

Abdoul Hameth BA et al., *Sub-Saharanans in China versus Chinese in Africa: vectors of cultural and economic relations of a new kind? A case-study of two metropolises: Guangzhou (China) and Dakar (Senegal)*

Sub-Saharanans in China versus Chinese in Africa: vectors of cultural and economic relations of a new kind? A case-study of two metropolises: Guangzhou (China) and Dakar (Senegal)

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Abstract: *The migration of Africans towards Asia started in the late 1990s and China is one of their main destinations. It is estimated that there are 500,000 immigrants of sub-Saharan origin in China (this represents half of the Chinese in Africa), and Guangzhou (Canton) is the Chinese city which hosts the largest number of them. A very dynamic commercial city, with nearly 15 million inhabitants. It is the administrative capital of Guangdong province, China's leading economic region. This region alone produces 10% of China's GDP. Since the early 2000s, it has been attracting businessmen and women from various countries: 200,000 Africans pass through Canton every year (Le monde, 2016) and 1,500 companies from this province are present in Africa. China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) facilitated its integration into the world economy and its opening. It is in this context that the number of Chinese (retail traders, entrepreneurs in the sector of public works) started increasing in Africa, where they currently account for 1 million persons. This is likely the effect of the expansion of China-Africa economic and cultural cooperation. Already in 2006, during the 3rd forum on China-Africa cooperation in Beijing, 48 African heads of state or of*

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government were invited to Beijing. Today, Africa is China's second investment destination, notably in the sectors of transport, energy and sanitation facilities. The goal of this contribution is to examine the situation of sub-Saharan Africans in Guangzhou and that of the Chinese diaspora in Dakar (Senegal), since these two movements are concurrent and started in the early 2000s. On the one hand, we have examined what is happening in Guangzhou: the evolution of the commercial activities carried out by African businesswomen and men and their profiles, focusing on a recent development. On the other hand, this contribution aims to question the economic, social and even cultural consequences of the Chinese presence in Africa and, on the opposite end, the impacts of Sub-Saharan presence in China. The analyses we propose here are based on surveys and field observations carried out jointly in China and Senegal between the years 2016 and 2020.

Keys words: migration, China, Senegal, cooperation, cultural, association, citizenship, businessman, trader.

The aim of this contribution is to examine the situation of sub-Saharan Africans in Guangzhou and that of the Chinese diaspora in Dakar (Senegal), since these two movements are concurrent and started in the early 2000s.

Then it will focus more specifically on the evolution of business activities carried out by African and Chinese businessmen and finally analyze the effects of institutional economic cooperation policies between China and Senegal.

The analyses we propose here are based on surveys and field observations carried out jointly in China and Senegal between the years 2016 and 2020.

The methodological approach was first based on direct observation of African activities and places of residence in Chinese urban spaces, then completed by reading the work of Chinese geographers (Li et alii 2009), articles from magazines (Jeune Afrique), newspapers (Liberation, Le monde, le monde diplomatique) and Tv5 monde broadcasts on Africans in China. Many authors use the term "chocolate city" or "Little Africa" to describe the urban enclaves of Canton occupied by blacks from

Africa. Secondly, our methodology involved surveys of the African associative network in China: interviews based on semi-open questionnaires were submitted to businessmen and women from different African countries and to African consular and diplomatic authorities in China. This method allowed us to compare the differentiated strategies of Africans in relation to their country of origin.

The survey carried out in China in 2016 and then in 2018 took place in the cities of Guangzhou, Wuhan and Beijing. The interviews conducted in the Xia Bei shopping street and the Yulong Market shopping mall in Guangzhou reveal the presence of a diversity of sub-Saharan nationalities. We interviewed 30 men and women from different countries such as Togo, Sudan, Kenya, Senegal, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, Mali, Guinea, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Ivory Coast. Nigerian nationals were among the first arrivals and are the most numerous of Sub-Saharanans. We should recall that Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa with 200 million inhabitants and that it has a large class of businessmen and benefits from a strategic geographical position. It is an important “commercial” hub in Africa. Containers filled with diverse and varied goods (cars, electronic equipment or household appliances, etc.) from China arrive at the seaport of Lagos (the economic capital of Nigeria) and are shipped to landlocked countries located within the continent, such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

