

# Untangling Centuries of South African Chinese Diasporas: Molluscs/ Abalone, Ungulates/Rhinos and Equidae/Donkeys

Karen L. Harris\*

*University of Pretoria*

\*Correspondence author: email: karen.harris@up.ac.za

## Abstract

This article seeks to consider perceptions of the Chinese in the context of the illegal trade in molluscs (abalone), ungulates (rhino horn) and, more recently, equidae (donkey hides), which has scourged the coasts and hinterlands of South Africa for the Asian market for over half a century. Abalone is heralded as a delicacy for celebratory occasions, rhino horn is in high demand as a medicinal cure for a range of ailments and the more recent donkey hides are connected to the treatment of menopause and related conditions. Since its inception in the latter half of the twentieth century, this illegal trafficking by syndicates has been indelibly ascribed to the Chinese with hugely negative consequences and stereotyping becoming embedded in popular consciousness. This article attempts to untangle the perpetrators from the entangled Chinese diasporas by identifying three distinct historical waves of Chinese arrivals in South Africa and deliberates on how ignorance of this past has perpetuated a stereotyping which culminated in the current Chinese hate speech case in the Equality court.

## Keywords:

Chinese South Africans; illegal trade; stereotyping; diasporas; xenophobia

## Introduction

In the wake of sensational media reports about the brutal killing of donkeys for their hides for Eastern medicinal purposes towards the end of 2016 and at the start of 2017, some South Africans took to social media to condemn the Chinese in an extremely disparaging and insulting manner. The postings on Facebook pages, such as the 'Karoo Donkey Sanctuary', 'Carte Blanche' and 'The Chinese New Year',<sup>1</sup> condemned and trashed the Chinese reflecting a deep xenophobia as well as a blanket stereotyping of the Chinese in this country.

1. The Chinese Association Gauteng, Press release, 17 February 2017.

- TL: 'They are the most despicable things on this planet!! I hate the chings'  
 RvW: 'I think we should start killing their children for cure for the common babalaas, ... !'  
 HP: 'There are no more disgusting humans than Chinese people. I wish they all just die. Every single one. I hate them and I will never change my mind'  
 LB: 'They are the most disgusting things on this earth!!!!. I wish they would start wiping themselves out, this earth will be better off without them!'  
 CM : ' ... Can we not stop these slant eyed freaks from coming into the country?!'  
 MK: 'We need to get rid of chinese in sa ..they not welcome ... they steal our economy. .dogs. Rhinos and now donkeys . . . . '  
 BP: 'F\*#@ the Chinese they are raping this continent.'  
 JT: 'Vile, barbaric people. Is there a living thing left in China ?'  
 HvJ: 'think trump must leave that wall and blow up china'<sup>2</sup>

It was a stereotyping and damning that was not without precedent. This was reminiscent of a century before where disconcerted anti-Sinicism prevailed in the colonies across the expanse of the Atlantic and Pacific,<sup>3</sup> but was also prevalent on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand and the urban towns of the Cape Colony.<sup>4</sup> It will be argued that an anti-Chinese sentiment – anti-Sinocism – became embedded in popular consciousness and has been perpetuated throughout the century spilling over into the present albeit in different forms.

There exist various explanations for why members of a particular social group, culture, sect, religion, language or nation are labelled and then consequently stereotyped and concomitantly prejudiced. In one of Benedict Anderson's most oft-quoted lines from his seminal work *Imagined Communities* he defines the nation as a 'socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group'.<sup>5</sup> Integral to his theory was the idea that 'print-capitalism' also created and buttressed 'imagined communities' by making it 'possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways'.<sup>6</sup> Beyond this cohesion from within, I would argue that one can add that the converse is also true as print media also generalises and perpetuates stereotypes of images of a group to a mass audience from without. This, in turn, can relate to the unfair entrenchment of characteristics or beliefs which then become part of a prejudice about a particular group.

In essence 'prejudice' is quite literally making a judgement 'before any analytical or cognitive faculties have been used',<sup>7</sup> a role that the media can both generate, perpetuate and enhance. However, Frank Dikötter contends that while prejudice is often perceived of as

2. The Chinese Association Gauteng, Press release.
3. M. Lake and H. Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6; R. Dittgen and R. Anthony, 'Yellow, Red and Black: Fantasies about China and "the Chinese" in Contemporary South Africa', in F. Billé and S. Urbansky, eds, *Yellow Peril: China Narratives in the Contemporary World* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), 108.
4. K.L. Harris, 'Paper Trail: Chasing the Chinese in the Cape (1904–1933)', *Kronos*, 40 (2014), 133–153.
5. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edn (London: Verso, 1991), 6–7, 49.
6. *Ibid.*, 52.
7. F. Dikötter, 'Race in China', in P. Nyiri and J. Breidenbach, eds, *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), ch. 7, 177.

‘a raw instinct, an emotional dislike of another “race”’, he argues that the very concept of ‘race’ is highly contested. For him it is a social construct, that is the ‘outcome of a long process of habituation and education’ which has been ‘painstakingly constructed and inculcated by particular social groups via culture’.<sup>8</sup> He proffers the concept ‘racialization’ as it indicates that races are by process ‘socially constructed as such within a given historical context for particular political reasons’.<sup>9</sup> In his earlier interrogation of the concept ‘race’ in a South African context, Saul Dubow had likewise argued that race should be considered as a ‘social and intellectual construct’.<sup>10</sup> Debates about race as a scientific or biological construct persist in historical, sociological, anthropological and archaeological scholarship and will continue to do so. What is of relevance to this article is what both Dubow and Dikötter concur about, and that is that race is ‘socially real’ and ‘has had a real and enduring existence’<sup>11</sup> and ‘in particular for the many individuals who are socially discriminated, politically excluded, or economically marginalised as a result of racialised practices’.<sup>12</sup>

As indicated, in addition to Anderson’s community or group cohesion from within, it is also important to note that there is also the other dynamic of cohesion being formed from *without*. These perceptions or prejudices formulated from outside of a group inadvertently impose and reinforce a sense of ‘shared’ identity albeit real or constructed. China and the Chinese are a case in point. In the eyes of the West (also a homogenised concept), China – and the Chinese – is perceived of as a monolithic uniform whole. Even scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm in his discussion of states being social constructs perpetuates this notion by alluding to China as being among ‘the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous’.<sup>13</sup> Dikötter disputes this indicating that China comprises of some 50 different minority nationalities with regional, cultural and linguistic differences which, he contends, ‘are as great as those to be found in Europe’.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, he points out that the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) government embraces and endorses this monolithic view inculcating the idea of a populace with an ancestral land, common origin and a shared history<sup>15</sup> – most likely as part of its power political arsenal. China and the Chinese as an ‘ethnically integrated majority’ have predominated outside perceptions since the end of the nineteenth century<sup>16</sup> right up until the present day. And it is this very perception, it will be argued, that is pertinent to an understanding of the recent anti-Sinitic outbursts in South Africa.

This view from the West about the East, from the outside as it were, is also apparent in the 1978 work of Edward Said, *Orientalism*, which has stood the test of time.<sup>17</sup> The meaning of the concept ‘orientalism’ originated in a totally different context and initially had positive

8. *Ibid.*, 177–8.

9. *Ibid.*, 178.

