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REIMAGINING IDENTITY: SOUTH AFRICAN CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS IN POST- APARTHEID GAUTENG.

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on Chinese associations in post-apartheid South Africa and is primarily based on oral interviews done with numerous members and leaders of the different Chinese communities. Since democracy, longstanding Chinese associations, which draw their membership from the South African-Born Chinese (SABCs), have reimagined themselves and transformed from having largely political aims to focus predominantly on community and cultural pursuits. This is the result of political shifts and the increasing freedoms guaranteed to all races by democracy, although their membership is declining. However, partly owing to their ambiguous status and identity during apartheid, the Chinese have continued to face discrimination. Specifically, being initially excluded from affirmative action policies as well as being subjected to racism and prejudice in the democratic era. Thus, there is still space for these associations to act politically as these issues have been and are being addressed through democratic institutions. Lastly, the third wave of migration has further impacted the associational lives of the Chinese in South Africa. The significant differences between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants have not only created divisions between these two groups but have also called into question the “Chinese identity” of SABCs. However, there has also been significant, albeit situational, instances of collaboration and solidarity between these two groups and their relevant associations, thereby adding complexity to the interactions and identities of said communities.

Key words: Associations, Associational Life, Migration, Community, Identity, Africa-China relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

The presence of the Chinese in South Africa dates back to as early as 1660, when Chinese convicts, exiles and independent travellers started to arrive.¹ Chinese migration subsequently unfolded in three distinct waves; independent immigrants to the Transvaal in the 1880s drawn by the mineral discoveries (to whom most South Africa-born Chinese (SABCs) today trace their ancestry), Taiwanese immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s following the increasing political and economic ties between apartheid South Africa and Taiwan; and recent Chinese migrants who have come looking for opportunities in democratic South Africa since the early 1990s. Alongside these patterns of migration, there is a long history of the association that has been well-documented in the literature on the Chinese in South Africa.² Initially, the dispersed Chinese diasporic communities came together through petitioning against their poor treatment and discrimination. By the turn of the twentieth century, associations like the Transvaal Chinese Association (TCA) were established to formally protest the government's anti-Asiatic legislation, which affected the Chinese and Indians, and to establish structures of community support. These protests were initially militant, but a split in the Johannesburg Chinese community saw the TCA adopting a more conservative approach over the decades.³ The implementation of apartheid and its racial laws from 1948, many of which negatively affected the Chinese, saw the different Chinese communities unite to form the Central Chinese Association of South Africa (CCASA) in 1954 which, however, was largely accommodationist and represented a decisive shift away from earlier militant tactics for the rest of the apartheid era.⁴

While the historical development of Chinese associations up until the end of apartheid has been well-documented, there has been little analysis about the effects of South Africa's democratic transition on such groups. This article looks

1 JC Armstrong, "The Chinese at the Cape during the Dutch East India Company Period". Presented at the UNESCO Slave Route Project Conference (1997), p. 3. Chinese scholars researching Chinese migrancy to Africa have come to similar conclusions about the first presence of the Chinese in South Africa. For example: L Anshan, *A History of Overseas Chinese in Africa to 1911* (New York: Diasporic Africa Press, 2017), pp. 1-2.

2 M Yap and D Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1996); YJ Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009); KL Harris, *A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912* (PhD, University of Pretoria, 1998); D Accone, "'Ghost People': Localizing the Chinese Self in an African Context", *Asian Studies Review* 30 (3), 2006, pp. 257-272.

3 YJ Park, *Shifting Chinese South African Identities in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa* (PhD, University of Witwatersrand, 2006), p. 97.

4 Yap and Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*, p. 323.

at the development of Chinese associations in the Gauteng Province since the end of apartheid, as most of the significant groups are based in this area. In particular, it focuses on The Chinese Association Gauteng (TCA, formerly the Transvaal Chinese Association), the Pretoria Chinese Association (PCA), the Shunde Friendship Association (SFA) and the national Chinese Association of South Africa (CASA). These are among the essential groups representing the contemporary South African Chinese population in the province. Many of these have their forerunners in the older Chinese associations first established in the early to mid-twentieth century. It is important to note that, this article will use the term “Chinese” to denote ethnic identity and self-identification by SABCs, and not to represent Chinese nationality.

The article argues that the granting of full citizenship rights to all South Africans has somewhat lessened the need for Chinese associations to play a political role through petitioning for concessions and rights for the Chinese population. These groups have also experienced a decline in membership and participation, partly as there is no longer a “common enemy” around which South African Chinese can unite, and partly due to the advent of social media, which has reduced the relevance of traditional organisations. In response to the changing social, technological, political climate and internal membership dynamics, South African Chinese associations have reimagined their role around cultural issues, notably the Chinese New Year celebrations, thus claiming their place as part of South Africa’s new “rainbow nation”.

