Lonely Nights Online: How does Social Networking Channel Chinese Migration and Business to Africa?

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Introduction

It is not news that the last fifteen years' expansion of economic ties between China and Africa has also led to a marked increase in Chinese migration to the continent. The growing body of scholarship dedicated to China-Africa migration (particularly as it relates to traders) has focused a lot on the role of social networks between Chinese citizens in finding suitable new migrants, managing their immigration experience and setting them up in new businesses. Scholars have pointed to the importance of Chinese kinship and regional networks as a factor undergirding the migration of Chinese people to an environment very foreign to them (see for example Pieke, 2004; Pieke et al, 2007; Park, 2009; Park, 2010; Turner, 2011; McNamee et al, 2012).

However, surprisingly little has been written on the role of internet communities in mediating the flow of migrants from China to Africa. This is particularly striking because, as we show in this paper, the internet plays a significant role in

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the everyday lives of Chinese migrants to Africa. This is true for tourists and traders, but even more so for the employees of Chinese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Despite the sporadic use of the Internet by scholars and journalists to get opinions from Chinese migrants living in Africa, there hasn't been a comprehensive study of the role of the Internet in China-Africa migration. One reason for this is the very size of the Chinese Internet. China now has more internet users than any other country and Chinese-language internet services like Baidu, Sina Weibo and Alibaba have shown explosive growth (Xu, 2012). For this reason, our paper can also not claim to be a comprehensive account of the role of online communication in migratory flows between China and Africa. Rather, we would like to offer those interested in this topic a few places to start, by showing how various sites are used by Chinese migrants in Africa and to point out a few of the most commonly occurring themes of this discourse. In the process we hope to open new avenues of enquiry to those interested in this underexplored side of China-Africa migration.

However, before delving into the specifics of this topic, one important question remains: why is the Internet so important in the lives of Chinese migrants to Africa? In looking at the lives of Chinese migrants to developing countries, several researchers have implicitly answered this question without necessarily drawing the logic through to the Internet itself. For example, Heidi Østbø Haugen and Jørgen Carling (2005) have pointed out that Chinese migrants to Cape Verde tend to isolate themselves in compounds due to perceptions that they will be targeted by criminals. This is even truer for Chinese migrants to mainland Africa. Dan Haglund (2009) has argued that Chinese SOEs' employment practices in Zambia (including short-term contracts and discouraging the immigration of spouses and children) tend to produce low levels of engagement with the local community. These workers live in what Ching Kwan Lee (2009)

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has called 'enclaves' or more evocatively, 飞地 (feidi – flying lands). Designed to keep Chinese workers safe, these walled compounds make interaction with the local community quite difficult. These worker compounds offer different levels of luxury (Lee describes a compound in Zambia with a Chinese cook, satellite TV, a karaoke room and even a Chinese-style stone bridge – this will definitely not be true for SMEs). Yet, despite varying levels of luxury in worker accommodation, a fast internet connection allowing them to download video and to stay in contact with their families at home has become a requisite part of the employer-employee compact. The internet doesn't only act as a one-stop entertainment, communication and leisure hub, it also softens the impact of the stringent security measures designed to keep Chinese workers out of trouble. These measures include a strong discouragement or blanket ban of workers leaving the compound at night. This rule, together with armed guards, is in-scribed into the employment contract offered by SOEs to prospective workers in China, and is considered a fundamental part of ensuring their safety. What hap-pens in practice is that these workers are subjected to long, lonely nights where online communication becomes their only outlet outside of their work commu-nity. This is not only true for SOE workers in their worker compounds, but also for the workers and owners of SMEs, who fear (not without reason) that if they wander around at night they will become the targets of criminals or corrupt po-lice (Global Agenda, 2009). In their case the Internet takes on a wider role than simply entertainment, maintaining family and cultural ties and managing bore-dom. It also becomes a crucial tool for employers to recruit new workers and to find reasonably priced supplies and for prospective workers to find out more about working conditions at certain factories before they commit themselves.