10. S. Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3.

11. *Ibid.*, 5.

12. Dikötter, ‘Race in China’, ch. 7, 178.

13. E. Hobsbawm, 1990, 66 as quoted in Dikötter, ‘Race in China’, ch. 7, 179.

14. Dikötter, ‘Race in China’, ch. 7, 179.

15. Dikötter, ‘Race in China’.

16. *Ibid.*

17. E.W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

connotations stemming from Western scholarly admiration of and interest in Eastern cultures. It dated back to the fourteenth century and referred to the study of Eastern languages, art, literature and religious thought in order to make them accessible to the West, but also to protect them from ‘occidental cultural arrogance in the age of imperialism’.<sup>18</sup> Some four decades ago, Said showed how the opposite was, in fact, true and that from the nineteenth century the meaning of Orientalism had changed and became a means of ‘creating a stereotypical and mythic east through which European rule could be more readily asserted’.<sup>19</sup> Western imperialism expanded and the negative ‘Orientalist’ approach ‘to China reached its height, when Europe colonised not only parts of China, but also knowledge about it’.<sup>20</sup> Orientalism thus became an ‘expression of [...] dominance and a means to the extension of [...] supremacy [...] an emblem of domination and a weapon of power’.<sup>21</sup> It was a term relating to the Orient – and one could add its people – as ‘discovered, recorded, described, defined, imagined, produced and, in a sense, “invented” by Europe and the West’.<sup>22</sup> It encapsulates the attitudes of the West towards the East which, more often than not, was prejudiced and condescending revealing a certain arrogance and sense of superiority which was marred by racism, naivety, presumption, ignorance and simplistic generalisations.<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, another dimension added to Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined community’ is the idea of ‘transnational racial identifications’. In their 2008 publication, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds argue that while Anderson has heralded the ‘nation’ as the imagined community in modern times this had ‘obscured the ascendancy of transnational racial identifications’.<sup>24</sup> Taking a cue from W.E.B. du Bois and his statement that the problem of the twentieth century was ‘the problem of the colour line’, they chart how the ‘religion of whiteness’<sup>25</sup> spread across and dominated four continents. Concomitant with this white solidarity and the spread of some 50 million Europeans across the globe in the nineteenth century, however, were an equal number of Chinese.<sup>26</sup> They too were to be regarded as a homogenous block, an ‘other’ that was stereotyped and despised at a range of levels.

In the light of these constructions of community, identity, race and orientalism the remainder of the article will consider the three distinct waves of Chinese that arrived in South Africa over a period of some three centuries. This aligns journalist with Ufrieda Ho’s comment on the current ‘hate speech’ saga when she refers to the ‘knotted complexities of what drives racism’ and the need to ‘untangle the history of the different Chinese

18. J.M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), xii; J.A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 5th edn (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 497–498.

19. MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, xii.

20. C. Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989), 44–45.

21. MacKenzie, *Orientalism*, xii.

22. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 497.

23. *Ibid.*, 500.

24. Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 5–6.

25. W.E.B. du Bois, ‘The souls of the white folk’, *Independent*, 18 August 1910, 339 as quoted by Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 1–2.

26. Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 6.

communities living in South Africa'.<sup>27</sup> The three waves of Chinese discussed here form only a trickle of the greater Chinese exodus or diaspora which involved over 30 million Chinese leaving China and settling in various parts of the world to initially be 'as much welcomed as they [were later] objected to'<sup>28</sup> generally succumbing to a global nomenclature of 'yellow peril'.<sup>29</sup> It is contended, as the author and more recently Romain Dittgen and Ross Anthony have argued elsewhere, that 'today's occurrence of "Yellow Peril" draws on strands of its inception over a century ago'.<sup>30</sup> This perception of the Chinese by host societies is shaped by a range of factors including geopolitics, history, memory, fear, anxiety<sup>31</sup> and I would add ignorance as well as a loathing of the unknown. In South Africa, regardless of the fact that each wave of Chinese that arrived on its shores came from different regions and arrived in different contexts and for different reasons, a general obliviousness and lack of knowledge about the Chinese and their past by sections of the South African public at large, has led to the inculcation of a perceived monolith and reprehensible stereotyping evident in these recent social media attacks. It must, however, be cautioned that these waves of immigration are in themselves a generalisation and, as with other culturally identifiable groupings, both within and between them, there are variations and deviations which counter any claims to homogeneity. Yet, regardless of this heterogeneity, perceptions of the Chinese community at large as perpetrators of poaching persist. They need to be disentangled from the web of illegal aliens, syndicates triads and cartels who are the perpetrators of these abalone, rhino and donkey poaching atrocities.

### First wave – SABC

It is not always generally known that the Chinese have formed part of the South African historical record since the early days of European colonisation.<sup>32</sup> In the latter half of the seventeenth century, a very small number of Chinese were present at the Cape. They arrived as convicts (*bannelinge*) who had been exiled by the Dutch in Batavia to carry out sentences of labour, while a few others were individuals who came of their own free will to set up as small-scale traders and service providers. Over a period of a century and a half their total number never exceeded 350 and there were never more than 50 individuals present at any given time.<sup>33</sup> Yet, despite this numerical insignificance, their presence did not obviate

27. U. Ho, 'Hate speech is blind ignorance', *The Times*, 14 February 2017. Ho is a third generation SABC and author of the book *Paper Sons Paper Daughters: Growing up Chinese in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2011).
28. H.F. Mac Nair, *The Chinese Abroad: Their Position and Protection – A Study in International Law and Relations* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1924), vii.
29. L. Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor: A History of the Chinese Diaspora* (London: Mandarin Paperbacks, 1990), xi.
30. Dittgen and Anthony, 'Yellow, Red and Black', 108; see also K.L. Harris, 'Anti-Sinicism: Roots in Pre-industrial Colonial Southern Africa', *African and Asian Studies*, 9, 3 (2010), 213–231.
31. Y. Park, 'Perceptions of Chinese in Southern Africa: Constructions of the "Other" and the Role of Memory', *African Studies Review*, 56, 1 (2013), 131–153; Dittgen and Anthony, 'Yellow, Red and Black', 108.
32. For a discussion of a possible earlier encounter see K.L. Harris, 'Early Encounters between China and Africa: Myth or Moment?', *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 17, 1 (2003), 47–71.
33. J.C. Armstrong, 'The Chinese at the Cape in the Dutch East India Company Period', paper presented at the Slave Route Conference, Cape Town, October 1997, 4–5.

against the disdain and negative treatment by the Dutch settlers.<sup>34</sup> From the very outset the Chinese were singled out as an identifiable minority that was prohibited by law to participate in the full extent of civil activities. They were not allowed to sell products that competed with the Dutch, nor live in areas among the settlers nor keep shops. Hans Heese has argued that many of the Chinese convicts were renowned for their business acumen or commercial ingenuity and this was also often the reason for their banning to the Cape by the Batavian authorities due to their competition with the Dutch East India Company (VOC).<sup>35</sup> In line with this, they were also prohibited from dealing with the enslaved population as they were suspected of tempting them in ‘all manner of misdemeanour’.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, their ostracisation as the ‘other’ was made tangibly apparent in the way they were listed last on the Dutch official register records (*opgaafrolle*), below the enslaved peoples as what Jim Armstrong denoted an ‘unassimilated appendage’.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, at the early Cape settlement, much of this Dutch settler opposition, which was completely disproportionate to the insignificant numbers of the Chinese, can be ascribed to the perceived economic challenge the Chinese posed to the European settlers. But it can possibly also be interpreted as part of a subconscious ‘othering’ of a perceived outsider, a form of ‘nativism’ where there is an intense dislike for an internal minority because of its foreign connections.<sup>38</sup> This sense of resistance or opposition to an outsider can also be employed as a mechanism to galvanise and strengthen cohesion among the so-called insider, the imagined community. At the same time, it reflects on a process of racialisation where the first signs of orientalism become apparent against a community that would be the precursor of a ‘transnational racial identification’.