While the democratic transition and South Africa’s new constitution have provided the conditions for the inclusion of all South Africans, including those of Chinese origins, into the new nation, the ambivalent status the Chinese enjoyed under apartheid has simultaneously continued into the democratic dispensation. This has come to the fore with the question of who should benefit from Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation. Due to confusion and ignorance about the history of the Chinese under colonialism and apartheid, the African National Congress (ANC) government initially did not deem the group to have been “previously disadvantaged”. This article will examine how South African Chinese associations have taken up new struggles in the post-apartheid era. The first of these is the successful campaign by CASA in 2008 to have the Chinese included in BEE policies. More recently, TCA laid criminal charges of “*crimen injuria*” against several individuals who posted racist and xenophobic comments about Chinese people on social media following the airing of a television programme on the illegal donkey hide market in 2017. The article will show that while the discrimination of South African Chinese has continued post-apartheid, the new democracy has nonetheless provided the constitutional foundation and institutions through which ongoing discrimination can be challenged.

The arrival of new migrants from the 1990s as part of what is known as “the third wave” Chinese migration has created new challenges in terms of how SABCs identify, which have been reflected in their associational politics. Darryl Accone, for example, analyses some of the tensions that have emerged between the SABCs and recent Chinese migrant communities – mainly because of the criminality that is commonly associated with the latter, which SABCs perceive as undermining the hard-working and law-abiding reputation they have cultivated over a long period. Additional tensions have arisen because of language divisions, with SABCs speaking English and some Cantonese, and recent migrants being mostly Mandarin speakers. Because of these tensions, many SABCs seek to distance themselves from the larger Chinese migrant group.⁵ At the same time, South African Chinese associations became drivers of solidarity between different Chinese communities and their associations, including recent Chinese migrants, particularly when it comes to cultural, social and community issues. This contradiction of situational friction and unity between SABCs and new migrants emerges throughout the article.

A key theme explored in this article is Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined communities”. Anderson first conceptualised and developed the idea of imagined communities by looking at the role of daily newspapers in nation-building processes in Europe during the 1800s. He argued that the shared national experience created an imagined community, where members imagined that they all had common beliefs, attitudes, opinions and morals.⁶ While he refers to national identity in his argument, socially constructed communities can also be fashioned around other forms of identification. Stuart Hall defines identities as the questions not about “who we are” or “where we came from”, so much as what we become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we represent ourselves.⁷ These questions have no fixed answers, and identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves.⁸ In the case of SABCs, there is an unbroken continuity between, on the one hand, Chinese identity in South Africa; and on the other, “Chinese” as a continuous category of diasporic subjecthood since the 1600s. South African Chinese waver between these two poles in the way they self-identify, as the discussion on their ambivalent relationship with the new Chinese migrant community will show.

5 Accone, “Ghost People”, p. 267.

6 B Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2006), pp. 6-7.

7 S Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?”. In: S Hall & P du Gay (ed.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), pp. 1-17.

8 Y Shi, “Identity Construction of the Chinese Diaspora, Ethnic Media Use, Community Formation, and the Possibility of Social Activism”, *Continuum* 19 (1), 2005, p. 57.

Authors such as, Yoon Park and Karen Harris have detailed the fluctuating status and identity of the Chinese during the colonial, segregation and apartheid periods.⁹ The apartheid state initially classified the Chinese as “Coloured” in terms of the Group Areas Act of 1950 and only introduced the subdivision of “Chinese” in the 1960s.¹⁰ However, the regime established close ties with Japan in the 1960s and then Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s, and concessions were granted to Japanese and Taiwanese immigrants. These indirectly also benefitted the South African Chinese, who became generally accepted by white society, thus further complicating their status.¹¹ Park and Accone extend this discussion by looking at the shifting identities of SABCs after apartheid, arguing that, disillusionment with the political and economic future of South Africa and a decreased sense of belonging to the country has led many SABCs to emigrate.¹² However, the majority of SABCs feel an increased sense of belonging in South Africa because they were born and raised in this country, of which they are now full and equal citizens, and have no intention of leaving.¹³ Harris also argues that, by looking at the history of the Chinese in South Africa, they should be included in the “previously disadvantaged” category of government policies and that their exclusion has led to their continued discrimination during post-apartheid.¹⁴ This article will show that the continued discrimination of the Chinese has emerged as the main political issue that South African Chinese associations mobilise against.

Another important element of South Africa’s democratic transition relates to the country’s changing relationships with Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Whereas the apartheid government developed strong economic and diplomatic ties with Taiwan, after its unbanning, the ANC cultivated diplomatic relations with the PRC and in 1997, joined the large majority of international states in recognising the PRC over the Republic of China.¹⁵ The economic and political ties between China and South Africa have since continued to grow, as seen by South Africa’s inclusion in the now Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) economic alliance in 2011.

9 YJ Park, “White, Honorary White, or Non-White: Apartheid Era Constructions of Chinese”, *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 27, (1), 2008, pp. 123-138; KL Harris, “Accepting the Group, but Not the Area”: The South African Chinese and the Group Areas Act’, *South African Historical Journal* 40 (1), 1999, pp. 179-201.

10 Accone, “Ghost People”, p. 263.

11 KL Harris, “Whiteness”, “Blackness”, “Neitherness” – The South African Chinese 1885-1991: A Case Study of Identity Politics”, *Historia* 47 (1), 2002, p. 121.

