



# 15

## Inter-regional Migration in the Global South: Chinese Migrants in Ghana

Joseph Kofi Teye, Jixia Lu, and Gordon Crawford

### Introduction

There has been a Chinese presence in Africa for many centuries, with a rise and fall in numbers at particular historical periods (Merli et al, 2016; Wang, 2022). For instance, the European colonial powers introduced Chinese labourers, especially in the post-slavery period, to work on their African colonial possessions as a captive labour force in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Snow, 1988, 42–6, cited in Harris, 2013, 176). Additionally, after the Chinese Revolution in 1949, China provided support to various liberation movements in Africa, and then post-independence assisted with material and technical support to selected newly independent countries (Harris, 2013, 176). From the start of the twenty-first-century Chinese migration to Africa has become increasingly significant (Brautigam, 2009; Broadman, 2007;

---

J. K. Teye (✉)

Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana  
e-mail: [jteye@ug.edu.gh](mailto:jteye@ug.edu.gh)

J. Lu

College of Humanities and Development Studies, China Agricultural University,  
Beijing, China  
e-mail: [lujx@cau.edu.cn](mailto:lujx@cau.edu.cn)

G. Crawford

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, Coventry, UK  
e-mail: [gordon.crawford@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:gordon.crawford@coventry.ac.uk)

Cardenal & Araujo, 2014; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2009), in line with the dramatic increase in Chinese trade and investment throughout the continent (Taylor, 2006, 1). However, while there is consensus that numbers have increased rapidly in recent years (Li, 2012, 62–64), estimates vary considerably and there remains a paucity of data about Chinese migrant flows to Africa (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2009, 591). Nonetheless, the increased diversity of Chinese migrants is clear, with increasing numbers of independent and unregulated migrants in addition to those official migrants connected to Chinese state-related projects, often in the construction sector (Wang, 2022).

While the increased movement of Chinese migrants to Africa has received attention in the literature in recent times, there is little understanding of the drivers and impacts of this migration (Merli et al., 2016; Teye et al., 2022). Research has suggested that while the increasing presence of Chinese migrants in informal sectors in African countries has created employment for low-skilled African workers, it has also led to growing resentment and opposition from some low-income Africans, often resulting in the vilification of Chinese migrants in various countries (Abid et al., 2013; Ajakaiye & Kaplinsky, 2009; Wang & Elliot, 2014), including Ghana (Tschakert, 2016).

This chapter examines the drivers and impacts of Chinese migration to Ghana, a West African country which has been a significant destination for Chinese migrants for several decades. The Chinese presence in this country is recorded from the late nineteenth century when indentured Chinese labourers were brought to the former Gold Coast by the British colonial government, including in 1897 a small group of 16 Chinese miners and technicians to work in the gold mines (Li, 2012, 74–75). After independence in 1957, a relatively small Chinese business community established itself in Ghana, for instance, in the catering and casino sectors, and more latterly in small-scale agriculture (Cook et al., 2016). In the twenty-first century, the number of Chinese non-resident migrant workers has increased, associated with the large-scale government-to-government infrastructure projects that have been undertaken, such as the construction of roads, the Bui dam, and football stadiums for the Africa Cup of Nations tournament in 2008. However such migration was usually short-term and regulated through being tied to official construction projects. Official numbers of Chinese citizens entering Ghana remained relatively small until the latter half of the 2000s. Sautman and Yan (2007) estimated the number of Chinese migrants in Ghana, in 2004, was about 6,000, but numbers have increased substantially since then, including an increased number of irregular migrants. Sources at the Chinese Embassy in Ghana reported that, as of 2018, there were about 30,000 Chinese migrants in Ghana (Zurek, 2018).

The Chinese in Ghana work in several sectors, including wholesale and retail trade, construction, manufacturing, mining, education and healthcare activities, and agriculture (Teye et al., 2022). Of all these sectors, it is Chinese involvement in the retail trade and artisanal mining sectors that has generated the most public debate. Although the artisanal mining and retail trade sectors are legally reserved for Ghanaians, an increasing number of Chinese migrants are working in these sectors (Teye et al., 2022). While we examine the impacts of Chinese migrants with particular focus on these sectors, examples have also been taken from other sectors, where appropriate.

This chapter is based on primary data as well as a review of relevant literature. The primary data was largely collected in 2020 and 2021, as part of the Migration for Equality and Development (MIDEQ) Hub.<sup>1</sup> The MIDEQ team in Ghana collected quantifiable data through a questionnaire survey of 1,268 Chinese immigrants, of which 855 respondents were male and the rest were female. The chapter also draws on qualitative data generated through in-depth interviews with 62 Chinese migrants and some Ghanaians. Qualitative data collected on return migrants in China was also used, as well as earlier interviews with Ghanaian small-scale miners with experience of working with Chinese miners. In line with the guarantee of anonymity, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper. The chapter is structured in five sections. This introductory section is followed by an overview of conceptual issues, including a discussion of the drivers of Chinese migration to Ghana. The third section discusses the impacts of Chinese migration in Ghana, with the fourth section then analysing the impact of Chinese migration in China. We draw out the main conclusion in the last section of the chapter.

## Conceptualising Drivers of Migration from China to Ghana

Given the increased flow of Chinese migrants to various parts of the world, some researchers have drawn on existing migration theories or proposed new frameworks to explain the drivers of migration from China to other parts of the world (Mohan et al, 2014; Wang, 2022; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). The push–pull theory, social networks theory, and migration infrastructure framework have all previously been used to explain the reasons behind the flow of Chinese migrants to Ghana (Sparreboom et al., 2018; Teye et al.,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) Hub unpacks the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. More at [www.mideq.org](http://www.mideq.org).