In these early colonial encounters, records of the subaltern are limited and their voices are for the most part silent. Yet, it is interesting to note in passing that some of the early travel records actually reflect specifically on what might be seen as the beginning of the Chinese harvesting of ocean products, and possibly molluscs such as abalone. Otto Mentzel describes how all manner of seafoods such as ‘crayfish, crabs, seaspiders and “granelen” [small crabs]’ are ‘zealously collected by these Orientals, cooked and sold ...’, adding that ‘One need not be squeamish in patronising their cook-shops, since they keep the places scrupulously clean and do not touch the food with their fingers’.<sup>39</sup> This rather banal description already hints at a prevalent prejudice about the ‘Orientals’, a perception integral to the ‘othering’ and stereotyping by members of Western colonial powers. Despite their negligible numbers, even this insignificant economic activity elicited negative reaction from Dutch settlers resulting in ordinances being introduced that forbade such activities with penalties such as fines and confiscation.<sup>40</sup>

34. For a detailed discussion of this see Harris, ‘Anti-Sinicism’, 213–231.

35. H. Heese, ‘Kriminelesake: Hofuitsprake aan die Kaap, 1700–1750’, *Kronos*, 12 (1987), 35.

36. Harris, ‘Anti-Sinicism’, 213–231.

37. Armstrong, ‘The Chinese at the Cape’, 61.

38. R. Daniels, *Asian American: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980), 19.

39. O.F. Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope*, Part ii (Cape Town, 1925), 92.

40. Armstrong, ‘The Chinese at the Cape’, 36–37.

After this initial ripple of Chinese immigration to the Cape Colony, the first substantial wave arrived in southern Africa as part of the mass migration from China in the mid-nineteenth century. This was to trigger the vitriolic anti-Sinitic sentiment in the colonies to the east of the Atlantic and the west of the Indian oceans. This opposition reached such proportions that it ultimately resulted in the introduction of legal acts of exclusion specifically drafted to restrain and control the immigration of the Chinese across the colonial expanse: Australia in 1855, New Zealand in 1881, the United States of America in 1882, Canada in 1885 and also eventually South Africa in 1904.<sup>41</sup>

From about 1860, over two million Chinese emigrated from China to the colonial world and although South Africa was not one of the most popular destinations, there were a sizeable number of arrivals reaching a figure well over 1 000 by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> While some remained in the coastal towns of the Cape and Natal British colonies, the majority of these Chinese gravitated to the interior regions of the newly discovered diamond and gold mines. They did not arrive to mine though, as their participation in mining was prohibited by law,<sup>43</sup> but again rather established small-scale trade and service businesses.<sup>44</sup> Here, their presence in the economic sector also drew negative reaction from the European settlers and various pieces of legislation and permit systems were promulgated to inhibit their activities as members of ‘one of the native races of Asia’.<sup>45</sup> They were not allowed to trade outside certain designated areas and were not eligible for citizen or property rights and were also singled out and discriminated against as ‘Chinese’ by having to obtain and pay for an annual renewable pass.<sup>46</sup>

Although most of these Chinese immigrants emanated from the southern provinces of China and primarily represented two distinct ethnic groups – Hakka and Cantonese – the host societies, both here and abroad, regarded them as ‘simply Chinese’.<sup>47</sup> Melanie Yap and Diane Man point out that the geographical distinction actually accounted for endemic ethnic animosity that was often relocated to overseas destinations.<sup>48</sup> It was a distinction that was also reflected in the establishment of separate associations and clubs representing the diverse nature of the Chinese immigrants,<sup>49</sup> an aspect that was not at all taken cognisance of by the other so-called receiving or host communities. It was a factor that

41. A. Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); S. Chan, *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); M. Ip, *Dragons on the Long White Island: The Making of Chinese New Zealanders* (Birkenhead: Tandem Press, 1996); K.L. Harris, “‘Not a Chinaman’s chance’: Chinese Labour in South Africa and the United States of America”, *Historia*, 51, 2 (2006), 177–197.

42. Public Record Office (PRO): CO 291/75 no 0687, 24 March 1904.

43. *Statute Law of the Transvaal 1839–1910*, Law 3 of 1895.

44. K.L. Harris, ‘Chinese Merchants on the Rand, c.1850–1910’, *South African Historical Journal*, 33 (1995), 155–168.

45. K.L. Harris, ‘A History of the Chinese in South Africa to 1912’ (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1998), 272–273.

46. Harris, ‘Chinese Merchants on the Rand’, 159.

47. M.Yap and D. Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions – The History of the Chinese in South Africa*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press), 1996, 32–33.

48. *Ibid.*

49. G. Houston et al., ‘Bodies that Divide and Bind: Tracing the Social Roles of Associations in Chinese Communities in Pretoria, South Africa’ (Human Sciences Research Council Report, March 2103), 19–20; U. Ho, ‘Hate speech’; W.J. Pauw, ‘Chinese Associations and Associational Life in South Africa’s Gauteng Province since the End of Apartheid’ (MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2019).



would play a key role in the blanket perception of the Chinese as an undifferentiated whole, both then and later.

Just after the turn of the twentieth century, this first wave of Chinese settlers in the interior of southern Africa was temporarily augmented by the introduction of 63, 695 Chinese indentured unskilled mine labourers.<sup>50</sup> This scheme was orchestrated and regulated by the British colonial authorities in an attempt to salvage and increase gold mining production in the Transvaal Colony after the devastation of the South African War (1899–1902).<sup>51</sup> The overwhelming majority of these recruited labourers emanated from the northern provinces of China (97.4%) and as they were introduced under extremely strict conditions and monitored under exceptionally rigid controls, even being housed in regulated compounds,<sup>52</sup> they did not have much opportunity to engage with the settler or free (as opposed to indentured) Chinese. It is important to note that the free Chinese were themselves generally disinterested in the new arrivals sharing neither kinship nor language nor any form of affinity with them. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that these settler Chinese held these indentured Chinese mine labourers in contempt inferring a distinct class difference between them.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, the Transvaal Labour Importation Act that regulated the labour scheme made it mandatory that the Chinese labourers were to return to China after completion of a three-year contract.<sup>54</sup> Regardless of this geographic, language and class division, the wide spectrum of colonial and indigenous communities did not distinguish between the settler Chinese and the indentured Chinese of different origins and class. Rather, they were stereotyped as a blanket community with the purported ‘vices’ of one becoming the vices of all.