12 Park, Shifting Chinese South African Identities, p. 287; Accone, “Ghost People”, p. 270.

13 Park, Shifting Chinese South African Identities, p. 288.

14 KL Harris, “BEE-ing Chinese in South Africa: a Legal Historic Perspective”, *Fundamina* 23 (2), 2017, p. 17.

15 See, C Williams and C Hurst, “Caught Between Two Chinas: Assessing South Africa’s Switch from Taipei to Beijing”, *South African Historical Journal* 70 (3), 2018, pp. 559-602.

It is against this backdrop that the changes analysed in this article need to be understood.

The article begins by analysing how and why the new democratic dispensation has contributed to a gradual shift away from political activities by SABCs associations and their embrace of cultural events. Yet this section will show how some of these associations have retained a degree of political functions during post-apartheid, largely in response to the areas of discrimination against the Chinese that have both persisted in and emerged in the context of the democratic era. Lastly, the article will examine the impact of recent Chinese migration on SABCs' identity and associational life, while simultaneously looking at instances in which the two groups collaborate, particularly around culture.

This article is based on semi-structured oral history interviews with Chinese subjects, particularly chairpersons and leaders of South African Chinese associations. Hence these perspectives do not necessarily fully represent the viewpoints of the associations' members. A second limitation for this research relates to language, as the author is only fluent in English and not in Cantonese or Mandarin. While this posed no problem to my interviews with SABCs, who were all fluent in English, it made communication with recent Chinese migrants difficult as many cannot speak English. Chinese immigrants are particularly sceptical and reluctant to be interviewed, mainly owing to their vulnerable and tenuous status in South Africa. As a result, the position and views of this group are limited both in this study and in the broader literature.¹⁶ This limitation emerges in the discussion on the tensions between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants, which mostly relies on the perspective of South African Chinese association leaders. Lastly, while there is also a Taiwanese community in South Africa, with many associations of their own, this lies outside the scope of this article.

2. THE RAINBOW NATION: A NEW SOUTH AFRICAN CHINESE IDENTITY

Associations such as the TCA, PCA and CASA have all played significant political roles since their formations in 1903, 1931 and 1954 respectively. While the TCA's approach to politics was initially passive resistance, this was eventually replaced by a non-confrontational approach (which was also adopted by other associations at the time), such as petitioning the government for concessions to the Chinese, during both the segregation and

16 Recent efforts to address this gap has come through the work of some academics, such as Dr Yoon Jung Park, and institutions, such as the Africa-China Reporting Project.

apartheid eras. Nonetheless, these groups remained active in campaigning against racial legislation, specifically those laws which targeted the Chinese, until the end of apartheid. In many ways, the new democratic dispensation of 1994 saw this vision fulfilled. The Chinese, along with all other South Africans regardless of race or gender, have been granted full and equal rights under the 1996 constitution.

While this has been a significant victory, democracy has had a complex effect on the identity of SABCs with some choosing to emigrate. These SABCs have expressed concerns about the lack of service delivery, insufficient healthcare, crime and future economic growth.¹⁷ This is part of a larger emigration trend among mostly middle-class white families, with whom SABCs share a similar economic status.¹⁸ Post-apartheid emigration reached its peak in 1999, with an estimated 58 000 South Africans leaving the country.¹⁹ This number has decreased to an average of just over 20 000 per year in the 2000s and 2010s.²⁰

Interestingly, while young SABCs are more inclined than the older generation to identify as South African first and Chinese second, they are also more likely to emigrate. This is largely because of their access to social, economic and cultural resources. Furthermore, many of the younger SABC generation view their belonging to South Africa as fluid in light of increasing globalisation and their desire to travel the world. There is also a perception that South Africans of Chinese descent have limited economic opportunities in the country, not least because of their initial exclusion from the Black Economic Empowerment policies.

The end of apartheid has, in many ways, decreased the need for Chinese associations that were formed in the twentieth century to have political functions. While the racial oppression experienced by the Chinese under apartheid engendered solidarity within the group, Eugene Kamson, chairman of CASA, argues that after apartheid and particularly after the Chinese were included into BEE policies following the associations' successful court case in 2008, there has been no "common enemy" of the Chinese in post-apartheid South Africa.²¹ As a result, CASA is currently not active in any significant way,

17 Park, *Shifting Chinese South African Identities*, p. 283.

18 M Steyn and D Foster, "Repertoires for Talking White: Resistant Whiteness in Post-Apartheid South Africa", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31 (1), 2008, p. 47.

19 A Myburgh, "Explaining Emigration from South Africa", *South African Journal of Economics* 72 (1), 2004, p. 122.

20 D Buckham, "Are Skilled, White South Africans Really Emigrating at an Accelerating Rate?", *Daily Maverick*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-10-01-are-skilled-white-south-africans-really-emigrating-at-an-accelerating-rate/>, accessed 31 December 2019.

21 Interview: Author with E Kamson and H Bue, Wingate Park, 5 August 2018. RE: Chinese Associations.

and some SABCs have questioned its continued existence and legitimacy.²² Furthermore, as there is no longer oppressive race-based legislation, the need to associate along racial lines has diminished as well. These developments, alongside the emigration of some SABCs, have partly resulted in decreased membership and participation in the Chinese associations of Gauteng. For example, since apartheid, the PCA has dropped from around 300 members (excluding their families) to 132 in 2019.²³ Erwin Pon, chairman of TCA, also indicates that their membership has seen a decline during post-apartheid.