In this paper we will sketch in broad strokes the different online communities that play a particularly important role in mediating Chinese migration to Africa, with a particular focus on the role of web forums. The reason for this choice and

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our approach and methodology is set out in the section below. In the subsequent section we identify three of the most prominent themes dominating online conversations: the discussion of working conditions and business practices, the discussion of relationships between Chinese and Africans and the description of African landscapes and environments to readers in China. We conclude by pointing out the potential for further research into this area. This paper is by no means intended to be comprehensive. Rather, we use it to open a wider discussion of the different ways online communication is shaping China-Africa relations.

The Chinese Internet: Patterns and Methods

One of the main factors complicating the use of the Internet as a research tool into the globalization of the Chinese experience is language. This is of course mainly a barrier to its use by scholars who do not speak Chinese. Yet even those who do might find themselves confused by the particular conventions and codes used by Chinese users of the internet or netizens. Another complicating factor is the sheer amount of information available. Akin to trying to drink from a fire hose, the researcher faces an overwhelming barrage of information, opinion and untethered comment. Research so far have tended to focus on certain particular topics (for example, recent work includes the rise of new web-based modes of discourse (Xu, 2012), the impact on young Chinese definition of self (Liu, 2011), the way this kind of media is used to mull over national disasters (Inwood, 2011) and using the Chinese netizen community as a barometer to gauge the wider Chinese public's view of Chinese foreign policy and its perceptions of other countries (Hu & Lei, 2010; Shen, 2011). Other research has focused on certain communities, for example, the way how Chinese students at foreign universities use social networking sites and discussion forums to ease their adaptation to new environments (Lin et al, 2011; Ye, 2006) as well as how internet use reflect the kind of cultural differences that affect adaptation (Wei et

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al, 2012). Research into the use of the Internet by Chinese communities living outside China has so far focused on Chinese communities in the developed world. However, we feel that it is exactly what Yu-Shan Wu in this volume has called the leapfrogging nature of the internet in Africa (the tendency of users to skip the gradual development of technology by acting as early adopters of the newest communication mechanisms available in the market) that makes Chinese internet use in Africa so useful to track its influence as a mediating force in migration.

Certain corners of the Chinese-language internet provide particularly useful glimpses into this mediating role. In our preparation for this paper we had to choose between three main types of web discourse. In the first place, we looked at the microblogging site Sina Weibo. While it is one of the biggest discussion forums on the web, it presents its own problems. In particular, Weibo's interface, which resembles Twitter, tends to produce large amounts of sort posts that drift loose from each other. It soon becomes difficult to discern who responded to whom and it presents a barrier to following conversations.

In contrast, single-topic QQ groups proved more useful. QQ is a multifaceted web presence developed by the Chinese internet giant Tencent. One of its main services is an instant messaging service. Once the user downloads the QQ app, it provides access to more than 700 million QQ accounts. These accounts are mostly in Chinese, although QQ is expanding into foreign markets and currently offers services in English, French, German, Spanish, Japanese and Korean. Although most QQ users only use it to chat with friends or make new friends online, QQ is frequently used by Chinese small-scale businesses both within and outside of China to find raw materials and markets as well as to recruit workers. QQ does not only offer one-on-one instant messaging, but also allows the creation of topic-specific QQ groups. In this research we have identified more than 30 QQ groups formed by the Chinese community to exchange information about

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living or doing business in African countries. While QQ lessens the random nature of Weibo messaging, and researchers can zone in on particular topics, they require researchers to track unfolding conversations in real time because they tend to be more ephemeral than web forums. In addition, they are not completely open. Entry into certain QQ groups requires approval by the group administrators who reserve the right to invite or expel group members. However, despite these limitations, QQ groups have proven themselves useful to our research, as we explain in more detail later in this paper.