2022). This chapter relies heavily on insights from the conceptualisation of migration drivers by Van Hear (2012, 1), who defines drivers of migration as “the factors which get migration going and keep it going once begun”. Van Hear identified four migration drivers, namely: predisposing/underlying/drivers; proximate drivers, precipitating drivers, and mediating drivers.

The *predisposing/underlying drivers* are structural inequalities (especially between migrants’ places of origin and destinations) which create the context in which migration is desirable. Structuralist migration theorists (see Morawska, 2012; Wallerstein, 1974) have traditionally attributed international migration to inequalities in the global distribution of economic and political power. The *proximate drivers* are the macro-economic factors that have a direct bearing on migration. At migrants’ sending areas, these factors include a poor economic environment, political instability, and environmental degradation, driving people away from their usual places of residence. At migrants’ destinations, they include good economic conditions and peaceful environments that may attract migrants (Teye et al., 2015). The *precipitating drivers* of migration are the conditions that directly trigger departure or migration. At migrants sending areas, these include unemployment, low wages, and poverty (Van Hear, 2012) while at migrants’ destinations, these may include the availability of job opportunities and high wages. The *mediating drivers* are made up of factors which facilitate or constrain migration. These include the quality of transportation facilities, improved communications, access to economic resources, and social networks required for migration.

## What Factors Drive Chinese Migrants to Ghana?

Our analysis shows that all the various categories of drivers influence migration flows from China to Ghana. Although the literature does not comprehensively focus on the role of *predisposing or underlying drivers* in shaping migration from China to Ghana, there is enough evidence to suggest that structural inequalities between the two countries contribute to migration flows along the corridor. As Ghana does not have adequate economic resources, it relies on loans and grants from the government of China for infrastructure development. In most cases, these loans come with conditional agreements which call for the services of Chinese firms and expatriates. Most of the migrants that migrate as part of such agreements are either highly skilled or low-skilled single men who migrate to Ghana to work for Chinese firms involved in the construction of roads, buildings, hydropower plants, railroad, and telecommunications networks (Cook et al., 2016). For instance,

about 110 Chinese nationals worked on the Bui hydroelectric power project in Ghana (Aryee, 2015). Similarly, more than 100 Chinese citizens worked in Tamale during the construction of Tamale airport. While the Chinese who move to Ghana to work with Chinese construction firms tend to go back at the end of the contracts signed in China, some have remained in Ghana for several years to work in the trade sector or lucrative mining sector (Teye et al., 2022).

Apart from Chinese migrants who initially moved to Ghana as a result of Chinese government grants to the government of Ghana, economic and political changes in China have also enhanced Chinese firms' competitive advantage, which in turn promotes the migration of independent Chinese entrepreneurs to Ghana and other African countries. Chinese entrepreneurs are increasingly able to access loans for investments in the trade and manufacturing sectors in African countries (Wang, 2022, 2).

With regard to the role of *proximate and precipitating drivers*, some scholars who use the traditional “push–pull theory” to discuss the flow of migrants have discussed the combined effects of both the proximate and precipitating factors in shaping migration flows (see Sparreboom et al., 2018; Wang, 2022). Our MIDEQ study showed that the low earnings of some people and high cost of living in China were among the factors that pushed people to migrate from China. For instance, GHGPm23, a middle-aged male Chinese migrant from Hefei reported that he was employed in China but the salary was inadequate to meet the needs of his household. He migrated to Ghana with the help of his brother who was already in Ghana. Similarly, GHGPm28, a young male Chinese from Henan Province, reported that he migrated to Ghana in 2018 because the cost of living in China was very high. He feels working in Ghana is less difficult and more profitable:

In China, the cost of living is expensive and we work very hard there. We work for twelve hours, which is difficult. But when I came to Ghana, working here is not really difficult and I can also make money that is why I came here  
(GHGPm28, a male Chinese migrant from Henan Province, China)

The above statement shows that while wages in China are generally higher than wages in Ghana, the high cost of living in China makes life difficult for low-income earners. Migrants are pulled to Ghana because of the possibility to make huge profits in the trade and mining sectors. As shown in Table 15.1, 65% of male migrants and 48.7% of female migrants who took part in the MIDEQ study, mentioned better job/wages in Ghana as the main reason for

migrating to Ghana. Some small-scale entrepreneurs also reported that it is very difficult to climb up the social ladder in China because the big companies “control” the market. However, there are more opportunities for them to grow their businesses and improve social status in Ghana, as highlighted below:

In China, the market is controlled by big firms so I heard that there is more profits in Ghana. So, I moved here to start gold business. Now I am highly respected here and if I go back to China, my friends respect me more because of the things I am doing with the money from Ghana (GHGPm21, a 38-year-old male Chinese migrant from Zhejiang province)

As Wang (2022, 2) has argued elsewhere, Chinese migrants in similar situations as the above case view “the fairer opportunity structure and more flexible

**Table 15.1** Reasons for migration to Ghana by gender (multiple response)

Reasons for migrating to Ghana	Male		Female		All	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Better job opportunities /wage in Ghana	556	65.0	201	48.7	757	59.7
Ghana is safe(r)	331	38.7	161	39.0	492	38.8
Had family/friends in Ghana	198	23.2	179	43.3	377	29.7
Low cost of moving to Ghana	88	10.3	39	9.4	127	10.0
Easy to access Ghana (geography, migration policy)	83	9.7	28	6.8	111	8.8
Advised by recruiter	72	8.4	27	6.5	99	7.8
I was brought here (not choice)	49	5.7	28	6.8	77	6.1
Better education opportunities in Ghana	33	3.9	37	9.0	70	5.5

space for career and identity transitions” as a major reason to move to Ghana and other African countries. Apart from economic drivers related to employment and wages, the fact that Ghana is a relatively safer place to live was mentioned by 38.7% of the males and 39% of the females as the reason for coming to Ghana (see Table 15.1).