The enhancement of the Chinese presence in Africa

China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) facilitated its integration into the world economy and its opening. It is in this context that the number of Chinese (retail traders, entrepreneurs in the sector of public works) started increasing in Africa, where they currently account for 1 million persons. This is likely the effect of the expansion of China-Africa economic and cultural cooperation. Already in 2006, during the 3rd forum on

China-Africa cooperation in Beijing, 48 African heads of state or of government were invited to Beijing. Today, Africa is China's second investment destination, notably in the sectors of transport, energy and sanitation facilities. China-Africa cooperation goes back to the early 1970s, with the presence of Chinese agronomists in some African countries. This was the case in Senegal, especially in regions suitable for rice production (Casamance, Senegal river valley), but also with the presence of Chinese doctors in some hospitals in large towns (Thiès, Dakar). These Chinese volunteers transmitted their knowledge (Chinese medicine) and their rice production techniques to Senegalese peasants. After France, China is the second economic partner of Senegal. The Senegalese president Mr. Sall paid three official visits to his Chinese homologue Xi Jinping, and in 2018 the latter went to Senegal during his diplomatic tour in Africa.

The Chinese first settled in the southern and eastern countries of the continent, then in western and central Africa. They are present in almost every sub-Saharan country, though they are unequally distributed. In the southern part of Africa, they are mainly in South Africa; in central Africa, they are mainly in Cameroon. In East Africa, they are mainly in Sudan; in west Africa, Senegal is among the privileged destinations of the Chinese. As it is often the case, the first migrants settled in economic towns that offered a lot of opportunities to develop a profitable activity. It is not surprising to meet Chinese in the towns of Johannesburg, Douala, Lagos, Khartoum, Bamako or Dakar. They set up shop on busy or shopping streets in these economic capitals and very quickly become serious competitors for local merchants.

China new destination for African business people

The number of Africans living outside of their country of origin is assessed at 32 million, that is to say 13.4% of the migrant population in the world. These African migrants are unequally distributed: 51% of them live inside the African continent, 49% live

on other continents, including 4.1% in Asia (UN and IMO, 2015). The migration of Africans towards Asia started in the late 1990s and China is one of their main destinations.

It is estimated that there are 500,000 immigrants of sub-Saharan origin in China (this represents half of the Chinese in Africa), and Guangzhou (Canton) is the Chinese city which hosts the largest number of them. A very dynamic commercial city, with nearly 15 million inhabitants, it is the third most populous city in China after Shanghai and Beijing, and traditionally turned towards the South Seas. It is the administrative capital of Guangdong province, China's leading economic region. This region alone produces 10% of China's GDP. Since the early 2000s, it has been attracting businessmen and businesswomen from various countries: 200,000 Africans pass through Canton every year (Le monde, 2016) and 1,500 companies from this province are present in Africa.

African migrants or business people passing through China?

African immigration to China is recent compared to African immigration to Europe. The first studies carried out by French and foreign researchers primarily describe the types of commercial activities (Bertoncello and Bredeloup, 2006; Onora, 2011) and the settlement strategies (Bodomo, 2012, 2013, 2015, Li, 2009).

The number of Sub-Saharanans present in China varies according to nationality. Access to recent and reliable statistical data remains difficult, but Nigerians, Malians, Guineans and Ghanaians are the four sub-Saharan nationalities which are most represented in Canton. Nigerians, who number 10,000, are at the top of the list (Liberation, 2013). Each sub-Saharan community in China develops a strategy in response to China's immigration policy, which is constantly changing but still very rigid.

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Top map: More than 32 million African migrants in the world, or about 13.4% of migrations

Number of African migrants in the world in 2015, in millions

Bottom map: South Africa, Ivory Coast and Nigeria are the first three destinations in Africa

Number of immigrants per country in 2015

The interviews reveal that Sub-Saharan activities in China are mainly in the sector of commerce. Sub-Saharan traders referred to as businessmen or businesswomen buy “Chinese” products and ship them to Africa. These traders, in reference to Bodomo (2015), are specialized in the export of various goods (electronics, clothing, agricultural equipment, mobile phones, medical equipment, pharmaceutical products, etc.) made in China. The interviews with traders helped to identify the profile of African immigrants and the sectors in which they work. The majority (95%) of the traders interviewed are men under the age of 50. They all attended French or Koranic schools. Some had lived in neighbouring countries or on other continents (Europe, Africa, Oceania) before arriving in China. Among the traders are former students who attended Chinese universities. Indeed, the reinforcement of the China-Africa cooperation policy has led to an increase in the number of African students in China. From 24 students in 1954, China counted 61,000 students in 2018, including 40,000 in Guangdong province. Wuhan is also a university town with many African students. We observe two types of businessmen. The first concerns those with a long-term visa, who represent an import-export company whose headquarters is in Africa and which has a branch office in China.¹ In fact, the businessman manages a branch