The proposal to introduce, as well as the actual arrival of, the indentured Chinese labourers for the gold mines, led to an unprecedented outcry throughout the country. It apparently ‘obsessed both its champions and its opponents’ and was likened to the anti-convict agitation of 1848 in that it was representative, impassioned and determined.<sup>55</sup> The various campaigns that were launched to oppose the indenture scheme resounded with rhetoric that was also echoed across the Anglo-colonial world – and would reverberate again across social media in the twenty-first century. The Chinese were denigrated in the most disparaging manner denoting them as people of an ‘alien race, whose whole idea of civilisation and manner of living [was at] variance with the Transvaal community’.<sup>56</sup> They were, as mentioned, vilified as the ‘yellow peril’, ‘yellow scourge’ and ‘Mongolian filth’ and described as a ‘dire moral pest’ ‘degenerate’ and an ‘inferior other’ that would bring about ‘moral ruin’<sup>57</sup> as ‘opium-smoking, gambling, and nameless vices [would] be introduced among the sober, steady, pure-minded population of Johannesburg’.<sup>58</sup> It was

50. P. Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

51. D.J.N. Denoon, ‘The Transvaal Labour Crisis, 1901–1906’, *Journal of African History*, 17, 3 (1967), 481.

52. Labour Importation Ordinance no. 17 of 1904.

53. *South African News*, 21 January 1904.

54. Labour Importation Ordinance no. 17 of 1904.

55. P. Lewsen, *John X. Merriman: Paradoxical South African statesman* (Cape Town: A.D. Donker, 1982), 263.

56. P.C. Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire* (London: n.p., 1923), 175–176.

57. Transvaal Archives Depot (TAD): Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) 94, 198/03, Secretary East Rand Vigilance Association: Letter to Mr Chamberlain re native labour, 16 January 1903; T.W. Pearce, ‘Chinese Coolie Labour in South Africa’, *Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, September 1904, 228.

58. E.S. Beesly, ‘Yellow Labour’, *Positivist Review* (April 1904), 82.



claimed, for example, that ‘the prisons of China had been cleared of ruffians in the search for labour’,<sup>59</sup> while a British missionary stationed in China, patronisingly commented that through a ‘process of selection’ they would eliminate ‘the more debased and degraded specimens of Chinese humanity’.<sup>60</sup> This was a stereotyping that was reiterated in a Salvation Army periodical, *All the World*, in which the Chinese were referred to as ‘naturally very suspicious, secretive [and] litigious’ adding that they are a ‘queer people’.<sup>61</sup>

Suspicion and secrecy were other attributes that stereotyped the Chinese in their overseas settlements, an aspect that would later be connected to smuggling, organised crime and syndicates. It was believed that the Chinese were prone to set up customary secret societies or clandestine organisations resulting in widespread apprehension and fear.<sup>62</sup> Although sometimes apprehended by compound authorities on the Witwatersrand gold mines, the Chinese were never convicted of the offence due to insufficient evidence.<sup>63</sup> In most cases, these probably operated as ‘friendly societies’ in which members of specific villages or who spoke similar dialects gathered to socialise. As Lynn Pan points out, the secret society was a type of surrogate clan, and was popular among immigrants because it was a substitute for the families who had been left behind.<sup>64</sup> But this would not be the image that would prevail, as to the outsider, this was something unknown and suspect.

The stereotype of the Chinese as ‘hard-working and diligent’<sup>65</sup> was also construed as a potential national danger since they would ‘take the bread out of the mouths of the white man’<sup>66</sup> and could ‘ruin’ or ‘overrun the country’.<sup>67</sup> Even the response from the ‘Aboriginal Native inhabitants of South Africa and citizens of the Cape Colony’ was an obviously Western orientalist opinion which was expressed in the following single but telling petition to King Edward VII in 1903:

the introduction of a class of labourers with no idea of any rights, and with morals and habits unlike those of the European races, in which your petitioners have been hitherto trained, will be, in the highest degree, prejudicial to the future of their race in its struggle for advancement and civilization.<sup>68</sup>

59. F. Frescura, ‘When Celestials Came Among Us: Chinese Miners on the Rand, 1904–1910’, *The SA Philatelist*, October 2010, 160; A. Rose, ‘Chinese Write Aways’, *SA Philatelist*, February 2011, 160; T.T. Huynh, ‘Loathing and Loving: Postcard Representations of Indentured Chinese Laborers in South Africa’s Reconstruction’, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 9, 4 (2008), 395–425; I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren, *2000 Casualties* (Johannesburg: SATUC, 1961), 17.
60. Pearce, ‘Chinese Coolie Labour’, 228.
61. Anon., ‘Chinese on the Rand’, *All the World*, May 1904, 244–245; B. Tuck, ‘The History of the Salvation Army in South Africa’ (MTh thesis, University of South Africa, 1982), 157.
62. J. Chesneaux, ‘Secret Societies in China’s Historical Evolution’, in J. Chesneaux, ed., *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 4.
63. PRO: CO 291/81 no. 7589/05, Chinese on Simmer and Jack Mine, Arrests for forming a secret society, March 1905; CO 291/85 no. 33492/05, Chinese labourers, Maintenance of order among, 28 August 1905; TAD: FLD 218 58/4 and 58/11, Secret societies, 1905.
64. Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, 20.
65. A.E. Munro, *The Transvaal Chinese Labour Problem* (London: n.d.), 85–87.
66. TAD: SNA, 33, 1255/03, Asiatic Affairs, re Indian immigration: R.V. Loveday – T.A. Brassey, 33; A.W., ‘Yellow slavery – and white’, *Westminster Review*, clxi, (5 May 1904), 478.
67. TAD: SNA, 33, 1255/03, Asiatic Affairs, re Indian immigration. R.V. Loveday – T.A. Brassey, 33.
68. Anon., *South African Native Opinion*, 8 December 1903, in TAD: SNA 188 na 3138/03, *South African Native Opinion*: Introduction of Chinese, 76.

Moreover, according to the anti-Chinese campaigners, most of the colonies regarded the importation of Chinese as ‘retrograde and dangerous’<sup>69</sup> and pointed out that in many cases elsewhere in the world this had led ‘after bitter experience and long agitation, to their complete or almost complete exclusion’.<sup>70</sup> References were made to legislation such as the American Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the ‘culmination of nearly three decades of anti-Chinese agitation’.<sup>71</sup> As indicated above, in 1904 the Cape Colony also introduced the Chinese Exclusion Act which targeted the ‘whole of the Chinese “race”’ making it illegal for any Chinese to live or enter the Cape Colony unless they could prove exemption through pre-1904 residence or by virtue of being British subjects.<sup>72</sup> This legislation remained on the law books until 1933 and effectively put an end to the immigration of Chinese into South Africa.

It was within the context of this highly prejudiced, ‘orientalist’ and anti-Sinitic environment that the settler Chinese communities in South Africa had to survive. The image of the Chinese that had been created before, during and after the indenture period from 1904 to 1910, was to cloud the public mind about those Chinese who lived both inside and outside of the labour compounds. For many South Africans, both black and white, stories of the Chinese indentured labourers formed part of an oral memory handed down over generations by those who had worked on or been aware of the mines propagating and perpetuating negative portrayals.<sup>73</sup> It also led to all Chinese in South Africa being regarded as descendants of the Chinese indentured mine labourers<sup>74</sup> but they had, according to legislation, for all intent and purposes been returned to China.