The role of *mediating or facilitative drivers* in shaping migration flows from China has also been discussed in the literature. While some studies have highlighted how Chinese migrants rely on social networks to migrate (Mohan et al., 2014; Teye et al., 2022), Xiang and Lindquist (2014, S124) has called for the need to focus more broadly on migration infrastructures, defined as “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility”. These authors have identified five dimensions of migration infrastructure, namely: “the commercial (recruitment intermediaries), the regulatory (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licencing, training and other purposes), the technological (communication and transport), the humanitarian (NGOs and international organizations), and the social (migrant networks)” (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, S124). In our MIDEQ research, we found that migration infrastructures were generally relied upon by the migrants to move to Ghana. As shown in Table 15.1, social networks, in particular, played a pivotal role in the migration of many of the Chinese in Ghana. Among female migrants, joining family and friends was the second most prominent reason for migrating (43.3%), while for male migrants, this was the third most important reason (23.2% of respondents mentioned this reason). Females were more likely to rely on social networks for migration as many of them came to join their spouses, as shown by the case of GHGPm12, a female Chinese migrant:

My husband was already here, and it was time to join him. When I gave birth, my salary was no longer enough for us. My husband was the one sending money to us every month. So, we decided that it would be wise to live together in one place and to help our child grow. He processed my documents and gave me money to come with our child (GHGPm12, a female Chinese in her 30s from Shandong Province.)

Consistent with the literature (Awumbila et al., 2017; Massey et al., 1993), social networks were also relied upon for information on Ghana. GHGPm21, a 38-year-old male Chinese who deals in gold, migrated to Ghana based on information provided by his friend:

My final decision was out of a conversation with a friend who was already in Ghana and works in the mining sector. He told me about the opportunities in

the mining sector because he knew my interest to establish my own business dating back to when we were still in college (GHGPm21, a 38-year-old male Chinese from Zhejiang province.)

As shown in Table 15.1, 21% of male and 44% of female Chinese migrants relied on information from family or relatives in Ghana to plan their migration. Some migrants also relied on friendship and kinship ties to process travel documents and funding the cost of migration, as highlighted by GHGPm18, a Chinese young man:

My uncle helped me to go through all the processes easily because he had helped many people to travel to Africa. My uncle was the one who guided me through what to do, where to go, among other things. He helped me to arrive in Ghana without any difficulties. (GHGPm18, a Chinese young man from Wuhan in Hubei Province.)

Another facilitative driver which contributed to reliance on social networks was having family/friends in Ghana (cited by 29.7% of respondents). Perhaps as a result of the facilitative role of social networks, the low cost of moving to Ghana was mentioned by 10.3% of males and 9.4% of females as another reason for moving to Ghana.

With regard to the commercial dimension of migration infrastructures, 28.3% of the migrants interviewed during our MIDEQ research reported that they contacted a broker or registered with a recruitment agency as part of preparations to migrate to Ghana. With reference to the regulatory regime, some of the migrants mentioned that it was quite easy to get an initial visa to travel to Ghana. The recruitment agencies assisted some of the migrants to navigate through the regulatory regimes. About a quarter (25.5%) of migrants had pre-departure training before leaving China. The technological dimension of migration infrastructures was also highlighted by some of the migrants. Nearly three quarters (70.8%) of the migrants reported that they used internet to get information about Ghana prior to leaving China.

## **Economic Activities of Chinese Migrants in Ghana**

Chinese migrants in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa work in several sectors. As shown in Table 15.2, the MIDEQ data shows that the major sectors where our Chinese respondents work include, wholesale or retail trade



(20.6%), construction, demolition or site preparation (13.5%), manufacturing (12.6%), accommodation and food (10%), mining (9.7%), education and healthcare activities (7.5%), and agriculture (5.9%). The Chi-square test shows that the distribution is gendered. For instance, a higher proportion of females (28.1%) work in the wholesale and retail sector than males (17%). The mining sector, on the other hand, is dominated by males (13.3% of males as against 2% of females). Chinese migrants in the mining sector are not linked to the government.

Chinese traders tend to work in the retailing of textiles, electrical appliances, medicines, food items, and agricultural products. Most Chinese entrepreneurs are involved in illegal retail because petty trading is legally reserved for only Ghanaians. In most cases, the Chinese shops are registered in the names of Ghanaians so as to avoid being arrested by security officials. Thus, although Ghana's Investment Promotion Act (2013) (Act 865) does not allow foreigners to engage in petty trade, Chinese enterprises are able to operate illicitly by relying on networks with Ghanaian traders (Teye et al., 2022). Since 2007, local traders in Ghana have been organising demonstrations against Chinese nationals due to their perceived take-over of the retail trade business. Studies by Sparreboom et al. (2018) reveal that many Ghanaian citizens, however, like the trading activities of Chinese citizens because their goods are cheaper. Some Ghanaian traders also have mutual networks with the Chinese as they get a cheap supply of goods from them.