The most useful for our purposes were single-topic web forums. These forums preserve whole conversations as they develop over time, which makes them an invaluable source for researchers interested in the breadth of opinions regarding a specific topic. The forums are also relatively stable, which means that one can follow a single thread back to its origin and return to these conversations over and over. The most useful web forums used by the Chinese community in Africa were:

Baidu PostBar[1]

Baidu is the largest Chinese language search engine in the world. Baidu PostBar (or Baidu Tieba), allows its users to create a bar (forum) by typing a keyword. The largest bar related to Africa on Baidu is the "Africa Bar", but country-related bars such as "Tanzania Bar" and "Ghana Bar", also host a many threads and discussions.

Tianya Club[2]

Tianya Club is a popular Chinese web forum with one of the most vibrant online communities in China. By January 2013 there were more than 78,297,000 registered users on Tianya. Tianya has the reputation for hosting fierce debates on Chinese social issues and international relations. Its sub-forum "Africa" contained 3,040 threads with 53,758 posts by 6th February.

Chinese in Africa[3]

"Chinese in Africa" is a web forum with more than 65,000 threads and more than 80,000 members by 2013. The forum was especially active in 2007-08, yet since 2010 the volume of the threads and responses has declined. However, it contains records of a large number of conversations documenting the lives, feelings, experiences and business interaction among the Chinese in Africa. The forum is divided into different sub-forums dedicated to topics such as "Life in Africa", "Business Opportunities", "Job-seeking", "Touring in Africa", as well as containing region-specific forums such as "West Africa", "East Africa" and "Southern Africa".

Qufeizhou[4]

Qufeizhou is targeted to Chinese who intend to go to Africa, or has been living or working in Africa. Launched in 2011, the forum is relatively new, but offers an integrated platform containing news, country-specific information about Africa, business, entertainment and opportunities to make friends. By January 2013, there were more than 25,000 members in the community.

Fob Business Forum – Africa Market[5]

The Africa sub-forum of the Fob Business Forum has generated over 10,000 threads dedicated to information about trade and investment in many African countries. Topics frequently discussed include trade procedures, dealing with African merchants and companies and sharing personal stories.

Sohu[6]

Sohu's Africa Circle mainly contains stories and pictures of unique culture and scenery in Africa.

Country-specific forums

The relative size of the Chinese communities resident in particular African

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countries such as Ghana[7], Nigeria[8], Tanzania[9] and South Africa[10], has led to the development of country-specific web forums. These forums are not exclusive to those who live in these countries. For instance, the "Chinese in Nigeria" web forum has become an important online community for Chinese across the West Africa to exchange information and opinions.

This list is by no mean exhaustive. These web-forums are widely used by Chinese businesspeople interested in expanding into the African market, company employees considering moving to the continent or those already living in Africa trying to connect with netizens in China or other Chinese people in Africa. In addition, researchers interested in tracking the way Africa is discussed among Chinese people either already living there or considering to relocate will find these forums particularly useful.

In the following section, we identify three broad themes dominating the discussions we followed in these online forums. Readers should keep in mind that these represent an initial attempt to delineate broad fields of discussion. We lack the space to give a comprehensive account of each theme. There are also many other themes of discussion on these forums that demand analysis.

Three major topics of discussion on web forums

1. Business Information Exchange

One of the most popular ways Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa use social media is to produce, source or integrate business information relating to Africa. The huge business potential shown by many African economies has attracted hundreds of thousands of Chinese entrepreneurs seeking opportunities to fill gaps in the market. In an online survey posted on Fob Business Forum entitled "Are you willing to go and work in Africa?" 326 out of 551 (59.17%) respondents said yes[11]. The thread also contains 232 posts which list some of the main factors motivating Chinese to go to Africa. Most of the respondents seemed young, and

expressed curiosity about Africa's exotic natural scenery. They also appeared seduced by the many success stories of their peers and predecessors in Africa. They discussed the high wages and unexplored opportunities on the continent, while expressing concern about security issues in countries unknown to them. These comments echo research findings among Chinese communities in various African countries (see for example Dobler, 2009; Haugen & Carling, 2005; Turner, 2011).

