). The number of African delegates to China also increased from 50 in 1959 to 98 in 1960 (Taylor, 2006:23).

China's long term objective for African countries, especially those who occupy the third category was to "help train indigenous revolutionary cadres whose function would be to transform the African nationalist political temperament into a Communist one" (Ogunsanwo, 1974:18). China aimed to assist those political groups fighting for independence against colonial and nationalist rulers. These policies clearly indicated China's stance towards anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism and which went against USA's perceived intentions. A case in point could be made in relation to the Suez Crisis of 1956. In July 1956 Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal which antagonised the West and October 1956 saw the onset of the Suez Canal Crisis where Britain and France planned to invade Egypt's waterway (Hutchison, 1975:16; Ogunsanwo, 1974:9). In Egypt's crisis China gave her a gift of \$ 4.7 million and offered to send 280 000 'volunteers' to assist Egypt (Ogunsanwo, 1974:9; Taylor, 2006: 21). China also criticised French and British policy and out rightly condemned the Anglo-French - Israeli invasion in a press conference where it issued a formal government statement denouncing Anglo-French activities in Egypt (Larkin, 1971:24). China continued to support Egypt and "attack Western political initiatives into December as the crisis ebbed" (Larkin, 1971:25). The Egyptian government commended China in its efforts. China also started to gain recognition amongst African countries for its stance against western imperial forces (Ogunsanwo, 1974:9). The Suez Crisis revealed China as a serious opponent against the West. Although it came as a surprise to China that France and Britain easily conceded, it was nevertheless seen as a victory for the Communist forces of the Soviet Union and China.

The period 1960-1965 marked the start of China's successful diplomatic relations with Africa, however at the same time relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated. After the death of the Russian leader Joseph Stalin leadership moved to Khrushchev who started to initiate relations with the USA (Taylor, 2006:22). At the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Khrushchev denounced Stalin much to the surprise of the Chinese delegation that was uninformed of Khrushchev's intentions (Ogunsanwo, 1974:12). Khrushchev called for "peaceful co-existence with the capitalist world, the non-inevitability of world-war



and the possibility of a parliamentary road to power in other non-Communist states” (Ogunsanwo, 1974:12). Since Moscow’s antagonism with the West was waning, China saw the need “to offer itself up as an alternative socialist model”, with the intention of becoming the leader of the socialist world (Taylor, 2006:23). With relations with Moscow becoming strained China decided to look towards Africa for partnership and support. With the support of African countries China aimed to strengthen its position against the Soviet Union which enabled the PRC to break ties with them (Taylor, 2006:23). In 1960 seventeen African countries became independent, it was also the year that African countries were allowed to join the United Nations (Ogunsanwo, 1974). China decided to “offer immediate diplomatic recognition and to express the hope that such recognition would be reciprocated”.

China immediately extended diplomatic recognition to African countries with the hope of gaining support (Ogunsanwo, 1974:62). This was important to China as it intended to gain diplomatic recognition from the United Nations, it also needed to gain support to oppose both the USA and the Soviet Union, and at the home front it needed to gain more alliances to isolate Taiwan in trade and diplomatic politics. As Ogunsanwo (1974:184) argues, “At the end of 1965 eighteen African states recognised China, though the degree of reciprocal diplomatic warmth varied”.

With African states becoming independent they were gaining appeal from the rest of the world. Africa became a three way struggle between the Western States, the Soviet Union and China (Ogunsanwo, 1974:63). From 14 December 1963 to 4 February 1964 Chou En-lai together with forty odd Chinese delegates toured ten African countries (Hutchison, 1975:61). There were three main reasons for China’s tour to Africa. Firstly it wanted to evaluate Africa’s perception of China and build more effective policies. Secondly, it aimed to emphasise to the USA its global interest and explain its stance towards the 1963 Moscow nuclear-test-ban treaty and lastly and most importantly it wanted to gain support for a second Bandung conference which was planned to be held before the second Belgrade conference (Hutchison, 1971:61). Taylor (2006:24) also notes China wanted to hold the second Bandung conference before the second Belgrade conference to prevent the Soviets from attending, leaving China to be seen as leading the developing world. Through the conference China would have also been able to promote its agenda of anti-hegemony and anti-colonialism.

Taylor (2006:25) indicates that the tour was not met with much enthusiasm, with only five African countries (Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Ethiopia and Somalia) agreeing for the need of a second Bandung conference. Egypt, Algeria and Morocco were not keen. In a speech given at the end of the tour En-lai remarked that “revolutionary prospects were excellent throughout Africa” (Hutchison, 1971:68). The African states propagated by Western journalistic rhetoric understood ‘revolutionary’ to mean militant violence, although En-lai meant ‘change’ which did not necessarily include violence (Hutchison, 1971:68). Even though En-lai tried to explain his statement the damage was already done and the tour ended with mixed fortunes. Although China “cemented relations with radical states, Chou had further alienated moderate ones” (Hutchison, 1971:69). In the preceding months after much disruption the second Bandung conference failed to emanate.

The period 1966-1968 marked China’s first Cultural Revolution (Gittings, 2005). The Cultural Revolution was a domestic revolution initiated by Mao Zedong to weed out those who did not explicitly acknowledge and practice the Maoist doctrines. During the Cultural Revolution “wrong tendencies were to be pointed out and corrected, and those of the old guard that was found lacking in revolutionary zeal and purity were to be routed out. The Red Guards were Mao’s defenders of the faith” (Hutchison, 1971:133). Taylor (2006) notes that China’s Cultural Revolution created setbacks in pursuing new diplomatic relationships and offering firm support for those African countries that China was already aligned to. All embassies, with the exception of Egypt, recalled their ambassadors. “The Red Guards who occupied the embassies interfered with the operations of the departments” and the African image of China tarnished (Taylor, 2006:32).

The Cultural Revolution officially ended at the Ninth Congress of the CPC [Communist Party of China] in April 1969 (Taylor, 2006:36). In May 1969 China began to send ambassadors back to the countries that they had diplomatic ties with (Anshan, 2008). China’s policy in Africa shifted towards aid as its key objective. Hutchison (1971:165) notes that “friendship, cultural, technical and governmental delegations to and from Africa increased and for the first time China emerged as by far the largest communist donor of foreign aid”. For instance, China supplied Zambia and Tanzania with a 169 million pound loan for the construction of the TanZam railway (Ogunsanwo, 1974:252). China quickly gained recognition amongst African countries and many countries began to renegotiate diplomatic ties with her. China

began to reconcile its relationship with the USA and now saw the Soviet Union as its key opponent (Taylor, 2006; Anshan, 2008).

The latter part of the 1970's and 1980's saw a change in the way China approached Africa. When Deng Xiaoping took over the reins from Mao, after his death, he initiated the strategy referred to as the 'Four Modernisations' (Jordan, 2004). This strategy aimed to modernise China's economy. During this period China primarily focused on the internal development of the Chinese economy and therefore limited the amount of assistance it could offer to African countries however it continued to maintain friendly ties with the African continent (Taylor, 1998). For instance in 1977 China sent Chairman Hua Guofeng to Africa to identify political parties who were interested in establishing relations with the PRC. In 1978, the International Department received these African delegates in China. This marked a departure from China's previous policies as China moved towards initiating relations with parties that were not communist (Anshan, 2008). In addition "from 1978 to 1990 more than 230 delegates from parties in sub-Saharan countries visited China, at the same time the CPC sent out fifty-six delegations to visit ruling parties of the thirty-nine sub-Saharan countries" (Anshan, 2008). In 1982 Premier Zhou Ziyang visited eleven African countries to establish cooperation and the 'Four Principals on Sino-African Economic and Technical Cooperation' was announced (Anshan, 2008). However trade and aid to Africa from 1976 to 1987 fluctuated (Taylor, 1998; Anshan, 2008). As China was more interested in developing economic relations with Japan and the USA, trade with Africa stagnated. Africa was seen as irrelevant to China's efforts to modernise and in the mid 1980's, in contrast to the rhetoric of establishing cooperation in the early 1980's, Africa was relatively absent from China's economic trajectory. Chinese politicians who were developing ties throughout the world largely ignored Africa (Taylor, 1998). China also became disinterested with battling the Soviets on African soil. In the mid 1980's however China reconciled relations with the Soviets (Taylor, 1998).

The Tiananmen Square crisis in 1989 (where a group of pro-democracy demonstrators were massacred when protesting against the new economic developments that saw the level of poverty rise) had ramifications on how the West and African countries reacted to China. The West imposed sanctions on China while some African countries such as Angola and Namibia were supportive of China (Taylor, 1998; Rupp, 2008). Since Africa openly embraced China while the rest of the world isolated it, China began to form close ties by offering aid. As Taylor (1998:450) comments "Chinese aid in the post-Tiananmen era increased dramatically

as Beijing scrambled to win over allies and sympathetic supporters”. This tactic enabled China to gain support against the West. From the time of the collapse of the Soviet Block, China saw the United States as its main rival. China then reinitiated its policy of anti-hegemony and positioned itself as a developing country supportive of other African developing countries (Taylor, 1998).

Trade between Africa and China increased by 431 per cent between 1989 and 1997 (Taylor, 1998). Due to the acceleration of China’s growth China’s economy demanded energy and resources found in Africa. Thus China’s trade and investment grew substantially from 1990. Osei and Mubiru (2010) indicate that “China’s FDI [Foreign Direct Investment] is closely linked to its trade and development assistance on the continent”. In 1991 FDI to Africa was 0.2% in 2008 this total grew to 9.8%. In 2008 China’s exports to Africa totaled 50.8 billion USD, while China’s imports from Africa reached 56 billion USD (website 2).

The relationship between China and Africa continues to grow and strengthen with China being interested in investing and trading with Africa (and in return receiving resources that the economy needs) and Africa likewise being keen on receiving much needed assistance in development. The next section takes a closer look at the political relationship between South Africa and China.

### **2.3 South Africa’s political relationship with China**

South Africa’s political relationship with China dates back to 1905 when the USA consulate in Johannesburg initiated ties between South Africa and the Qing dynasty (Taylor, 2006: 127). The People’s Republic of China (PRC) was prevented from directly establishing political relations with the South African government as its anti-Marxism and anti-Communism stance went against the PRC’s political ideologies (Taylor, 2006:128). The PRC also refused to initiate ties with countries and political parties that were friendly with its enemies. The PRC’s political relations with South Africa stretched only so far as assisting the liberation movements but its political ideologies and policies again prevented it from actually making a large contribution to the struggle against apartheid. However, as the political situation in South Africa changed, China was more open to establishing ties with her albeit it applied stringent conditions. This section deals mainly with the PRC’s maneuverability with

South Africa's political parties and its rise to obtain full diplomatic ties when South Africa became a democratic state.

According to Taylor (2006:128) the two major liberation movements in opposition to the apartheid government were the African National Congress (ANC), formed in 1912, and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). The PAC was formed in 1959 when certain members from the ANC broke away from the political party as it perceived it to be dominated by anti-apartheid 'Whites'. Taylor (2006) indicates that the PAC's ideology verged on racism and saw the struggle in South Africa as primarily a racial one. Initially the PRC had cordial relations with the ANC which could be seen when ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) delegates travelled to Beijing from 1953 to 1963. However relations with the PRC started to break as the ANC aligned itself with the pro-Soviet SACP. China who was against the Soviet regime did not want to establish relationships with the ANC if it aligned itself with the SACP who was pro-Soviet. The ANC and SACP together formed the guerrilla movement Umkhoto we Sizwe (MK). The two political organisations travelled to various African states as well as the Eastern Block to accumulate aid and support. MK received arms from the Soviet Union. Soviet training personnel were sent to South Africa and South African volunteer's travelled to the Soviet Union to receive training and education. Initially, "China remained involved in the ANC struggle and a sizeable proportion of the MK cadres sent abroad went to the PRC" (Taylor, 2006:129), however as China severed relations with the Soviet bloc, relations with the ANC thus weakened. ANC cadres, who were influenced by the SACP, criticised China at international conferences resulting in the breakdown of the aid relationship that China had with the ANC. With the souring of ties between China and the ANC, China turned to support the PAC.

China felt the need to be involved in the struggle for liberation in South Africa although access to the most effective liberation movement was closed due to its close ties with the Soviet Union. However, China decided to align itself with the PAC as it felt obliged to help South Africa in its struggle with the aim of counterbalancing the Soviets influence on the SACP and ANC (Taylor, 2006:130). Although the PAC claimed China to be its "most reliable ally" China's "support was meager and unreliable" and did not come close to matching the aid and support given to the ANC by the Soviets (Taylor, 2006:130). Taylor (2006:130) points out three reasons for China's lack of interest in the PAC. Firstly China was keen to support organisations that allowed it to gain prestige and influence. China would

rather support an active guerrilla army such as ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) than instruct PAC servicemen in Tanzanian training camps (Taylor, 2006:130). Secondly, feuds within the party (from 1978 to 1981) meant that the organisational capacity of the PAC could not match that of the ANC and it never posed a major threat to the apartheid government. Thirdly, China could not afford a large scale military aid programme. China was fortunate that the PAC was not organised enough to call for military assistance. China dabbled in political relations with various African political movements, assisting those that they could potentially gain from the most.

From 1975 to 1983 the PRC made many attempts to connect with the ANC. In 1975 Oliver Tambo, a prominent member of the ANC, visited Beijing on a trip that was sponsored by the Algerians. In 1979 Vice-Premier Li Xiannian met with the ANC Secretary General Alfred Nzo. China wanted to normalise relationships with the ANC, however with China's invasion of Vietnam, which was condemned by the ANC, the ANC then backed out of securing relations with the PRC. As the Soviet Union focused its attention abroad and loosened its grip on the liberation movements allowing for other political bodies from the outside to become involved, China stepped up relations with the ANC. In 1983 China shifted its foreign policy towards South Africa from being ideologically motivated to treating "all organisations struggling for national liberation in Southern Africa alike, without discrimination" (Taylor, 2006:136). China was no longer focused on competing with Russia rather it was now motivated in pursuing a foreign policy of broadening its presence and status in Africa. In 1983, the president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo visited China to re-open relations between the two. China promised aid and Tambo remarked that "the Chinese side has assured us of political, moral and material support" (Taylor, 2006:137).

China began to concentrate on backing the ANC liberation movement. There were more political delegates visiting the PRC and China called for sanctions against Pretoria. Its policy toward South Africa shifted from militancy to calling for peaceful negotiations to bring an end to apartheid. Taylor (2006) however, indicates that China used more rhetoric than actual support in assisting South African and other African liberation movements. China's main focus was expanding its presence within Africa.

In February 1990 Nelson Mandela, the leader of the ANC, was released from prison and thereafter liberation movements were unbanned. The PRC greeted this news with enthusiasm.

In October 1992 Mandela paid a visit to China and met Premier Li Peng and President Jiang Zemin and “expressed his gratitude for Chinese support to the anti-apartheid struggle” (Taylor, 2006:141). China was also keen on establishing official ties with South Africa, prior to the country’s first democratic election (Taylor, 2006:141). The recognition of China by South Africa would officially open up trade and political links with China. China was emerging as an economically powerful country that would be able to negotiate trade agreements with South Africa and contribute to growing South Africa’s economy. However, for South Africa to recognise China, China had one condition, that South Africa must sever ties with Taiwan. Geldenhuys (1995:5) notes that “in an effort to isolate the ROC in world politics, Beijing compels other countries to choose between the two China’s by rejecting out of hand, formal relations with both”. China did not want countries to have a dual recognition with China and Taiwan as China considered itself to be the main ruler of the Chinese territory. To have dual recognition would undermine China and its ‘one China’ policy. This means that the PRC have given other countries an ultimatum, no country can have any formal diplomatic relations with both the PRC and ROC, a choice has to be made.

In May 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa. Mandela had to make a choice between China and Taiwan and decided to take over full diplomatic relations with the Taiwanese government from the previous National Party administration (Cornish, 1997:250, Taylor, 2006). Mandela’s decision was based on loyalty. Taiwan had assisted the ANC towards the end of the struggle and had supplied the ANC with R20 million towards its election campaign (Cornish, 1997:250; Taylor, 2006:143). Mandela also stated in 1994 that “unless [Taiwan] does something very bad against us, we would never take the initiative in cutting official ties” (Taylor, 2006:143). Mandela again in 1996 reiterated that “Taiwan supported us during the latter phase of the struggle ... It is not easy for me to be assisted by a country, and once I come to power, say ‘I have no relations with you’. I haven’t got that type of immorality, and I will not do it” (Taylor, 2006:145). However, despite the newly elected government having strong ties to the ROC and Mandela’s loyalty to a country that had supported the ANC through tough times, the issue of who to establish diplomatic ties with was still on the agenda. Taiwan and China both scrambled to gain ultimate recognition from South Africa. The Chinese Trade Minister Liu Qinhua, for instance, stated that “the lack of diplomatic ties meant that China felt unable to offer preferential trade links” and the Deputy Foreign Minister Fuchang Yang asserted that “the Taiwan question must be settled before diplomatic relations can be settled” (Taylor,

2006:142). China through withholding trade relations tried to force South Africa into making a decision. Taiwan on the other hand offered South Africa \$41 million aid to finance its various projects within the country (Taylor, 2006:143). Alfred Nzo, the South Africa Foreign Minister, also went on state visits to both China and Taiwan in an effort to try to secure a compromise with China over the Taiwan debate however China remained adamant that recognition would only be given if South Africa de-recognised Taiwan.

Taylor (2006:143) indicates that some South African observers wanted Pretoria to establish diplomatic ties with Beijing for various reasons. There were many factors why some observers would choose China over Taiwan. Geldenhuys (1995:4) points out that China “holds a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council, has the world’s largest population, possesses a nuclear capability, and boasts one of the fastest growing economies in the world”. With China’s growing economy and its influence in the international sphere, relations with the PRC could have been beneficial to South Africa. Having a permanent seat on the UN Security Council would mean that if South Africa became an associate country to China it would receive support from China on certain issues under discussion. Geldenhuys (1995:4) adds that “political, strategic and economic considerations make it imperative that South Africa should follow the lead of the vast majority of nations in extending official recognition to Beijing”. Guliwe and Mkhonto (2009) note too that the PRC was also in support of South Africa becoming a democratic country during the liberation struggle.

It has been argued that in contrast to the above Taiwan appeared weak. For instance although the ROC acted and was treated as a sovereign state in international relations by others, it was still a province of mainland China (Geldenhuys, 1995:15). Taiwan has not completely severed ties with mainland China and if independence is considered, the PRC would take military action against the ROC and would reunite Taiwan to mainland China by force. Since the PRC has a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, its veto position has consistently denied Taiwan a place in the Security Council. Mainland China thus has considerable power over Taiwan. If South Africa were to retain diplomatic relations with the ROC it would have difficulty in establishing itself as a successful economic and global player as doors to China (which is a formidable economic power) would be closed. In addition Taiwan is also marginalised by other countries, such as the United States of America, in favour of the PRC. Thus, aligning with Taiwan would also mean that South Africa would also be marginalised.



There might also be diplomatic and political disagreements between South Africa and other countries if South Africa becomes permanently associated with Taiwan (Geldenhuys, 1995).

At that time the argument for establishing a diplomatic relationship entailed South Africa benefiting politically and economically by having a partnership with the PRC, if South Africa failed to acknowledge the human rights violation in China it undermined the values that were set by the ANC which were drafted in the foreign policy blueprint. The ANC foreign policy stated that human rights issues needed to be addressed in international relations with other countries (Geldenhuys, 1995:5; Mandela, 1993; website 3). The document also stated that South Africa “should and must play a central role in a worldwide human rights campaign” and that “South Africa under the ANC rule will be neither selective nor afraid to raise human rights violations with countries where our own and other interests might be negatively affected” (Geldenhuys, 1995:5).

China also had a series of human rights issues that had not been addressed. Geldenhuys (1995:5) states that the PRC was “one of the few remaining communist dictatorships in a world that has largely turned its back on this repressive form of government”. The Chinese government was still held accountable for the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and was still “accused of committing genocide against the indigenous people” of Tibet (Geldenhuys, 1995:5). In 1994 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) exposed the PRC’s use of “convict labour in the manufacturing of goods for export” (Geldenhuys, 1995:5). The PRC also conceded that if Taiwan declared independence and became a sovereign state, then the communist state would “use force to bring the island back into its fold” (Geldenhuys, 1995:8). By becoming independent Taiwan was seen by China as turning its back on reunification. Since the PRC admitted to using force to control Taiwan it brought into debate whether mainland China was fair in setting such a policy which questioned South Africa’s decision to align with them.