¹The business cards of the traders we met indicate the activities of their companies and we notice that they bear the same terms, such as DAROU MBAYE TRADING CO. LTD. TERANGA TRADING CO, LTD. MALI MULTIFUNCTIONAL TRANSPORT CENTER CORPORATION GUANGZHOU OFFICE. ETS THIAM BUSINESS- King of trade Logistic. SOFIA INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

office specialized in the purchase, import and export of a wide variety of goods from China to Africa and vice versa. The quantity of products shipped varies. It can be an order of two mobile phones, a box of medicine (tablets), dozens or even hundreds of boxes of jeans, or heavy agricultural equipment. The authorization to establish a branch office involves very strict conditions, such as checking the company representative's state of health. The latter is subjected to medical tests and the issuance of the installation permit depends on the results. The second type corresponds to men and women who come for a short stay (one week, two weeks or a little more) in order to buy goods – businessmen who are in transit. The nature of the goods and the quest for the cheapest price may oblige the businessman or woman to visit many Chinese cities. Indeed, some cities specialize in the manufacture of furniture, others in the manufacture of bathroom tiles or agricultural equipment, and offer very good prices. Once the purchase is made, the businessman entrusts the shipping of the products from China to Africa to a trader, preferably an African one. After that, he returns to his country of origin and awaits delivery. Our surveys show that some traders make two, three or even four short stays a year when they have a multiple-entry visa. Traders from the same country sometimes make the journey together, sharing the same hotel room, the same rental car for shopping, as well as the costs of shipping to Africa, etc. in order to reduce the expenses of accommodation in China. This pooling of resources is typical of African businessmen or businesswomen operating in China.

Highly competitive Chinese and Senegalese business markets

Some partnerships do exist between Chinese and African businessmen, but our surveys show that they are often short-lived and asymmetrical. Indeed, segregation is common and worsened by a lack of Chinese policy regarding the economic integration of

COMPAGNY (Import-Export) SYLLA and BROTHERS FREIGHT AND TRANSPORT AGENCY, and so on.

foreigners, especially those from Africa. One example is that Africans can only engage in gainful employment in the commercial sector. Only expatriate Africans, i.e. those recruited by foreign companies present in China, such as the French company “Orange”, or high-level professional athletes are allowed to work outside the commercial sector. *Some Africans set up business with the Chinese in a ‘discreet manner’. But when business goes well, the Chinese can break the contract and resume the activity on their own account; the African is left without rights and does not dare complain to the Chinese authorities because he has no chance of winning* (2016 interview with a businessman who has been in China for 10 years). It is very difficult for African traders running clothing shops to maintain their activities as they face stiff competition from Chinese traders. *When we start selling a product that is highly appreciated by Africans in transit, Chinese traders imitate us and ‘slash’ the prices. It is therefore difficult to maintain an activity in these conditions,* says a Guinean who owns a jeans shop in a commercial hall located on Xia Bei Street, a popular place for African businessmen and businesswomen (see photo). Africans engage in other gainful employment, but on an informal basis. This is in the form of guide and interpretation services offered by African students in China.

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An African businessman negotiating the price of a mobile phone in a phone shop Guangzhou, 2016, photo by Abdoul H. Ba

They know the cities and help businessmen to travel and to bargain for goods with Chinese wholesalers. As for African women, they cook and sell African dishes that are usually delivered to the homes of businessmen who are on a short-term visit. Although this catering activity is illegal, it is quite successful, as the demand is high, and all the ingredients required are available in Chinese markets thanks to the importation of African products.

African traders in China control their imports and exports. They respond to orders from African traders - whether wholesalers or semi-wholesalers - whose shops or hardware stores are located in Africa. Sometimes these same traders have their own shops in different African cities that they stock regularly (Ba, 2019).

