

Migrants or Sojourners? The Chinese Community in Maputo

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This study focuses on intra-community relations within the ‘Chinese community’ of Mozambique. To do this analysis we carried our research within the members of the Association of the Chinese Community of Mozambique (ACCM) in Maputo, during six months of 2012. In fact, the ACCM or the former Chinese Pagoda, is, after its reactivation in 1998 – following its closure in the wake of independence in 1975 by the Government of Mozambique – the place where the ‘Chinese community’ in Maputo meet to exalt China, their Chinese identity or to socialise. Two groups that are part of the (ACCM) in Maputo are discussed: the ‘Sino-Mozambicans’, who divide themselves into two sub-groups: the Chinese born in Mozambique from a Chinese father and a Mozambican mother; and the Chinese born in Mozambique with both parents of Chinese nationality. The other group consists of the Chinese born in China and arrived in recent years with the recent wave of Chinese migration symbolised by the actual Chinese economic expansion. For lack of a better word, we are calling this latter group ‘Sino-Chinese’.

If, as is demonstrated in our research, the ‘Sino-Mozambicans’ claim their ‘Mozambicanity’, they also identify themselves as Chinese, despite the fact that they don’t speak Mandarin, Cantonese or other Chinese languages or even if they have never been to China. However, the ‘Sino-Chinese’ do not consider them as Chinese, creating some discomfort or tension between them. Also, the ‘Sino-Chinese’ migratory wave does not consider themselves as emigrants but as sojourners. Why and how do ‘Sino-Mozambicans’ claim Chinese identity? Why they are not accepted as ‘Chinese’ by the ‘Sino-Chinese’?

To answer these questions, this paper focuses on a brief historical introduction of the Chinese community which explains how a ‘Sino-Mozambican’ community was developed in Mozambique and how it was broken down by the independence of the African country in 1975. Secondly, we will look at the relationships between the ‘Sino-Mozambicans’ and the ‘Sino-Chinese’ members of the ACCM, which as we said is the main place of encounters between the two groups and of exaltation of Chinese identity. Finally, we conclude with a brief synthesis of the central ideas of our study.

Key words: Chinese Community, Maputo, China, Mozambique, Sino-Mozambicans, Sino-Chinese