Social media[12] is playing a crucial role in creating links among Chinese traders in Africa. QQ and Alibaba are two of the most widely used web tools for manufacturers or wholesalers in China to look for, negotiate and partner with Chinese merchants overseas. Alibaba provides a dedicated service to business, while QQ has a wider range of users, including those using the service for leisure. However, users seeking business partners also frequently use QQ for this purpose. One finds many threads on web forums that are used by producers or wholesalers to list their wares and their QQ contact details in order to attract potential retailers. Below we lay out some of the main themes of business-related conversations we found on various Africa-focused Chinese web pages, although describing these business activities comprehensively would require more research:

Seeking collaboration and partnership: When one reads through the threads on these business forums one gets a distinct idea of the web-based personal networks facilitating the flow of Chinese-made goods to Africa. Much of the discussion on these forums is dedicated to looking for business partners. The categories of goods offered in these advertisements include everything from textile and electronics to furniture, machinery and building materials. Those who post these advertisements often circulate their business information wherever they can, disregarding the topics discussed in a particular thread.

In these types of threads, a discussion often starts with the topic initiator expressing his or her willingness or expertise to source goods from China to sell in

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Africa. The topic followers subsequently post what they can offer, along with their QQ number or email address, asking for further communication privately. The researcher therefore frequently finds conversations disappearing from view the moment they become interesting. This echoes our point above that while QQ and Alibaba play a crucial role in facilitating China-Africa business exchange, their use limits our ability to judge the extent to which web forums facilitate China-Africa trade. For example, we found this thread on Tianya[13]:

Subject: I have question to ask those who own shops in South Africa

Date: October 13, 2011

Viewed: 1317

Responses: 23

Original Post:

I will go to South Africa to open a shop, but I am not familiar with sources of goods and transport. I want to ask my predecessors [in South Africa] - how do you find these in the easiest and cheapest way? I am not really good at this. Please help me. Thank you!

Replies (selected):

- That's easy. Find a freight forwarding company

- People who got rich over there won't tell you

- General cargo transport clearance, etc. is not a problem. Just go to South Africa to see what you can sell.

- It's easy to sell wedding dresses in Africa. Come to visit our site on Alibaba [address] and my QQ number is [deleted]

- (A spam message)

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- Ask me if you don't understand domestic custom clearance.

- You can find anything you want in Yiwu.

- First, you need to ensure you have enough supply domestically (in China). Second, look for a freight forwarding company. They usually have receiving points in several cities like Guangzhou, Yiwu, Shanghai and Qingdao. You just send your goods to them. Third, give them the shipping address and contact information in South Africa so they can contact you when the goods arrive. It's easy because all the freight forwarding companies help with custom clearance. They charge by the cubic meter. In 2009 each cubic meter cost 1,500 [South African] Rand, but now it has increased to 2,500 Rand.

- Hello, please contact me if you have any cheap goods that needs stock processing. I am professionally selling many different kinds of overstock goods. Low prices and good quality. Contact me via [email address] Thank you!

- I export second-hand cloth from China. I'm looking for clients in Africa to collaborate. Please contact me via my number or QQ attached below. [Phone number] and [QQ number].

- Doing business in South Africa is quite tiring. Where are you going? Johannesburg?

- (A spam message)

Introducing business models: Chinese web forums provide a platform for businesspeople to learn from each other through discussing which business models have proved realistic in specific African countries. Some of the major questions raised and answered in Africa-oriented Chinese web forums relate to:

The procedures involved in exporting goods to specific African countries, including how to deal with customs;

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How to transfer capital and profit between China and Africa;

Which kinds of financial transactions to conduct with African clients in order to avoid fraud;

How to deal with African government officials and police;

How to handle immigration-related issues, including bringing additional Chinese employees into Africa

Not all of the business models being shared on Chinese social media are legal in the host nations. In fact, the internet has also become a source for sharing knowledge on how to accumulate wealth illegally or unethically, thanks to weak law-enforcement in many African countries. For instance, Chinese illegal gold mine operators and workers in Ghana – mostly from Shangin in Guangxi Province – have used web forums and personal blogs to share their experience, stories[14] and methods of operating[15] small-scale illegal gold mines. However, it is difficult to quantify exactly how often such information has subsequently influenced additional Chinese to seek similar ventures in Ghana.