Taiwan had however given generously to South Africa. Taiwan invested R1.4 billion in South Africa which contributed to creating 40 000 jobs and 280 factories. Taiwan and South Africa signed “agreements for trade, investments, technical cooperation and financial assistance totaling R1.1 billion” (Geldenhuys, 1995:14). In addition Taiwan financed the governments Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). The ROC also “offered to establish a Vocational Training Centre in Gauteng Province ... [that would] train 5 000 to

6 000 people each year in various industrial trades” (Geldenhuys, 1995:8-10). Other aid contributions made by the ROC towards South Africa includes a donation of R25 million towards a community forestry project in South Africa, a loan of R55 million to the Development Bank of Southern Africa (based in South Africa) for the development of small farms, a R105 million loan to Eskom (Electricity Supply Commission) for rural electrification projects and was considering a multi-billion rand investment on a joint petrochemical venture with South Africa that would also have the add on effect of creating thousands of jobs. (Geldenhuys, 1995:14) Geldenhuys (1995:14) notes that the “PRC, by contrast, hardly features as either an investor or an aid donor to South Africa”. Taiwan also contributed to the South African economy through tourism. Geldenhuys (1995:14) points out that South Africa was emerging as an attractive destination for Taiwanese tourists; this was seen in 1994 where Taiwanese tourists spent nearly R100 million in South Africa. It can be argued that with Taiwan’s reputation for fighting for democracy, its generous aid donations and loan agreements that economically benefited South Africa and its growing tourism in South Africa which contributed to South Africa’s economy, Taiwan also had much to offer South Africa.

In November 1997 South Africa decided to de-recognise Taiwan in favour of mainland China. This decision formally took effect on 1 January 1998 (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009). South Africa had to sever political links with Taiwan, but could still continue economic relations. South Africa’s acceptance of the ‘one China’ concept “opened way for full diplomatic interaction with China, while maintaining economic links with Taiwan” (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:302). The decision made by President Mandela was based on economic considerations rather than ideologies. Guliwe and Mkhonto (2009) states that President Mandela’s dilemma revolved around choosing between ‘old friends’ from Beijing who supported the liberation struggle and ‘new friends’ who helped during the democratic elections. However, this decision came as a surprise - even to the Chinese and Taiwanese - as Mandela went on record saying that “it would be immoral to cut off diplomatic ties with Taiwan” and he commended Taiwan for its role played in the liberation struggle (Cornish, 1997:251, Taylor, 2006). Cornish (1997:251) suggests that Mandela’s anger towards those who questioned his decision “seem to support the argument that he was pressed to take this course, against his will, by his party caucus and by fellow African leaders”. African leaders also made it clear that if South Africa wanted to play an influential part within the UN it

needed to formalise ties with China. The US President also stressed to South Africa that it was his priority to improve relations with China (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009).

Guliwe and Mkhonto (2009), however, list five factors that contributed to South Africa's decision to favour the PRC. Firstly, South Africa aims to play a more significant role in international affairs "which required full diplomatic relations with China, given China's veto in the UN Security Council" (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:302) Secondly, China supported the liberation struggle and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has friendly relationships with the ANC and SACP. Almost 'the entire international community' was in recognition of the 'one China' concept (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:302). Since South Africa's goal is to play a more crucial role in international affairs its relationship with China is imperative. Since Hong Kong reverted back to mainland China, which opened more markets for South Africa, there is more potential for investment and two-way trade. Lastly, South Africa sees future trade and investment with Taiwan to be limited (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009).

In 2008, South Africa and the PRC celebrated a decade of formal diplomatic relations. During this time period several policies were drawn up between the two states. These included "The Pretoria Declaration on Partnership that was issued in April 2000. A Bi-National Commission (BNC) that was established in 2001. A Strategic Partnership was declared in 2004. A Programme for Deepening Strategic Partnership was established in June 2006" (website 4).

The Pretoria Declaration on Partnership which was signed on April 25, 2000 was a diplomatic agreement that established the fundamental guiding principles of the two countries. The document reiterated the five principals outlined in the 1955 Bandung Conference. It outlined four main aims of the partnership between the two countries. Firstly, a Bi-National Commission was established to coordinate the relations between the two countries, to act as a mediator so that mutual agreements can be made and to ensure that new agreements that are made are incorporated into previous agreements. Secondly, the declaration stated that the two countries would work together to "develop, strengthen and diversify their economic relationship to the mutual benefit of their peoples" by removing barriers that would prevent "bilateral trade, investment, service and commercial relations" (website 5). Closer cooperation will be established between enterprises of the two countries in order to develop natural resources especially in the mining and manufacturing industry.

Thirdly, both countries agreed to “the promotion of a new Sino-African relationship on the basis of equality and mutual benefit” (website 5). China also aimed to support Africa in peace efforts and by promoting African interests in world bodies such as the United Nations or G-77. Lastly, the two countries signed an agreement supporting each other in establishing a new international and economic order. This would entail that,

The two sides maintain that in this future New Order, the diversity of the world should be respected; the principles of sovereign equality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries should be upheld; no country should dominate others; the negative effects of globalization-especially on developing nations-should be reduced and restricted; and harmony, democracy, justice and equality in international relations should be actively pursued and fully promoted (website 5).

The two major areas of importance was South Africa’s and China’s political and economic cooperation. In December 10, 2001 former South African President Thabo Mbeki, at the invitation of President Jiang Zemin, launched the first Bi-National Commission in Beijing (website 6). The Commission was in keeping with the Pretoria Declaration signed in 2001 and aimed to strengthen both political and economic relations between the two countries (website 7). Since then the bi-national commission met every two years. In 2004 the Bi-National Commission redefined the relationship between the two countries when they expressed that their rapport was now a "strategic partnership of equality, mutual benefit and common development” (website 8). In June 17-24, 2006 Premier Wen Jiabao of the State Council of the PRC visited seven African countries: Egypt, Ghana, Congo, Angola, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa. Premier Jiabao paid a two day visit to South Africa from 21-22 June. This visit was significant as it marked the first official visit of a Chinese Premier from the PRC. The Programme for Deepening Strategic Partnership was signed at this time which increased the level of economic participation between the two countries (website 8). On August 24, 2010, President Jacob Zuma signed the “comprehensive strategic partnership” with President Ju Jintao in Beijing on his first official diplomatic visit to China (website 9). The Beijing Declaration was also signed which “outlined 38 bilateral cooperation agreements, ranging from political dialogues, trade, investment, mineral exploration and agriculture to joint efforts in the global arena” such as the U.N and the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) (website 9). The agreement mainly outlined strategies aimed at increasing economic cooperation. Such strategies included balancing the trade between the two countries by South Africa exporting more value-added manufacturing goods to China and by rectifying any statistical discrepancies in trading. China planned to increase

investment in South Africa's manufacturing industry so that products could be manufactured from South Africa's raw material. The two countries "agreed to provide mutual technical support in the areas of green economy, skills development and industrial financing ... encourage companies to explore cooperative opportunities in infrastructure construction projects ... and promote economic development through development financing, fair trade, global economic governance and the reform of the international financial system to support developing countries" (website 9). According to Labuschagne (2010) Zuma also witnessed the signing of business contracts between Chinese and South African companies. Zuma's visit also coincided with a business seminar attended by 350 South African representatives to Beijing. Zuma also attended the Shanghai 2010 World Expo to view the South African Pavilion (Labuschagne, 2010). In addition Vice President Kgalema Monlanthe visited Vice President Xi Jinping on September 28, 2011 to sign a "memorandum of understanding on mineral resources cooperation and an agreement for the development of financial cooperation" (website 10). The agreements called for cooperation in mineral resource management, utilisation and development that would benefit both countries. The agreements over the years between the two countries clearly shows that China has and will continue to penetrate and play an integral part in South Africa's political and, more significantly, economic affairs. These strategic agreements therefore see the relationship between the two countries expanding.

#### **2.4 South Africa's economic relationship with China**

In this section, the focus turns to how these policies have assisted economic relations between the two countries and the affects it has on the South African economy.

The subsequent opening up of South Africa's markets to China and the policies, mentioned above, has led to increased trade and investment between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> Trade between the two countries was initiated in 1990, when political conditions started to improve in South Africa. Although China trades with many of Africa's countries which has a wealth of natural resources to offer, China's relationship with South Africa "is said to be one of the closest between African countries and the world's fastest growing economy [which is] premised on South Africa's relatively developed industrial and commercial base and the strength of the South African state" (Bowker, 2008:1).

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<sup>8</sup> The two countries referred to are South Africa and the PRC.

In 1991 bilateral trade was only US\$ 14 million but within six years total trade amounted to US\$ 1.5 billion which is a significant increase (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:303). In 1998, when South Africa established formal diplomatic ties with China, trade in the coming years soared (Bowker, 2008). In 2002 trade reached over US\$ 2 million and in 2004 the volume of bilateral trade surpassed US\$ 6 million. In 2007 trade increased to US\$ 13 million (or R88 billion), which is a 45% increase compared to the 2006 level. (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:303) “Bilateral trade increased from R40 million (US\$ 5.7 billion) in 1995 to R 119.7 billion in 2009” (website 11). Overall trade started from R5.2 billion in 1998 reaching R120 billion in 2009 (website 12). In 2009 China become South Africa’s largest trading partner while South Africa is China’s second largest African trading partner (Beijing Review, 2010; website 12).<sup>9</sup> In 2010, bilateral trade reached \$10.81 billion from January to June, up 56.1 percent over the same period last year (Beijing Review, 2010).

South Africa mainly exports raw materials and basic commodities to China which includes iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, copper, granite, platinum, gold, nickel, aluminium, zirconium, vanadium oxides, shorn wool and tobacco. The exporting of mostly unprocessed goods with limited value-addition continues to create jobs in China (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:307). By contrast, South African imports are dominated by manufactured products followed by high-technology goods. These high value added products include clothing and textiles; footwear; tableware and kitchenware; plastic products; ‘white goods’<sup>10</sup>; electrical appliances; data processing machines, printing machinery, bulldozers and motor vehicles (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009:307; website 12). Since South Africa imports more value added products than it exports, this results in a trade imbalance between the two countries.

South African trade data indicates that the trade balance has favoured China since 2001 (website 12). Bowker (2008) also states that trade deficit between the PRC and South Africa has increased as trade has progressed. “From 2001 to 2008, the trade surplus in China’s favour increased from R5 billion to R 46.6 billion, but decreased to R22 billion in 2009” (website 12). Although there has been a discrepancy in recording trade statistics and it has been disputed by the Chinese government that trade is balanced (website 12), both

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<sup>9</sup> Angola is China’s largest African trading partner (Yong, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> “White goods are heavy consumer durables such as air conditioners, refrigerators, stoves, etcetera which used to be painted only in white enamel finish. Despite their availability in varied colours now, they are still called white goods” (website 13).

governments now recognise that the trade imbalance has to be rectified and South Africa plans to increase its exports of higher value added products in order to achieve a more equal trade balance (Bowker, 2008).

In a briefing held on May 2010 by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, ahead of President Zuma's planned state visit to China in August, the Committee raised concerns over South Africa's political and economic relations with China. The Committee was uneasy over China's exploitation of the resources of the country without contributing to the development of skills. Also on the agenda was the concern over South Africa's trade deficit of R22 million, the need to discuss what products could be exported in order to decrease the trade deficit, the lack of investment in infrastructure and what measures could be taken in order to increase the competitiveness of South African goods in the face of cheap Chinese exports. Also under discussion was the issue of Chinese nationals who are brought to the country by Chinese businesses and who do not pay taxes. These businesses employ their own nationals which limits the number of job opportunities for South Africans (website 4).

In August 2010 during President Jacob Zuma's state visit to China 'A Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' was agreed upon (website 4).<sup>11</sup> During a press conference in China President Zuma announced that the "expanded partnership focused on issues such as benefaction and value addition to resources, infrastructure, market access and trade to the Southern African Development Community region and Africa as a whole" (Beijing Review, 2010). This new partnership that was signed, targets the manufacturing sectors in South Africa so that more value-added products can be produced for export. President Zuma also indicated that "China is indeed a key strategic partner for South Africa" (Beijing Review, 2010). Whether the new Comprehensive Strategic Partnership formulated proves to be a success and reduces South Africa's trade deficit with China by creating value-added export and by encouraging infrastructure development - is yet to be seen.

## **2.5 A brief history of Chinese in South Africa**

The mid to late 17<sup>th</sup> century marked the entry of the first Chinese migrants to South Africa. These migrants, who were usually slaves and convicts, were brought by the Dutch East India

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<sup>11</sup> See section 2.3 for details.

Company (who controlled the Cape at that time) to South Africa. From the early to mid 1800's a small number of contract labourers and artisans came to South Africa and during 1904-1910, 63 000 Chinese miners were imported to and later exported from South Africa. Although these Chinese marked the first arrival of Chinese in South Africa, most were in due course repatriated to China or they slowly became a part of the mixed race population in South Africa (Park, 2009:26).

Laribee (2008:357) indicates that the Chinese migrated to South Africa in "three distinct waves; three groups of immigrants whose passports may have displayed the same country's name but in actuality have come from three very different Chinas". During the 1870's the first wave of Chinese immigrants came to South Africa (Laribee 2008:357). Some of these Chinese are the ancestors of the local or South African born Chinese (SABC). Huynh et al (2010:289) point out that "the Chinese South African community of approximately 10 000 is made up of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generation South Africans whose ancestors began arriving from China in the late 1870s". These Chinese migrants came independently to seek new opportunities in the *gam saan* or 'Gold Mountain' as gold mines had been discovered in Johannesburg in the 1800's (Laribee, 2008; Yap and Man, 1996). These Chinese migrants originated from two areas, about 400km apart, in the Kwangtung (Guangdong) province of south China and could be ethnically distinguished as Cantonese and Moiyeaneese (or Hakka). These migrants "spoke different dialects, practiced different customs and their relations both in their home province and abroad were marked by traditional animosity ... despite the fact that outsiders saw them all simply as 'Chinese' " (Yap and Man, 1996:32-33). Accone (2006:261) who describes the relationship between the two groups of Chinese as bitter also states that they settled in different regions to avoid each other. "Cantonese settled largely in Johannesburg, Pretoria and the wider Witwatersrand area while the Moiyeaneese made the coastal towns their home - principally Port Elizabeth and East London, with smaller groupings in Cape Town and Durban" (Accone, 2006:261). During the 1900's however ethnic differences between the two groups became blurred (Yap and Man, 1996:35).

According to census data there was a total of 413 Chinese living in South Africa in 1891. By 1904 this number increased to 2 556, however this number still remained small in relation to the South African population. Between 1949 and 1953 the population of Chinese migrating to South Africa consisted mainly of new brides. Until the apartheid years the number of Chinese entering South Africa grew slowly. Although the Chinese formed a small population, they



were treated harshly on the basis of 'race'. With the enforcement of the Immigrants Regulation Amendment Act 43 of 1953, which prevented Asian's from entering South Africa, it was difficult for Chinese to enter the country. There were only a small number of isolated cases of Chinese coming to South Africa, these included Chinese chefs who had temporary permits and illegal immigrants who were eager to join their family in South Africa (Park, 2009; Song, 1993).

The second wave of Chinese migrants who came to South Africa during the 1970's and 1980's, or the latter part of apartheid, originated from Taiwan (Huynh et al, 2009). The South African apartheid government, that was under sanctions, and Taiwan, who were both isolated countries at the time, fostered friendly trade relationships. Taiwanese migrants consisted of mainly industrialists looking to invest and set up manufacturing enterprises in South Africa. The South African government also offered the Taiwanese generous incentive schemes. These incentives included "relocation costs, subsidized wages for seven years and subsidized rent for ten years, cheap transport of goods to urban areas, and housing loans, and favourable exchange rates to encourage the immigration of investors and their families from the ROC as well as Hong Kong, which was still a British protectorate at the time" (Huynh et al, 2009). The laws that prevented Asian immigration to South Africa were waived to allow Taiwanese industrialists to enter. In 1988 around 2 500 Taiwanese entered South Africa, these numbers rapidly increased. In 1992 the number of Taiwanese in South Africa grew to 30 011. The Taiwanese industrialists established nearly 150 factories especially in the remote parts of South Africa and by 1992 created more than 40 000 jobs; they also invested R1 billion in capital (Huynh et al, 2009).

However, in the late 1990's to the early 2000's, most Taiwanese left South Africa. Their decision to leave was based on the "termination of their subsidies, South Africa's official recognition of the People's Republic of China (PRC), difficulties with South Africa's labour regulations, and stiff competition from the entry of cheap imports brought in directly from China" (Park and Chen, 2009:28). Other issues that the Taiwanese found challenging were the crime and security problems within the country as well as the increase of new migrants in small towns (Park and Chen, 2009:28). "Political and economic stability were also major concerns during this period, as the interest rate increased and the South African Rand depreciated to a record low of R13:US\$1" (Park and Chen, 2009:28). Park and Chen

(2009:28) estimate that in the mid-1990's there were approximately 30 000 Taiwanese living in South Africa, however since then numbers have dwindled to approximately 6 000.

Park and Chen (2009:28) indicate that the “third wave of immigration, which overlaps with the second and continues today, is immigration primarily from the People’s Republic of China”. The number of Chinese from the PRC has grown steadily from the late 1980’s but increased towards the period of diplomatic recognition in 1998. Large numbers of legal and illegal migrants have entered South Africa. The population of Chinese migrants that have entered South Africa has exceeded the total number of South African Born Chinese and Taiwanese and has increased in the past five to seven years (Park and Chen, 2009:28).

Huynh et al (2010:289) make a further distinction between those migrants from mainland China who have arrived pre-2000 and those who arrived post-2000. Those migrants who arrived in South Africa pre-2000 began arriving in the late 1980’s to the period leading up to South Africa’s recognition of the PRC in 1998. Most of the migrants were middle managers or professionals. Many of them had links to factories in China located in megacities such as Shanghai or Beijing or the eastern coast of China, “The majority of them entered into import, retail and wholesale trading as well as manufacturing of consumer products” (Huynh et al, 2010:289). Huynh et al (2010:289) state that the post-2000 period is marked with a dramatic increase of Chinese migrants coming to South Africa, most of which comprise small traders and peasants mainly from Fujian province. The next section will discuss those migrants that have recently entered South Africa and who also form the focus of this study.

## **2.6 Recent Chinese migrants to South Africa**

Park (2009:157) indicates that there are no accurate statistics of the number of Chinese migrants in South Africa as it is difficult to calculate as poor record-keeping, corruption within The Department of Home Affairs as well as large numbers of illegal migrants coming into the country makes it difficult to keep a precise record. The Chinese embassy estimates the number to be around 200 000, while news agencies in China estimate it to be 300 000. Wilhelm (2006:325) states that “the biggest inflow is from the new generation of migrants from mainland China ... it is estimated that between 100 000 and 200 000 legal and illegal immigrants have settled in South Africa”.

This is significant as it depicts a large increase of migrants over a short space of time. Accone (2006) also indicates that this number is likely to increase as the government builds more strategic partnerships with the People's Republic of China. For instance, Chinese entrepreneurship has been promoted through government assistance evidenced by the opening of the China Mall in Durban, which was initiated by the Progressive Business Forum that promotes business between China and South Africa (website 4).

Research on the new Chinese migrants in South Africa is scarce, with only a few articles being published (Park, 2009 and 2012; Park and Chen, 2009; Park and Huynh, 2010). These articles in most part produced descriptive accounts of Chinese in rural parts of the Free State and indicate the rise in 'Chinese shops' in these areas. The majority of these shops are run by small Chinese families with hired help from extended family who come from the same village in their home country. In the case of larger shops 'black' South African staff is hired in order to assist them. Park and Chen (2009:35) indicate that male respondents usually apprentice "with an uncle or other male relative or fellow villager at a shop prior to purchasing their own similar business". Park and Chen (2009) also point out that older relatives may pursue bigger business ventures in towns or other regions. This indicates that through the help of relatives or contacts from their home country residing in South Africa, the Chinese are able to establish their own business in these rural areas, thus contributing to the increase in the number of businesses. This phenomenon occurs in rural areas, and apart from this study, research on how social networks increase business support in the city is yet to be conducted.

Park and Chen (2009) also report that these migrants have family and friends in neighbouring towns or across South Africa. One respondent indicated that he "... has an extensive network of family and friends in the Free-State extending into KwaZulu-Natal" (Park and Chen, 2009: 25). These connections enables them to form a closed community which offers support, information (as community news is conveyed through these networks) and customs are continued as they celebrate Chinese festivals.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on various facets of China's relationship with South Africa. South Africa's political and economic relationship with China has seen a rapid development since

1990's. Although the political and economic relationship of both countries is widely written on, literature on Chinese migrants to South Africa have historically been sparse. This study therefore contributes to rectifying this discrepancy and will add to the existing body of knowledge in this area. The following chapter will outline the theoretical framework of this study.

## CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Introduction

Theory in research is essential as it provides a means by which the researcher is able to navigate, examine and provide an understanding of the data collected. It provides a particular perspective by which the researcher can understand and interpret the data. The particular theory chosen is based upon the intention of the research. The intention of this research is to provide an understanding of how the Chinese migrants participate economically and socially in trading and living in the host country, more specifically to the city of Durban, in which they are situated. The recent Chinese migrants to South Africa, who have come from a different economic, political, social and cultural environment, have to contend with broader conditions (political, economic, social and cultural) and everyday conditions (social and cultural exchanges, interactions in the work, school and social environment) of the host society in which they now live. In order to understand how the Chinese migrants come to engage in everyday activities, the macro-structures such as economic and political systems of the host country as well as micro-structures such as the interaction the Chinese people have with other Chinese migrants, South Africans and foreigners (especially foreigners from other African countries) have to be taken into account in order to provide an holistic account of their lives.

The theoretical approach therefore taken in this study is that of social constructionism. Burr (1995:2) indicates that “there is no one feature which could be said to identify a social constructionist position”, there are many facets that constitutes the social constructionist perspective but there is no all-encompassing theory which has to be stringently adhered to. Thus under the social constructionism approach, symbolic interactionism is taken to be the key theory used in this research, however ideas and principals from other theories are also incorporated in order to enrich the theory and to give it more clarity.

Symbolic interactionism provides an adequate lens through which micro-level face-to-face interaction could be understood. Maine (cited in Ritzer, 1996: 514) indicates that although symbolic interactionism is seen to be associated with micro-subjectivity and micro-objectivity it is not devoid of insights into the macroscopic levels of social analysis. This aspect is expounded later in this chapter; attention is given now to explicating the theory.

### 3.2 Symbolic interactionism and language

Symbolic interactionism postulates that individuals “act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them” which arises “from the social-interaction” that occurs between individuals (Blumer, 1969:2). Blumer (1969:69) also states that

human beings are seen as living in a world of meaningful objects - not in an environment of stimuli or self-constituted entities. This world is socially produced in that meanings are fabricated through the process of social interaction. Thus different groups come to develop different worlds - and these worlds change as the objects that compose them change in meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Blumer (1969:69) also states that “all objects are social products in that they are formed and transformed by the defining process that takes place in social interaction”. Through social interaction people are able to create and even change the meaning that objects have for them. This indicates that the meaning of an object does not arise from the object itself but is “formed from the ways in which others refer to such objects or act towards them”; it is socially produced from the meaning/s people attach to it and how they respond to the object (Blumer, 1969:68). An object can thus have different meaning/s to different people and different groups of people and it also means that meanings are created, sustained and transformed by the “defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969:5).

Since meanings are created between people when they interact with each other there needs to be a medium through which this interaction is facilitated. Mead (cited in Ritzer, 1994:198) indicates that “only when we have significant symbols can we truly have communication”. A significant symbol is a kind of gesture which only humans can make.<sup>13</sup> Mead (1962:46) writes that the set of vocal gestures most likely to become significant symbols is language: “a symbol which answers to a meaning in that experience of the first individual and which also calls out the meaning in the second individual. Where the gesture reaches that situation it has become what we call ‘language’. It is now a significant symbol and it signifies a certain meaning”. Ritzer (1994:199) states that “with language the gestures and their meanings are

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<sup>12</sup> Blumer (1969:68) indicates that “objects consist of whatever people indicate or refer to” including others and oneself.

<sup>13</sup> According to Mead (1962:14) “gestures are movements of the first organism which act as specific stimuli calling forth the (socially) appropriate responses of the second organism”.

communicated”. Words, concepts and categories are laden with meaning which allows individuals to understand, interpret and reflect on what has been articulated before giving a response (Mead cited in Popenoe, 1995; Mead cited in Buechler, 2008; Blumer, 1969). Language thus allows us to effectively communicate with one another. Language, and the concepts and categories implicit, allows us to communicate with others in a meaningful way. Language allows us to communicate our thoughts, intentions and provides a way in which the world has meaning for us. Through the meanings explicit in the language we use in conversation with each other we are also able to give meaning/s to the objects that surround our world.

Since language and meanings implicit within the language used is constructed between people during social interaction it also indicates that people produce their social reality through the language that is used to describe the social world that s/he lives in. Burr (2003:8) indicates that “when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed”. Thus our knowledge of the world and our social reality is constructed through the daily interactions of people through the language that they use. By articulating the thoughts and ideas through the words that we use, we create and reproduce our reality which enables us to interact with others. The language that is used in everyday conversation when people interact is seen as important as it also provides a reflection of what is occurring within society.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) indicate that we are born into a society and culture where language and particular concepts and categories exist and we internalise these concepts and categories and reproduce them through our actions and interacting with others. Burr (2003:50) indicates that “the concepts that we operate with are tied in with the kind of society we live in and are therefore not random”. The people within a particular society are able to produce and reproduce particular concepts and categories that help them to explain and give meaning to the world that they live in. When new knowledge is acquired (through media, communication with others etcetera) people reflect on that knowledge and may come to interpret and form new meanings of the objects in their world and thus they come to react or change their behaviour in accordance to the new information received. However, individuals do not merely internalise these concepts and categories, they have the capacity to change, alter, reform or do away with particular concepts or categories (Fay, 1996). Ritzer (1996:213) also indicates that “people need not accept the meanings and symbols that are imposed on them from without” as they have the capacity to interpret and form new meanings of

situations. Thus symbolic interactionism sees individuals as active agents<sup>14</sup> “capable of making unique and independent choices ... [and] they are able to develop a life that has a unique style” (Ritzer, 1996: 213).

Burr (1995:4) states that the way in which people come to understand the world also “depends upon where and when in the world one lives”. Since knowledge is historically and culturally specific this indicates that people live their life within a certain historical period under certain cultural beliefs. People live within a certain historical period and are surrounded by certain culture/s that informs the way they come to understand the world. For instance, certain concepts and categories used in the past now have vastly different meaning in the present and might have a different meaning in the future. This also means that there is not a ‘once-and-for-all-description’ of human nature, that the way we come to understand the world changes in context of the time and cultural period. This study is thus also undertaken within a specific historical period and with a specific cultural context and should not be generalised or equated with other societies which are vastly different to the one under study.

### **3.3 The self in social interaction**

With regard to symbolic interaction Blumer (cited in Plummer, 1991: x) states that,

This approach sees a human society engaged in living. Such a living is a process of ongoing activity in which participants are developing lines of action in the multitudinous situations they encounter. They are caught up in a vast process of interaction in which they have to fit their developing actions to one another. This process of interaction consists in making indications to others of what to do and interpreting the indications made by others. They live in worlds of objects and are guided in their orientation and action by the meaning of these objects. Their objects, including objects of themselves, are formed, sustained, weakened and transformed in their interaction with one another.

Symbolic interactionism expounds how society’s activities are created, sustained and transformed by individuals engaging in interaction with each other by making indications to others and themselves thus resulting in their conduct being aligned to others. This occurs as individuals are capable of ‘self-interaction’ (Blumer, 1969: 62). Blumer (1969) indicates that “with the mechanism of self-interaction the human being ceases to be a responding organism

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<sup>14</sup> According to Fay (1996:64) “agents act on the basis of their intentions, are aware of their world and attempt to respond to it on the basis of this awareness. Agents perceive their situation, reason about it, form motives, knowingly act on the basis of this reasoning and reflexively monitor their actions to see whether it produces the desired result. Agents are capable of reflection-explaining, evaluating, justifying and criticizing their actions-and altering them on the basis of this reflection”.



whose behaviour is a product of what plays upon him from the outside, the inside, or both. Instead, he acts toward his world, interpreting what confronts him and organising his actions on the basis of the interpretation". This means that our behaviour does not arise from 'essences' within us or response to stimuli rather our actions are derived from how we interpret what is seen or articulated. Individuals have the capacity to think, interpret and reflect on the situations that occur and determine an appropriate action in relation to what has been seen or articulated. In interpreting situations they give meaning to these situations and respond according to the meaning given.

According to Blumer (1969) interpreting and defining social acts is essential in understanding how individuals react and interact with each-other. Blumer (1969: 66) takes it one step further by stating that "symbolic interaction involves *interpretation*,<sup>15</sup> or ascertaining the meaning of the actions or remarks of the other person, and *definition*, or conveying indications to another person as to how he is to act". People are not only capable of reflecting and interpreting the world around them but more importantly they are capable of interpreting others action, interactions and comments towards them. They are able to gain meaning through these social interactions and they act according to that meaning perceived. For instance, if A gives an indication (for instance a gesture, command or instruction) to B, then B would firstly identify the act in which s/he is about to engage in and interpret and define what is required to do by reflecting or engaging in 'self-interaction' before commencing in the act. When B's line of conduct fits in with A's indication then joint action occurs. By interacting (gesturing or through articulation) with one another individuals continuously make indications to others and themselves allowing them to fit their conduct with that of others.

### **3.3.1 Self, identity and culture**

Fay (1996:34) states that "selves are selves in part because they have the capacity to become other than what they are. They can stand outside themselves, assess what they see, and within limits choose to accept or alter or abandon what they perceive. But this means that in an important sense a self can be other to itself".

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<sup>15</sup> Blumer's emphasis.

Fay (1996) indicates that the self possesses an awareness of itself only by being conscious of others reactions to it. Fay (1996:42) states that

“you become aware of yourself as a consciousness only through your becoming conscious of another’s consciousness of you. That is, only when you become aware of yourself as an object to another do you become aware of yourself as a self. Your being is *your* being (that is, a being for you) only in so far as it is a being for another. In this way, your being is necessarily tied up with my being: *the being of one’s self and the being of an other are interrelated*”.

This indicates that the self is essentially social. Human beings are conscious of others reactions to it. The reaction of others, towards the self informs the self of what the self is.<sup>16</sup> This means that through interacting with others we become who we are. Our capacity to interpret, reflect, and make judgments from the knowledge gained through social interaction with others make the self permeable and porous. Fay (1996:48) indicates that porous selves open and respond to other porous self, that self and other are dialectically interacting. Taylor (1994: 32) also states “that human life is fundamentally dialogical”. It is through dialogue with others that “we become full human agents capable of understanding ourselves” (Taylor, 1994:32). In addition, Taylor (1994:32) states that through interaction with others we acquire the language needed for self definition. A sense of self is gained through interaction with others who use particular words to describe us. By using particular words to describe people we are telling them what they are (Taylor, 1994; Burr, 1995, 2003; Blumer, 1969). Therefore the self is not a stable entity, the self is able to change in relation to how we interpret others’ verbal responses, the conduct of others towards us and what is occurring in his/her social world.

Therefore human beings are not coerced into reacting in a certain way through the structures of society, nor are their reactions a product of something that has been evoked from within him/her, rather people reflect and interpret their observation and interaction with others and come to react in accordance to that interpretation. Self identity is created through social

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<sup>16</sup> For example, if someone states that you are a fantastic painter, you gain a sense of who you are through other people indicating to you who you are. You become aware that you are a good painter only through other peoples indicating it to you. If nobody told you that you are a good painter then you would never know that you are good. If nobody told you who you are then you would not know who you are. Thus we need other people to give us confirmation of who we are. We need other people to tell us who we are, when they tell us who we are we have a sense of self, we have a sense that we know who we are. Who we are, the self, can change according to the people we are with and the environment we find ourselves. Different people would react to others differently under different circumstances. Therefore the same person can be a witty student at school, and a nasty younger sister at home.

interaction with others; by interpreting the actions and verbal responses of others towards us we are able to gain a sense of self.

Since we become aware of ourselves through others reactions and verbal comments towards us, we are also able to manage how we present ourselves so as to provide a “certain sense of self that will be accepted by others” (Ritzer, 1996:215). Goffman (1959) terms this ‘impression management’. Through interaction and reflection in everyday situations people become aware of how to form impressions of themselves so as to get an acceptable response from their audience. People also act differently towards different people.

The Chinese migrants who have come to South Africa would therefore reflect and interpret and give meaning to their new environment according to the knowledge they received from communicating with other Chinese migrants and by socially interacting with South Africans and other foreigners, especially those from other parts of Africa.

Since we acquire our identity from those around us, it could also be said that others are also responsible for giving a negative impression of ourselves. Taylor (1994:25) indicates that “misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victim with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need”. If people are not given the recognition that is needed a negative self-image is created. If people use harmful derogatory language to describe the self, the self would acquire a negative self-image. This is applicable to this study as the social reality of the Chinese migrants is created through the interaction that they have with each other, the locals as well as other foreigners. How the Chinese experience reality in South Africa also depends on how locals come to treat and speak about them.

Through social interaction we not only become particular selves, we also come to acquire a particular culture and become familiar with a particular way of life by becoming socialised into a particular society. However, Fay (1996:56) indicates that “culture is never merely absorbed; more accurate to say it is *appropriated*”. Fay (1996:56) goes on to explain that culture is appropriated because it “consists of rules which detail acceptable ways to speak, think, feel and behave”, and these rules can change based on how people come to interpret these rules. “Rule-followers thus do not simply ‘conform’ to rules, but instead elaborate and transform them in the process of following them” (Fay, 1996:56). This indicates culture is not

static; it changes as people are able to change it. Since “cultural values and codes are often subverted, challenged, re-thought, rejected and/or transformed” culture is dynamic and fluid (Fay, 1996:57). People are able to choose for themselves what cultural elements to embrace and reject, they are able to interpret and change them as well as resist and challenge cultural beliefs.

Since selves are porous selves are able to respond to other porous selves. Through social interaction new cultural knowledge is gathered and individuals are able to incorporate that knowledge in their lives. Fay (1996:59) writes that

Another important fact about culture is that they are essentially open. Cultures are ideational entities; such they are permeable, susceptible to influence from other cultures. Wherever exchange among humans occurs, the possibility exists of the influence of one culture by another. Even when such influence does not occur it is because those in one culture consciously reject the foreign or strange culture: but this rejection is itself another way the alien culture interjects itself into the home culture). Human history is in part the story of the ways different cultural groups have rearranged cultural boundaries by expanding contacts, tolerating outsiders, and fashioning interactive arrangements. Even the creation of stricter boundaries involves mutual impact. The human world is not composed of a motley of independent, encapsulated, free-floating cultures; rather, it is one of constant interplay and exchange.

### 3.4 Joint action and structure



**Figure 1** The interplay between micro and macro levels. The arrow-heads run in both directions to indicate that micro-level actions create and reproduce macro-level outcomes and macro-level structures guides micro-level activities.

The interplay between micro-level actions and macro-structures are examined as both perspectives are needed to fully understand the social dynamics of the lives of the Chinese traders. I propose that there is a dialectical process between macro and micro levels. Ideas at the micro-level can become macro-level structures through the collective action of individuals; likewise, macro-structures are reproduced through the joint micro actions of knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1984).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, when innovative ways of organising production are thought of at research facilities of companies these ideas are transmitted and applied by workers through their joint action altering the structure of the

Blumer (1969:70) indicates that joint action “refers to the larger collective form of action that is constituted by the fitting together of the lines of behaviour of separate participants ... Each participant necessarily occupies a different position, acts from that position, and engages in a separate and distinctive act. It is the fitting together of these acts and not their commonality that constitutes joint action”. Joint action is produced when individuals are able to align their actions in accordance with the acts of others. This occurs when individuals are able to identify the social act and then interpret and define each other’s action in forming the act. Once the individual is able to identify the social act (by observing or by verbal articulation) s/he is in a position to perform the act. The individual then interprets the acts/articulations of others through self-interaction which acts as a guide to direct him/her as to how to act in relation to them (Blumer, 1969:70). Misinterpretation of the act will result in the act not being adequately performed. There will be interaction but actions would not align to one another resulting in confusion.

Blumer (1969:71) indicates that joint action is built or constructed over time by the fitting together of acts which results in the formation of a ‘career or history’. Common definitions, constructions, categories or concepts are continuously used which provides individuals “with decisive guidance in directing his own act so as to fit into the acts of others. Such common definitions serve, above everything else, to account for the regularity, stability and repetitiveness of joint action in vast areas of group life” (Blumer, 1969:71).

Since individuals have correctly interpreted what actions to take they are able to produce these actions in habitual conduct. Blumer (1969:70) points out that “joint actions range from a simple collaboration of two individuals to a complex alignment of the acts of huge organisations or institutions”. Hence the fitting together of acts of a multitude of individuals, who have correctly interpreted how to perform the required actions in relation to one another, are able to routinely produce these actions resulting in structures such as an organisation or institution being created. Structures which are created by the collective action of individuals are reproduced on a daily basis forming routine or habitual practices. Thus it can also be argued that micro activities of everyday life reflect the wider social structures that occur (Collins, 1981; Fielding, 1989).

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organisation and how work is conducted. If the structure created is successful then other companies would also replicate it thus reforming the ways in which companies organise production.

Giddens (1984:26) also indicates that “structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity”. Structures (in order to exist) require knowledgeable agents who are able to understand and interpret what is required of them in their day-to-day lives. This means that active agents are able to create and reproduce structures (such as the economic and political systems) through social practices. Fay (1996:65) also states that “structures provide the conditions for the possibility of action and guides as to how actions are performed, but it is the agents who produce and reproduce this structure by means of their activity”. Individuals have particular roles that they perform; the collective performance or activity of these roles results in the formation of structures. In turn structures guide human activities that are carried on a daily basis in a given society however it is the active agents within society who have the capacity to produce and reproduce these structures.

Blumer (1969:73) also indicates that “any given act has a career in which it is constructed but in which it may be interrupted, held in abeyance, abandoned or recast”. Fine and Klienman (1983:98) also point out that “since meanings provide the basis for individual and collective action, people’s meanings will have consequences for action, the production of social structure, and changes within those structures”. Through interaction new meanings are formed which produces changes in social structures. Joint action by knowledgeable agents not only produces habitual practices that constitute structure they can also transform, alter, change or terminate structures thus also reforming the ways structures are produced through interaction and the structure within which we live.

Blumer (1969:17) states that “a network or institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act”. Here Blumer (1969) points out that networks, as social structures, operate due to self-directing individuals who give meaning to their actions. Fine and Klienman (cited in Ritzer, 1996:213) also sees social networks “as a set of social relationships that people endow with meaning and use for personal and/or collective purposes”.

A distinction must be made between the joint micro action and the micro-interactions or interrelations between people. The **joint action** of people is needed to produce and reproduce

structure but the **face-to-face interaction** should be seen as unique encounters between individuals. Shibutani (1988:24) indicates that “although conventional norms provide a framework of expectations that facilitate joint action in routine settings, what happens in each historical context is unique”. Every time two individuals meet in a working environment, for instance, it gives rise to the formation of new conversations, situations or circumstances as compared to the routine habitual social practices that are conducted by individuals in the workplace and whose joint actions of these practices make up structures.

Fielding (1989:16) also states that “our grasp of events at the interactional level is the strongest”. Since events, situations and social interactions are experienced on a first-hand or face-to-face basis it is consciously felt. Since individuals live it, it becomes a social reality. Social interaction and the discourses inherent in interaction are significant in shaping how individuals come to view the world and relate to one another. The dialectic process between joint micro action and social structure as well as micro-level social interaction should be taken into consideration in understanding how individuals conduct their lives.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

An integrated paradigm was used as both macro-micro and object-subjective continua were seen as important in explaining the economic and social lives of Chinese traders in Durban. Symbolic interactionism, upon reflection, was chosen as the theory that adequately explained the data obtained. Symbolic interactionism, views the language which participants used as important as it conveyed significant meaning as to how they view their socio-economic situation and how their social reality is created. Since it views the self as a dynamic on-going construction in which identity is fostered through interaction with others, how they are treated and treat others is significant in understanding how they may adapt to live in South Africa. It also gives importance to their actions and interactions with South Africans and other foreign Africans within business establishments. Joint actions, social networks and culture are all imperative aspects in comprehending the Chinese migrant trader’s actions, situations and experiences in the city.

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

Following, the last chapter which outlined the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework employed in this research (and thus constructionist ontology), this chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this research.<sup>18</sup> The interpretive epistemological position is used in this research, which subsequently links with the constructionist ontology.<sup>19</sup> The interpretive epistemology “sees people and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings as the primary data sources” (Mason, 2002:56). Knowledge of the world is produced through researching how people construct meaning through social interaction, how they interpret and understand the social world from their own perspective. Thus the methodology used reflects the epistemological position of this research.