Chinese involvement in small-scale gold mining in Ghana can be traced back to 1998 when a small number of miners from Hunan province were involved in fairly unsuccessful ventures (Crawford et al., 2015). However,

**Table 15.2** Sector of main work of Chinese migrants in Ghana by gender

	Male	Female	All
Agriculture, forestry, or fishing	6.4	4.7	5.9
Wholesale or retail trade	17	28.1	20.6
Construction, demolition, or site preparation	18	4.2	13.5
Manufacture or repair products	15.7	6	12.6
Accommodation or food services	5.6	19.2	10
Mining	13.3	2	9.7
Education or healthcare activities	2.9	17.2	7.5
Office administration or support activities	3.1	4.5	3.5
Infrastructure related (water, electricity)	3.9	0.2	2.7
Other	14.1	13.9	14.1
Total	100 (841)	100 (402)	100 (1243)

Pearson chi 2 = 251.7172, Pr = 0.000

the substantial increase in the gold price from 2008 onwards led to a new wave of Chinese miners migrating to Ghana. Another driver was the ongoing economic boom in China, enabling lower-class Chinese citizens to borrow sums of approximately US \$25,000 from banks in China for investment in small-scale gold mining activities in Ghana. At the height of Chinese involvement in this small-scale gold mining boom in Ghana in 2012 and 2013, the Chinese media reported that almost 50,000 Chinese nationals had migrated to Ghana for purposes of small-scale gold mining, mostly from Shanglin County in Guangxi Province, a traditional area of small-scale gold mining. Such high numbers are particularly striking given that small-scale gold mining in Ghana is restricted to Ghanaians by law (see Minerals and Mining Act 2006, Act 703, Section 83a) and therefore Chinese involvement in actual mining was illegal. However, it is important to understand the context of this involvement of Chinese migrants in illegal mining. Firstly, the majority of small-scale mining undertaken by Ghanaians is actually illegal, although very prevalent, the phenomenon of *galamsey*, where unregistered miners dig for gold. Chinese miners found ways to integrate themselves into the widespread illicit gold mining sector (Crawford & Botchwey, 2017; Hilson et al., 2014; Teschner, 2012). Secondly, Ghanaian state officials, politicians, and traditional authorities (chiefs) have long tolerated and benefited from illegal mining. For instance, politicians' election campaigns have been financed by "*galamsey* kingpins", with the implication that any attempt by the government to stop illegal mining is thereby compromised (Abdulai, 2017). Evidence suggests that Chinese miners were able to tap into this "culture of impunity" through the provision of bribes to officials, chiefs, politicians, and security personnel who then "looked the other way" concerning their mining activities (Botchwey et al., 2019, 12). However, the Chinese miners did not simply integrate themselves into the existing small-scale mining sector, rather they transformed it. They introduced capital, technology, and equipment into an informal sector that had hitherto used rudimentary methods. This led to the mechanisation and intensification of production, enabling much larger sums of money to be made, especially at a time when gold prices were historically high. However, such mechanisation also caused widespread environmental destruction. This led to a media outcry against illegal mining in general and, initially, against Chinese miners in particular. Ultimately this forced the government's hand, leading to a crackdown on the Chinese miners. These latter points are discussed in the impact section below.

As previously explained, apart from trading and small-scale mining, Chinese have historically worked in the construction sector. Most of the migrants in this sector are either highly skilled or low-skilled single men

who have migrated to Ghana to work for Chinese firms involved in the construction of roads, buildings, hydropower plants, railroad, and telecommunications networks (Cook et al., 2016). The migration of these persons is directly linked to the Chinese government's financial support to Ghana. In most cases, loans given by the Chinese to the Government of Ghana come with contract agreements that require the engagement of the services of Chinese firms and expatriates (Sparreboom et al., 2018). Chinese involvement in the manufacturing sector has not attracted much attention but it is significant. Chinese employers are involved in the manufacture of a wide variety of goods, including medicines, clothing, cooking utensils, etc. (Teye et al., 2022). Their involvement in the accommodation and hospitality sector is also significant. There are a number of Chinese hotels and restaurants in Ghana (Sparreboom et al., 2018).

## Impacts of Chinese Migration in Ghana

### Economic Impacts

The Chinese presence in Ghana has positively contributed to economic transformation in some sectors. Chinese involvement has transformed small-scale gold mining in Ghana from a traditional and indigenous activity that had used rudimentary tools for centuries into a highly mechanised industry that can no longer be called artisanal and often is more medium-scale than small-scale. In particular, the Shanglin miners introduced specialist equipment from China—wash plants, crushing machines, and water platforms with mechanised suction equipment for river dredging—as well as the use of heavy machinery (such as excavators and bulldozers). Collaboration between Chinese and Ghanaian miners led to business relationships and processes of technology and skills transfer that resulted in Ghanaian miners adopting the same mechanised techniques. A common practice by licenced Ghanaian miners was to form a partnership with Chinese miners, to whom they (unlawfully) sub-let their concessions, taking between 10 and 15% of the value of the gold produced, while the Chinese who financed and undertook the mining activities took 85–90%. Ghanaian miners also benefited from the know-how of the Shanglin miners. After such agreements expired, the Ghanaian miners had gained the capital to continue with mechanised production without direct Chinese involvement. Mechanisation has significantly intensified production and areas of land are now mined in weeks that previously would have taken years using traditional methods (Crawford et al.,

2015). The intensification of gold production is reflected in the phenomenal increase in production from small-scale mining, increasing almost nine-fold from 2005 to 2018, and from 11% of total production to 41%.

The technology transfer discussed above is not limited to the gold mining sector. In the construction sector, Chinese construction companies have been bringing into Ghana heavy machinery to construct roads, dams, and bridges. The Ghanaians who work with the Chinese gain skills in managing the heavy equipment. The presence of Chinese migrants, in the trade sector, has also positively contributed to the transformation of the sector. A number of Ghanaian traders get their goods “on credit” from Chinese businesses (See Sparreboom et al., 2018). However, some Ghanaian businesses have been highlighting competition with Chinese traders as a challenge to business growth and their desire to make good profits.