Hiring and job-seeking: Job seekers, especially young Chinese college graduates looking for global exposure, often post on these Africa related forums searching for opportunities. Chinese-run businesses in Africa also take advantage of web forums to recruit and bring additional Chinese workers to Africa. Chinese web forums therefore has served as a *de facto* job portal for recruiters and job seekers to find each other. But neither recruiters nor job seekers openly discuss job opportunities in a thread, as they prefer leaving their QQ numbers or email addresses for private communication.

Africa job opportunities posted on Chinese web forums cover a wide range of industries, from translators (English, French, Portuguese or Arabic) to engineers, designers, accountants and salespeople. A lot of these job ads have listed

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requirements such as being hardworking, adaptable to harsh environments and possessing the enthusiasm to work overseas.

The benefits set out by job recruiters often include daily Chinese meals, living quarters arranged at the company's cost and a return ticket to China one to three times per year. Because the Chinese working in Africa usually earn two to three times more than their counterparts in China, one can argue that job advertisements on web forums play a significant enticing role, motivating additional Chinese user to consider working in Africa.

Stories of success: A few Chinese businesspeople use web forums to tell their stories of success in Africa. They have usually been staying in Africa for longer than 5 years, often started their businesses from very small, working hard and living frugally. Such stories might create a positive image of Africa full of business opportunities, making some readers consider going to Africa. For instance, one thread talks about how a Chinese man earned a lot of money by just selling bean curd to the Chinese community in Uganda[16]. In another case, Tianya's Africa forum organized a special temporary forum during which a successful Chinese entrepreneur answered questions from the community on doing business in Ethiopia[17]. The two hours of conversation covered topics such as starting up a business, dealing with Africa labor and living expenses.

Remittances: It is estimated that a majority of Chinese working in Africa eventually send their income back to China as remittances, often in the form of U.S. dollars. However, tight foreign exchange controls in some African nations present barriers to the export of income or profits. This has sparked numerous discussions on Chinese web forums about the best ways to send remittances from Africa to China, both legal (through banks or MoneyGram) and illegal (through Chinese-run underground banks or Chinese tourist agencies).

African news: Because many Chinese living in Africa are not fluent in English, a number of Chinese web forums are dedicated to updating and translating news about African macroeconomic environment, investment opportunities, govern-

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mental policies and local sentiments towards the Chinese communities. For instance, Qufeizhou maintains a frequently updated news sub-forum[18] with articles from both Chinese and Western newspapers.

2. Perception towards Africa and Africans

Due to cultural and language gaps and a lack of opportunities to socialize, life in Africa is typically not easy for recent Chinese migrants. Therefore sharing personal experiences and feelings online has become an important part of their social life. Some of the main topics shared on Web forums, QQ and Weibo are listed below.

Perception of fricans: One of the most fiercely debated topics on Chinese web forums comprise opinions and perceptions towards Africa and Africans. As many Chinese have never traveled internationally before arriving in Africa, their limited awareness of multiculturalism often leads to biased perceptions of the value systems and lifestyles of host nations. This is reinforced by limited interactions with Africans outside of the work context. On web forums, a number of Chinese have posted threads complaining about the living environment, security issues, difficulties they experience in managing African workers and other culture-related issues. These sentiments generally receive a lot of support from other Chinese, who chime in with similar experiences. These conversations also mediate and shape the opinions of those who have never visited Africa. Yet sometimes fierce debate may occur on issues such as whether racism towards Africans should be tolerated[19]. These debates usually reach no consensus.