Babbie (2010:4) refers to methodology as the “science of finding out”. Therefore the aim of the chapter is to show why a certain methodological stance was taken and to illustrate the processes that were utilised in order to scientifically ‘find out’. The methodological stance, which is qualitative, derives from the research questions posed (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Hennink et al (2011:10) highlights that what the researcher wants to find out is based on how research questions are framed. For instance, if the researcher is interested in the “quantification and measurement” of social issues then a quantitative methodological stance is used (Terre Blanche et al, 2006:272). If the researcher is interested in explaining, understanding and describing experiences, processes or behaviour then qualitative methodology is used (Hennick et al, 2011:10). Sarantakos (2005:49) indicates that “the differences between the methodologies do not suggest differences in quality but in their nature and purpose” and that “both research models possess certain qualities that make each one suitable for studying particular aspects of reality that the other cannot”. Both research methods have merit and are “valuable in their own context” (Sarantakos, 2005:49). The author acknowledges this point, and emphasises that due to the ‘nature and purpose’ of the

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<sup>18</sup>Hennink et al (2011:11) state that ontology “refers to what we think reality looks like and how we view the world”. Similarly Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:4) state that ontology “is a philosophical belief system about the nature of social reality-what can be known and how”. The constructionist ontology looks at how social reality is constructed through people’s interaction with the world. The meanings that people impart on objectives and experiences are seen as important as well as the language used to describe their experiences (Sarantakos, 2005).

<sup>19</sup>Epistemology (under which methodology is a subfield (Babbie, 2010)) refers to the rules and principals which govern “how social phenomena can be known and how knowledge can be demonstrated” (Mason, 2002:16). It refers to how knowledge of the world is produced.



research inquiry of this study a qualitative research methodology was seen as the most appropriate in addressing the research questions posed.

This chapter therefore begins with a summation of the research questions followed by a discussion on the appropriateness of qualitative research methodology used in this research. Qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observation which were used to elicit information from participants are discussed in this chapter. A description of how gathered data was analysed is also discussed. Finally, ethical issues and limitations encountered in the research process are considered.

## **4.2 Summary of research questions**

The research questions formulated forms the backbone on which this research is structured as it gives rise to the type of methodology used. The key questions are as follows:

1. What are the economic factors that have allowed the new Chinese migrants to adapt to trading in the city of Durban?
2. How have social networks and interaction contributed to the new Chinese migrants' ability to adapt economically and socially?
3. What micro-level social interactions occur between the new Chinese migrants, other foreigners and South Africans at trading zones?
  - 3.1 How do trading zones, that the new Chinese migrants inhabit, serve as spaces which allow for intercultural exchange?
  - 3.2 How do these interactions assist or hamper the ability of the Chinese to adapt economically and socially?
4. What are the key economic, social and cultural challenges faced by Chinese migrants living in Durban?
5. What is the future of Chinese migrants in South Africa, specifically in urban areas?

The response to these questions demands in-depth descriptive knowledge that can only be achieved by conducting qualitative research. Hennink et al (2011:10) explains that qualitative

research is conducted when “an in-depth understanding of the research issues [is required] that embraces the perspectives of the study population and the context in which they live”. This research focuses, on how Chinese migrants, engage in economic, social and cultural activities. It requires an understanding of the issues from their point of view and from a context in which they live and experience the world (Hennink et al, 2011). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) as well as Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out that qualitative research looks at the inner experience of participants and how they form social meaning in the cultural context in which they find themselves. The meanings that the Chinese migrants attribute to their experiences are also important in understanding the social context in which they live and work. Thus, the qualitative methodology used in this research is most appropriate in addressing the issues under research. The next section focuses on the various facets of qualitative research that is utilised in this research.

### **4.3 Qualitative methodology**

Hennink et al (2011:8) state that qualitative methodology cannot be easily defined as it is a broad term that covers a wide range of techniques and philosophies. Sarantakos (2005:36) also states that since qualitative methodology “contains elements from many different schools of thought” it is “diverse [and] pluralistic”. It is usually used when there is a need to explore, describe and explain social phenomena and issues (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). It is holistic as every component of the research is interrelated and the issue under investigation is studied in its entirety (Sarantakos, 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The information gathered is informative and detailed and it offers ‘thick’ descriptions of subjective social constructions of people (Sarantakos, 2005). In addition, its approach is inductive, meaning that it begins with obtaining specific data which is narrowed down to general categories during analysis to gain an understanding of the topic (Sarantakos, 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). It also stresses ‘openness’ during the gathering data procedures. Questions that are directed to participants are open-ended “allowing for a multiplicity of findings to emerge” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:9). It is also ‘open’ in the sense that the researcher enters into the field with “no preconceived ideas or pre-structured models or patterns, there is no strict design, no hypotheses, no limits in its focus, scope or operation” (Sarantakos, 2005:45). Its openness leads to versatility and flexibility in the research. During the course of research if new information comes to hand that requires a change in methods or processes, qualitative

methodology allows for change and is thus valued for its flexibility in the research process (Sarantakos, 2005).

“Qualitative researchers also study people in their natural settings to identify how their experiences and behaviour are shaped by the context of their lives, such as the social, economic, cultural or physical context in which they live” (Hennink et al, 2011:9). It is thus said to be naturalistic as the research process is undertaken in a natural setting (Sarantakos, 2005). It is also context specific as participants lives are studied within the political, economic, social and cultural context in which they live that impacts them in a multitude of ways. It studies a small number of people as its aim is to attain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation and it is concerned with the “process or meanings individuals attribute to their given social situation” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011:45) rather than measuring or enumerating social happenings. Sarantakos (2005:45) also states that “it presents the information gathered verbally in a detailed and complete form, not in numbers or formulae”. The analysis of the data is presented in written form. Along with the above mentioned points this approach also values the emphatic approach or *Verstehen* approach (discussed further below) in engaging with participants; subjective meanings of participants; reflexivity of the research process as well as seeing the researcher as an integral part of the research process. These attributes of interpretive qualitative methodology will be discussed below.

Mason (2002:1) indicates that qualitative methodology can be used to “explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants, the ways that social processes, institutions, discourses or relationships work and the significance of the meanings that they generate”. Qualitative methodology also allows one to discover issues from the perspective of the participant and understand the meanings that they allot to their behaviour. (Hennink et al, 2011:9). Issues that are understood from the viewpoint of the participant with the aim of understanding the meanings they give to the social phenomena are seen as the empathetic approach or *Verstehen*. This concept was derived by Wilhelm Dilthey and was used extensively by Max Weber (Snape and Spencer, 2008; Sarantakos, 2005). Snape and Spencer (2008:7) indicate that *Verstehen* means learning about people’s lived experiences which take place in a specific historical and social context. According to Hennink et al (2011:17) *Verstehen* refers to understanding people from their own perspective and context

and describing their social world using their own words and concepts. While Sarantokos (2005:40) indicates that *Verstehen* relates to people's views, opinions and perceptions which are experienced and expressed in everyday life. All definitions of *Verstehen* point to understanding the lived experience of people from their perspective within a specific context. It is the meanings that they create by the words that they use to describe their social reality that is important.

Hennink et al (2011) also points out that a distinction should be made between 'understanding' and '*Verstehen*'. According to Hennink et al (2011:18) "understanding refers to understanding issues from the researcher's own interpretive framework or the outsider's perspective; *Verstehen* refers to understanding the issues from the interpretive framework of the study population, or from the 'insiders' perspective". This research aims to follow the *Verstehen* approach, however it must be noted that during the participant observation phase of the research (which is broadly discussed in the sections to come) the researcher is seen as the primary instrument for collecting and analysing data and thus the researcher's understanding of the social interactions of the participants under study in a specific political, economic, social and cultural context is also given importance (Terre Blanche et al, 2006). In order to gain an appropriate interpretation of the issue under study I needed to be reflexive concerning relationships and interactions of the study population.

Reflexivity requires that the researcher be self-aware of the processes and actions taken in the research. Reflexivity means that "researchers take constant stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their data" (Mason cited in Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005:43). The researcher needs to be aware that actions taken and the identity which is imputed on the researcher by the participant will affect the research process and will affect the outcome of the data collection process. Finlay and Gough (2003:ix) states that reflexivity allows the researcher to "reflect on their subjectivity, on how their social background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impact the research process and how the study participants react to the researcher and the research setting". Pillow (2003:175) also states that reflexivity is important as it legitimises, validates and questions the research process. Thus researchers need to "use reflexivity continually throughout the research process" in order for the research to validate the research process (Hennink et al, 2011:20).

Hennick et al (2011:19) states that “it is during the coming together of the researcher and the study participant that each will react to the background, characteristics and positioning of the other and this will contribute to the co-construction of reality during the interview process”. The interview is also seen as a place where identities are relationally constructed and the interview itself is socially constructed. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006:146) indicates that there are two forms of reflexivity namely: personal reflexivity and interpersonal reflexivity. Personal reflexivity refers to how researchers reflect on their own backgrounds and suppositions which may have an influence on the research process, while interpersonal reflexivity recognizes that the personal dynamics between researcher and participant as well as the interview setting can influence knowledge creation (Hennink et al, 2011:20). This research employs both personal and interpersonal reflexivity to understand how data was created through the data gathering process. Reflexivity was also used during all process of the research in order to ensure validity.

Since issues are understood from the perspective of the participant, qualitative research is said to study the subjective meaning of participants (Sarantakos, 2005; Terre Blanche et al, 2006; Hennink et al, 2011; Hesser-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Terre Blanche et al (2006: 277) indicate that “subjectivity is not considered the enemy of the truth, but the very thing that makes it possible for us to understand personal and social realities empathetically”.

#### **4.4 Sampling**

Sampling refers to studying a proportion of the target group in the research conducted. Sampling is necessary as complete coverage of the target population may be impossible (Sarantakos, 2005). Sampling is stratified into two forms: probability and non-probability (Babbie, 2010). Probability sampling refers to sampling where every unit in the population under study has the same chance or opportunity of being selected and it is also representative of the total population and findings can be generalised to the whole population under study (Sarantakos, 2005; Babbie, 2010; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). However, non-probability sampling is used in situations where probability sampling cannot be achieved due to accessibility of the sampling population; there is insufficient information on the population, or where it is not feasible to include a large sample size (Descombe, 2007; Durrheim and Painter, 2006). Non-probability sampling is mainly used in explorative research and qualitative analysis where the aim of the research is to elicit information, gain an

understanding of the population group and to discover issues that the wider population have no or limited knowledge of (Sarantakos, 2005). Non-probability sampling does not ensure representativeness of the study population and results cannot be generalised to the whole population (Sarantakos, 2005; Descombe, 2007). In non-probability sampling a few cases of the study are sampled in order to elicit qualitative information (Davies, 2007 Descombe, 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). The information received from participants is used to gain an understating of participant experiences or the meanings that they give to social issues (Davies, 2007; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Since it is difficult to gain access to the Chinese population in Durban and since this research is based on understanding the lives of Chinese migrants from their perspective, the non-probability sampling technique was used in this study. The non-probability technique allowed the researcher to gain rich nuanced understanding of the lives of the Chinese migrants.

The non-probability purposive sampling method was used in this study. Purposive sampling is a technique used where “researchers purposely choose subjects who, in their opinion, are relevant to the project”. (Sarantakos, 2005:164). Denscombe (2007:17) also state that in purposive sampling the researcher “deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data”. During the course of the research I was compelled to choose participants purposively on the basis of their ability to speak English as they could communicate with the researcher.

In the preliminary investigation it was discovered that recent Chinese migrants have a limited grasp of the English language. In articles written with regards to the Chinese in the Free State and Johannesburg regions, it was also noted that the Chinese migrants have difficulties in communicating with the wider population that reside in South Africa (Park and Chen, 2009). Advice from professionals working in the same field showed that it was difficult obtaining participants as the ability of the Chinese migrants to converse in English was limited. A sample size of 8-10 participants was therefore envisioned, as language barriers and secrecy issues that the migrants might have, as some of them might be illegal, might dissuade them from participating in the research. Although there were a number of migrants who could speak English, most notably in the Durban North area, they refused to be interviewed.

A translator was approached during the field work preparation period, and had agreed to translate Mandarin into English during the interviews. The translator, however, had made

travel plans and had promised to assist me on her return. Since the translator failed to contact me after several months and due to the time limit of the research, I interviewed those Chinese migrants who could speak English. Thus I decided to choose participants on the basis of their capacity to speak English. This was by no means an easy task. It took me several months to find and interview willing participants.

#### **4.5 Qualitative interviewing**

Qualitative interviews were used to gather data. Qualitative interviewing treats individuals as a means through which information about the social world is conveyed. It is the individuals' insights, perspectives and meanings on a particular phenomenon that produces rich detailed information which are seen as important in understanding the wider social world. In instances where there is a lack of knowledge about a social phenomenon, qualitative interviewing allows for the implicit information to be discovered through conversing with those whose relevant insights and knowledge have been ignored or neglected. Qualitative interviewing can thus yield exploratory and rich descriptive data on aspects of social life that one has little or no knowledge of (Hesse-Biber, 2011:94).

Qualitative interviews are seen as the primary method through which information is sourced in this study. By using qualitative interviews I have gained insight into the lived experience of Chinese migrant traders whose lives are shrouded in secrecy but whose presence is highly noted. By using interviews, descriptive information was elicited to better understand the lives of participants in Durban. Qualitative interviews were also favoured as it follows the ontological and epistemological position set in this study. Since the study views "people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions" as meaningful, qualitative interviewing can reveal such aspects (Mason, 2002:63). The intention of this study was to "talk interactively with people, to ask them questions, to listen to them and to gain access to their accounts and articulations" which is necessary in order to gain insights into their lived experience and which can only be achieved through qualitative interviewing (Mason, 2002:64).

Although qualitative interviews are seen to vary in style there are some common features of qualitative interviewing such as: the conversational approach in interviewing; theme or topic centered interviews; production of knowledge that is contextual and viewing the interview

itself as an interaction where meanings and understandings are constructed between the interviewer and participant.

Qualitative interviewing is used to produce rich data through verbal communication between interviewer and participant. Mason (2002:62) notes that there is an “interactional exchange of dialogue” between a researcher and participant. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:94) also states that “in-depth interviews are a particular kind of conversation between the researcher and the interviewee that requires active asking and listening” on the part of the researcher. In the interview process the role of the researcher is to ask questions, listen to participants’ responses and pursue issues that are seen important as well as to give verbal support to the participant by using probes to encourage dialogue (Hesse-Biber, 2011). By giving verbal support the researcher creates an informal atmosphere which enables the participant to be more open and allows conversation to flow freely.

Babbie (2010:320) takes it a step further by stating that “a qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent”. Mason (2002:62) concurs with this point by explaining that in qualitative interviewing the “researcher has a number of themes, topics or issues that they wish to cover” with the participant. It must be noted that although an interactional dialogue occurs it is the interviewer who sets the agenda on what is to be discussed and pursues issues that the respondent has identified as important to the topic raised.

Denscombe (2007:184) writes that “research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions”. This means that people respond to the interviewers’ identity (based on the physical and social attributes of the interviewer) and come to make certain judgments about the interviewer which affects the interview and subsequently the data collected. Denscombe (2007:184) argues further that the information divulged by participants is affected by the personal identity of the researcher since the age, sex and ethnic origin has a bearing on what people are willing to reveal. The interviewee attaches certain meaning to the researcher’s personal identity and would therefore respond to the researcher in a particular way. Since meaning is attached to the identity of the researcher it may affect the way the interviewee responds and reacts to the researcher and would thus affect the data that is



produced. As data is produced through dialogic interaction the interview itself then serves as a space where meanings are constructed. The interviewee constructs the researcher in a particular way and thus reacts to that construction. How the interviewee perceives the researcher is important as it might shed light on wider social dynamics, which is discussed in greater detail below.

Qualitative interviewing is seen as a site where “meanings and understandings are created in an interaction” between the researcher and participant (Mason, 2002:63). The interactional interview is seen as a process where meanings are co-created (Hesse-Biber, 2011:112). Since meanings are co-created, the interview involves the construction or reconstruction of knowledge (Mason, 2002:63). Through interviews knowledge is constructed and reconstructed (as the interviewee gives an account of previous experiences) through dialogical interaction.

#### **4.5.1 The interview process**

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese migrants trading at various parts of the CBD and one interview was conducted with the supervisor of one of the business hubs where Chinese migrants trade. Seven females were interviewed and three males were interviewed.

Semi-structured interviews were seen as the most appropriate method to elicit knowledge from Chinese traders. In semi-structured interviews “the interviewer has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered” (Denscombe, 2007:176). Although the interviewer has a set of questions, the interviewer is flexible in terms of the order in which the questions are asked. Fielding and Thomas (2008:246) point out that the interviewer “is free to alter the sequence [in which the questions are asked] and probe for more information”. This flexibility allows the interviewer “to adapt the research instrument to the respondent’s level of comprehension and articulacy” (Fielding and Thomas, 2008:247). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:102) also explain that “semi-structured interviews also allow individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them”. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:102) write that,

... while the researcher does try to ask each respondent a certain set of questions, he or she also allows the conversation to flow more naturally, making room for the conversation to go in unexpected directions. Interviewees often have information or knowledge that may not have been thought of in advance by the researcher. When such knowledge emerges, a researcher using semi structured design is likely to allow the conversation to develop, exploring new topics that are relevant to the interviewee.

Semi-structured interviews thus allow for participants to talk openly, freely and at length and allows for ideas, opinions or experiences to emerge and develop. It allows for the interviewer to explore new information and knowledge that would have remained implicit to the wider public. It is the flexibility in method, the allowance for participants voices to be heard and openness to explore uncharted facets that makes this method the most appropriate to use in this study. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. This involves a “meeting between one researcher and one informant” (Denscombe, 2008:177). In this study I conducted face-to-face interviews with one Chinese migrant trader at a time.

Interviews took place at the shops where the Chinese migrants trade. Most of the interviews were conducted at the China Mall while the rest were conducted at the CBD Group and China City. I thought it best to have the interviews at the location where the Chinese owner trades as the shop owners were relatively busy and were therefore unable to be interviewed at a neutral place. Secondly, interviewing the owners within the shops gave me the opportunity to take note of the interactions that occur between the Chinese shop owners, the workers and customers. Since some Chinese traders were busy attending to their businesses I had to come to the stores several times to see if they were able to participate in the interview. Although I did set up appointments with some shop owners they were still unavailable and I had to reschedule the interview. During some of the interviews the shop owners had to excuse themselves from the interview to attend to their customers. I did not see this as a disturbance rather it became an opportunity to take note of the interactions that took place between the Chinese shop owner and the customer. These interactions also form part of the interview process. After the interview had been conducted, once the voice recorder had been switched off in some cases, some participants became more interested in my research and my life and they began asking me personal questions which I openly answered which provided them with an opportunity to get to know me. Since they got to know me better they felt more at ease and were able to speak more about themselves and their lives.

How the interviewee constructed me, the interviewer, was also noted during the interview. Since I presented myself as a student interested in their lives, Chinese shop owners felt relaxed and was able to open up as I was not in an authoritarian position in relation to them. During the interviews some shop owners also constructed me as 'Indian' stating that it was easier to talk to be because I was 'Indian' or they used my identity to explain their lives in relation to the lives of 'Indian' people. This indicates that not only did the Chinese shop keepers internalise the 'racial' composition of the population in Durban (since words such as 'Black', 'White', 'Indian', 'Coloured' are used by the South African population to describe 'race' groups within this particular society) but they also impart particular attributes to the different 'race' groups. Although I presented myself as a student, the shopkeepers readily constructed me as 'Indian' with particular attributes attached to that identity which influenced, to a certain extent, how they perceived and reacted towards me and how they explained their lives to me. The construction of my identity by the Chinese traders therefore influenced the interview process.

A voice recorder was used to record the interview. Three participants declined the use of the recorder. I had to therefore record these participants' responses manually on paper. Writing the participants responses on paper was not a difficult task as the Chinese traders spoke slowly, emphasised important ideas, thought intensely about the question asked and were very accommodating in allowing a pause in conversation while I took notes.

A list of difficult words that were used in the interview guide was created by me prior to the interviews. The list of difficult words (used in the interview guide) was translated into Mandarin, using a translation website. This was done so that if the participant did not understand the question I was then able to refer to these words in order to give the participant a clear idea of what the question was asking of them. This technique proved valuable as respondents found some questions difficult to understand. By pointing out the translated word the respondent was able to grasp what the question asked of them and they were able to respond.