Incomes and livelihoods have also improved substantially for those who work with the Chinese in the various sectors. Some of the local labourers who work with the Chinese earn substantial amounts of money. Small-scale mining has, for instance, become big business, at least for those Ghanaian and Chinese miners in ownership and financing roles. A Ghanaian miner collaborating with Chinese miners on his small-scale concession indicated that his 15% amounted to an income of 15,000 to 25,000 Ghanaian cedis per week (approximately USD \$6,000 to USD \$10,000 per week in 2013). However, the state benefits little: this is an informal sector, with no taxes on incomes paid by miners. One benefit to the state is through increasing sales of gold to the Precious Minerals Marketing Company (PMMC), the official government gold buying and exporting agency. It should be noted that individual chiefs, state officials, and politicians have also benefited through bribery and corruption, with such benefits being private and illicit (Crawford & Botchwey, 2017). Similarly, traders who have partnerships with the Chinese benefit from the higher profits.

Chinese entrepreneurs sometimes built up roads and schools for the community in order to create a more harmonious relationship with local communities, and sometimes they donated money or goods to local people, thus directly or indirectly helping local economic development. The wider local economy has also benefited, notably local women traders from whom migrant workers who buy vegetables, chickens, and other foodstuff for their daily consumption, thereby helping local families improve their livelihoods. This concurred with interviews conducted by Crawford and Botchwey with Ghanaian miners in 2014 in Dunkwa-on-Offin, a town that was a centre of Chinese mining in the mid-2010s, one of whom stated that “the town was hot, very busy” and local people “had money in their pockets” (Botchwey

et al., 2019: 110). Similarly, research by Liu (2014), also undertaken in Dunkwa, revealed that local traders had been upset when the Chinese miners were forced to leave (see below), with the consequent decline in sales. However, MIDEQ research participants noted that in some communities the Chinese do not do much as far as social responsibility is concerned:

The Chinese presence has benefitted this community marginally. They have created jobs for a few people, of which most of them are members of Amanfro, the nearby community. However, the Chinese have not engaged in any corporate social responsibility activities such as building of schools and clinics. They have not contributed any medical equipment to the clinic.... They have also not helped the community to get potable water. (GHGPRk01, a male key informant in a host community)

Between the year 2010 and 2011, the Chinese bought for NM DA JHS [Junior High School] and Methodist JHS some computers, jerseys and footballs. But during the same period, they destroyed a lot of the water bodies in the community. ... Generally speaking, apart from the employment the Chinese offered the people in this community, they haven't done much to better the lives of the people in the community. (Male focus group discussion, GHGPRFGD02)

The above statements show that while people in the study communities have benefitted from employment opportunities, there is a general belief that the Chinese migrants have not helped to provide social amenities.

## Environmental Impacts

Many of the environmental impacts of the Chinese economic activities in Ghana are associated with gold mining. One negative consequence of mechanisation of production has been the intensification of environmental degradation, impacting both land and water resources. Extensive destruction of farmland occurred due to the scramble to acquire land for small-scale mining in the gold rush from 2008 onwards, especially by Chinese miners who came with capital to buy land, as highlighted during a male focus group discussion:

The mining company has taken possession of all the lands in the community that were used for farming. They have also cut down all the shea nut trees in the town. So, we no longer get shea nut to extract the shea oil for sale to help in the development of the community. The sad thing is that, the owners of

the land that they took possession of are not even employed in the company. (GHGPRFGD13, male focus group discussion in host community)

Environmental and economic impacts are intermingled, with the loss of farmland affecting both cocoa production and food crop production, and having an adverse effect on both food security and the country's foreign currency earnings (Crawford & Botchwey, 2017, 12). The destruction of river systems has emerged as another serious form of environmental degradation, particularly through direct mining in rivers, despite such practices being illegal. As noted, Chinese miners introduced water platforms and suction equipment for river dredging, with Ghanaian miners then adopting this practice. As a result, rivers have become severely polluted, with high levels of water turbidity and loss of aquatic life. Additionally, drinking water has become increasingly contaminated, with increased cost of treatment to make such water potable (CSIR - Water Research Institute, 2013). A focus group participant in a mining community highlighted some of these challenges in the statement below:

Their presence has affected us negatively because we normally dig gold but in bits. They are doing it in large quantities, destroying our water bodies....Prior to the arrival of the Chinese, our *galamsey* people mined the gold and took it home to wash it. However, the Chinese came to show us that excavators could be used to dig so deep and changfan machines to wash it in large quantity to enable them get more money (GHGPRk03, a female key informant in a mining host community in Ghana)

Such environmental destruction finally led the government to take action against illegal mining, with some targeting of Chinese miners, as discussed below.

## Political and Security Impacts

Concern about the scale of environmental destruction associated with mechanised small-scale gold mining has led to considerable disquiet among the populace and media pressure that has forced the government to act. This has occurred on two occasions, both involving a militarised crackdowns, with the first focusing on "illegal Chinese miners". Initially in May 2013, President Mahama established an Inter-Ministerial Task Force aimed at "flushing out" illegal miners in a military-style operation. Although this was officially aimed at all illegal mining, the spotlight on Chinese miners was evident. The operation led to the deportation of 4,592 Chinese nationals, along with small

numbers of other foreign nationals from Russia, Togo, and Niger (Modern Ghana, 12 July 2013), while many other foreign miners fled the country. It was notable that no Ghanaian miners were arrested despite their involvement in illegal mining, often in collaboration with Chinese miners. Subsequently, in April 2017, President Akufo-Addo declared a moratorium on all small-scale mining, enforced by a military taskforce (Operation Vanguard) from July 2017. Initially in place for six months, this moratorium was extended for 20 months until December 2018, when it was lifted but only for those registered miners who had successfully renewed their licences. By late January 2018, Operation Vanguard had resulted in the arrest of 983 miners, this time overwhelmingly Ghanaian, and only including 12 Chinese and four Burkinabé miners. There have also been clashes between Chinese miners and local youth in some communities. The local youth sometimes attack Chinese miners for destroying their lands.