Interracial dating and marriage: In recent years, an increasing number of threads have started to reveal an important new phenomenon relating to the lives of the Chinese community in Africa – dating and marriage with Africans. Interracial marriage is an important factor measuring immigrants' assimilation into a host society. As the number of Chinese in Africa is rising, cases of interracial mar-

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riage are becoming more common, albeit still rare. Again, the internet provides the space for Chinese to share stories of their romance with Africans, a topic still unfamiliar to Chinese netizens. Threads dedicated to such topics often attract a lot of discussion. Sometimes they develop into fierce arguments on whether a relationship with an African is reliable and long-lasting. Below is a sample thread containing one such discussion, translated into English:

Title: Getting Married to Tanzania[20]

Date: August 20, 2009

Viewed: 17414

Responses: 161

Original Post:

I am marrying my Tanzanian boyfriend. He wants to take me to Tanzania and told me I will like it there. I know nothing about that place. Can anyone tell me where I can find a job there? If I start a business, how much will it cost? My English is not bad. I can also be a tour guide. Please tell me everything you know about it! Thank you.

Replies (selected)

- Tanzania is a good place.

- I know several Chinese women who married Tanzanians and moved to Tanzania. They all divorced.

- If you can handle him marrying 4 women and making you deliver 15 children, then you should go. I am not lying.

- Aren't there enough Chinese men for you?

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- Don't think it's romantic to do so. You will regret it in the future.

- You have very unique tastes.

- I wish you happiness.

- I have been working here (Tanzania) for 5 years. I never thought about marrying a woman here.

- Be careful. Don't get cheated on.

-I stayed long in Dar es Salaam. Every time I think about blacks, I think whatever social class they belong to, they like to beg from you, even for a glass of Coke. Can you bear living in an environment where a few dozen brothers-in-law, nephews and cousins always come to extend their dark hands towards you?

- Agree. The world's most shameless, most obscene, lowest quality and most ungrateful people are blacks. Take me as an example, I have studied markets for a year in more than 10 African countries and decided to operate my business in Congo for 5 years; I guarantee you that you don't want to marry a black, except for the children of the President.

- I can't stand their body odor . . . urg . . . urg. . . I am going to vomit

- Watch out for AIDS and malaria!

- You guys, don't be like this. "Black ghosts" are very NICE. There must be some misunderstanding here :)

- Don't look through colored lens. That man must be a nice person... but Africa is not an easy place to live.

- I am sorry. I never discriminated against blacks when I was in China. But now I do.

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- Except for Cape Town, everywhere else in Africa is a garbage dump.

Sharing experiences**:** For those who overcame difficulties and finally succeeded on the continent, web forums provide the opportunity to gain fame through telling their personal stories and advising the public. The survival tips being shared range from handling a house robbery in South Africa[21], encountering corrupt police officers[22], lawsuits in Ethiopia's Federal High Court[23], protecting companies' property against thefts, or more commonly, ever-changing impressions of Africa. These individual stories are often motivating or inspiring to readers who may be considering working in Africa.

Emotional and physical support: The forums we analyzed do not only play an important role in recruiting workers to come to Africa, but has also developed into a community offering support. For example, an incident that drew a lot of attention on Baidu's "South Africa Bar" related to a Chinese man who was solicited to work in South Africa by a Chinese businessman in South Africa without receiving a legal work permit. One day he became seriously ill but his employer refused to send him to a local hospital or back to China because he had not yet paid off the cost of his travel to Africa. His wife who was staying in China had no choice but to post threads online to ask other members in South Africa for help. Her posts received a number of responses, including someone who volunteered to communicate with his boss and subsequently helped the sick worker return to China[24]. This example shows how Chinese web forums help to mediate the fraught migration experience, while also sidestepping issues of legality. While answering this question falls outside the purview of this paper, it is interesting to ask whether these forums should be seen as undermining the role of the local host government and the Chinese embassy, or whether it grew out of the relative lack of support offered to Chinese migrants by these two actors.