Some of the participants were given the interview schedule a week before the interview so that they could understand and familiarise themselves with the questions and it also gave them a chance to prepare the answers to the questions. This was done as the level of English amongst some of the Chinese participants were low and I also wanted the respondents to feel

comfortable, especially since they might be apprehensive in answering questions from a ‘stranger’. Giving the interview schedule to the participants in advance showed that the interview and the questions were not meant to be an ambush on them but rather I wanted the participants to feel comfortable and obtain their trust and wanted to show that the process was professional and transparent.

The participants were free to refuse to answer any question he/she felt uncomfortable with. A consent form was given to participants in order to obtain their permission to conduct the interview as well as to protect their identity during the various stages of the research. The recorded interviews were transcribed by me verbatim. Fielding and Thomas (2008:257) write that “verbatim transcription offers the advantage that all possible analytic uses are allowed for”. This means that a number of perspectives can be explored during analysis. Fielding and Thomas (2008:257) also point out that transcribing audio recording verbatim is advantageous as data that may not be seen as important at first may become significant later, it is thus important to transcribe the entire interview so as not to lose any data.

Eight of the participants interviewed were from the PRC while only one participant was from the ROC. The participant from the ROC (or Taiwan) had come to South Africa with his immediate family fourteen years ago. This is seen as the outcome of the agreement made between the PRC and South Africa fourteen years ago, which stated that if diplomatic ties between the two countries were to officially resume then South Africa should sever all ties with Taiwan (Guliwe and Mkhonto, 2009). Therefore, the majority of Chinese migrants in South Africa, who have come after 1998, are from the PRC (Wilhelm, 2006; Accone, 2006).

#### **4.6 Participant observation**

Initially it was assumed, due to time restrictions, that it was not possible to conduct participant observation, however when one of the interviewee’s asked if I wanted to work for her during the holiday I was granted the opportunity to not only work for a Chinese migrant trader, but also observe the interactions that occurred between the Chinese shopkeeper, her customers and workers. I was able to conduct participant observation for a set period of time. Participant observation refers to a method of producing data which involves “the researcher immersing herself or himself in a research ‘setting’ so that they can experience and observe at first hand a range of dimensions in and of that setting” (Mason, 2002: 84). The researcher

places him/herself in a particular environment in order to understand an aspect of social life. In participant observation the researcher is the main instrument through which data is generated (Jones and Somekh, 2005:138). Hennick et al (2011:170) writes that during participant observation the researcher is systematically involved in “watching, listening, questioning, and recording people’s behaviours, expressions and interactions as well as noting the social setting, location or context in which the people are situated”. Participant observation involves the researcher being aware of the social setting through listening and watching what people do and say in order to generate detailed data. Through observation and participating in the various activities with those being observed, the researcher is able to grasp an understanding of the particular interactions, behaviour and actions that occur. The researcher records what occurs in the setting through writing field notes which forms the raw data which can be analysed.

Jones and Somekh (2005:138) indicate that participant observation “entails being present in a situation and making a record of one’s impressions of what takes place”. Data is recorded or the social happenings are seen from the point of view of the researcher who holds a particular ontological position. In this research the researcher’s ontological position (also outlined in the theory chapter) “sees interaction, action and behaviour and the way people interpret these, act on them” as central (Mason, 2002:85). During participant observation my main focus was the interactions and actions that occurred in the social setting. A detailed description of the social setting as well as other significant occurrences were also recorded. Observations were made of naturally occurring phenomena which meant that the observation process was unstructured and flexible.

#### **4.6.1 Participant observation process**

The Chinese trader hired me as I initially presented myself as a student who was interested in interviewing Chinese migrants in the Durban area. The female shopkeeper required students who could work for her on a casual basis. Therefore access to the store and spending time in the presence of Chinese migrant shopkeepers were immediately given. Participant observation was conducted in a shop located in one of the shopping malls where the research was conducted.<sup>20</sup> The shop sold various products but specialised in selling toys. Participant observation was conducted over a five week period. I worked two days every week on a

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<sup>20</sup> The exact location of the shopping mall is not revealed so as to protect the identity of the participant.

Friday and a Saturday. Two days a week was chosen (instead of working everyday) as I lived far from the shopping area and transport costs were high. Since participant observation was conducted in winter, and being a young female researcher, it was dangerous, to travel by public transport as it gets darker quicker than in summer and this encourages criminal activity. This, however, allowed me to examine the changes that occurred on a week-to-week basis. I worked from 9am to 4pm and sometimes I worked until 4:30pm. I arrived at work early so that I could observe other Chinese shopkeepers.

The shop I worked for employed both South Africans and other African foreigners. Since I worked alongside young South African and Malawian males and females I was able to acquire a first-hand account of their interaction with regard to their employers and their thoughts and feelings with respect to working for the Chinese trader. Working in a shopping centre also allowed me to easily talk to other shop assistants who worked for Chinese migrants. I recorded their stories and attitudes towards their Chinese employers in my field notes. The observations of the employer-employee relationship was imperative in understanding the interaction that occurs within the Chinese shop which is discussed in detail in the succeeding chapter.

When I began to work for the Chinese shopkeeper our relationship changed from being a student interested in interviewing a Chinese migrant shopkeeper to employer and employee. Mason (2002:95) indicates that “relationships in research settings are likely to develop and change over time”. My relationship with the shopkeeper and the other workers in the shop did change over time. Since I become one of the workers I had a first-hand account of the interactions that occurred in that particular Chinese shop. I was employed to do various tasks from observing customers, to placing products on the shelves, placing price tags on the products using the price machine, doing stock take, sorting products, shifting heavy boxes around the store and in the store room, sorting the store room and cleaning the shop especially during the morning before the store opened and in the afternoon after the store had closed, as well as serving the customers. I did these tasks with the shopkeeper, with the other shop assistants or by myself.

Since most of my time was spent working, observing and listening I had no time to take any notes during participant observation. Field notes were written soon after leaving the field. Observations, interpretations and reflections were recorded simultaneously. Mason (2002:99)

writes that “you may incorporate your own perceptions, everyday interpretations, experiences and so on into your field notes, or alternatively you might feel that you should keep these separate from your observations of others”. Mason (2002) goes on to explain that how you write your field notes depends on your epistemological perspective. Since the epistemological position used in this research is one that views knowledge as constructed through the daily interactions of people, it is therefore acceptable to incorporate the reflections of the researcher and how the researcher played an active part in the research process in the field notes.

#### **4.7 Settings**

This research was conducted in the city of Durban located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Durban was founded in 1820 and started off as a small trading post “until the establishment of Boer hegemony in 1838” (Brookfield and Tatham, 1968: 46). In 1844 the British annexed Durban and it became part of the Colony of Natal (Brookfield and Tatham, 1968: 46). Freund and Padayachee (2002: 3) indicate that Durban owes its prosperity to economic factors. In the mid-nineteenth century sugar farming formed the basis of its economic activity. After South Africa became a Union in 1910, “Durban prospered as the nearest South African port to the Witwatersrand and became a leading port in southern Africa” (Brookfield and Tatham, 1968: 46). Since Durban was inextricably linked to the mining in the Witwatersrand it grew to accommodate the needs of the mining industry. Thereafter industrial development accelerated its growth.

Durban is characterised by having a diverse population group, which was categorised by law into different ‘racial’ groups. The apartheid system of racial segregation which was formally implemented in the 1950’s, but was initiated earlier on, divided people into ‘racial’ groups that could only occupy particular areas where they could live and work. The ‘race’ groups<sup>21</sup>, whose categorisation are largely used today, are the ‘White’, ‘Black’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘Indian’ groups. Brookfield and Tatham (1968: 45), in their study of the distribution of racial groups in Durban, divided the city into consolidated areas “using as basis a map of racial distribution ... the object was to obtain racially homogenous areas as far as possible”. Their study

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<sup>21</sup> Prior to the implementation of the new ‘racial’ categories of ‘Black’, ‘Coloured’, ‘Indian’ and White’ these groups had the categories of ‘Native’, ‘Coloured’, ‘Asiatics’ or sometimes ‘Indian’ and ‘Europeans’ respectively (Brookfield and Tatham, 1968; Kuper et al, 1958).

conducted in the 1960's clearly maps out the different areas that the 'race' groups occupy. In discussing the commercial centre of the city they remark that,

“A unique feature of Durban, not parallel even in Cape Town, is the dual nature of the commercial centre. The larger European Central Business District, with clear division between shopping, commercial, and entertainment areas, overlaps in its poorer, western, end an Indian CBD in which this areal differentiation of functions is to some extent duplicated. Most European shops, especially in the overlap area depend somewhat on non-European custom, but comparatively few Europeans patronise shops in the Indian CBD. Entertainments are totally separate. This dichotomy is reinforced by the dualism of the transport system. The European bus system, carrying only a few non-Europeans in segregated seats, focuses on the European center; the privately owned Indian and Native buses, serving the wide Indian and Native areas on the fringes, focus on the Indian commercial core. It should be remarked, however, that the racial separation of business is less clear than it appears to be; Indians own much European land, and Indian money penetrates a substantial sector of the European economy” (Brookfield and Tatham, 1968:64).

The CBD was divided into the European or 'White' area which occupied a larger proportion of the city area and the non-White area mainly occupied the fringes of the city. In the overlap area non-Whites were able to shop, however, few 'Whites' visited shops in the 'non-White' area. There was a clear separation between the 'White' and 'Non-White' shopping, entertainment and commercial areas. The bus system also catered to the needs of the different 'race' groups, with government buses going only to the 'White' commercial zones and privately owned 'Indian' buses going to the 'Indian' economic zones.

As the population of the city grew it became harder for different groups to adhere strictly to the 'racial' zoning. With the abolition of Apartheid in the 1990's the city took on a new shape. Although some remnants of a city divided along racial lines still exist, the city now has been transformed into a place where different 'racial' groups are free to trade and shop where they please. South Africa's democratisation has also led to sanctions being discontinued and for a new immigrant population, especially from African countries, to emerge as traders in various parts of the city. This has also been followed by a 'Chinese' population who now live and trade in and around the city centre. Wilhelm (2006) reports that in 2006 government acknowledged the increase of Chinese migrants in the country. The city of Durban has seen a significant rise in Chinese migrant traders. 'Chinese shops' have come to line particular streets of Durban some clustering together in certain districts.



This research however was conducted in particular malls that mainly cater for Chinese businesses.<sup>22</sup> Research was primarily conducted in the ‘China Mall’ with seven interviews being conducted. One interview was conducted in ‘China City’ and one participant from the wholesale shopping district the ‘CBD Group’ was interviewed. Observation was also conducted in the places noted above. China Mall, Oriental City and CBD Group are located within the confines of the CBD while China City is located northwards less than 15km outside the CBD. The emergence of shopping complexes dedicated especially for the purpose of selling goods imported from China by Chinese people is a recent phenomenon in Durban. For instance, China Mall was officially opened on 29 October 2010 and now boasts 82 shops with a further development of 47 shops in the pipeline (website 14; website 15). The China Mall development was an initiative by the Progressive Business Forum (PBF) SA-China Chapter (website 14). The mall is owned by Robin Xu who is a member of the PBF and who also played a significant role in organising trade delegations to China (website 14). Oriental City was launched early in 2011 and China City opened in the middle of 2011.<sup>23</sup>

The city is now a place where different groups of people are able to come into contact with each other. The trading zones that the ‘Chinese’ occupy are significant in this research as it exposes the interactions that go on in the city. Park (2010) puts forwards the idea of ‘borderlands’ advocated by Anzuldua (1987) in describing the cultural interchange that occurs in urban areas (distribution and wholesale centers and the city) between the Chinese and South Africans and other foreigners especially from other parts of Africa and Asia. This study examines such exchanges and interactions.

#### **4.8 Analysis of data**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data obtained. Thematic analysis allowed for themes to emerge from the interpretations of the participants responses. Common experiences as well as particular situations were drawn together under these themes. The process of thematic analysis began by reading the interview transcripts and participant observation notes numerous times in order to gain a firm grasp of what was said by participants and the interactions that occurred (Mason, 2002; Denscombe, 2007; Rivas, 2012). Thereafter the interview transcripts and the participant observation notes were methodically examined with

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<sup>22</sup> Attempts were made to elicit respondents that run shops around the city but due to language problems I was unable to interview them.

<sup>23</sup> This information was obtained during participant observation.

the intention of creating codes from the participant's responses. Similar codes were then grouped together under a unifying category. Participant's common experiences as well as outstanding individual situations were taken into consideration. Categories were then compared to other categories in order to establish if they related to each other. This required interpretation and reflection of the data. Once categories were compared and linkages between categories were established it allowed for themes to emerge (Rivas, 2012). The themes that emerged were further scrutinised by rechecking interview transcripts and participant observation notes so as to affirm a correlation between the two. Once the themes were firmly established I began the process of writing the analysis.

#### **4.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethics in research are important as it protects the participants "from unethical research procedures" which could cause harm to participants (Ali and Kelly, 2012:59). At all stages of this research ethical procedures were followed. Before eliciting participants, the research proposal was approved by the Board of Ethics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which ensured that the questions being asked to respondents were fair and did not produce any psychological harm to participants. Once permission was obtained, Chinese migrants were asked on a voluntary basis if they wished to participate in the study. The reason for conducting the study was explained to participants and participants were asked to sign a consent form. The consent form highlighted the nature of the study and gave the researchers as well as the supervisors details so that participants could contact either one of them if they felt that the interview was biased in any way. The consent form also stated that participants could refuse to answer any question that they felt uncomfortable with and that they could stop participating any time during the interview process. I also assured participants that information obtained from them would only be shown to the supervisor of this project and that no-one else would be allowed to access to it. I asked the participant's permission to use a recording device to record the conversation. A few participants refused being recorded so I manually recorded what they said. I also gave some participants an interview schedule a week or so before the interview so that participants would feel comfortable answering the questions. The recorded interviews were transcribed by me ensuring that no one else had access to the recordings. During the writing of the analysis chapter, the participant's identities were concealed by using pseudonyms. The exact locations of participant's business premises were also concealed in order to protect their identity. The above steps were followed so as to

ensure that the research followed ethical procedures, ensuring that participant's identity and integrity was protected throughout the research process.

#### **4.10 Limitations of study**

This study presented a few limitations. Firstly, since a translator was not used only participants who could speak English was elicited to be interviewed. This also meant that participants had to speak in English, which sets limits to how they could express themselves. Although this was the case, participants tried their best to explain their situation. Since participants were busy running their shops, focus group interviews were impossible to arrange and thus not used as a method to gain data. In addition, secrecy was another challenge in eliciting interviews due to possible illegal entry into the country.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has expounded all the necessary steps taken in order to elicit data and why such steps were used. Qualitative methodology was used as the research questions required descriptive information (as opposed to numerical information) in order to be answered. The sampling size was guided by searching for those migrants who could speak English (as a translator was not available) and by issues of secrecy. Although this set a limitation to the study, the participants were congenial in describing their experiences and I had an opportunity to get to know the migrants that participated in the study. Altogether nine migrants participated from various Chinese Malls in Durban. Interviews and participant observation were chosen as methods to obtain information. These methods were used to gain knowledge of the participants lives, experiences and interactions within the trading zones. Interviews were conducted to gain insight from the perspective of the participant and participant observation allowed for examining the dynamics within the 'Chinese shop'. Thematic analysis allowed for the data to be scrutinised and to be drawn together under themes. Ethical procedures were also followed throughout this research, such as obtaining ethical clearance, explaining to voluntary participants the reasons behind conducting this research, and ensuring that information received remained confidential so as to protect the identity of participants. This section therefore focused on the procedures used to gain information. The next section delves into discussing and analysing the data obtained.

## CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the methods used in order to elicit information on the lives of Chinese migrants trading in the city of Durban. Interviews conducted and ethnographic data sourced through participant observation revealed aspects of the migrant's lives that would have otherwise remained concealed.

After analysing the semi-structured and ethnographic notes five themes emerged from the data. These themes provide the basis through which common and conflicting ideas are drawn together and elucidated. The first theme encompasses the economic and social lives of Chinese traders in Durban and centers on Chinese migrants aspirations on becoming entrepreneurs and their concerns over how crime affects their businesses and personal lives. The social interaction between Chinese employers, South African and Malawian workers and their customers within these 'China shops' is the second theme that arose out of the research. Although casualisation of labour sets the conditions under which work takes place, the face-to-face interactions between employer and employee are seen to be constrained with employees being afraid to express their opinion or grievances resulting in muted conflicts in the workplace. The third theme encapsulates the opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese traders while living and working in Durban. South Africa and China's compatibility of economic systems and the creation of appropriate supply, distribution, trade and social networks by the Chinese migrants have enabled them to seek and expand business opportunities. The challenges however, faced by Chinese migrants include crime, trust, prejudice and overcoming language and cultural barriers. The fourth theme focuses on Chinese traders adapting to South Africa. I argue that a combination of factors such as experiences shared in South Africa, bridging the language barrier and social networks created amongst Chinese migrants play an important role in determining whether migrants are able to adapt in living and trading in Durban. Finally, the future of Chinese traders in South Africa is the last theme discussed. Indicators suggest that due to stable political and economic systems and relations Chinese migrants are more likely to continue living and trading in South Africa. Another important determinant in projecting the future of Chinese migrants in South Africa is to explore whether the children of these migrants are able to integrate within South African

society as this then will serve as an indication of whether the migrants are willing to plant firm roots in South Africa.

Based on the above themes, this chapter provides an analysis of the data gained on the lives of the Chinese traders.

## **5.2 The economic and social lives of Chinese traders in Durban**

The Chinese migrants living and trading in and around the city of Durban, unlike their counterparts in the Orange Free State who are exclusively from Fujian Province (Park and Chen, 2009), are from various provinces in China. Although the participants in this study have come from different places within China, their interviews reveal two aspects that they all share, which inevitably shape how they conduct their lives within South Africa. The first aspect deals with obtaining monetary wealth and the second aspect focuses on how crime or the perception of crime in South Africa has affected how they live their lives.

### **5.2.1 Obtaining wealth**

Migrants reveal having had different careers in China, such as factory work, administration, sales, acupuncture, cinema assistant and students. In South Africa, however, trading goods has come to be the norm. Participants indicate that starting a business is an opportunity for them to increase their monetary wealth. Both in China and South Africa their outlook on life is shaped around increasing wealth. One participant indicated that in China their aim was to achieve a good lifestyle by obtaining more wealth.

**S:** What was your life like in China? Was it easy or difficult?

**Justin:** It's easy but you see the people always want much more life.

**S:** Much more life?

**Justin:** Ja, much more good for the life.

**S:** Okay, a good lifestyle.

**Justin:** More and more and more, for example maybe you got 1000, so you say maybe I get 10 000, if you got 100 000 then you want 1 million, it's just like that.

The same ambition is also rendered out in South Africa. Their aim is to prosper and achieve monetary success in South Africa. When participants were asked what their future goals were, they responded by stating that they would like their business to thrive or prosper and for their business to grow by having more stores.

Looking at Chinese history Bian (2002:91) argues that the post-Mao period in the PRC is one where “state redistributive inequalities are giving way to patterns increasingly generated by how individuals and groups succeed in a growing market-orientated economy”. The death of Chairman Mao in 1976 also saw the collapse of his rigid hierarchical system when Deng Xiaoping implemented market reforms that made it possible for Chinese citizens to have occupational status, occupation and social mobility, denied during Mao’s reign, thus leading to a new class system (Bian, 2002). Bian (2002) explains that market reforms have led to increased social mobility. For instance, research (spanning two decades) conducted by Lu (cited in Bian, 2002:95) on emerging class structures in rural areas within China showed that private entrepreneurs became the new capitalist class. In addition China’s guaxi networks<sup>24</sup> have increased the social and occupation mobility of people. People use these networks in order to gain better jobs. Thus market reforms and the use of guaxi networks have led the Chinese to secure better employment and income. Since entrepreneurs are seen to occupy a capitalist class and since guaxi networks provides the means of achieving this, more people utilize these networks in order to become entrepreneurs so that they can hold a better class position which also results in having a better income. In the case of South Africa guaxi networks have allowed Chinese migrants to become entrepreneurs (see following sections), thus securing a better class position.

The language participant’s use indicated that their social reality is shaped around an economic discourse of obtaining monetary wealth. By participants indicating that they would like to establish more businesses or become wealthy one can see that through their dialogue the capitalist macro structure within society is expressed and is reproduced by the actions that they have taken. Through participants articulations the influence of macro structures within their lives can be noted. Their activity of running the business and the language used to articulate it revealed a facet of how they view their social reality. In this case the capitalist economic structure plays a significant role in the participants lives.

**Brian:** My expectation, I do the business, it’s my first business, I can maybe, what do you say, maybe grow up and try to get two or three branches. Then it would be better for the life.