## Inequalities

The presence of the Chinese in Ghana has contributed to both a reduction in inequality as well as a widening of it. In the gold mining sector, the transformation in small-scale mining due to the techniques and equipment introduced by the Chinese miners has led to a huge increase in incomes for those at the top of the industry, but has also brought about a widening of inequalities, with stratification among Ghanaians involved in small-scale mining having significantly increased, inclusive of a gender dimension. Those miners that have accumulated capital (invariably males) have been able to substantially increase their incomes, and also to diversify their sources of income through investment in hotels, for instance. Yet with mechanisation replacing unskilled labour, many women, children and young people are now left to extract small remnants of gold by re-washing the gravels that remain in heaps of “tailings” at abandoned pits after intensive mining has been completed. Among Chinese miners, outcomes were varied, often influenced by class position in Shanglin. Again, those able to mobilise capital to invest in mining machinery and pay for travel tended to do much better than those that had to take on loans and incur debt (Botchwey et al., 2017: 315). The same situation was observed by the MIDEQ team in the trading sector. Ghanaian traders who have partnerships with the Chinese earn more income.

At the same time, there are reports of exploitation of Ghanaian employees by Chinese employers. In some cases, wages paid to Ghanaians are reportedly far lower than what is paid to Chinese at the same levels. There have also been reports of exploitation of the Ghanaians who “front” for the Chinese

business entrepreneurs to register their businesses. The case of a 44-year-old male Ghanaian illustrates this level of exploitation. He was approached by a Chinese who wanted to set up a retail shop in 2016. MUGU's documents were used to register the shop "as the owner". Currently, MUGU works as a salesperson who is paid 1400 Cedis per month. He is scared that he would be sacked if he demands more benefits:

In the Registrar General's office, I am the owner of the business. [But] in reality, I am just a sales boy for them. Even his nephew earns higher than me. He [the nephew] has a car but I don't even have a bicycle. I receive just 1400 [cedis] as salary... I am scared that if I ask for more salary, he will sack me and get another Ghanaian's documents to register (a 34 year old male Ghanaian)

The above scenario demonstrates exploitation within social networks. As Awumbila et al (2017) have noted, even in situations where individuals are cooperating for a common goal, exploitation may occur within networks due to unequal power relations.

## **Benefits of Migration to Chinese Migrants and Household Members Left Behind**

### **Improved Incomes and Livelihoods**

Except for few individuals, the majority of Chinese who migrated to Ghana reported improved incomes. In the trading sector, the migrants reported higher profitability and improved living conditions compared with working in China, as highlighted below by a Chinese in the trading sector:

My living condition is better now than when I was in China due to my profitable business. I live in a two-bedroom house at Adenta; I have a car and a fiancée. Although I was not poor, I did not have some of these things when I was in China. I had my own business back in China but not as profitable as the new one in Ghana. I did not have a car in China and lived in a one-bedroom after the divorce. (GHGPM09, a middle aged Chinese young man from Beijing)

Chinese migrants engaged in small-scale gold mining particularly earn higher amounts than they would have earned in China. For the average employees in the mining sector, 100 thousand Yuan (CNY) per year is the basic level in addition to reimbursement of their costs on visas and



travels. However, it is widely agreed that for those gold mining bosses, the income from gold mining is much more than 100 thousand Yuan (CNY) per year (approximately US\$14,000), although it is quite difficult to know the exact amount they earn. Before migrating to Ghana, the miners were engaging in agricultural production, trucks for transport, small-scale factories, and so on. The economic benefits of all these livelihood activities cannot be compared with gold mining in Africa no matter whether he is an employee or a boss. And this is the strongest driver for many Chinese people to migrate to Ghana for small-scale gold mining. Traders in Ghana also reported that they earn more in Ghana than in China. This can be seen with their newly built houses, expensive brand cars, and expenditures on children's education in China.

## Remittances and Local Development

The migration and economic activities of Chinese migrants generally benefit their left-behind family members and local communities with remittances including financial and social ones. Data from the MIDEQ survey in Ghana indicates that 65.6% of male and 49.1% of female Chinese migrants sent remittances to their relatives within the twelve months prior to the study. Financial remittances generally flow between Chinese groups through bank transfers and the remittances are generally used for the improvement of houses, children's education, and health care. Especially when the profit is quite high, the migrants will invest in housing in the rural areas, and even the big cities. Besides, social remittances also are observed in some areas of the counties where the migrants come from. One typical case is the "Gold Mining Garden", an investment by one returned gold miner in Shanglin County, which includes many African culture elements including sculptures, grass-roofed houses, photos of Ghanaian attractions, etc. This has played a role in the dissemination of African cultures and enables more Chinese to learn and understand Africa.

While migration and remittances obviously contribute to local development through building of houses and acquisition of cars, they also have negative effects on some aspects of local development. Interviews in China revealed that migrating for gold mining in Africa has become a popular culture in the traditional mining communities and this quick way to make money has greatly shaped the youth's values and weakens their aspirations for any other industry investment. Thus migration to Africa for work in the gold mining sector, to some extent, is harmful for local entrepreneurship and industry development.