Despite the disparate nature of the various Chinese arrivals and communities within the southern African region from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century, a process of racialisation and pervasive orientalism had spread across the colonial and indigenous frontiers. This forged a transnational racial identity of the Chinese which would remain embedded in popular consciousness in the coming century and beyond. In particular, the first decade of the twentieth century was a period in which the foundations were laid for the future history of the Chinese South Africans in the segregated Union, apartheid Republic and later democratic South Africa.

## Second wave: RoC

With the Chinese being designated as ‘prohibited immigrants’ according to the Immigration legislation introduced shortly after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, their numbers declined as they became dependent on natural increase and a few special permit

69. A.W., ‘Yellow slavery – and white!’, *Westminster Review*, clxi (5 May 1904), 487.

70. H. Samuel, ‘The Chinese Labour Question’, *The Contemporary Review*, 85 (April 1904), 458; C.K. Cooke, ‘Chinese Labour: Its Moral, Economic, and Imperial Aspects’, *The Empire Review*, January 1904, 205.

71. M. Boyd, ‘Oriental Immigration: The Experience of the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Populations in the United States’, *International Migration Review*, 5, 1 (1971), 48.

72. Statutes of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, Act 37 of 1904, The Chinese Exclusion Act, 1.

73. The author’s experience of reactions over three decades when presenting papers and talks at both academic and lay forums.

74. See L. Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886–1924: A People’s History of South Africa, volume 1* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980), 69.

entrants.<sup>75</sup> Although their numbers halved within decades<sup>76</sup> and they became numerically insignificant and politically inconsequential, there remained a lingering legacy of ‘orientalism’ in the broad spectrum of South African collective memory.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, even though they were now second and third generation, they were not citizens but rather residents retrospectively referred to as South African born Chinese (SABC).<sup>78</sup> However, as overseas Chinese, they were further tainted as they were associated with the corrupt and inept Manchu (Qing) dynasty (1912), considered allies of the revolutionary Sun Yat-Sen and his Kuomintang party (1920) and later as insurgents of the Chinese Communist Party (1949).<sup>79</sup> In addition, not unlike overseas Chinese elsewhere, perceptions of them were skewed by the rise and spread of triads, tongs and syndicates that spread across the globe.<sup>80</sup> In South Africa, they continued to be subjected to discriminatory legislation as ‘non-whites’ and were denied rights pertaining to citizenship, ownership and the franchise. With the onset of apartheid in the mid-twentieth century, they were legally categorised as non-white according to the Population Registration Act of 1950 and designated a separate group area (albeit with difficulty) according to the Group Areas Act of 1950 and thus denied access to all social and other amenities.<sup>81</sup> The detrimental effect of these and other discriminatory laws led to 60 per cent of Chinese graduates leaving the country between 1964 and 1984 further dissipating their already dwindling numbers.<sup>82</sup>

Almost ironically, an economic turn in the misfortunes of apartheid South Africa had led to the country’s ostracisation on the global stage as a pariah state which initiated the onset of the second wave of Chinese immigrants. After developing closer commercial and diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan (RoC) from the 1970s, the apartheid government devised incentives to induce RoC entrepreneurs and investment to the country to boost its flagging economy. The RoC became South Africa’s fifth-largest trading partner, official diplomatic ties were cemented in 1976<sup>83</sup> and through a range of concessions Taiwanese immigrant figures in South Africans soared to 30, 000 by the 1990s overshadowing the size of the SABCs (or resident Chinese) threefold.<sup>84</sup> In some arenas, prohibition gave way to permits and permission for the local Chinese, as the government was obliged to relook at its policies regarding its Chinese residents. However, they still remained in an invidious

75. See Yap and Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*.

76. *Census Statistics of the Cape of Good Hope: 1891, 1904, 1912, 1913 and 1921*.

77. Harris, ‘A History of the Chinese’, 333.

78. D. Accone, ‘“Ghost People”: Localizing the Chinese Self in an African Context’, *Asian Studies Review*, 30 (2006), 261.

79. Harris, ‘A History of the Chinese’, 3.

80. M. Schmidt, ‘Study throws light on triad gangs in SA’, *Sunday Argus*, 28 November 2004, 18; P. Gastrow, ‘Triad Societies and Chinese Organised Crime in South Africa’, Institute for Security studies, Occasional paper no. 48, 2001, 10, <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Papers/48/48.html>, accessed May 2017.

81. For a full discussion of this see K.L. Harris, ‘Accepting the Group but Not the Area: The South African Chinese and the Group Areas Act’, *South African Historical Journal*, 40 (1999), 179–201.

82. K.L. Harris, ‘Chinese in South Africa’, in M. Ember, C.R. Ember and I. Skoggard, eds, *Encyclopedia of Diasporas* (Human Relations Area Files, Yale University, New Haven: Kluwer Penlum Academic, 2005), 737.

83. Harris, ‘Accepting the Group’, 179–201.

84. Accone, ‘Ghost People’, 265.

position between white and black.<sup>85</sup> When the apartheid government attempted to co-opt the SABCs with a token place on a 60-member presidential Council, the community excused itself from the invitation. Yet, the communities' response was divided, reflecting their inherent differences in Chinese clubs and associations across the country. It was in the wake of this dilemma that the Chinese decided to forge an umbrella organisation, the Chinese Association of South Africa (CASA), to act as its official mouthpiece so as to try to link the numerous regional and clan organisations, some of which dated back to the previous century.<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, the tangible Taiwanese presence in South Africa surged in numbers, through diplomatic intervention<sup>87</sup> and economic force with over 300 factories being established by 1990, R1 billion invested in capital and over 40,000 new jobs being created.<sup>88</sup> Yet, this Taiwanese presence in South Africa divided the Chinese communities further: with the newcomers forming their own groupings and networks, there was tension as they apparently appeared to attempt to infiltrate and even take over the resident Chinese associations.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, labour transgressions, human rights violations and other related problems in the Taiwanese industrial sector cast the SABCs in an extremely negative light.<sup>90</sup> The SABCs came to be tarnished with the same disparaging brush – and, as before, the vices of the one became the vices of all.

Feelings of this disconcert are evident in a letter by a SABC to the press entitled 'Chinese values mocked'. Herein the writer indicates that although he is of Chinese descent he is 'first and foremost a South African' and declares that his parents instilled in him 'Chinese values' admitting that he naively believed 'most people of Chinese origin had the same values.'<sup>91</sup> His letter, however, contends that:

The recent influx of 'foreign' Chinese, particularly from Taiwan, has shattered that belief. [He] can but only express disgust at the behaviour of those Taiwanese who have exploited our resources [...] They have tried to deplete our natural resources with their gill netting, ivory smuggling and abalone (perlemoen) smuggling. At the economic level there have been many instances of fraud and dubious foreign exchange transactions.<sup>92</sup>

He concludes that within the few years that these new Chinese have been in South Africa, 'they have all but succeeded in destroying the favourable image of the Chinese people'.<sup>93</sup>

It was indeed during this second wave of Chinese immigration that the very first signs of illegal trading in abalone and rhino horn appeared to surface.<sup>94</sup> Both products were highly

85. K.L. Harris, 'The Chinese "South Africans": An Interstitial Community', in G. Wang and L. Wang, eds, *The Chinese Diaspora: Selected Essays, Volume II* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1998), 275–301.