**Emily:** Grow business, want to own, open ten stores around the world.

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<sup>24</sup> Guaxi networks are “interpersonal connections of sentiments and obligations that dictate social interaction and facilitate exchange in Chinese society” (Bian, 2002:107). According to Bian (2002:108) guaxi contacts are usually relatives and close friends.

**Lee:** Run the business, hope it prospers.

**Tracy:** I just want more business, nothing else.

Since their aim is to obtain wealth their daily routine revolves around attending to their business during the day and attending to their family after they close their business. Participants indicated that they are always busy with operating the business. Some Chinese traders also bring their children to their place of work as they have no one who could attend to them. Since most of their time is dedicated to running the business they have little or no time for leisure activities. Their limited time is dedicated to individual leisure activities such as playing computer games, and watching films and television. When participants were asked to discuss their feelings about living in Durban the following statements captures their sentiments:

**June:** But you see we don't have any time shopping, we don't have time eating outside restaurant. Everyday working, working, working. (laughs) So we don't have time to spend your money.

**Justin:** Um, always rushing, everyday rushing.

**Lee:** So it's kinda busy when you have to be here for work and then go back, take care of the whole house.

Their comments indicate that working in their shops consumes much of their time. They are mostly busy attending to the everyday functioning of their business so they lack the time to pursue social activities.

### 5.2.2 Crime

The second aspect that influences the lives and subsequently the behaviour of Chinese migrants is the crime experienced or the fear of crime in South Africa. I argue, in line with Berger, that participants through their actions and interactions establish a shared reality experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful (Berger cited in Wallace and Wolf, 1995:262). Through participant's actions and the language they use to express themselves the fear of being victims of crime is created as a social reality. This social reality influences their actions taken within South Africa. For instance, according to the participants, crime prevents and restricts their activities. Tracy revealed the difference between living in South Africa as opposed to China.

**Tracy :** Then you know this place, you know in China, um, after finish work we can go on the street, it's so many shop so many shopping mall, some they open and you,

er, 10 12 o'clock, some its 24 hours. So we can go whatever we want to go. We eat nice food, we can play outside. Here I can't even go out here.

In China, Tracy enjoyed many after work activities such as shopping, going to restaurants, or even spending time out of her home. In South Africa, however, Tracy is restricted to going to work to make a living and then returning straight home. She reveals that she is unable to go out after work. Her statement reveals both sadness and frustration at her predicament. In addition, June states,

**June:** You see, before in China I got free time in weekends, with my family and friends, we can shopping, we can eating outside, walk street, other street, but here we can't do like that.

**S:** Why not?

**June:** You know it's dangerous, not only Chinese, the other people, most of the other people are scared to stay outside alone.

June establishes two reasons as to why there are constraints in going out. Her economic activity of running the business to obtain monetary wealth keeps her busy. In addition she cannot go shopping, eat at restaurants or even walk on the road as she fears for her safety. The fear of crime in South Africa prevents her and many other Chinese migrants from conducting basic social activities alone. Tracy also reveals that using public transport is also a dangerous activity. She states further that using public transport 'is not safe for us' indicating that it is not safe for the Chinese migrants in contrast to South Africans. Since she does not have a car she is limited as to where she can go and what she can do. It can be argued that the fear of crime affects most activities.

**S:** Is it easy or difficult to live in South Africa?

**Tracy:** It's fine. (contemplates her answer)

**Tracy:** Not so easy. You go everywhere you should have a car. You don't have a car you can't go anywhere. For Chinese, other people I know they have.

**S:** Which other people?

**Tracy:** Maybe Indian you can by bus, by taxi. For us it's not easy.

**S:** Oh, what do you think will happen if you travel by taxi or bus?

**Tracy:** I think not safe for us.

Brian reveals that he too has to be cautious while driving. He does not feel safe and has to always be aware of his surroundings and be conscious of where he stops his vehicle.

**Brian:** I hope and think my life would be better than the other city. In Johannesburg it's more dangerous, you can't anytime stop your van, you have to think anywhere,



you look around, but here more, feeling is good then in Johannesburg. But in whole South Africa I more like Cape Town.

**Brian:** Here most of the things is good, but I don't like one thing, is the safe, it's too dangerous. In Johannesburg I was robbed twice. One time they took my car away and second time they broke into my house, so I, after that, I don't want to stay in Johannesburg again so I moved to Richards Bay and then come here.

His experience of crime has driven him to come to KwaZulu-Natal where he has to start his life again. Tracy also in a conversation that I had with her (after the recording of the interview) revealed that she also experienced crime in Johannesburg and therefore came to Durban in the hope it would be safer for her. This indicates that the Chinese migrants not only come to KwaZulu-Natal or to the city of Durban to seek untapped consumer markets<sup>25</sup> they also come to escape the crime that has negatively affected their lives and experiences in South Africa. Chen also states that her life is guided by her being cautious about the crime in certain areas. In my interview with her she emphasised being careful and watchful and trying to be safe by doing "the right things at the right time" such as not wearing jewellery and by being careful as to how she carries her bag. The South African and Chinese media also report incidents of Chinese people being murdered and assaulted during robberies which fuels concern amongst migrants as they fear becoming victims of crime (Ngwenya, 2007; Kanindo, 2007; Enslin-Payne, 2007). Media reports state that Chinese citizens are injured or killed during robberies which indicate that crimes against Chinese are not due to xenophobia but since Chinese are assumed to possess wealth due to their business enterprises they are seen as soft targets for criminals. However, China's commerce ministry's Director General for west Asia and Africa, Yabin Zhou, explains that incidents reported in the press have been exaggerated (Kanindo, 2007; Enslin-Payne, 2007). Since participants have experienced or have heard of incidents of crime against the Chinese the discourse of crime has shaped how they view their social reality within South Africa. Since the fear of becoming a victim of crime features in their social reality it plays a role in influencing their behaviour.

**Chen:** Do the right things at the right time, don't go anywhere too dangerous. At night stay at home.

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<sup>25</sup> Haugen and Carling (2005) indicate that there is a geographical expansion of 'Chinese shops' or as they term it 'Baibuo shops' due to market saturation.

### **5.2.3 Summary**

It can be argued then that the lives of the participants interviewed are directed towards obtaining wealth. In addition migrants express a deep seated fear of becoming victims of crime. Since the goal of most Chinese is to be financially wealthy their activity is geared towards establishing, maintaining and growing their business. Since this is their main activity in Durban much time is spent operating their businesses. Their businesses are opened every day of the week including the weekend. This gives them little time to engage in any form of social activity. Only one participant indicated participating in organised religion. Even if they did have time, they feel restricted as to what they can do due to the fear of crime they experience. The fear of crime limits their activities as it makes them reluctant to use public transportation, go shopping or to restaurants and even walk on the street alone. As a result I argue that the experience of crime has influenced their behaviour and in turn influences the interaction that they have with South Africans.

### **5.3 Social interaction between Chinese traders their employees and customers**

In Durban a fair amount of Chinese traders use local and foreign African labour to perform certain duties within the shop such as cleaning the store, counting stock, moving heavy boxes around from stockroom to store floor, stacking the shelves, moving shelves around to make more place for other items, assisting customers, packing customers goods and monitoring the shop for shoplifters. The shop I worked in during the participant observation phase of my research was no exception. I worked for a Chinese shop manager for two days per week over a period of five weeks in order to understand the relationship that Chinese owners share with their workers and customers. The woman in charge of the store, June, offered me a job during the initial stages of the research during my attempts to elicit interviews from Chinese shopkeepers. June worked for a large Chinese company that was responsible for the production and distribution of products. The shop sold a range of items but specialised in selling an assortment of toys which occupied the centre of the store. Other items sold included kitchenware, garden utensils, hardware equipment and household cleaning products which were lined along the periphery of the store.

During the first week of working at the store I met two other South African shop assistants, Nosipho and Rose. Nosipho was a first year student studying social work through one of the

universities in South Africa. She had been working in the store for approximately four weeks. Rose was a high school student who worked during the weekend. She lived in another town in KwaZulu-Natal and came to Durban as she perceived the education in the city to be of better quality than her hometown. The third assistant, Vivian, who was in her early twenties, was from Malawi. She had been working for June since the shop opened seven months earlier. Another Malawian woman, Kylie, also worked in the shop during weekends only, during the week she worked at the company's wholesale distribution centre. During the second week of the participant observation research Rose and Nosipho left their jobs and were replaced by three young males: John and Ishmael, who were from Malawi, and Jay a South African student studying Business Science. Jay left his job after one week of working in the store.

### **5.3.1 Interaction between Chinese traders and their employees**

From conducting participant observation and interviews I argue that the employer-employee relationship, is split into two components. The first examines the relationships or roles required for the effective functioning of the store. The second aspect deals with the face-to-face interactions that occur within the workplace.

In everyday situations shop assistants and traders align their actions in order to effectively operate the business. The employer sets instructions on how tasks are to be performed by the workers. Once tasks are learned they are repeated, sometimes on a daily basis. Such habitual tasks, for instance, include counting stock, packing shelves or placing price tags on goods. Such joint action occurs in all of the 'Chinese shops' that have been observed. The employer sets out what tasks are to be performed and the employee acts toward performing what is required of him/her. In some cases workers enquire as to what tasks are to be done and even make suggestions as to what task they could do, Blumer (1969:17) indicates that since they come to "share common and pre-established meanings of what is expected in the actions of the participants, and accordingly each participant is able to guide his own behaviour by such meanings". This indicates that employers do not merely command their workers, but workers through daily practice become aware of what actions are required of them since the meanings established are constant. On some occasions it could be observed that tasks were not appropriately carried out. Tasks not properly performed indicate that what is required was incorrectly interpreted by workers or employers. Symbolic gestures made were not properly

understood and interpreted which resulted in the wrong actions being conducted. Since workers do not come from the same linguistic background as the employers, all instructions are set out in English which is seen as the common medium of communication. Since English is not adequately understood by the employer and employee, difficulties arise as instructions given are not properly interpreted. Since indications are misinterpreted the actions of what is to be done do not fit together resulting in mistakes being made and an overall feeling of frustration. For instance, June at times became frustrated and she reprimanded John and Ishmael occasionally as they performed tasks incorrectly. Ishmael more than John could not understand English properly and therefore often misinterpreted what June had said leading to misunderstandings.

I also put forward the idea that the joint action performed between the employers and workers reproduces the global structure of casualization of workers.<sup>26</sup> Morrione (1988) citing Blumer indicates that large-scale structure emerges from micro-processes. In turn ‘large-scale structures are important in that they shape the situations in which individuals act and supply to actors the fixed set of symbols that enable them to act’ (Ritzer, 1996:224). This exhibits the dialectic process of structure and joint action. The collection of joint action creates and reproduces structure. This means that a multitude of actions align with one another to create and re-create structures. Structure, in turn, sets out what is required or expected of people to do as they “set the conditions and limitations on human action, but they do not determine it” (Ritzer, 1996: 224).

The casualisation of labour is adopted as an employment trend by traders as it benefits them. Casual employment is seen as a flexible option for employers as labour can be employed or dismissed when needed, it also reduces labour costs as low wages are paid and there are no benefits paid to workers (Barker, 2007; Jarvis, 1999). Research conducted also points out that casual work in South Africa is eroding labour standards as wages are low, there is no social and employment security, it is difficult to unionise workers, conditions of work are precarious and there is little incentive to train workers (Barker, 2007). This sets the conditions under which employees work. At the Chinese shop where participant observation

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<sup>26</sup> Casual workers are employed on an “occasional basis when employers need them” and there is no job security as workers are not protected by the Labour Relations Act (Jarvis, 1999:109). Casual work is seen as a flexible way for employers to utilise labour in relation to demands of production or services required (Barker, 2007; Jarvis, 1999). There is an increase in casual employment in South Africa’s retail industry as employers increase number of staff during peak periods, holidays and weekends (Barker, 2007). Chinese shops which are predominately retail stores use casual labour as it allows for labour flexibility and it reduces the costs of labour.

was conducted it was noted that the work done entailed moving heavy boxes around the store room and having to set them on the shelves. This was physically strenuous and the young women often complained about being tired. There was little time to rest as there was only one 30 minute break for the working day, there was also no proper area for staff to have their lunch hence workers had to sit in the dirty, dusty store room. Working conditions were therefore not optimal.

Considering that South Africa experiences a situation where unemployment is rife and there are a large number of unskilled workers in search of employment, 'Chinese shops' do offer employment opportunities for South Africans. The unemployed who actively search for jobs come to 'China shops' in the hope of finding employment. By being employed in Chinese shops, workers agree to be casually employed. This agreement is a verbal agreement (no contract is signed) in which both parties understand that low wages are to be paid and there would not be any benefits incurred to workers as they are employed casually.

Although casualisation of work does enable people to become employed and earn a wage, the wages that they earn is little and thus constrains their activities. Rose and Nosipho articulated that at R50 a day their wages were too low, and that the money they earned did not cover their expenses. This sentiment was shared by other shop assistants who worked for Chinese stores in the area. After Nosipho had left her job, June indicated that Nosipho was unable to work in the shop as she did not have enough money to live in Durban and her situation was 'desperate'. At one point Nosipho laments "why is the government doing this to us, why have they brought the Chinese here?" The employees indicated that having the Chinese here was a double edged sword. On the one hand South Africa is in need of Chinese investments to stimulate the economy which will lead to job creation. The products that the Chinese traders bring and sell are also inexpensive so South Africans, who could not normally afford to purchase goods, would now be able to do so. However, although the Chinese do offer South Africans job opportunities, the wages paid are so low that they are unable to live an adequate life. People are nevertheless still caught in a cycle of poverty.

Park (2012:8) in her research also indicated that respondents state that Chinese businesses assist to create employment, however employees must contend with working long hours for low pay. Since the work offered by Chinese shopkeepers requires menial skill, and since

there is a large quantity of unemployed labour<sup>27</sup> and a large low skill labour surplus in South Africa, if a person leaves their job they can easily be replaced (Altman, 2006:5). The large number of unemployed workers vying for the position also makes it difficult for those who are employed to negotiate wages as they could always be replaced if they dislike their working conditions. This was evident when Rose, Nosipho and Jay left their jobs. A South African worker from another shop had also left for a better employment opportunity. The South African shop assistants that I spoke to felt exploited as they earned low wages for the work that they did. The Chinese employer has the power to dictate how much to pay their workers. Since the work requires one to do menial tasks and there is an abundance of unemployed workers in South Africa who are willing to sell their labour there is no pressure to increase workers' wages.<sup>28</sup> In addition since work is on a casual basis there is no formal contract stipulating certain agreements between worker and employer. There is also no union representation for workers as they work casually. This results in shop assistants breaking the exploitative relationship by choosing to leave their jobs in order to find higher pay for their labour. Although employers know that workers leave their job because of low wages they are unwilling to increase wages as there is an abundance of labour so if one worker leaves then they can easily employ another worker.

It seems that it is easier for South Africans to leave their job at the Chinese store to find better employment but for the Malawians it is difficult. Although the South African shop assistants that I have spoken to do have a problem with their wages the workers from Malawi have not verbally communicated this to me. [This was noted when I told Vivian that I was only able to work two days a week. She responded by shaking her head in a disapproving manner and told me that working two days a week is not enough as the wages I received was low] John who had been in South Africa for three years and had done many other menial jobs told me that this job was easy compared to other work that he had done. The Malawians working at this store, unlike their South African counterparts, were unable to readily leave their jobs as they needed the income and their agency was limited as they were in a more despairing position. Added to this, foreign African migrants could also be illegal and thus finding work that offers higher wages is difficult if they do not have the proper documents. Their agency is

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<sup>27</sup> According to household surveys conducted by Statistics South Africa (SSA) the employment rate as of the first quarter of 2012 stands at 24.5. Out of 127 countries South Africa unemployment rate is the 27<sup>th</sup> highest (Statistics South Africa, 2012). Altman (2006:8) also states that "South Africa has one of the highest rates of open unemployment compared to other stable global economies".

<sup>28</sup> During participant observation it was noted that a number of unemployed youth came to the Chinese shops to ask for employment.

constrained as they have limited choice over what occupation they can do and their bargaining power over how much they can be paid is also limited as the unemployment level is high and they can be easily replaced.

Although casualisation of labour sets out the situation and conditions under which work takes place within the 'Chinese shops', it does not determine the face-to-face interactions of employers and employees. During observation it was noted that the trader's response to workers was standoffish. Traders tend to keep workers at a distance by being detached or aloof. They do not confide in workers, trust workers or have casual conversations with them. Communication is limited to giving workers orders. I also found my employer, June, to be strict, authoritarian and firm. She did not socialise with her workers but only gave us instructions to follow.

One of the reasons for the Chinese trader's impassiveness towards workers could be attributed to the difficulty they experienced with regard to their workers stealing from their establishment. Tracy and Emily state that workers have stolen from their businesses.

**Tracy:** But some people they don't understand you, they can't do it nicely, there is many people very lazy and like to stealing. I find many workers stealing.

S: Is it, so you have to fire them and get another worker?

**Tracy:** Yes, I have two guy follow me long time.

S: Alright so they help you?

**Tracy:** Yah, they fine.

Since traders have experienced some workers stealing they find it difficult to trust all their workers. For instance, June checks all her staffs' bags when the shop closes at the end of the day. Another aspect that Tracy touches upon, which is also expressed by other Chinese traders I interviewed, is that labour is perceived to be lazy and work slowly.

**Justin:** Um, The local labour almost all don't have responsibility. You understand. Only want money, don't want working. Slowly, lazy that's the big problem.

Shop assistants also express resentment towards their employers and they convey discontentment with the treatment they received from their employers. Shop assistants from other stores complained about the severe treatment they received from their employer. I asked one shop assistant, Cathy, who worked at another shop what was it like working for a Chinese employer. She says that it is,

“Terrible”! “Out of all the bosses I had, the Chinese boss is the most terrible. They treat you like shit. They treat you like you are not human, like some kind of dog. Like you are not like them. They don’t know how to treat people”.

She then says that there are some pleasant ones and there are some horrible ones and her ‘boss’ had some good days. For instance her ‘boss’ did give one of the shop assistants a raise when he asked, however the same shop assistant had an argument with the employer and resigned. This shop assistant was angered by the treatment she was receiving but it was difficult for her to find better employment.

Although shop assistants were offended by their employers’ behaviour towards them their actions towards their employer did not express the discontentment that they felt. They concealed the resentment felt and presented themselves as obedient, diligent workers during their daily interactions with their employer. Although the workers portrayed themselves as diligent and ready to meet the demands set by their employer, many employees resented working for the traders citing low pay and unfair/harsh treatment as the cause of their anger towards the employers.

I noticed during my observations that the Chinese trader placed themselves in a superior position in relation to their workers. The Chinese trader played the role of being the ‘boss’ of the establishment. As a ‘boss’ they placed themselves on a hierarchy, positioning themselves as superior in relation to their employees. The employer portrays the role of being the superior in charge or in control of all aspects of the business operation including being in control of the workers. They are able to control and instruct their workers as they please. The workers validate their ‘boss’s’ superiority by being quick to respond to their commands, and by carrying out their commands mercurially and as effectively as they possibly can.<sup>29</sup> They try to gain the ‘boss’s’ favour by being good employees willing to help, baby sit their employers children, and by doing the best that they can for the business. Workers are aware of their employers’ coldness towards them and they try to gain their favour and trust by forming a good impression of them (selves) by answering to the demands of the boss. They are aware that in order to try to build a good relationship with the ‘boss’ they need to be a good employee by listening to the boss, following the instructions, helping customers with

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<sup>29</sup> This research has not explored whether the superiority of the Chinese traders could be attributed to anything else other than an employer-employee power relationship, such as broader ‘racial’ tensions.



their queries and being an overall good worker. The need to please their 'boss' also arises from the fear of being dismissed. Workers are aware that as casual employees their position is precarious as no contract was signed and they may be dismissed without any notice. Since employees are in a desperate position to keep their jobs they have to form a good impression and portray themselves as good workers so as to be seen as a pleasant worker and an asset to the business. They also refrain from expressing how they feel or complain to employers about low pay, working conditions and treatment received as they fear being fired or mistreated. No compromise or negotiation is made with regards to the above aspects as such a relationship does not allow for open dialogues to be made. Since employers hold a powerful position in relation to workers, the workers felt that they were unable to confront their employees about working conditions, wages or defend their positions when certain misunderstandings occur. Thus workers harbour a quiet resentment towards their employer but they present themselves in a pleasing manner in order to win over their 'authoritarian' employer.