Another reason for this phenomenon relates to the emergence of new social media. Mobile phone apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook and WeChat offer cheap communication unhindered by time or distance constraints. These social network platforms are rendering associations that traditionally rely on a central meeting place and inter-personal relationships obsolete. New alternative communities and associations are also emerging on these virtual platforms.²⁴ This is the case for the Chinese in South Africa with SABCs and recent Chinese migrants mostly using WhatsApp and WeChat respectively.²⁵ And while most Chinese associations have adapted now and have their own online presence, this has not quelled the decrease in active membership.

Many South African Chinese associations have also historically performed a cultural role. For example, the TCA has a long history of hosting Chinese New Year at the First Chinatown of Johannesburg.²⁶ During apartheid, this cultural celebration, and other ones like the Taiwanese Double Ten festival commemorating the national day of the Republic of China, was a means of strengthening community bonds and identity. Racial segregation enforced by the regime ensured that they were exclusively Chinese events. Some Chinese South Africans have even gone as far as to say that without the Group Areas Act, Chinese identity and culture would not have developed as significantly.²⁷

However, in the face of declining membership and political relevance during post-apartheid, South African Chinese associations have begun to reimagine themselves both by bringing culture more to the forefront, and by

22 G Houston *et al.*, "Bodies that Divide and Bind: Tracing the Social Roles of Association in Chinese Communities in Pretoria, South Africa", Human Sciences Research Council, 2013, p. 11.

23 Houston *et al.*, "Bodies that Divide and Bind", p. 37.

24 W Pauw, *Chinese Associations and Associational Life in South Africa's Gauteng Province since the End of Apartheid* (MA, University of Witwatersrand, 2019), p. 109.

25 Pauw, *Chinese Associations and Associational Life*, p. 115.

26 The first Chinatown of Johannesburg is situated in Ferreirasdorp and has been home to a sizable Chinese community from the early 1900s. It is the base for many Chinese associations including the TCA. Since the end of apartheid, a second Chinatown has emerged in Cyrilidene as a result of recent Chinese migration.

27 Park, *Shifting Chinese South African Identities*, p. 236.

adapting these cultural functions to the idea of the new “rainbow nation” that embraces different identities and traditions. For example, since 1994, the Chinese New Year celebrations both in the First Chinatown and in Cyrildene in Johannesburg have taken on an increasingly multi-cultural character and audience.

The First Chinatown was established in the early 1900s when Chinese migrants began living on Commissioner Street in the Johannesburg Central Business District. Despite being the original Chinatown for SABCs, it has seen a drop in population and relevancy post-apartheid.²⁸ In its place, Derrick Avenue in Cyrildene has emerged as the “New Chinatown” in Johannesburg. It has its origins in the Taiwanese migrants who moved into the area in the 1990s. However, this area has eventually come to be dominated by mainland Mandarin-speaking Chinese migrants.²⁹

The Chinese New Year, celebrated in both Chinatowns, has become one of South Africa’s most popular public cultural events and is attended by people from all backgrounds.³⁰ Generally, many of the attendees are not Chinese. Even some of the street stalls, and participants in the dragon dances and the parades, are of different ethnic background groups. This highlights how the Chinese New Year has become an integral part of nation-building and social cohesion. The freedom and equality guaranteed by democracy have allowed SABCs to claim their place within the broader South African nation. In this context, this has transformed the Chinese New Year, hosted by TCA, from an exclusive celebration to an inclusive event for all South Africans.

An analysis of the advertisement for the 2019 Chinese New Year festival at the First Chinatown in Johannesburg provides interesting insights (Figure 1). The advertisement makes use of several images that are associated with popular Chinese traditions of the New Year, such as dragons, fireworks and lanterns. The list of entertainment available at the event are all related to Chinese cultural performances or martial arts. There are also instances where Chinese written characters are used as part of the aesthetic. This demonstrates that while SABCs and their associations are constructing a new South African identity, their Chinese identity and heritage remains a central aspect of this reimagination.

28 Pauw, *Chinese Associations and Associational Life*, p. 92.

29 Pauw, *Chinese Associations and Associational Life*, p. 3.

30 U Ho, “Joburg’s Chinese Community: New Year, Old Traditions”, *Business Live*, 15 February 2018, <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/life/food/2018-02-15-joburgs-chinese-community-new-yearoldtraditions/>, accessed on 14 March 2019.

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Celebrate the Year of the Pig at the

**Chinese New Year & Lantern Festival
Street Celebration with
Spectacular Musical Firework Display**
(Computer synchronised fireworks display)

Saturday 23rd February 2019
Entertainment from 5pm & Fireworks display at 9pm

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- * Lion & Dragon Dance Performance
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- * Also many food stalls available from 4pm

Joburg's First Chinatown
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Commissioner Street will be cordoned off between Miriam Makeba & Alexander Street.
Security on Patrol. Street Parking & Limited Paid Parking at 1Fox

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Shunde Friendship Association | Johannesburg First Chinatown Association
The Pon Family | Swallow Inn | Ming Woo | Mei Mei
Chow Kee | Canton | Lucky Cafe

Restaurants:
Canton Restaurant 011 834 4194 | Ming Woo Restaurant 011 833 5924
Lucky Cafe & Chinese Take Away 011 836 9311 | Swallows Inn Chinese Restaurant 011 838 2946

For more information, please contact TCA: info@tcagp.co.za or 082 456 4875

Figure 1: Advertisement for the 2019 Chinese New Year in Johannesburg.
Source: The Chinese Association of Gauteng Newsletter, 4 February 2019.