86. Anon., 'Chinese community: No politics please', *Financial Mail*, 10 July 1981, 6.

87. Anon., 'Home from Taiwan', *The Argus*, 20 October 1980.

88. Yap and Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*, 421.

89. Y. Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2008); Accone, 'Ghost People', 257–272.

90. Accone, 'Ghost People', 265; Yap and Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions*, 421.

91. Anon., 'Chinese values mocked', *Sunday Times*, 6 October 1991, 18.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. Anon., 'Perlemoen prices leave a nasty taste', *The Sunday Times*, 16 January 1983, 17.

prized on the Chinese market as a delicacy and high-end cuisine and as a health remedy or aphrodisiac, with both fetching astronomical prices on an ever-growing illegal black market. From the late 1970s, Chinese criminal organisations that were modelled on traditional Chinese and Hong Kong triad societies began to operate in South Africa.<sup>95</sup> These had all the trappings of clandestine operations and the South African police found it impossible to infiltrate the groups as they could apparently not recruit informants from the Chinese community to assist – probably as a result of fear.<sup>96</sup> The first reports of a flourishing black market trading in abalone emerged in the Western Cape in December 1978<sup>97</sup> with an initial report indicating that 60 000 kg over the official quota had been exported to Hong Kong.<sup>98</sup>

While triads and smuggling organisations were and still are at the heart of the industry, there was and still is a wider network of locals and lower-level government officials that contribute to the illuiveness and efficiency of the trade both within and outside of South Africa's borders.<sup>99</sup> Compounding matters is that in the case of both abalone and rhino horn poaching, police and game wardens have been implicated in the syndicated operations.<sup>100</sup> This, along with insufficient resources in terms of manpower and sophisticated tracking equipment, hampers the effective eradication of the abalone and rhino horn poaching epidemic.<sup>101</sup> In both cases, these two faunae were flagged as being on the verge of extinction as the poaching continued to increase decade after decade.<sup>102</sup>

The abalone industry often recruits unemployed local fishermen – even schoolboys – to do the diving to poach the molluscs which they then give to middlemen who supply the smuggling conglomerates with the product for processing in clandestine factories or warehouses.<sup>103</sup> Neighbouring territories and countries, such as Transkei, Mozambique and Swaziland,<sup>104</sup> are also often involved in the smuggling process as transit points as they have no regulations regarding the abalone trade and the product is falsely imported back into South Africa *en route* to Hong Kong.<sup>105</sup> Towards the middle of the 1990s, the abalone trade had expanded to such an extent that the police discovered established

95. Pan, *Sons of the Yellow Emperor*, 338; Gastrow, 'Triad Societies', 5.

96. P. Krost, 'The Invasion of the Triads', *Saturday Star*, 26 July 1997, 18

97. H. Geysler, 'Perlemoen Industry Investigation', *The Argus*, 13 December 1978, 1.

98. B. Van Delft, 'Is there a con in the can of SA Perlemoen', *The Star*, 12 July 1981, 14.

99. See for example K. de Greeff and S. Abader, *Poacher: Confessions from the Abalone Underworld* (Cape Town: Kwela, 2018); Schmidt, 'Study throws light on triad gangs'; C. Chow, 'The Ecological, Industrial and Drug War Behind the Abalone on Your Dinner Table', *Africa-China, Wits Journalism*, 31 May 2017. <https://africachinareporting.co.za/2017/05/the-ecological-industrial-and-drug-war-behind-the-abalone-on-your-dinner-table/> accessed June 2019

100. H. Parker 'Closed shop is at the root of the Perlemoen Wars', *Business Day*, 30 January 1995, 4.

101. D. Kneen, 'Poachers strip tons of Perlemoen', *The Argus*, 23 December 1993, 6.

102. M. Gosling, 'Cape's Abalone is well on the way to extinction', *Cape Times*, 20 November 2012; Anon., 'Conservationists team up to save the rhino', *To The Point*, 3 August 1979, 26; D. Potgieter, 'Undercover Squad routs rhino horn smugglers', *Sunday Times*, 20 January 1991, 3.

103. J. Cameron, 'Harbour swoop', *Cape Times* (2 December 1993), 1.

104. Anon., 'T'kei-Far East Link in Smuggling Ring', *Daily Dispatch*, 2 March 1991, 1; M. Gosling, 'Chinese director of Swazi firm may face charges for poached SA Perlemoen', *Cape Times*, 29 November 2002, 3; K. Gillet, Review of 'Poacher confessions from the Abalone underworld', *South China Morning Post*, 4 October 2018.

105. Chow, 'The ecological, industrial and drug war'.

abalone drying warehouses, freezing stores and canning factories within South Africa being run by Chinese nationals.<sup>106</sup> Many of these criminal organisations were run from the major cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban with restaurants as front-cover businesses and posed huge challenges to a policing system not yet equipped to deal with organised clandestine crime and the different investigative processes required.<sup>107</sup>

The poaching of rhino horn was and remains an equally lucrative business. The first syndicates also appear to have begun operating from the mid-1970s using poachers from within and along South Africa's borders to kill the animals, hack off the horns while they are still alive leaving them to bleed to death and then supply the products to middlemen.<sup>108</sup> Given the dangers involved in the killing, the payment made is worth the poachers' while, but at the same time the final product can fetch up to US\$60, 000 per kilogram on the black market.<sup>109</sup> Currently the killings have said to have escalated out of control, and while it threatens the very survival of the rhino species, it has also become one of the most highly developed criminal activities confronting the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).<sup>110</sup>

As South Africa began to move towards the new democratic dispensation, the fortunes of many of the Taiwanese businessmen and women took a downturn. No longer privy to special government concessions through the apartheid demagogues and with labour regulations being transformed and trading licences being opened up, the economic edge they had was blunted and prospects for the Taiwanese began to look dismal. This was further compounded by the loss of the monopoly the Taiwanese had on the eastern import trade as a result of the relaxing of South African immigration regulations allowing entrance to formerly 'prohibited immigrants' from the PRC.<sup>111</sup> Before the end of the twentieth century, it was estimated that almost half the Taiwanese population in South Africa migrated back to Taiwan.<sup>112</sup> This exodus coincided with the influx of the third and most substantial wave of new Chinese from mainland China. However, with a foothold within southern Africa, the networks of organised crime did not abate – on the contrary, they appeared to have escalated at an uncontrollable rate.

### Third wave – PRC

This third wave of Chinese to South Africa can almost be characterised as a tsunami.<sup>113</sup> There was a distinct warming of relations between the new democratic South African

106. Sapa, 'Perlemoen poaching syndicate cracked', *The Citizen*, 26 November 1994, 12; D. Simon, 'Abalone War', *Cape Times*, 6 January 1995, 1; Gastrow, 'Triad Societies', 2.

107. Gastrow, 'Triad societies', 1.

108. L. Vigne, 'Stop pseudo hunters from buying "trophy" rhino horns', *Business Day*, 10 November 2011, 11.

109. Y. Nair, 'Rhino horn gangs can "forfeit" bail', *Daily News*, 20 June 2012, 7; K. Somerville, 'Rhino Horn and Conservation: To Trade or Not to Trade, That is the Question', *The Conversation* (13 September 2016).