Once workers form a good impression of themselves, employers are then more flexible to opening up to them and communicating with them. For instance, in my experience of working with June, she was authoritarian, distant and impersonal towards me. Although June could speak English it was difficult for her to be open with her workers. She only gave out orders but she never expressed how she felt or talked about her life nor did she want to know about our lives. It was difficult for her to let her guard down to express her opinions or how she felt even if she could speak English. Noting her detachment I began portraying myself as a good worker. I was also friendly and respectful towards her. Upon reflection I realised that I also treated her with respect so as to get to know her better. By being a good worker I showed June that she was able to trust me and that resulted in her becoming less reserved. Although she did not speak about her personal life, she was open to talk about the business. Although as a worker I did not have much power to influence economic situations such as the negotiation of better wages and so on, I did have the ability to influence the social interaction that I had with June by creating a positive impression of myself.

Although in some 'Chinese shops' workers have to manage how to present themselves so as to foster good relationships with their employer, this is not the case for all workers. In contrast to June's aloofness, Brian and Cho were different in their response to me. I met

them when I was eliciting interviews and I immediately built a repertoire with them.<sup>30</sup> Brian owns the store and Cho, who is from another country in Asia, helps him to run the store. They work in the same building as June. While working for June I visited Brian and Cho during my lunch break and after work. They were always open and friendly towards me. It was easy to talk to them about their lives in South Africa; they could easily share their opinions and feelings. Although Cho has trouble with her English she tried to communicate with me and I tried my best to understand her. It was easy for me to have casual conversations with her and she was also very kind and considerate. Since they were always friendly towards me I went to their shop on a regular basis to socialise with them.

Chen (another participant) also has friendly relationships with her workers. She was able to laugh and joke with her workers and she also taught her workers Chinese words. Thus how traders respond to or interact with their workers is important in micro-social interaction. This also indicates that the relationship between Chinese traders and their workers should not be generalised. For instance, Cathy had an employer who constantly mistreated his workers, my employer was initially distant and impersonal but since I presented myself as a good worker she began to open up to me. With regard to Brian and Cho they were instantly genial and hospitable and I was able to befriend them easily. This also suggests that although the conditions of work follow the characteristics of casualisation, the face-to-face interaction or relationship between employee and labourer depends on the face-to-face interaction of the Chinese traders and workers. Although work is performed within certain economic and labour structures there is evidence to suggest that individuals have the agency to respond in different ways to the same situation, in terms of how they treat their workers.

### **5.3.2 Chinese trader's interactions with customers**

In dealing with customers, traders present themselves as friendly and courteous. For instance, Brian and Cho are friendly towards their customers and their geniality is reciprocated as they receive gifts from them.

**S:** Okay, so you have a good relationship with customers and people.

**Brian:** Yes, I think so. These few customers they give us the gift.

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<sup>30</sup> I do acknowledge that although my interaction with them is not based on an employee-employer relationship, they however came across as genuinely friendly even with regard to their own employees.

Since customers give them gifts it shows that they appreciate the good service received and it is a thank you gesture towards Brian and Cho for being kind, courteous and friendly. Since Chinese traders interact with their customers most of the time that are mostly South Africans and people from other African countries it gives an indication of the treatment they receive from the society that they trade in. Lee reiterates Brian's sentiments by stating that customers are friendly most of the time.

**S:** On a daily basis who do you interact with?

**Lee:** Customers

**S:** Customers

**Lee:** Yah, mostly Indian.

**S:** Because of

**Lee:** where we are situated

**S:** Is it difficult or easy to interact with South Africans or other Africans?

**Lee:** Not so bad, yah. Most, most of the customers are friendly.

This indicates that the society in which they trade in are mostly friendly towards the Chinese traders. In a survey conducted<sup>31</sup> based on African perceptions of Chinese in South Africa the majority of respondents viewed the Chinese as hardworking (64%), disciplined (49%) and friendly (57%), while only 4% saw them as unfriendly "crooks or capitalists" or "snakes" (3%) (Park, 2012:9). Respondents interviewed, from the study mentioned above, also state having pleasant experiences when interacting with Chinese shopkeepers (Park, 2012:9). June also has good business relationships with her regular customers that buy goods in bulk. She greets them with enthusiasm when they walk into the store. She can trust them as they always buy products from her and they do not hesitate to pay her in cash.<sup>32</sup> Customers also assist Brian by giving him advice on where to find certain products. For instance, one of his patrons drew a map to a store that sells a product that Brian was interested in. This indicates that businesses have also come to rely on the advice given by patrons in purchasing products that would suit consumer demands.

Customers not only give Brian advice about what they need in their daily lives but cultural information is also shared. For instance, Brian and Cho asked me about bags or boxes (that Hindu patrons enquire about) that are used to place sweets in as gifts for wedding guests. I gave them a few boxes and bags acquired at weddings that my family attended. This advice

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<sup>31</sup> Park (2012) conducted a survey based research into African Perceptions of Chinese in Africa. Three hundred questions were administrated, one hundred of which were administrated within the University of Johannesburg and two hundred across Johannesburg and Soweto. Qualitative interviews were also conducted.

<sup>32</sup> Goods in the store can only be purchased by cash; no credit cards can be used to buy products.

allowed them to purchase this stock which patrons bought in bulk. From observation, products sold in Chinese shops also cater to the religious needs of consumers. For instance, an array of statues and pictures of 'Gods' are sold, products required for the lobola marriage ceremony and blankets which are used in religious ceremonies are sold at cheaper prices compared to up market stores.

Although most customers are friendly towards the traders and good business partnerships can be established, the participants explain that that have experienced some difficulty with them. Brian indicates that there is a wide perception that Chinese cannot speak English. If people knew that they do speak English then "they will spend more time with you" to get to know them better.

**Brian:** Um, it's not much only thing like you try to open the shop they will try to ask you something, normally, sometimes they just say hello because most of the people they think Chinese people can't speak English, that is a problem. Maybe just say hello. Most of the people they meet you, they know you or don't know you clearly, they just say hello and if you try to talk to them they will spend the time with you.

Chinese traders do experience difficulties in communicating with their customers as they do not speak English fluently. Some of the traders interviewed do realise that since they cannot speak English adequately this limits the extent to which they can communicate with their customers.

Another problem experienced with clients is the perception that large discounts are guaranteed in Chinese shops. Chinese traders do sell most of their goods at cheap prices and they do give discounts to customers if they buy in bulk but some customers do request discounts and Chinese traders are forced to give those discounts as they are unable to handle aggressive customers. Cho explained to me that she does not know how to handle those customers who demand discounts and she gives in to their demands. June had the same problem. For instance, one of June's customers complained to June that the store opened too late, he then demanded that she give him a large discount. On this occasion June stood up for herself by explaining that she was also trying to make a profit and that she could not give him a greater discount. He still had a negative attitude towards her and inconsiderately sat on one of the chairs that the store was selling. I felt remorseful over June's predicament as there was nothing I could do to defend her. I did not want to get into an argument with the customer as he might not want to purchase at this store again.

Trust and surveillance of customers and workers is another problem experienced by Chinese traders. Most of the stores I visited have a television monitor and surveillance cameras around the store to observe the behaviour of patrons. They also have shop assistants who walk around the store from time to time to watch for suspicious customers. Traders note that customers steal from them especially during peak periods. I personally detested having to watch for shoplifters as it was assumed that everyone that entered the store could be a potential thief. Their trust towards people was limited due to the amount of theft experienced in their shops. June once mentioned that I should be extra vigilant as her sister's shop was recently robbed. They only noticed that a robbery had taken place when they rechecked the television monitor. The robbers operated in a group. One person acted as a lookout, while the other person distracted the shop assistant and another stole the goods. After hearing this I started taking monitoring June's store more seriously.

Most Chinese traders indicate that their customers are friendly and they are able to form good business relationships with them. However some of them have experienced difficulty in dealing with customers, theft that occurs within the store, and difficulty in negotiating discounts and inability to effectively communicate with their customers.

## **5.4 Opportunities and challenges faced by Chinese traders**

### **5.4.1 Opportunities**

Although Chinese traders face many social challenges they nevertheless have economic opportunities to trade in the country. Since South Africa has partnered with China (PRC) it has enabled many Chinese to enter into South Africa. Although the participants interviewed in the study had different careers in China, in South Africa they feel that trading is a good business opportunity for them which Brian explains:

**Brian:** Oh, opportunity. This one, I think for Chinese people is everyone thing, because in China can make many many things good things, it's not the same good quality, but its many, many good things. For the people who stay in over-sea to give them, selling the Chinese stock, for everyone Chinese people even the other countries people it's a good opportunity.

**S:** To sell?

**Brian:** They can get cheap stuff from China then they can sell to other country.

**S:** Okay, then that's a good opportunity?

**Brian:** I think so, I also know many businessmen, they also get the stock from China. They straight go to China and get the stock and come sell in South Africa.

Here Brian reveals why trading for Chinese is a good business opportunity and it also divulges an important aspect of trade within the global sphere. China's economy is structured around mass production which produces goods at low cost. This macro activity provides an opportunity for Chinese people as well as others for purchasing these goods at low prices and selling them to consumers for a profit. They can target areas, places or countries that have previously had little exposure to the Chinese market, such as African countries. When a large number of business people see this as an opportunity and pursue this opportunity by establishing their own business and getting their goods from China a macro-structure is created. The economic system of China and South Africa are able to give those who are keen, an opportunity to establish a business which emphasises the enabling aspect of structure; however the business person has to, by his/her own agency, establish his/her own business (Giddens, 1984; Fay, 1996). If a large number of people are able to establish businesses, as such in the case of South Africa, then another macro-structure is created. Thus one macro-structure (the mass production of goods in China) through individual agency is able to create another macro-structure (world-wide distribution and trading of these goods). Thus collective micro interaction and action is able to produce macro-structures (Coleman, 1990).

The successful distribution, supply and trade of goods to international markets are due to the social networks created. Participant's interaction and action through social networks form the foundation through which trade amongst Chinese takes place. Social networks are created through the agency of individuals who are able to supply information as to where there are good business opportunities and untapped markets. Through interaction social networks are constructed. Some of the participants interviewed came to South Africa through the recommendation of a friend or family member.

S: So why did you decide to come to South Africa?

**Brian:** Before come here, I am come here, it's my brother, he come here first then he go back to China then he go to Canada. He tell me, now the whole country is, how to say it, er improve,

S: Ja, ja improve.

**Brian:** and the people, most of the country, they have business of China they sell. We need to learn more, especially the English, so he got a chance to come to South Africa, to the language school in Cape Town, so he

(Interrupted by customer)

**Brian:** So he tell me maybe he can come South Africa, er to learn the language, to know the people, to know about the countries, that's why I come here. After 3 months I am thinking going back but I got a chance, a friend in Johannesburg tell me maybe there is some business this side. That's why I go to Johannesburg from Cape Town.

After that, after that, it's okay, but here to do the business it's not so, the big competition, it's not so hard like China. In China it's very hard because plenty people, maybe if business is okay and then maybe in a few months other people do the same, then competition, then fighting for the price. But here (inaudible) Chinese things they make in China are plenty and cheap so just get the stock come here and make money. That's why I stay here for 7 years already ... Then come here also find a friend of mine in that shop, he call me and say why not try and open a shop here. Then I come here. I don't know, maybe it's a chance, before I didn't open a shop, a business, just a find people who want anything then I help find it and sell it to them.

Through social networks friends and family are able to dispense information on business conditions and prospects in South Africa. This information influences the migrant to come to South Africa to trade. Once in South Africa the migrant may use the same social network or may rely on other social networks created to start the business and to find distribution or supply networks. This is evident in the case of Brian. His brother informed him of opportunities of education and business in South Africa. He was able to manoeuvre his way from Cape Town to Johannesburg as a friend told him of opportunities there which made him stay in the country for the past seven years. The cheap price of the goods also allowed him to make a profit. A friend in Durban also informed him that there was an opportunity to open businesses in the city. Brian had taken this chance and explored this opportunity by opening a business. It is through these networks that information about business opportunities is dispersed. Brian's relationship with his brother and friends has created dyadic<sup>33</sup> networks. This is diagrammatically expressed in Figure 1. Information is transmitted from family member to family member or friend to friend. The arrows indicate that information flows in both directions. In Brian's case his brother gave him the relevant information that allowed him to decide to come to South Africa and pursue business opportunities.



**Figure 1** Adapted from Prell (2012:135-136).

Social networks are able to create wider or broader macro-structures of business networks, distribution and supply networks and trade networks. A complex distribution and supply system/chain is also created through social networks. Brian explains that in 'China City' which is situated in Johannesburg, containers of products arrive daily. The products in these

<sup>33</sup> Dyads refers to the relationship between a pair of social actors (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982:15).

containers are distributed to various parts of South Africa, including Johannesburg where most of the participants I interviewed obtain their goods from, who in turn sell to local consumers. Distribution and trade networks are thus created.

**Brian:** China City is close to the stadium in Johannesburg. It is also like the China Mall but it's different. In China City most of the shops they do the wholesale and the China Mall they sell the wholesale and retail. There is a difference. But most of them is very busy, every day you can see the container come.

S: So in South Africa is there lots of competition between Chinese business people?

**Brian:** Ja, also here, also, but it's not so hard because the people get the stock from different place.

S: Where do you get your stock from?

**Brian:** Many places, from Johannesburg, from China. So depend on everything, when keep on going to sell these I would get it from China because more cheap...

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S: Where do you get all your products from?

**Lee:** China

S: Do you get it directly from China or

**Lee:** No actually we have a supplier in Joburg, and they get it from China, so we get it from Joburg, yah.

Brian, Lee and many other participants are able to tap into supply networks that are available to them to replenish their stock. Brian indicated that large quantities of products are cheaper to purchase directly from China than it is to obtain it from Johannesburg. Retail stores mainly purchase from Johannesburg, while wholesale stores mainly obtain their goods directly from China. The store I worked at obtained their goods directly from China. It was a wholesale store that also sold products to customers who did not want to buy bulk products. One of the shop assistants who worked at June's shop during the weekend also worked at the distribution centre during the week. She explained that the centre is always busy and that she sometimes had to assist ten customers simultaneously. Containers of toys go to the warehouse from where it is distributed to 'Chinese shops' and other major local stores. Sometimes a huge container arrives and it is sent directly to Johannesburg. From Johannesburg the contents of the container is distributed to Cape Town and Durban. She explained that "sometimes it goes to Joburg and comes back". Although goods arrive at Durban port, Johannesburg is seen as the central hub from where products are distributed.

Products obtained directly from China arriving at Durban port are sold at a lower value than those obtained from Johannesburg due to handling costs. Thus those traders who obtain



goods directly from China have an advantage as they can price their goods lower than those who acquire goods from Johannesburg. This means that they can make a higher profit as consumers would buy from a store with the lower price. Laribee (2008:361) also indicates that it is cheaper to obtain goods directly from China than to purchase them from within South Africa or Sub-Saharan Africa.

These goods are then sold to the consumers. From observation and during interviews it was noted that people (local and foreign nationals) are either able to start or continue having successful businesses due to the low price of goods offered in the Chinese wholesale and retail shops. There were many entrepreneurs buying goods in bulk to stock their own stores. This indicates that 'Chinese shops' promote business growth and entrepreneurship amongst South Africans and other foreigners. With South Africa experiencing conditions of high unemployment the low cost of goods sold at Chinese shops provides an opportunity for those who are unemployed to start their own business and earn an income. Chinese shops also contribute to the informal economy as many hawkers or vendors purchase smaller goods in bulk and sell it to the wider public and tourists who visit the area. Since Durban is noted as a tourist destination many hawkers buy goods such as small toys and novelty items such as key rings which are sold to tourists especially along the Durban beachfront area. The Chinese shop that I worked at was located close to a beachfront which allowed hawkers to easily buy goods, sell these goods and even return to purchase more or better products to sell to tourists. On one occasion I recall that hawkers bought more from Chinese shops during an international sporting event that took place in Durban. Since more consumers are likely to purchase paraphernalia during prestigious events that occur in the city this provides an opportunity for hawkers to sell goods and make an income. Therefore Chinese shops also contribute positively to the informal economy as it provides those without employment, especially those who are unskilled, the opportunity to earn a living.

Another opportunity, as indicated in the interview above with Brian, that Chinese migrants have in South Africa is the prospect of attaining knowledge by having the chance to go to various higher education institutions. Brian explains that his brother first came to Cape Town to study the English language. Since South Africa was seen to improve politically and economically it was an opportunity for Brian to study in the country as well.

S: What are some of the opportunities that you had, since you came to South Africa?

**Justin:** Before come here for study, um.

S: So what did you study?

**Justin:** Hotel and business management.

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S: Why did you decide to come to South Africa?

**Brittany:** Before just for studying.

S: What are you studying at the moment?

**Brittany:** I study account.

Justin and Brittany also came to South Africa as they saw an educational opportunity. Both of these participants were engaged in studying disciplines of business.

#### 5.4.2 Challenges

From all the interviews conducted Tracy was the only one to have experienced and spoken about xenophobia.

S: Is it good or bad, how do people treat you?

**Tracy:** With me, I'm fine. I'm a good person, not like the other Chinese. Um, they how you say, some Chinese they don't like to talk too much and they don't like Black people, especially Black people.

S: Why?

**Tracy:** Black people almost all stealing, even if you are nice to them, they just do that.

S: So some Chinese they don't like Black people.

**Tracy:** Almost.

S: Almost all. What about other people, White people, Indian people, Coloured people, what about them?

**Tracy:** Not talk too much.

S: Ok.

**Tracy:** You can't be friends with them, only some, because, er, South Africa also don't like Chinese.

S: Why do you think that?

**Tracy:** I don't know, they, I hear one Black guy, he is very bad, he say you Chinese you must all go back China. Now I told him if we all go back China you don't have food to eat even, you will die soon. You see now everything come from China. We must be friendly. Some people they don't understand this. They thinking we come to your country its like, I don't know how to explain it, they just thinking like that. But because of us come here, now your country is getting nicely and many things. You know China is a very strong country, we have everything so we bring then you people also have everything.

Tracy describes herself as being "a good person" in relation to other Chinese who find South Africans troublesome. Tracy indicates that South Africans and Chinese mutually exhibit animosity towards each other. The reason indicated by Tracy as to why Chinese dislike

'Black' people is due to the crimes, such as stealing, committed by "them", where 'black' people are stereotyped as thieves. Due to this they are likely to distrust people from any other 'race' groups. Due to the negative actions taken against them by South Africans a negative image is created which affects how they view South Africans. Tracy states that "you can't be friends with them" indicating that South Africans cannot be trusted. This gives an indication of how she views South Africans. Her view of South Africans is in relation to the negativity she experienced. The negativity South Africans exhibit towards Chinese might be brought about due to the Chinese establishing businesses in the country. In times of high unemployment the local population might be displeased at their circumstance and are likely to lash out on foreign businesses who they feel are stealing employment opportunities and resources from them or they are angered by foreigners being in a better economic position in relation to them (Crush, 2000; Vale, 2002; Nyar, 2001). Alden (2007:85) states that "many Africans are pointing out the possibility that the influx of Chinese migrants, coupled with the negative impact of employment practices and other acts viewed as discriminatory by local people could spark acts of xenophobia and racism" as seen in Lesotho in 1990. However, in South Africa xenophobia is directed towards African foreigners with rare cases of discrimination against Chinese or Europeans (Nyar, 2001).

Tracy reiterates that 'China' is trying to assist South Africa by bringing affordable products to the country and without their help many South Africans would not be able to afford basic necessities provided by the Chinese at inexpensive prices. Tracy goes on to say that both sides need to be friendly in order to cooperate. It is therefore a challenge for her to live in a country that she views as prejudiced against Chinese.

Another challenge, as indicated above, is the issue of crime against the Chinese within their businesses and social environment. Some of the Chinese shopkeepers man the till themselves in fear of their workers stealing from them. Most Chinese shops I have entered either have someone to watch out for theft or they have surveillance cameras to monitor the behaviour of customers. This is taken very seriously by the Chinese traders. This leads to distrust of customers and people in general as they have to be more watchful and attentive of people around them. From observation it can be noted that respondents keep to themselves and only have basic interactions with their customers and workers. Issues of crime, distrust and prejudice prevent the Chinese from actively socializing with South Africans.

Not many Chinese have South African friends. This may also be due to the language barrier that exists. Participants indicate that it is a challenge to communicate with people and customers as they do not have adequate knowledge of the local languages spoken. For instance, although June speaks English she still argues that she cannot fully express herself or communicate on a deeper level with South Africans.