3. Tourism related information share

To the majority of Chinese readers Africa is a continent of desert, forest, tradi-

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tional civilization, poverty, disease, warfare and corruption. Web forums allow Chinese travelers and residents in Africa to upload photos and to share their travel stories with a wider readership who wants to read about the realities of life in Africa. These stories, from the beautiful scenery of South Africa[25] to local women in Ethiopia[26] and traditional African festivals[27], have encouraged more Chinese travelers to explore the continent. Some Chinese travelers also launch threads to seek travel companions. A number of Chinese tourist companies have started to utilize web forums to promote their travel packages to Africa. The role these forums play in stimulating travel to Africa presents many opportunities for future research.

Conclusion and future research

One of the biggest problems bedeviling English-language reporting on China-Africa relations in both the popular and academic press is the tendency to flatten individual experience. The reduction of people into monolithic labels – "China" and "Africa" instead of individual Chinese and Africans – remains an ever-present danger. The Chinese-language internet offers an invaluable chance to get to grips with what it is really like for individuals to arrive, settle and survive in Africa. This experience has been notoriously difficult to gauge. The use of questionnaire-based surveys can be useful, but they tend to reduce spontaneity and can be logistically challenging to conduct. Web forums offer an invaluable chance to see conversations among Chinese migrants developing over time, to gauge the range of opinions within this community and to read how they see Africa and Africans.

In this paper we offered an initial attempt to map the parameters of this kind of analysis. We outlined the different kinds of web communities primarily engaged in mediating Chinese business development, labour recruitment and migration related to Africa. We also outlined in broad strokes some of the most common topics of conversation on these forums. This paper represents barely an intro-

duction into this research and we hope to contribute more in-depth accounts of the role of the internet in mediating migration to specific places in the future. This research also opens up other potentially fruitful fronts, for example the relationship between different communities of Chinese migrants in countries that have experienced successive waves of migration from different parts of the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan, the various business models of Chinese enterprises in Africa, the constantly changing opinions towards Africa and Africans held by different Chinese communities, the emerging impact of interracial marriages between Chinese and Africans, and the factors that contribute to the movement of Chinese people and capital to Africa. Future research should also take into consideration the important reality that despite the fact that it presents significant barriers to research, the majority of interactions among Chinese in Africa take place through QQ. Combining enquiries into web forums with a closer assessment of QQ would further reveal the impact of the internet on the lives and work of the Chinese in Africa.

End Notes

[1] Chinese:百度贴吧 http://tieba.baidu.com

[2] Chinese:天涯 http://bbs.tianya.cn/list-5033-1.shtml

[3] Chinese: 非洲华人网

[4] Chinese: 去非洲网 http://bbs.qufeizhou.com/

[5] Chinese: 福步外贸论坛非洲市场 http://bbs.fobshanghai.com/forum-51-1.html

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[6] Chinese: 搜狐非洲圈论坛 http://africa.q.sohu.com/topics

[7] http://ghana.5d6d.net/

[8] http://www.nigeriabbs.com/bbs/forum.php

[9] http://tan.africaapple.com/forum.php

[10] http://www.nanfei8.com/

[11] http://bbs.fobshanghai.com/thread-1749324-1-1.html

[12] Alibaba, headquartered in China, is a leading e-commerce platform for small businesses around the world. Its Chinese platform had 54.8 million registered users and showcased 8.4 million supplier storefronts as of June 30, 2012. For more information see http://news.alibaba.com/specials/aboutalibaba/aligroup/index.html

[13] http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1881-1.shtml

[14] http://bbs.shanglin.net/thread-88396-1-2.html

[15] http://blog.china.alibaba.com/article/i29820305.html?domainid=tomzhangxf

[16] http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1232-1.shtml

[17] http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-outseachina-66311-1.shtml

[18] http://bbs.qufeizhou.com/forum-53-1.html

[19] http://tieba.baidu.com/p/463051153?pn=1

[20] http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-684-1.shtml

[21] http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2115448270

[22] http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2139174544

[23] http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-5033-1863-1.shtml

[24] http://tieba.baidu.com/p/2136227049

[25] http://q.sohu.com/forum/12/topic/4471550

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