Other cultural events which associations such as the TCA and PCA help organise include the Dragon Boat Race Festival at the Florida Dam in Roodepoort, the Hong Ning Old Age Home annual braai fundraiser, an annual youth tour to Taiwan and the Mid-Autumn Harvest Festival (commonly known as the Moon Festival)³¹ The TCA also has an email newsletter that informs recipients of the numerous social and cultural activities that both it

31 Interview: Author with E Kamson and H Bue.

and other associations host. These developments suggest that while under apartheid Chinese associations were primarily focused on addressing the political concerns of their constituents, since 1994, these groups have instead reimagined themselves as cultural institutions to better reflect the new identity and sense of belonging of SABCs as a constituent part of democratic South Africa.

3. AMBIGUITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN THE POST-APARTHEID ERA

It is clear that South African Chinese associations have somewhat turned to cultural functions post-apartheid; there still exists a space, albeit diminished, for these groups to act politically. This, in part, contributed to the continued ambiguous status of SABCs and ongoing discrimination and racism against the Chinese into the democratic era.

Despite South Africans of Chinese origins earning full citizenship rights in 1994, the subsequent Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act 35 of 2003 indirectly discriminated against the Chinese in South Africa. These acts were instituted to address the economic inequalities created by the legacy of apartheid through affirmative action.³² Black people, defined to include Africans, Coloureds and Indians, were set to benefit from these policies. The position of the Chinese in apartheid was ambiguous - being classified as "Coloured" under the apartheid's Population Registration Act of 1950, with the subdivision of "Chinese" only being added in the 1960s, and then later receiving concessions by indirectly benefitting from the privileges granted to the Taiwanese in the 1980s. In light of this confusion, the Chinese were excluded from the post-apartheid definition of black and were thus unable to benefit from these policies of redress.³³ Therefore, their ambiguous status continued into the democratic era. Eugene Kamson was the chairman of CASA for four years during the B-BBEE dispute and he concisely sums up the conundrum they were in at the time, "We were previously disadvantaged and now we are disadvantaged again".³⁴

In 2007 CASA took up the case to have SABCs included as beneficiaries of BEE and begun appealing to the South African government. For some South African Chinese, this was about setting the record straight and

32 Harris, "BEE-ing Chinese in South Africa", p. 3.

33 "Chinese South Africans Qualify for BEE, Court Rules", *Mail and Guardian*, 18 June 2008, <https://mg.co.za/article/2008-06-18-chinese-south-africans-qualify-for-bee-court-rules>, accessed 14 March 2019.

34 Interview: Author with E Kamson and H Bue.

ensuring that they were not disadvantaged by being at the opposite end of these legislations. For others, access to education and jobs were a concern. Kamson says he found that one of the main reasons why the Chinese were excluded in the first place was out of ignorance of their history in South Africa by government officials. He states that many were sympathetic to their cause after being informed of the historical context, but none were willing to take on the political risk that addressing this issue could cause.³⁵ As a result, CASA decided to take the government to court to speed up the process. In 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Chinese were to be included in the definition of “black people” in terms of the Constitution.³⁶

Another example of a South African Chinese association acting politically post-apartheid is the ongoing hate speech case in the Equality Court spearheaded by TCA. The context behind this is the exposure of the black-market donkey hide trade by the South African media. The first reporting on this subject was in a *Mail & Guardian* article titled, “Why are gangs killing our donkeys?” published on 20 January 2017.³⁷ The report revealed that a Chinese syndicate operating in Benoni was to blame and that the hides were sought after for traditional Chinese practices and medicine. While it identified a specific criminal network to be the perpetrators –Chinese people, in general, were linked to this issue, as was evident by the racist and derogatory comments on Facebook. On 29 January 2017, *Carte Blanche*, an investigative journalism TV show, further discussed the issue. After the broadcast, there was another outpour of racist and anti-Chinese opinions on social media in regards to this expose. It became clear that the negative, ambiguous and generalising media portrayals of Chinese people influenced public opinion and perceptions accordingly.

Most of the racist comments were posted on the Facebook profiles of *Carte Blanche*, the Karoo Donkey Sanctuary and TCA. Some of the vile statements made included racist slurs, such as “chings” and “slant-eyed freaks”, death threats, and accusations. They made no distinction between the criminals and the Chinese as a whole. Furthermore, the comments show how the Chinese population has become a scapegoat for several issues regarding poaching and the illegal trade of various items such as ivory, rhino horns, donkey hides and others.³⁸

35 Interview: Author with E Kamson and H Bue.

36 Harris, “BEE-ing Chinese in South Africa”, p. 14.

37 G Whittles and G Sigauqwe, “Why are Gangs Killing our Donkeys?”, *Mail & Guardian*, 20 January 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-01-20-00-donkey-hide-bust-points-to-gang>, accessed 16 March 2019.