**June:** Um, like the young people, like another uncle his daughter born in South Africa so she is South African Chinese, so the language is okay, but like her father is lived in South Africa for twenty years but he can understand but for speak, speaking still got some problems. And like, me, only for easy, like talking, er, the weather, like the price it's ok but something else, sometime the video in the car.

S: The radio.

**June:** The radio in the car, sometimes it's difficult for me to understand.

It is a challenge for Chinese to understand the culture and society in which they live in as they do not understand the language spoken. It is also difficult to effectively conduct their business if they cannot communicate with their customers. Participants also indicate that the South African police and government also give them problems. Tracy indicates that government officials always come to her store and ask if she has followed the product regulations and if she and her workers have the correct documentation to be in South Africa. This frustrates her as this occurs on a regular basis.

**Tracy:** Yah, you must have money and here is not easy for shop, because every day from every place government many different place will come and check you selling, you selling wrong or anybody wrong here.

S: So the government, people from the government came to the shop then.

**Tracy:** Yah, it's many times. Its checking everything, do you have original passport are your worker have passport are you selling anything like name brands like do you have licence to selling whatever, it's too much bother.

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**Justin:** And sometime the police do something not right.

S: The police.

**Justin:** Um.

S: Like what sort of things do the police do?

**Justin:** For example, you see, the way you running business or what. Sometime the police is for customer but they say it's our fault. But not our fault. For example, I ask you something, if you buy the cup from the shop, Checkers or what, you pay alright, you just go outside, you broke it, you come here and exchange, they give you or not?

S: No.

**Justin:** No, but the police say you must give. (Inaudible) So this is nonsense. Even if the people stealing, you catch them and this security is for kick him nicely but the police come back and say that security is wrong. Lock up security, go away. So it was

me making the security don't like the people, don't like catch the criminals. So you see that is problem for the South Africa.

Although the Chinese do have a great economic opportunity to conduct business in South Africa as well as having an opportunity to study there are also some social barriers that they face. Issues of crime, trust, the enforcement of proper law by police and language hamper their business activities.

### **5.5 Chinese traders adapting to South Africa**

There are a number of factors such as ability to speak the local language, networks, experiences of being in South Africa and length of time that either assists or hampers the migrant's ability to adapt. I argue that a combination of factors must be taken into consideration in order to determine whether individuals are able to adapt to living in South Africa.

An important aspect in having the ability to adapt to the society that they inhabit is the social network structure that surrounds the individual. The more close contacts of friends and family the more comfortable people feel in their host environment. The social network supports people. For instance, Tracy who lived with her sister and brother-in-law for three and a half years in Johannesburg enjoyed their support and even formed friendships with local South African people. When she moved to Durban she experienced difficulty as she lived alone with her infant and was lonely. She did not have much companionship or friends that she could socialise with. In comparison June's husband had brought her to South Africa. She had been here for a year and was getting used to her social situation faster because her husband gave her support and advice. Although they live separately they share a home with other relatives. This not only saves on living costs but she had family and friends nearby who she could rely on and socialise with. For instance they borrow Chinese films from each other and were able to discuss problems and ascertain solutions, and discuss aspects of living in Durban. It made living in South Africa much easier as she has a strong support network. Brian and his wife also share a flat with his friend who owns a business around the same area as he does. Brian's friend also assisted him in establishing the business by giving him advice on what products to purchase, how to run the store, where to find supply networks and how to communicate with customers. Through his friends' support Brian was able to establish and

run his business. Therefore having a social network to assist would make adapting to Durban and trading in the city much easier.

Since English is the lingua franca in South Africa it is imperative for Chinese migrants to be able to speak the language as it would assist them to not only understand their customers but will also help in socialising and communicating with the local people (De Klerk, 1996). Learning to communicate with the locals would help in creating friendships. Many participants complained about the loneliness experienced and the inability to make friends as their English language ability is limited. Creating friendships with local people would help them to understand aspects of the local culture that might be difficult to understand. It would therefore make it much easier to adapt to South Africa as they have a source of local information. If they are able to understand the people they live amongst and trade with it would be easier to adapt. They will be able to understand the society better through the local media by reading newspapers or watching the news or local television programmes and so be able to understand the social environment in which they live. At the moment they read a Chinese newspaper that mostly gives information on Chinese people living in Africa and not the actual events of the country itself. For Brian speaking English is an advantage as he is able to have discussions with clients and able to have friendships with local people who give him information relating to the events and culture of the society.

S: So how is your interaction with South Africans?

**Brian:** Um, you know important is language and after we can learn the language try to talk with people, so most of the people is easy, they friendly you can talk to them, they like to help you, like to talk to you and then you can know many things. But, er, what I say in South Africa it's dangerous you can't go anywhere you want it's how you say it, but anyway here, you want to communicate with the people, they like to talk to help you, to teach you, its nothing like Chinese culture.

**Brian:** You know in China there is, er, to do the business the competition is very hard so if you open the shop the other people also open the shop, if you don't know each other, they won't tell you many things. You want to know these things you buying and how much it is, they won't tell you and then they think, ah, you know something and buy something to do competition with me. They keep quiet. But here most of the shops they help you.

S: Even most South African shops or most Chinese shops?

**Brian:** Er, no Chinese shops, South African shops.

Language is also important in conducting effective business. Brian remarks that if the language is learnt then they would be able to communicate with other local traders who are very open to assisting them. Brian also indicated that when he was in Johannesburg he had

decided to change his name from a Chinese name to an English name so that people who find his name easier to remember. It was his way of integrating into society.

The migrants' experience within the host country is also a determining factor as to whether they are able to adapt to the society. For instance both Tracy and Brian have had negative experiences in Johannesburg. They were both victims of crime and have come to Durban to escape being victimised again. Although Brian has managed to look past the incident and have a positive view of his life in Durban, Tracy is still uncomfortable with living in Durban. The experience and perception of crime have constrained the participants from socialising with local people. It is difficult to trust people when they have experienced something that is life threatening. Since the Chinese traders are busy spending most of their time working in order for their business to prosper they do not have much time for themselves or to socialise, this accompanied by issues of crime and distrust, and language, prevents the Chinese migrants from effectively adapting to South Africa and building good relationships with local people.

For those who have had positive experiences they have a positive outlook of life in Durban. Emily for instance, has her whole family living and trading in South Africa. She even goes to church where she socialises with local people. Being part of an institution has allowed her to be more accepting of her life in South Africa. The Chinese people who have lived in Durban for a longer period of time also feel comfortable and have adapted to how the society works and have come to understand aspects of the local culture.

Although Brian had experienced crime his outlook of life is more positive as he has grown accustomed to living in Durban which he finds to be friendlier than Johannesburg. Through Brian's agency he is able to look past the negativity and experience positive aspects of the society. This might be attributed to Brian having a strong social network to rely on. Brian has also lived in KwaZulu-Natal for a number of years and has not experienced crime in the province. Social networks combined with years lived in Durban, positive experiences and the ability to understand the language has enabled him to look past negative events and foster a positive view with regard to living in Durban.

## 5.6 The future of Chinese in South Africa

The future of Chinese in South Africa is unpredictable but there are indications as to what may be their future position considering all the evidence gathered in this study. The Chinese may continue to live and work in South Africa if macro structures within the country remain intact and stable. Both the political and economic conditions within South Africa and the country's relationship with China are important in understanding the future of the recent Chinese migrants within the country. If South Africa is both politically and economically secure then the Chinese would continue to work in the country for an extended period of time. One participant explains that he would leave the country if there is any political unrest.

**Justin:** Future plans is for (inaudible) because if the South Africa still peaceful then we be keep here long time, if something happen like ... we become to the Zimbabwe, I will be leaving.

If they are unable to make a profit this might also persuade them to leave especially if their level of English is low. Justin indicated that before he opened his business he was employed in various occupations such as a waiter in a restaurant, a chef and a shop manager. His ability to speak English and his credentials from a South African educational institution enabled him to obtain employment in a number of fields. Those with limited skills in South Africa may find it difficult to pursue a different career path if the economy of the country becomes unstable or if the competition between traders becomes so high that they are unable to turn over a profit.

Despite worries over crime China has invested significantly in South Africa. The Edge Institute database of FDI reports that there are 47 Chinese firms in South Africa across different sectors, 25 of which are state owned (Hazelhurst, 2011:19). Reports indicate that 11 of the firms are in the construction and infrastructure industry while only 6 was in the mining industry indicating that investment is not solely directed towards the extraction of resources but rather a large proportion goes towards the development of South Africa itself (Hazelhurst, 2011:19). Other sectors with five or more firms include the automobile, electrical machinery and financial sectors (Hazelhurst, 2011:19). In 2010 President Zuma with 13 ministers and a 370 business delegation visited China in order to sign a comprehensive strategic partnership to increase economic ties between the two countries (Hazelhurst, 2010:20). In 2011 a 20 member Chinese business delegation visited South Africa in order to hold discussions with



South African firms they were interested in working with (Haper, 2011:2). This indicates that both China and South Africa are keen to do business with each other which points to future co-operation and the fostering of more business relationships between the two countries. This suggests that China will likely to be involved in the South Africa economy in the future. With partnerships and collaboration between South African and Chinese government and businesses being established, Chinese citizens are more likely to feel secure to trade in South Africa for the long run.

Micro conditions such as extreme level of xenophobia or the increased level of crime towards the Chinese may also trigger the movement of Chinese and their businesses away from South Africa. In these cases if the South African government feels that the Chinese, their products, their businesses and the political cooperation of the Chinese government are important for the economic growth of the country, then necessary intervention would be needed to curb negativity towards the Chinese. In addition if South Africa plans to continue having economic and political relations with China then she would need to protect the Chinese migrants living in South Africa.

Whether the Chinese fully integrate within South African society will not only depend on macro conditions but also the acceptance of Chinese by South Africans. Presently the Chinese rely on their social networks for establishing their business and for socializing. Having a network cocoons them from having to extensively socialize with South Africans. However as in the case of Brian, who has and is still continuing to find niche markets for his products, he relies on local consumer taste to direct his purchases. By socializing and communicating with the locals he is able to gain an idea of the products that consumers would readily purchase and he can thus make a profit by listening to the information given to him. This indicates that Chinese business people would come to also rely on the information given by locals, especially in times of high competition, in order for their business to be successful. Therefore the Chinese would have to socialise and become familiar with the culture of the people who they sell to. Although speaking to their South African shop assistants would assist them in making purchasing decisions, many have come to realise that in South Africa, especially Durban, there is a diversity of people who engage in a variety of cultural and religious practices, and their shop assistants may not be aware of certain customs and practices. The Chinese trader might have to cater for that need and in order to do so they need to communicate with the South African people.

In order to communicate effectively the Chinese would have to gain more knowledge of the local languages especially English which is the language of business and politics used in the country. Blumer indicates that “if there is confusion or misunderstanding along the lines of meaning communication is ineffective and interaction is impeded”. Thus in order to effectively communicate the English language (and the meanings explicit within the language) needs to be understood. To get to know the South African people, language seems like the ultimate barrier preventing Chinese and South African from effectively socializing. The participants that I interviewed had a reasonable grasp of the English language and that enabled me to get an understanding of their lives in South Africa. I was able to assist June with difficult customers or with customer requests. I was able to assist Brian in understanding aspects of the Hindu religion. I was able to sympathize with Tracy on her issues of loneliness in a new place. Through communicating with them not only cultural knowledge is transmitted but friendships also develop. This is important if Chinese are to fully integrate into South African society. But the need to communicate, in the case of South Africa, is stimulated by economic factors on the part of Chinese. They need to communicate in order to gain more business by attracting customers into their shop or by learning about cultural products and the preferences of the South African consumer. At the moment where there is low competition for consumer markets in Durban and where a variety of things can be sold, the Chinese are able to sell their products without having too much consideration for the needs of the public. In the future this could change.

The Chinese migrants in South Africa are able to get by, by using the social networks available. However in times of need such as in case of accident or natural disasters, the need to speak a local language is imperative. Brian, who could speak English, was able to assist his and his friend’s family by contacting a lawyer when they felt the agent who leased out the apartment to them was taking advantage of them. His ability to speak English gave him more agency to gain much needed outside help.

If macro and micro aspects of the South African society remain stable there is a firm likelihood that the Chinese would stay in South Africa for an extended period of time. The longer they stay in South Africa the more probability that they may adapt and even integrate into society. In the case of Chinese in Durban, if they continue to receive cordial treatment, as noted in previous sections, and if their businesses prosper then there is a greater chance of

them staying in South Africa. Castles (2000:278) also points out that “migration almost inevitably leads to settlement of a certain proportion of the migrants” which is due to the “social nature of the migration process sustained by the informal networks”. The networks created by Chinese migrants give them support so that they will be able to remain in the country for longer periods of time which could result in settlement. A recent study on Chinese traders, in five African countries including South Africa, revealed that traders lived in South Africa for an average of nine years despite citing crime and corruption as their biggest obstacles in conducting business (McNamee et al, 2012). One female participant in that study stated that “The place you fought a battle is the place where your home is” as an explanation for making Johannesburg her home (McNamee et al, 2012:31). Thus despite certain obstacles traders in Johannesburg are starting to build a ‘home’ in that province.

In addition if their children grow up and attend South African schools there is an increased chance that they would adapt a South African lifestyle and become citizens of the country. If this occurs then their status group will move from them being migrants to citizens of the country which will greatly change the population dynamics of the country. The presence of Chinese in South Africa already has impacted the economy of South Africa. The social and cultural presence of Chinese is slowly beginning to show within South African society. The Indian migrants who landed on the shores of South Africa a hundred and fifty years ago had no inclination that the future of Durban would comprise a large number of their descendants. They have endured deplorable social and political conditions however they managed to make South Africa their home. The same could be said for the descendants of the South African Born Chinese who also endured trying conditions in the country but also managed to find a home here. With social, political and economic systems within South Africa relatively stable the present group of Chinese migrants would have to choose for themselves if they wish to make South Africa their home.

## CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

This study focused on the lives of the Chinese migrant traders in the city of Durban. The key objective of this research was to understand how the migrants adapt socially and economically to trading and living in Durban. In order to achieve this objective, interviews and participant observation was conducted amongst participants in trading zones of the CBD. Symbolic interactionism was the key theory used in analysing participant's responses which provided the means through which the research questions could be answered.

The research conducted indicated that the migrant's main objective is to accumulate wealth. Their social and economic activities thus revolve around trading in order to prosper and build a life for themselves. With attention primarily given to trading their social activity is limited to individual pursuits (such as watching movies) as opposed to face-to-face activities with other Chinese, South Africans or other foreign nationals. An additional reason for the lack of socialisation is the fear of crime. The perception of being victims of crime is so embedded in their minds that it affects how they carry out their daily activities. They avoid social contact with locals, avoid participating in social activities and they constantly monitor their stores. Therefore social interaction between migrants, South Africans and African foreigners primarily occur within the 'Chinese shops'. Social interaction occurs between Chinese employers and workers who are either South African or are from another country in Africa. Although the working conditions is based on casualisation of labour in all Chinese stores, the face-to-face interactions between Chinese traders and their employees is based on how the employee treats his/her workers. Since the employer stands in a position of authority to the worker, s/he has the power to influence the behaviour of the worker. Social interaction between traders and employees cannot be generalised. This means that each trader would form different interactions and thus different relationships with their workers. Some traders may be distant towards their workers, while others favour a more friendly approach. In this study the interaction between the Chinese traders and customers tend to be friendly with customers sharing cultural and business information with traders, however traders occasionally experience difficulty with customers who demand large discounts and there are incidences of theft. It could thus be said that for Chinese traders their shops act as a window through which they could experience the larger cultural and social milieu. With a diversity of

peoples entering their shop on a daily basis they are able to socially interact with them and share cultural information allowing them to capture glimpses of society at large.

This research also reveals that Chinese migrants actively form social networks in order to establish or grow their business. Social networks of family and friends enable migrants to receive and dispense information on business conditions and potential prospects. Business networks of distribution, supply and trade networks are also created by migrants who use these networks to obtain goods at the cheapest price in order to make a profit. These networks are created and sustained by the Chinese migrants as they continuously invite other migrants into the network, growing the network and increasing trade and business information. The presence of these networks gives migrants an opportunity to start a business. These networks also contribute to form larger macro-structures.

A combination of factors that have allowed for migrants to adapt to South Africa was also discussed. The ability to speak English, the social networks present, migrant's positive experiences in the host country and duration of stay in the host country are taken into consideration in understanding how migrants come to adapt in South Africa. Conversely the lack of social networks, the inability to speak English and negative experiences hampers migrants becoming accustomed to the host society.

The future of Chinese migrants in South Africa was also considered. It was noted that both macro structural conditions and micro interactions should be examined in determining whether migrants would prolong their stay in South Africa. If political and economic conditions are stable and favourable advancing business growth, the chances of Chinese staying in South Africa for a longer period of time increases. The social interaction that the migrants have with the host society also plays a role in understanding the future of migrants in the country. The Chinese migrants in this study share a satisfactory view of life in South Africa citing crime, their limited knowledge of English and their busy lifestyle as their primary obstacles in interacting with locals. If the recent migrants allow their children to attend South African schools, their children may become socialised within the society allowing them to be more knowledgeable and acclimatised to living in South Africa. If this occurs then these children would form a gateway through which their parents are also able to firmly establish themselves in the country. This may also lead to them living in South Africa

for a longer period of time or even becoming citizens of the country which would have further social, cultural and political implications.

The recent Chinese migrants in South Africa are gradually making inroads into the South African society which can be seen when the country's media shifts its focus from only reporting on trade and investment negotiations between the two countries to covering stories on the activities of Chinese nationals within the country. Media reports on Chinese migrants indicate that they are now visible enough to be mentioned and that their presence in South Africa is having an impact on the society. A case in point could be made with a recent news article on the alleged murder and rape of a female Chinese migrant by another Chinese migrant. The deceased had fallen to her death from the fifth-floor flat at 'The Towers' situated in Pinetown, Durban. The accused was assassinated outside the Pinetown Magistrate's Court when two armed men sped off after firing from the vehicle. The police and "a source close to the local Chinese community"<sup>34</sup> believe the shooters were part of the Triad or Chinese Mafia. The report also provides various views of the alleged murder and assassination from the fourteen Chinese families' residing in 'The Towers', the family of the victim and the accused, as well as the lawyers of both parties (Naidoo, 2012). This indicates that through the media, broader South African society, will gain insight into Chinese migrants as more than 'just traders'. For instance, it was relatively unknown that the Triad had extended into South Africa and that 'The Towers' housed fourteen Chinese families. The newspaper article also revealed certain Chinese traditional elements that are unknown to the wider South African public. As a result, reportage in the media will soon produce an image of a 'Chinese community' in South Africa.

### **6.1 Recommendations for further research**

This research presents a starting point for further study into the recent Chinese migrants to South Africa. Continuing from this research, a quantitative study of social networks (with the application of social network theory to indicate the extent and intensity of these networks) could be examined. A quantitative study could include looking at the demographics of the Chinese migrants coming to South Africa with the intention of examining certain patterns such as which migrants are most likely to come to South Africa: would they be younger or

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<sup>34</sup> The newspaper article had described the Chinese migrants as the local Chinese community; previously a local Chinese community was unheard of in Durban.

older, are more males likely to come to South Africa than females and why, what is their social position in China and how do they now perceive their social position to be in South Africa. Further ethnographic study could be conducted. For instance, if a researcher can come into contact with a gatekeeper a larger set of dynamics of Chinese lifestyle within South African could be examined. The researcher could board with a Chinese family to understand Chinese family dynamics within the South African environment. Ethnographic studies of Chinese stores could also be done at various locations within South Africa. Researchers could also examine public perceptions of Chinese migrants, enquire of local businesses as to what their perceptions of Chinese people are and whether they are benefiting from Chinese commodities or are their businesses struggling in the face of Chinese imports. Longitudinal studies could be done into examining the progression or deterioration of Chinese shops or Chinese migrant experiences can be investigated so as to ascertain the developments in their lives, whether they return home, become integrated within the South African society, move to another country or province or move back and forth between host country and home country. Longitudinal studies of public perceptions of the Chinese migrants could also be investigated. Partnerships, merges and even start up ventures between South Africans and Chinese could be examined. In addition, South African's living, working, studying or establishing businesses in China could be another possible area of study.

## **6.2 Summary**

This research points out that the recent Chinese migrant traders through their social and business networks have established a foot hold in living and trading in South Africa, specifically in the city of Durban. Although their social interactions with South Africans are limited, their 'Chinese shops' serve as spaces through which they experience wider South African society. Their experiences and knowledge of broader society is therefore limited to the people they come into contact with in these trading zones. Based on this limited interaction, perceptions of South Africans and the different 'race' groups that inhabit South Africa are formed.

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