## Inequalities in Areas of Origin

About 20 years ago, all of the households in the research sites in China were similar, with their livelihood activities being mainly related to agriculture production. There is evidence that gold mining opportunities in Ghana have deepened inequalities in the communities of origin at both the household and community levels. In the fieldwork, it was observed that not all of the migrants have brought earnings and wealth back to their families: The wealth and money brought home strongly depends on when the migrants entered Ghana and engaged in the gold mining activities. Early migrants could access high-quality mines with more possibilities while the later ones, especially those who went to Ghana after 2012, actually lost more than they earned. In the three years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has become worse for some migrants. Some interviewees in the left-behind families responded that their husbands/sons are afraid of coming back to China because they borrowed a lot of money which they could not pay because of the economic challenges associated with COVID-19. Some traders also reported similar inequalities. In some cases, the pioneer migrants made huge profits but those they helped to migrate in recent years do not have the same profits. Thus while the literature often discusses inequalities between migrant households that receive remittances and households that do not receive any remittances (Bragg et al., 2017; Pickbourn, 2016), we have seen that there are inequalities among different families depending on migration status and the time-period that the migrant travelled to Ghana.

## Psychological and Health Impacts

While financial remittance and benefits are given more attention in the literature (Bajra, 2021) than health and psychological impacts of migration, some returned migrants mentioned that it could be frightening to work in the gold mines, especially when they experienced robbery and other attacks. A few returned migrants said they even have experienced an exchange of gunfire with those robbers which brought long-term psychological impact on their current life. Finally, some returned migrants told us that Chinese migrants whose visas expired were sometimes captured by policemen and detained in dark rooms until some local prominent people or Chinese friends came to bail them. One respondent said that as a result of these incidents, he has been having nightmares and will therefore never go back to any African country.

Malaria is also an inevitable challenge for all Chinese migrants in Ghana. Nearly all the returned migrants we interviewed have been affected by

malaria, with some of their fellow villagers having died due to malaria. Another health risk for the Chinese migrants is HIV which is high due to sexual promiscuity among the miners. In some villages, more than 10 migrants have been infected with HIV which also brings the risk to their wives.

## Conclusion

Chinese migration to Ghana has increased considerably in recent decades, and this chapter focuses on the drivers and impact of such migration in Ghana, with particular reference to the trading and small-scale mining sectors. Relying on Van Hear's (2012) conceptualisation of the drivers of migration, we have demonstrated that migration flows from China to Ghana are driven by an interaction of underlying, precipitating, proximate, and mediating factors. With regard to underlying factors, structural inequalities between the two countries provide a context for the flow of Chinese government financial grants with conditionalities which facilitate the migration of skilled and unskilled migrants to Ghana. Precipitating and proximate drivers include high costs of living in China and limited opportunities for upward social and economic mobility. As argued elsewhere (see Wang, 2022), high profit margins, especially in the small-scale gold mining and trade sectors, attract Chinese migrants to Ghana because these factors provide opportunities for social mobility.

The migration of Chinese people to Ghana has both positive and negative impacts. In the mining sector, Chinese migrants have introduced new equipment and techniques which has led to a transformation of small-scale mining into a mechanised and intensive operation. Positively, incomes and livelihoods of both Ghanaian and Chinese miners have improved with the overall increase in efficiency of production, and there has been a spill-over effect into the wider local economy that serves the small-scale miners. However, financial rewards from intensified production have benefited some more than others, with increased income inequalities along social class lines, largely determined by ownership of capital. There has also been a gender dimension to such increased inequalities, with poor women's situation in the sector worsening as they become marginalised or excluded by mechanised production. Such differential economic benefits were also very evident among the Shanglin miners, with the fortunes of some contrasted with the debt bondage of others. Negative impacts include greater environmental degradation of both water bodies and land, including the loss of agricultural land for the

production of both food and cash crops. Such pollution also brings with it a cost to the state in reclaiming land and cleaning-up water sources, while tax incomes from small-scale gold production remain limited and often evaded. An additional negative impact is on the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens, given the evidence of state collusion in unlawful activities and its hypocrisy in undertaking a military-style crackdown in a selective manner. Similarly, in the trade and manufacturing sectors, Ghanaians that are in partnership with Chinese entrepreneurs benefit in terms of employment and higher incomes. However, there have been cases of exploitation of some Ghanaians by Chinese migrants. While migrants and their families left behind benefit through improved incomes and remittances, migration and associated financial flows contribute to a deepening of inequalities in migrants' sending areas. Migration and working in illegal mines in Ghana are also associated with a number of psychological and health problems that continue to affect returned migrants.

**Acknowledgements** This work has been undertaken as part of the Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) Hub. Funded by the UKRI Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (Grant Reference: ES/S007415/1), MIDEQ unpacks the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. More at [www.mideq.org](http://www.mideq.org)

## References

- Abid, R. Z., Manan, S. A., & Amir, Z. A. (2013). 'Those nation wreckers are suffering from inferiority complex': The depiction of Chinese miners in the Ghanaian press. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, 1(2), 34–49.
- Abdulai, A. G. (2017). The galamsey menace in Ghana: A political problem requiring political solutions? *Policy Brief*, 5, June. University of Ghana Business School.
- Ajakaiye, O., & Kaplinsky, R. (2009). China in Africa: A relationship in transition. *European Journal of Development Research*, 21(4), 479–484. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2009.3>
- Aryee, E. T. K. (2015). *International migration: An evaluation of irregular Chinese migrants in contemporary Ghana*. Doctoral dissertation, Thesis, University of Ghana.
- Awumbila, M., Teye, J. K., & Yaro, J. A. (2017). Social networks, migration trajectories and livelihood strategies of migrant domestic and construction workers in Accra, Ghana. *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 52(7), 982–996.