38 KL Harris, “Untangling Centuries of South African Chinese Diasporas: Molluscs/Abalone, Ungulates/Rhinos and Equidae/Donkeys”, *South African Historical Journal* 71 (2), 2019, p. 264.

In response to the racism expressed on Facebook, TCA released a media statement decrying the hate speech targeting the Chinese community, while reaffirming that they are against both poaching and animal cruelty.³⁹ The association subsequently also laid criminal charges against those who took part in the xenophobic comments and submitted a hate speech complaint to the South African Human Rights Commission. An account was opened to help pay for legal expenses and the association regularly hosts fundraising events.⁴⁰ The court proceedings are now nearing their end as the TCA closed its case on 5 December 2019. Closing arguments were to be heard in February 2020 but have been postponed following the TCA's dissatisfaction with transcriptions of the proceedings. Once this issue has been resolved, a new date will be set.⁴¹ However, four respondents have already agreed to tender unconditional apologies and to settle on TCA's terms. These terms are, they will pin their apologies on their Facebook profiles for six months and do 500 hours of community service. Three other respondents have made similar confessions, but they are still awaiting the court's ruling.⁴²

Erwin Pon, the chairperson of TCA, wrote an opinion piece for *News24* on 10 March 2019, regarding the hate speech case. Therein he seeks to raise awareness of the hurtful stereotypes towards the Chinese in South Africa and states that the Chinese community, referring to SABCs, stands against this, "assault on the cultural and identity differences that are part of the lifeblood of our diverse democracy".⁴³ He made a similar comment in court by stating that, "in a diverse democracy such as ours, underpinned by principles of equality and dignity, it cannot be acceptable to say about a particular group of people, "wipe them out" or "get rid of them".⁴⁴ These calls for violent removal of all Chinese people from the country also undermine the attempts by South African Chinese associations at constructing a new post-apartheid Chinese identity that rests on the inclusivity of the "rainbow nation". Pon and his association are calling on the notions of equality and diversity espoused by this very "rainbow nation" to combat racism and discrimination

39 "Media Statements", *The Chinese Association of Gauteng*, February 2017, <http://www.tcagp.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Chinese-Association-Press-Release.pdf>, accessed 16 March 2019.

40 "Media Statements", *The Chinese Association of Gauteng*, (7 February 2017), <http://www.tcagp.co.za/wpcontent/uploads/2017/02/The-Chinese-Association-Press-Release.pdf>, accessed 16 March 2019.

41 *The Chinese Association of Gauteng Newsletter*, 29 February 2020.

42 *The Chinese Association of Gauteng Newsletter*, 8 December 2019.

43 E Pon, "Racist and Violent Speech Aimed at Chinese South Africans a Threat to Democracy", *News24*, 10 March 2019, <https://m.news24.com/Columnists/GuestColumn/racist-and-violent-speech-aimed-at-chinesesouth-africans-a-threat-to-democracy-20190310>, accessed 17 March 2018.

44 Pon, "Racist and Violent Speech Aimed at Chinese South Africans a Threat to Democracy".

against Chinese people. Like CASA before them, TCA is also relying on the institutions of the very system that has allowed these issues to continue in the post-apartheid. While democracy has not eliminated the need for civil action by Chinese associations, it has provided the means to challenge their ambiguous status successfully, and with each victory, the space to act politically becomes smaller.

4. DIVISIONS AND SOLIDARITY: THE IMPACT OF RECENT CHINESE MIGRATION ON SOUTH AFRICAN CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS AND IDENTITY

As noted earlier, the democratic era has seen the third wave of Chinese migration through two separate influxes. The first in the 1990s included mainly businesspeople and professionals, often from major cities such as Shanghai or Beijing.⁴⁵ The second, much larger, influx consists of small-traders and peasants, particularly from the Fujian province, who started arriving in South Africa in the early 2000s, an offshoot of a more considerable outward Fujianese migration on a global scale.⁴⁶ By 2013, there were an estimated 350 000 to 500 000 Chinese migrants in South Africa.⁴⁷ This significant change in the demographics of the Chinese in South Africa had a complex effect on SABCs, which is reflected in their associations.

The case of TCA provides interesting insights into the relationship between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants. While the association is mostly geared towards SABCs, Pon, who is a fourth-generation Chinese South African, explains that the association is open to any person of Chinese origin.⁴⁸ This inclusivity is reflected in their objectives, which aim to “promote unity, harmony and goodwill amongst those of Chinese descent in Gauteng and throughout Southern Africa”.⁴⁹ Despite these stated aims, the association’s membership remains predominantly SABC. Pon argues that this is because of the linguistic and cultural differences between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants and not because of any animosity between the groups.⁵⁰

45 T Huynh *et al.*, “Faces of China: New Chinese Migrants in South Africa, 1980s to Present”, *African and Asian Studies* 9 (3), 2010, p. 289.