110. J. Rigoulet, 'Why is the Illicit Rhino Horn Trade Escalating?', *The Conversation* (21 April 2017).

111. K.L. Harris, 'Rising Chinas and the History of the South African Chinese', in B.P. Wong and C.B. Tan, eds, *The Rise of China and its Impact on Ethnic Chinese Communities* (London: Routledge, 2018).

112. Houston et al., 'Bodies that Divide and Bind', 21; Accone, 'Ghost People', 30, 265.

113. See Zapiro's play on the idea of an Asian tsunami depicting China (and India) flooding the African continent, in the *Mail and Guardian*, 1 June 2006.



government and the PRC towards the end of the twentieth century.<sup>114</sup> This was evident in increasing bilateral trade agreements, escalation of official visits, more lenient immigration policies and the eventual switch of diplomatic relations to the PRC in 1998.<sup>115</sup> By the end of the 1990s, South Africa ranked as the country representing the highest number of Chinese immigrants in any one African country.<sup>116</sup> While figures on Chinese immigrants in South Africa vary radically, it is estimated that close on half a million Chinese have arrived from the PRC since the 1990s<sup>117</sup> – including both legal and illegal individuals.<sup>118</sup> In a post-apartheid country with increasing unemployment and poverty, the influx and very presence of an identifiable cultural grouping has only served to contribute, compound and fuel xenophobia and, in particular, Sino-phobic reactions.<sup>119</sup> This increased Chinese presence has been made more visible and been further enhanced by the global hype about China in Africa – the so-called ‘Asian invasion’, the ‘new Chinese imperialism’ and the ‘Chinese scramble for Africa’.<sup>120</sup> International media headlines and academic debate continue to deliberate and critique this new global development fore-fronting the negative effect of China and the Chinese in Africa at various levels.

At a local level, various instances flared up to augment the already prevalent disdain and concern about rising China. The first of many such incidents occurred in the streets of Johannesburg in 1992 where an increasing number of Chinese traders, estimated at around 500, entered the informal sector as street hawkers.<sup>121</sup> Lambasting them as ‘invaders’, the African Council for Hawkers and Informal Business (Achib) condemned the Chinese as squeezing the locals out of the market and accused them, amongst others, of unfair competition. Tempers ran high and threats of violence ensued until CASA, Achib and the local

114. C. Alden, ‘Solving South Africa’s Chinese Puzzle: Democratic Foreign Policy Making and the “Two China’s Question”’, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 5, 2 (1997), 80; C. Alden, “China and South Africa: The Dawn of a New Relationship”, *South African Yearbook of International Affairs*, 1998/1999 (Johannesburg; South African Institute of International Affairs, 2000).
115. Anon., ‘Exit RoC’, *The Citizen*, 30 December 1997, 6; Alden, ‘China and South Africa’.
116. Harris, ‘Anti-Sinicism’, 217.
117. Y. Park, ‘Perceptions of Chinese in Southern Africa: Constructions of the “Other” and the role of Memory’, *African Studies Review*, 56, 1 (2013), 136.
118. G. Mohan, and M. Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese Migrants in Africa: New Agents of Development? An Analytical Framework’, *European Journal of Development Research*, 21 (2009), 588–605; J. Wilhelm, ‘The Chinese Communities in South Africa’, in S. Buhlungu, J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman, eds, *State of the Nation: South Africa 2005–2006* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2006), 352; Y. Park, ‘South Africa’s Dance with the Chinese Dragon’, unpublished paper, The Africa Institute of South Africa (25 March 2009), Abstract.
119. R. Anthony, ‘Xenophobia in South Africa: Implications for Chinese Communities’, CCS Commentary, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch (30 April 2015); Park, ‘Perceptions of Chinese in Southern Africa’, 137.
120. C. Alden, *China in Africa* (New York: Zed Books, 2007); G. Yu, ‘Introduction’, in D. Shinn and J. Eisenman, *China and Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), ix; S. Grimm, ‘Editorial’, *The China Monitor*, 60, 3 (March 2011); K.L. Harris, ‘The Construction of “Otherness”: A History of Chinese Migrants in South Africa’, in S. Cornelissen and Y. Mine, eds, *Afro-Asian Encounters: Migration and Agency in a Globalizing World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
121. *Business Day*, 22 September 1992.



Chinese Business Association intervened to resolve the fray.<sup>122</sup> This was only one of many such objections compounded by the ongoing reaction and criticism from trade unions against the flooding of the South African market with cheap Chinese goods – so-called ‘Fong Kong’.<sup>123</sup>

Another local development that thrust the South African born Chinese into the limelight in the new democratic dispensation and fanned the flames of Sino-phobia was the eight-year-long legal battle that ultimately recognised the SABCs as eligible to qualify for equity in terms of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (BBBEE).<sup>124</sup> The media had a field day deliberating about the status of the Chinese as ‘neither fish nor fowl’, as ‘the new black’, making them conspicuous in print media and on social media. Added to that were the crass government ministerial comments that further endorsed ‘crude racial stereotypes’.<sup>125</sup> Although eventually winning the case and acquiring employment equity status, the SABCs found this a bittersweet victory in a country rife with xenophobia.<sup>126</sup> Even though it could be argued that they were not targeted to the same degree as foreign nationals from Africa, they remained in an invidious position as to their status.

The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) indicated that the improved relations and increased networks between South Africa and the PRC as regards immigration and trade have made it that much easier for ‘Chinese criminal elements to operate in the slipstream of the expanding exchanges between the countries’.<sup>127</sup> The chairman of CASA in Johannesburg also suggested that most of the smuggling activities are related to the ‘new immigrants’.<sup>128</sup> Thus, with more fluid relations the prospects for poaching and smuggling appeared to be enhanced, along with the ever-increasing demand in a country with a high unemployment rate. Currently, a fresh abalone costs up to ZAR3350.00 in a Hong Kong restaurant, the epicentre of the global abalone trade, while the price of dried abalone available locally in South Africa ranges from ZAR1200 to ZAR1400 per kilogram.<sup>129</sup> The number of illegally harvested abalone has apparently risen from 4 million a year in 2008 to 7 million in 2016 with an annual worth of US\$440 million. The illegal trade is worth 10 times more than the legal trade.<sup>130</sup> The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries stands helpless in the face of a quota system that it is clearly not able to enforce,<sup>131</sup> while the Police

122. For a detailed discussion of this see K.L. Harris, “‘The Formidable, Unwelcome Competitor’: Overseas Chinese Merchants in South Africa”, in Z. Guoto, ed., *History and Perspective: Ethnic Chinese at The turn of the Centuries* (Fujian: Fujian People’s Press, 1998).

123. K. Nkosi, ‘R2m Fong Kong bust’, *Sowetan*, 19 June 2006, 6; A. Khoza and Y. Omar, ‘Mixed feelings to “Fong Kong” trade’, *Sunday Tribune*, 7 August 2011, 20; Dittgen and Anthony, ‘Yellow, Red and Black’, 108.

124. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act no. 2003.

125. D. Accone, ‘Case of the Chinese can’t be made in black or white, but only in yellow’, *The Sunday Independent*, 19 July, 1998; U. Ho, ‘Chinese locals are black’, *Business Report*, 19 June 2008; V. Ndlovu, ‘Chinese not black’, *The Sowetan*, 20 June 2008.