- Bajra, U. Q. (2021). The interactive effects of remittances on economic growth and inequality in western Balkan countries. *Journal of Business Economics and Management*, 22(3), 757–775.
- Botchwey, G., Crawford, G., Loubere N., and Lu, J. (2019). South-South irregular migration: The impacts of China's informal gold rush in Ghana, *International Migration*, 57 (4), 310–328. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12518>
- Bragg, C., Gibson, G., King, H., Leffer, A. A., & Ntoubandi, F. (2017). Remittances as aid following major sudden-onset natural disasters. *Disasters*, 42(1), 3–18.
- Brautigam, D. (2009). *The Dragon's gift: The real story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Broadman, H.G. (2007). *Africa's silk road: China and India's new economic frontier*. World Bank.
- Cardenal, J. P., & Araujo, H. (2014). *China's silent army: The pioneers, traders, fixers and workers who are remaking the world in Beijing's image*. Penguin.
- Cook, S., Lu, J. X., Tugendhat, H., & Alemu, D. (2016). Chinese migrants in Africa: Facts and fictions from the agri-food sector in Ethiopia and Ghana. *World Development*, 81, 61–70.
- Crawford, G., Agyeyomah, C., Botchwey, G., & Mba, A. (2015). *The impact of Chinese involvement in small-scale gold mining in Ghana. Research Report*. International Growth Centre, London School of Economics. <https://www.theigc.org/project/the-impact-of-chinese-involvement-in-small-scale-gold-mining-in-ghana/#outputs>
- Crawford, G., & Botchwey, G. (2017). Conflict, collusion and corruption in small-scale gold mining: Chinese miners and the State in Ghana'. *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 55(4), 444–470. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2017.1283479>
- Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)—Water Research Institute. (2013). Impact of small-scale mining on the water resources of the Pra River basin. CSIR.
- Harris, K.L. (2013) The Chinese in South Africa: Five centuries, five trajectories. In Chee-Beng Tan (Ed.) *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* (pp.176–190). Routledge.
- Hilson, G., Hilson, A., & Adu-Darko, E. (2014). Chinese participation in Ghana's informal gold mining economy: Drivers, implications and clarifications. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 34, 292–303.
- Li, A. S. (2012). *A history of overseas Chinese in Africa to 1911*. Diasporic Africa Press.
- Liu, S. N. (2014). Ghanaians. *Perception of Chinese migrants in Ghana*. Unpublished mimeo.
- Massey, D. S., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kuoaoouci, A., Pellegrino, A., & Taylor, J. E. (1993). Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review*, 19(3), 431–466.

- Merli, M. G., Verdery, A., Mouw, T., & Li, J. (2016). Sampling migrants from their social networks: The demography and social organization of Chinese migrants in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *Migration Studies*, 4(2), 182–214.
- Mohan, G., Lampert, B., Tan-Mullins, M., & Chang, D. (2014). *Chinese migrants and Africa's development. New imperialists or agents of change?* Zed Books.
- Mohan, G., & Tan-Mullins, M. (2009). Chinese migrants in Africa as new agents of development? An analytical framework. *European Journal of Development Research*, 21(4), 588–605. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2009.22>
- Morawska, E. (2012). Historical-structural models of international migration. In Martiniello, M. and J. Rath (Eds.), *An introduction to international migration studies: European perspectives* (pp.176–190). Amsterdam University Press.
- Pickbourn, L. (2016). Remittances and household expenditures on education in Ghana's northern region: Why gender matters. *Feminist Economics*, 22(3), 74–100.
- Sautman, B., & Yan, H. R. (2007). Friends and interests: China's distinctive links with Africa'. *African Studies Review*, 50(3), 75–114.
- Snow, P. (1988). *The star raft: China's encounter with Africa*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Sparreboom, T., Badasu, D. B., Teye, J. K., Kandilige, L. and Setrana, M.B. (2018). Immigration and economic growth in Ghana. In OECD/ILO *How immigrants contribute to Ghana's economy* (pp.176–190). OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302037-en>.
- Taylor, I. (2006). *China and Africa: Engagement and compromise*. Routledge.
- Teschner, B. A. (2012). Small-scale mining in Ghana: The government and the galamsey. *Resources Policy*, 37(3), 308–314.
- Teye, J. K., Awumbila, M., and Benneh, Y. (2015). Intra-regional migration in the ECOWAS region: trends and emerging challenges. In Akoutou, A., B., Sohn, R., Vogl, M. and D. Yeboah (Eds.), *Migration and civil society as development drivers—A Regional perspective* (pp.176–190). Zei Centre for European Integration Studies.
- Teye, J. K., Kandilige, L., Setrana, M. B., & Yaro, J. A. (2022). Chinese migration to Ghana: Challenging the orthodoxy on characterizing migrants and reasons for migration. *Ghana Journal of Geography*, 14(2), 203–234.
- Tschakert, P. (2016). Shifting discourses of vilification and the taming of unruly mining landscapes in Ghana. *World Development*, 86, 123–132.
- Van Hear, N. (2012). Forcing the issue: Migration crises and the uneasy dialogue between refugee research and policy. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 25(1), 2–24.
- Wang, J. (2022, April 7). What drives Chinese migrants to Ghana: it's not just an economic decision. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/what-drives-chinese-migrants-to-ghana-its-not-just-an-economic-decision-177580>
- Wang, F. L., & Elliot, E. A. (2014). China in Africa: Presence, perceptions and prospects. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(90), 1012–1032.
- Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The modern world-system I: Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. Academic Press.

- Xiang, B., & Lindquist, J. (2014). Migration infrastructure. *International Migration Review*, 48(s1), S122–S148.
- Zurek, K. (2018). Ghana has the highest number of African students in China. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-has-the-highest-number-of-african-students-inchinaenvoy.html>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