46 For a detailed analysis of the social, cultural, economic and religious context of Fujian that drives this trans-national migrancy, see, J Chu, *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

47 YJ Park, “Perceptions of Chinese in Southern Africa: Constructions of the “Other” and the Role of Memory”, *African Studies Review* 56 (1), 2013, p. 136.

48 Interview: Author with E Pon, Johannesburg, 24 July 2018. RE: Chinese Associations.

49 “About Us”, *The Chinese Association of Gauteng*, <http://www.tcagp.co.za/about-us/>, accessed 14 March 2019.

50 Interview: Author with E Pon.

As mentioned above, SABCs are South Africans of Chinese descent, which inherently makes their life experiences and identity significantly different from those of recent Chinese migrants. Furthermore, most of the recent Chinese migrants are Mandarin speakers and are not always proficient in English, whereas English is the first language for many of the SABCs, with a few still speaking Cantonese. Many SABCs have a long family history in South Africa, dating back to the mid-1800s. As their ancestors came from Guangdong, their cultural and linguistic background is different from that of recent migrants, who come from all over China, especially the Fujian province. The passing of time has furthered this cultural gap, and many SABCs, especially the younger generation, do not retain any Chinese traditions but instead have become fully “westernised” and South African.

Class and citizenship differences have also created a clear distinction between the two groups. SABCs are considerably wealthier than many of the recent Chinese migrants.⁵¹ The migrants from the Fujian province, who make up the bulk of the latter group, were predominantly small traders and peasants in China. As a result, many lack social and economic capital, as well as having low levels of education and limited knowledge of English.⁵² These class differences mean that the two groups inhabit different spaces. For example, many SABCs have integrated into formerly white affluent neighbourhoods, whereas recent Chinese migrants are drawn to the low-cost housing in Cyrildene and Bruma.⁵³ They also have divergent interests and activities, which shapes their associational lives. In terms of citizenship, SABCs are South African. In contrast, the vast majority of recent migrants are Chinese citizens, and they are in South Africa on temporary visa permits or, in some cases, illegally.⁵⁴ This indicates significant cleavages between the two groups in terms of class, ethnic identity and belonging. Many Chinese migrants have entered the country illegally, and some of them engage in other illegal activities once here.⁵⁵

In light of these sharp differences between the two groups, SABCs had to reconsider their “Chinese identity”. The Chinese have historically faced racist stigma’s around illegality and criminality, especially after 1904-1910. The “Transvaal Experiment” in Chinese labour which saw the emergence of “yellow peril” discourses in the media and public. In response, there have been

51 Huynh *et al.*, “Faces of China”, p. 269.

52 Huynh *et al.*, “Faces of China”, p. 295.

53 Pauw, *Chinese Associations and Associational Life*, pp. 92-93.

54 Some Chinese migrants are in South Africa on temporary permits or permanent residence permits. However, there is also a large number who are in the country illegally and undocumented.

55 YJ Park, “Chinese Migration in Africa”, *South African Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper No. 24*, 2009, p. 14.

attempts to present the group as law-abiding and hard-working. However, the criminal elements within the enormous third wave of Chinese migration have undermined this portrayal, and many of these older stereotypes have resurfaced. Consequently, many SABCs push back against being associated with Chinese migrants because of the stigma of illegality and criminality attached to this group. Furthermore, South African Chinese associations also no longer numerically represent the majority of the Chinese in South Africa. This has further called into question their purpose and legitimacy.

Janet Chen is a recent Chinese migrant. She emigrated from the Fujian province of China to South Africa in 1994 at the age of four, along with her parents, who came in search of economic opportunities.⁵⁶ Her family was poor when they migrated, through hard work, they were able to improve their financial standing. They enrol her in private schools, and she currently works as a civil engineer. Chen states that although she has some friends who are SABCs, there are still considerable language and cultural divisions in their relationships. She struggles to connect with SABCs because they do not speak Mandarin and are far removed from her experience of Chinese culture and heritage. Chen also criticises the capricious nature of SABCs' claim to their Chinese identity. She argues that, during events such as the Chinese New Year, SABCs would claim that "we are all Chinese", but when confronted by the stereotype of illegality and criminality surrounding the Chinese, they would argue, "not us, we are South African Chinese".⁵⁷ Her comments point out that, some SABCs waver in the way they self-identify either as South African Chinese or as part of the larger Chinese diaspora. This tug of war between the two identities seems dependent on the situation and, consequently, can lead to either situational unity or friction with recent Chinese migrants.

Despite the differences between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants, there are various instances in which associations like TCA interact and collaborate with the plethora of new associations established by Chinese migrants after 1994. As per its constitution, TCA strives to, "promote and preserve all ties with similar associations within and beyond the borders of the Republic of South Africa".⁵⁸ Consequently, Pon is in contact with many of the different chairs of the recent migrant associations.⁵⁹ They discuss community

56 Interview: Author with J Chen (pseudonym), Johannesburg, 18 August 2018. RE: Chinese Identity.

57 Interview: Author with J Chen, Johannesburg, 18 August 2018. RE: Chinese Identity.

58 "About Us", *The Chinese Association of Gauteng*, <http://www.tcagp.co.za/about-us/>, accessed 14 March 2019.