The future of these businessmen and women depends on Chinese migration policies that regulate their economic activities in a decisive way. Moreover, the Chinese state seems unwilling to propose a social and cultural integration policy for Africans present in China². To compensate, African communities organize themselves into associations based on various criteria such as country of origin, religion, and language, and collaborate with the consular and diplomatic authorities of their country of origin to carry out social and cultural actions and investment operations in their home countries.

A new kind of south-south relationship that brings changes

The role of Senegalese migrants in China-Africa economic and diplomatic cooperation is great, as shown by their involvement in the organization of formal events: the decentralized economic forums at Yiwu and Guangzhou. The migrants earned this position thanks to their status as entrepreneurs and wealthy businessmen, in addition to their knowledge of the Chinese business world³. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the China-Africa diplomatic and economic relationship, we interviewed three diplomats⁴, two African ambassadors in Beijing and the Senegal Deputy Consul in Guangzhou. The interviews reveal that China wishes to strengthen its presence in Africa by diversifying its economic partnerships as we will see later in this contribution. One

² The daily *Le Monde Afrique* of 15 April 2020 published an article entitled “Coronavirus et discrimination en Chine : L’Afrique monte au créneau” (“Coronavirus and discrimination in China: Africa is taking a stance”). It discusses conflictual situations between blacks living in China and the Chinese population.

³ Read the online article “Profil d’un homme d’affaire sénégalais à Guangzhou” (“Profile of a Senegalese businessman in Guangzhou”) published on 27 July 2018. Source: www.sinhuanet.com. We visited Mr. M. Dieng’s office in Guangzhou and noted that he employs many Chinese assistants.

⁴ His Excellency General Fall, Ambassador of Senegal in China; His Excellency Mr. Bal, Mauritania Ambassador to China, Mr. Diallo, Senegal Deputy Consul in Guangzhou.

proof of greater Chinese presence in Africa is the recent multiplication of Chinese cultural centers (Confucius) in Africa, especially on university campuses, as well as the organization of decentralized economic forums, the presence of many Chinese construction and public works companies in Africa, the signing of agreements in agribusiness, the establishment of Chinese traders in major African cities, and the provision of scholarships to African students.

This fieldwork allowed us to observe more closely the realities of sub-Saharan immigration to China. Of course, we opted for a qualitative approach and the interviews carried out in China were confined to the African community. To complete the analysis, we would need the Chinese population's point of view regarding Africans. The method of interviewing migrants from different African countries was preferred, contrary to the method of following a single migrant or a single profile or even a group of migrants from the same country. It captures a more global view of how African migrants, having stayed in China, see the political and economic situation in their home country.

Africans established in China since the mid-1990s or early 2000s declare that China's economic take-off and the speed of the transformation of cities (construction of superimposed urban highways and subways) have been possible thanks to the power of the State, the discipline of workers and managers on construction sites, and the Chinese desire to be first in different fields. These migrants think that Chinese cities are as well-equipped as Western capitals like London or Paris. African immigrants living in China believe that Europe is no longer the only example to follow and that African heads of state and the African people should learn from Chinese models of urban planning and development of commercial activities. The African diplomats interviewed confirm that Chinese President Xi Jinping is encouraging Chinese businessmen to invest abroad and to increase economic partnerships. The Senegal economic forum in Guangzhou was

indicative of this state of mind: businessmen, agribusiness men and Chinese academics from agricultural institutes demonstrated their will to engage in economic partnerships with Senegal during this meeting.

This way of examining the relationship, beginning with China-Africa (South-South) economic trade, whose first vectors were itinerant traders and African traders based in China, is interesting. The new type of relationship established between the world's first emerging country (China) and the sub-Saharan African countries whose financial power and technological levels are still modest enables us to evaluate the evolution of political and economic models in the South, as well as the way techniques and know-how are transferred between China and Africa.

This research also questions the intercultural dynamics linked to migration between these two continents (Ba, 2017). Similarities can be observed between Asia and Africa, particularly in terms of ethnic and confessional diversity. Can we speak of cultural convergences, especially between Chinese and African Muslims? This question is not discussed in the work of the above-mentioned researchers, whereas we consider it essential given the current period when cultural issues are playing an increasingly important role in diplomatic and economic relations, and in the design and follow-up of sustainable and territorial development projects

Other similarities to mention are the existence of informal commercial activities, social inequalities and disparities between urban and rural areas.