126. K.L. Harris, ‘En route to “Dignity Day”’: The South African Chinese and Historical Commemorations’, *Historia*, 55, 2 (2010), 147–162.

127. Gastrow, ‘Triad Societies’, 9.

128. Chow, ‘The ecological, industrial and drug war’.

129. *Ibid.*

130. DAFF, TRAFFIC, Image Initium Media cited in Chow, ‘The ecological, industrial and drug war’.

131. Chow, ‘The ecological, industrial and drug war’.

Department still does not have the capacity or wherewithal to combat the activities which have become increasingly more violent.<sup>132</sup> And to further complicate matters, abalone poaching has recently become more directly involved with a drug trade where abalone is being exported and mandrax is being imported in a type of barter system, while other accounts indicate that poaching syndicates are actually ‘paying small fishing communities in drugs to catch abalone’.<sup>133</sup>

In 2011, the insatiable demand for rhino horn resulted in a doubling of the price making the ivory trophies literally ‘worth more than their weight in gold’.<sup>134</sup> Rhino poachers could expect to receive between ZAR2,000 and ZAR10,000 per rhino while the middleman would receive up to ZAR4,000 with the final product obtaining in the region of ZAR500,000 on the foreign Chinese market.<sup>135</sup> While southern African countries deliberate on whether to ban or legalise the trade in rhino horn,<sup>136</sup> the numbers continue to dissipate. Added to that is the Asian entry into the trophy hunting industry which is used as a mechanism to gain access to rhino horn which is then traded on the black market in the East.<sup>137</sup>

As a result of the third wave of Chinese to southern Africa, the SABCs have again recently had to contend with an escalation of another onslaught on their ‘Chineseness’ – besides abalone pilfering that persists, and rhino horn poaching that continues to escalate, the donkey-killing saga is the latest vice to be attributed to the ‘sins of the yellow man’.<sup>138</sup> In cases detected across the breadth of the country and spilling into the neighbouring states, the ‘Chinese’ have been linked to the illegal and preposterous activities of the brutal butchering of donkeys that were skinned alive and left to die. The skins are boiled to produce gelatine for the Chinese medicine ‘ejiao’ which is believed to treat menopause, and cure insomnia and dizziness as well as high blood pressure.<sup>139</sup> With newspaper headlines and media coverage abounding, along with the abovementioned defamatory Facebook insults, the SABC decided to take a stand. The Chinese Association of Gauteng issued a press statement in which they expressed their outrage over ‘the cruelty and abuse uncovered’ and ‘condemn[ed] in the strongest possible terms all individuals involved in the ill-treatment of these donkeys and indeed, any other forms of animal cruelty’.<sup>140</sup> They gave their full support to the television program for having featured these acts of cruelty, and stated they supported the Karoo Donkey Sanctuary for their efforts to improve the plight of these poor animals. Furthermore, they welcomed the prosecution of such perpetrators whatever their nationality.<sup>141</sup>

132. Z. Feni, ‘Number of abalone poachers growing’, *Cape Argus*, 22 June 2007, 10

133. A. Smith, ‘Ngcuka lifts veil on triad activities in abalone trade’, *Cape Times*, 23 May 2003, 3; M. Waldner, ‘Chinese gangs dole out drugs for abalone’, *City Press*, 24 July 2005, 6; A. Hyman, ‘Abalone theft fuels Cape’s drug wars’, *The Times*, 29 September 2016.

134. W. Khuzwayo, ‘Rhino horn more valuable than gold’, *Star*, 21 January 2011, 15.

135. Y. Groenewald, ‘Rhino poachers’ hides on the line’, *Mail and Guardian*, 9 April 2009, 8.

136. Somerville, ‘Rhino Horn and Conservation’; ANA, ‘Rhino poaching in SA placed on agenda’, *The Citizen*, 4 December 2015, 9; W. Hartley, ‘Government too in “awe” of China to push rhino issue’, *Weekend Post*, 28 January 2012, 8.

137. Vigne, ‘Stop pseudo-hunters’, 11.

138. Ho, ‘Hate speech’.

139. D. Chambers, ‘Hands off African donkeys’, *Sunday Times*, 2 October 2016.

140. The Chinese Association Gauteng, Press release.

141. The Chinese Association Gauteng, meeting 18 February 2017.

However, they also raised their concerns about the xenophobia directed at the Chinese community particularly in the face of past tragic xenophobic experiences in the country directed at other minority communities. They declared the comments ‘racist, inflammatory, vitriolic, insulting, hate-filled and [promoting and propagating] hatred of and violence to Chinese people’. They added that what was more terrifying were the comments that were said to ‘directly incite violence and harm to [their] children’.<sup>142</sup> Following legal advice taken to protect the safety and well-being of the Chinese community, they informed the media that criminal charges of ‘crimen injuria’ had been laid against some of the writers of these offensive comments. The TCA believes that the case ‘will continue to educate the public on the impact of hate speech and discrimination on the Chinese community and on South Africans at large, highlighting the importance of holding to account those who violate the rights of others’.<sup>143</sup> The case commenced in the Johannesburg High Court in March 2019 and proceedings are set to continue in October and November 2019.<sup>144</sup> The Association also laid a complaint of ‘hate speech’ with the South African Human Rights Commission.<sup>145</sup>

## Conclusion

The extremely detrimental impact and long-term damage the poaching of abalone, rhino horn and donkey hides has had and continues to have on the South African ecology, the extinction of species and the broader illegal economy is unfathomable. But it has also had a human cost. This illegal unbridled activity committed by what appears to be mainly non-South African Chinese continues to perpetuate another long term negative impact, and that is the negative stereotyping of ‘the image South Africans have of Chinese’.<sup>146</sup> The Chinese in South Africa continue to be racialised as a homogenous group, buttressed by a media that perpetuates a sense of othering as part of a transnational identification of a so-called imagined community. The role that Anderson claims print (and other) media plays in forming cohesion within a group is in this instance evident as it fosters a stereotype of one from without. As Dekötter argues, racialisation is a process and over time this process has inculcated a particular monolithic perception of the Chinese in popular consciousness. As Dubow contends, race is socially real and for the South African Chinese, this racism and sinophobia has been perpetuated for well over a century and still exists as the recent outbursts on social media and the current court case attest. Thus, the Chinese in South Africa continue to be regarded as homogenous by the non-Chinese South Africans, instead of ‘untangling the history’<sup>147</sup> of the different Chinese diasporas and indeed the Chinese communities living in South Africa.

142. The Chinese Association Gauteng, Press release.

143. The Chinese Association Gauteng, TCA hate speech case in the Equality Court– update, 7 August 2019.

144. The Chinese Association Gauteng, TCA hate speech, 7 August 2019.

145. The Chinese Association Gauteng, Press release.

146. Accone, ‘Ghost people’, 267.

147. Ho, ‘Hate speech’.

**Author Biography**

Professor **KAREN LEIGH HARRIS** is a full professor and Head of the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria, lecturing undergraduate and post-graduate students in history as well as heritage and cultural tourism. She is also the Director of the University Archives and Chairperson of the Historical Association of South Africa and the Africa representative on the Executive Board of the International Society for the Study of Chinese Overseas.