59 Although the project's research is not extensive enough to make claims on the gender dynamics of either SABC, Taiwanese or recent Chinese migrant associations, it is necessary to note that the research identified some associations with female chairpersons: TCA's Women's Federation for SABCs; Taiwanese Woman Association for the Taiwanese; and the

issues, such as racism and crime and the Chinese New Year and other cultural celebrations are also held in conjunction with the new associations.⁶⁰

Other South African Chinese associations, such as the Shunde Friendship Association (SFA), have shown high levels of interaction with recent Chinese migrants. It was established by King Pon in 1997 and is one of the youngest Chinese associations.⁶¹ The association takes its name from the Shunde district of Foshan, which is situated in the Guangdong province of China. The association's purpose is also linked to Shunde identity. Its objectives are to preserve and promote the ancestral, cultural and traditional roots to Shunde for SABCs. Examples of this include trips (often for the youth) to ancestral villages in China and at their 20th anniversary celebration in 2018, a famous chef from Shunde was invited to South Africa to share the cuisine unique to the area. Despite being an association predominantly for SABCs, it has many connections to recent Chinese migrants. Pon suggests that, his association collaborates with new Chinese associations on various fronts, including connecting families between the two countries and in the joint celebration of Chinese New Year. Additionally, the SFA has formed a voluntary medical assistance group to help new Chinese migrants to access healthcare and receive medical support under emergencies. This group uses its contacts and knowledge of the healthcare system in South Africa to ensure that in case of an emergency, all Chinese are well catered for. Pon states that they are well known for their humanitarian work amongst the recent Chinese migrant communities in Gauteng. They are even contacted by the Chinese Embassy and Consulate to help in certain situations.⁶²

In 2017, there was a case of a Chinese tourist who was shot in Gauteng and needed financial and medical assistance. The SFA, together with several Chinese migrant associations, managed to fundraise enough money which paid for the man's four-month stint in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a private hospital. At the time of the interview, Pon was helping on fundraising for a Chinese migrant, from the Fujian province in China, to be treated at Johannesburg's Milpark hospital as he was also shot. Pon says that despite their different origins, he and the association are trying to unite with Chinese newcomers.⁶³ While the influx of recent Chinese migrants has not significantly affected the membership of the SFA, it has added to its roles in the form of voluntary and charitable work. This reflects the class divisions between

Chinese Scholars and Students of South Africa and Africa Chinese Woman Association for recent Chinese migrants.

60 Interview: Author with E Pon.

61 Interview: Author with K Pon.

62 Interview: Author with K Pon.

63 Interview: Author with K Pon.

SABCs and recent Chinese migrants that have been analysed earlier. Despite the links between the SFA and recent Chinese migrants, there exists an inherent separation and power disparity between the group helping and the group in need of help.

Another example of the interaction between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants is the Hong Ning Old Age Home, a retirement village in Belgravia for Chinese seniors living in Johannesburg. The home was established in 1977, to provide care to retired SABCs, and continues to operate today. The food served, events held, and activities offered are all geared to cater to this group of the Chinese population. Although the residents comprise mainly SABCs, the home is also open to recent Chinese migrants. Shirleen Man, a committee member of the nursing home, explains that the lack of elderly Chinese migrants is because many of the new migrants have not yet reached the retirement age or return to China after reaching the age of seniority.⁶⁴ Presumably, the poor economic status of many Chinese migrants, not being able to afford the fees of the home and visa issues, also add to the reasons for their absence.

Despite this, the home receives substantial investment and support from different sections of the Chinese population. South African Chinese associations, such as the TCA and PCA, have strong historical ties to the home. At the same time, various Christian and Buddhist Chinese, as well as Taiwanese organisations/charities, also provide donations and funding. Furthermore, the home is fervently financially supported by many of the new wealthier Chinese business associations.⁶⁵ The Hong Ning Home receives widespread support and is considered a vital community facility by the different groups of Chinese.

5. CONCLUSION

South African Chinese associations have experienced significant change as a result of the new democratic dispensation. Full and equal rights to all South African citizens have decreased the importance for these associations to have political objectives as they did in the past. Instead, to survive declining membership and participation, associations have increasingly taken on a role as cultural institutions that form an integral part of the diversity of democratic South Africa. Through this process, a new South African Chinese identity that fits into the framework of the rainbow nation is being constructed. However, some associations have continued to engage in political activities post-apartheid, as the very same democratic government that ensured full and

64 Interview: Author with S Man, Johannesburg, 18 August 2018. RE: Chinese Associations.

65 Interview: Author with S Man, Johannesburg.

equal rights to all also initially discriminated against the Chinese by excluding them from affirmative action policies.

Furthermore, prevailing racist stereotypes and misconceptions in this new democratic society have additionally prompted political action from Chinese associations in response, as in the ongoing hate speech case. Importantly, these issues have been and are being addressed through the new constitution and democratic institutions. Lastly, the democratic transition coincided with the third wave of Chinese migration to South Africa. The significant similarities and differences between SABCs and recent Chinese migrants have led to instances of situational friction and unity between the two groups. They have also highlighted how SABCs are navigating between their Chinese identity in South Africa and as part of the Chinese diaspora. This fluid nature of identity suggests that the process of “reimagining” is still ongoing.