On the other hand, there are differences: Chinese cities are better equipped than African cities. The intra-urban transport infrastructures such as highways and subways, inter-regional transport infrastructures such as airports, railway stations, sea and river ports are modern and far more efficient in China than in Africa. If we push the comparison further, we might say that the

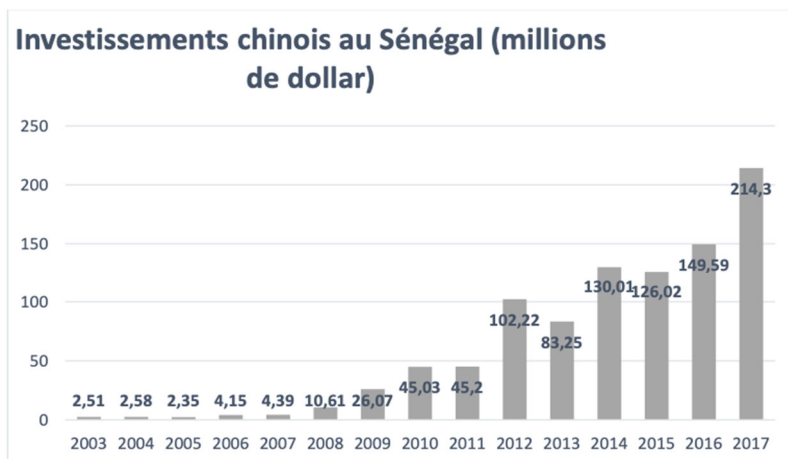
subway in Guangzhou is as efficient as the one in western Europe (Paris, London, Milan...)

As for the future of African entrepreneurs in China, everything depends on their ability to adapt to the evolution of the economic world and on Chinese migration policy. For some migrants, the competition is tough and unfair. They are losing their role as intermediaries between Chinese entrepreneurs and the African market. Chinese business people are beginning to deal directly with the Chinese diaspora based in Africa, whose role in African economies continues to grow.

Large Chinese companies and small merchants in Dakar: the underside of an unstoppable economic strategy bolstered by the Confucian culture

The establishment of Chinese companies in Senegal started about forty years ago, i.e. around 1980, 9 years after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Senegal in 1971. Indeed, in the 1980s, 2 large Chinese firms specialized in the fields of fishing were set up, accelerating the industrialization of these sectors, heavily dominated by hand-crafted, familial and / or lineage forms of operation until then.

In 1983, the Henan-China company relocated a subsidiary to Senegal in the context of the construction of “Amitié” (Friendship) Stadium, which remains one of the biggest sports facilities in the country today. Henan-China developed its operations in Senegal, broadening its spectrum and investing considerably in the fields of rural hydraulics, road and real estate projects. Following President Hu Jintao’s visit to Senegal in 2009, the presence of Chinese investors and businesses throughout the country increased, which seemed to indicate that a large part of the economy was being appropriated for “made in China.” From 2003 to 2017, the amount of Chinese investment in Senegal soared, as the following chart shows.



Source: MOFCOM

Chinese investment in Senegal (in millions of dollars)

Many sectors are concerned by these investments: agricultural machinery and equipment, fishing and fish processing, metallurgy, the marketing of groundnuts, and many others.

Chinese companies are becoming more and more aggressive, as shown by many authors such as Y. Lacoste (2007), Brunet A and Guichard J-P (2011), Gaye A (2011) to cite but a few. In Senegal, in the field of construction and particularly in building and public works, Henan-China occupies a unique place in the building of bridges and flyovers. The China Road Bridge and Corporation group built the Ila Touba highway, inaugurated in December 2018; this infrastructure, with its strong economic and symbolic overtones, connects Dakar, the political and economic capital, to Touba, the spiritual capital of the Mourides, which welcomes hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year. This second-largest human settlement in Senegal is located in the heart of groundnut

basin, and the Mourides are very successful entrepreneurs, particularly in the transport, real estate and trade sectors. The Senegalese government entrusted WIETEC (the Weihei International Economic and Technical Cooperative Co.) with the building of the Diamniadio ministerial sector. The COMPLANT group is credited with the construction of the great theatre of Dakar (see photo). In the region of Sindia, Twyford Ceramics Limited installed a large industrial tile manufacturing unit. The Affiniam anti-salt dam built by the China Railway Engineering Company in 1988, made it possible to recuperate 7000 ha of arable land in the south of Senegal. There are many Chinese fishing companies including Tamon Fishing International Sarl, one of the largest, which is installed between Diamniadio and Bargny, and which has an annual processing capacity of 30,000 tons and a storage capacity of 6,000 tons with 8 freezing tunnels.

Aware of their increasingly important position on the Senegalese economic chessboard and the development of a certain competition with European countries and India, Chinese companies in Senegal formed an association in order to strengthen their position and protect their interests. This association has 44 member companies in various sectors of activity such as construction, fishing, energy, automobiles, scrap metal, telecoms and telephony.

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The Great Theatre of Dakar with 2000 seats was built by a Chinese company and inaugurated in 2011. It is considered as one of the most beautiful architectural realisations in west Africa. Photo by Abdoul H. BA, Dakar, 2020.

Besides these large companies, we note the presence of small Chinese merchants. They arrived in Dakar in the early 2000s and occupy the Boulevard General De Gaulle, a very busy street known as “Les Allées du centenaire” (Centenary Alleys). This street, which connects the center of Dakar to the other districts, is located near the large markets patronized by the lower classes. Along this boulevard, a succession of small Chinese owned shops (canteens) offer various products such as clothes, shoes, kitchenware and mobile phones. The presence of this Chinese diaspora has changed the face of the boulevard.

This spatial transformation began with the appearance of canteens on the ground floor of the buildings, a process which A. Dia calls “cantinisation” (Dia, 2009). Very quickly, Chinese merchants gained a foothold and began to buy houses from Senegalese who were in need. Thus, they expanded their commercial zone.

According to A. Dia, of the 147 commercial stores listed along Boulevard General de Gaulle, 125 are run by Chinese, whereas they only owned 10 in 2002. Today, a small Chinese district is developing similar to the China Towns of the major western metropolises.

The Chinese diaspora provokes different reactions on the part of the local population. Chinese shops located in Dakar constitute supply points for small Senegalese merchants located in the country's interior. The prices are competitive. They feel that the Chinese have contributed to the development of informal trade. For others, Chinese traders create jobs (night watchmen, assistant salesmen, etc.) and propose good salaries. As for the Dakar merchants who sell shoes, fabrics, household appliances or small craftsmen like shoemakers and jewelers, the competition with the Chinese is tough. The latter offer various products, sometimes imitations of Senegalese products made in China in great quantities and resold at low prices in Senegal. Chinese merchants attract most of the low-income customers. In front of this hard competition, some Senegalese craftsmen gave up their activities. For others still, in particular former inhabitants, Chinese businesses have disfigured the boulevard. They say it is not well maintained and that it has become an open-air market (Dia 2009).

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Along boulevard "Allées du Centenaire" a succession of Chinese owned shops offer various products, as can be seen on the right hand side of the picture (photo: Abdoul H. Ba, Dakar, 2020)

Today, large Chinese companies are taking over Senegal's formal sector in various fields ranging from construction and public works to agribusiness, particularly in the groundnut and mahogany sectors. Thus, the Chinese state is positioning itself as an important economic partner of Senegal due to the volume of its investments and the variety of sectors involved, while, at the same time, the

Chinese diaspora is increasing its control of a part of Dakar's urban economy and perhaps soon the economies of other major cities as well, thanks to its strong network of mutual aid and expertise in commercial activities. The paradox of the presence of these Chinese traders is that they create jobs by recruiting Senegalese assistants but penalize small traders from Dakar who are unable to compete with them.

The cooperation between China and Senegal is asymmetrical, as is always the case between two countries with highly unequal economic, financial, demographic and technological parameters and diverse natural resources. However, such South-South cooperation can be beneficial in the long run, especially since it is not marred by the aftermath of a recent war or a colonial past in which the former dominant and former dominated countries are struggling to overcome a painful past. Nevertheless, many conditions must be met for this China-Senegal cooperation to be mutually advantageous and sustainable: 1) ensure a transfer of technical skills from China to Senegal, 2) ensure an exploitation of Senegal's natural resources by Chinese companies that respects the balance of ecosystems and cultural identities, 3) avoid that the presence of Chinese low-cost manufactured products contributes to the disappearance of local Senegalese handicrafts, 4) ensure better treatment of the Senegalese diaspora in China and help it to re-invest in Senegal. This challenge is all the more difficult as the increased globalization of the economy makes it hard for politicians in small states of the south to be demanding in front of powerful companies - international firms and major economic players.

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