

“THE CHINESE ARE COMING”: A HISTORY OF CHINESE MIGRANTS IN NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

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My dissertation examines the historical and contemporary migration of Chinese people to Nigeria as well as their interaction with the Nigerian state, workers, and consumers in late colonial and post-independence Nigeria. Beginning in the 2000s, Chinese migrants, together with Chinese products, have indeed greatly influenced the economy of Africa, and particularly Nigeria; but the significant Chinese presence in Nigeria is not a particularly recent phenomenon. As early as the 1960s, an influential yet understudied group of Chinese migrants began to dominate key manufacturing industries in Nigeria, including textiles, footwear, and enamelware, controlling more than 50 percent of the Nigerian and even the West African market in these three product types. These early Chinese immigrants had a profound influence not only on the economy, but also on the daily lives of ordinary Nigerians. What factors have pulled and pushed Chinese migrants to Nigeria? How have early and recent waves of Chinese migration influenced the local economy and people's daily lives? How have the meanings of Chinese products to different groups of Nigerians changed over time, and how have these groups made cultural as well as economic sense of these products? How have Chinese transnational networks of information, capital, and goods interacted with African networks, institutions, communities, and individuals?

Combining archival records, oral history interviews, and participant observation, I will examine the long-term and recent influence of Chinese activities on Nigerian societies and economies. I argue that the Chinese presence in Nigeria was a historical and evolving concept that changed over time, varied with place, and differed by targeted groups. Hong Kong Chinese industrialists who built factories, employed Nigerian workers, and manufactured products locally in the 1960s had a different influence from the mainland Chinese traders who imported made-in-China products and undermined local manufacturing industries from the 1990s onward. Therefore, by focusing on Chinese migrants in Nigeria and placing them in a wider historical context of Nigerian industrialization from the era of decolonization to the present, my dissertation challenges the Eurocentric narrative of Chinese migrants' role as laborers and reveals how different groups of Chinese migrants—entrepreneurs, traders, and workers—were shaped by, and in turn shaped, the history of both Nigeria and China. However, this transnational influence was not unidirectional. I also argue that it was the changing policy of Nigerian governments, the evolving preference of Nigerian consumers, and decisions of Nigerian traders that attracted both the early wave of Chinese industrialists and the later wave of Chinese traders and products to come. It was also the broader historical context of Nigeria— decolonization, industrialization, civil war, and economic crisis—that determined the destiny of Chinese migrants in the country.

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To my parents, who have loved and supported me unconditionally throughout my life.
To my wife, who encourages me with steadfast love, care, and understanding.
And to my daughter, who inspires me to be more than what I was the day before: May you
understand the journey to knowledge never ends.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

ATL	Arewa Textile Limited
BTIL	Baguada Textiles Industry Limited
CDW	China Dyeing Works Ltd.
CFAO	Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale
DWS	David Whitehead & Sons
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FTL	Economic Community of West African States
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
JFTC	Jiangsu Foreign Trade Corporation
KCTC	Kano Citizens Trading Company
KMT	Kuomintang
KTL	Kaduna Textile Ltd.
MAN	Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
NCS	Nigerian Enamelware
NEWCO	Nigerian Enamelware
NNDL	Northern Nigerian Development Limited
NNIL	Northern Nigerian Investment Limited
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NRDC	Northern Region Development Corporation
NRMB	Northern Regional Marketing Board
NSE	Nigerian Stock Exchange

NTL	Nigerian Textile Ltd.
NTMA	Nigerian Textile Manufacturers' Association
PRC	People's Republic of China
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UAC	United Africa Company
UNICO	Universal Nigeria Industries Company Ltd.
UNTL	United Nigerian Textiles Ltd.
UNTWU	United Nigerian Textiles Workers' Union
WAHUM	West Africa Household Utilities Manufacturing Company
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZTIL	Zamfara Textile Industry Limited

INTRODUCTION

“Even [if] the whole world of [Nigerian] textile factories close, UNTL will be the one running.”¹ This was the promise made by Dr. Cha Chi Ming, the founder of United Nigerian Textiles Ltd. (UNTL)—Nigeria’s largest textile-factory group since the late 1970s—to all his managers and senior workers at UNTL’s annual meeting in Kaduna in 2001.² Having been born in the era of the Chinese Republic, Cha started his textile enterprise in the Shanghai area during the interwar period, relocated his factory to Hong Kong in the late 1940s due to the Chinese Civil War, and established UNTL in Nigeria in 1964.³ Cha’s seemingly risky move to Nigeria proved to be more than successful: UNTL quickly expanded, outgrowing all its rivals in Nigeria by the late 1970s, and Cha was dubbed the “Textile King of Africa.”⁴ Moreover, UNTL’s dominating influence over Nigerian textile production did not fade away with the overall decline of Nigeria’s textile sector and wider economy; rather, it attained a near-monopoly of textile manufacturing in the northern part of the country in the early 1990s. Ironically, perhaps, it was Cha’s fellow Chinese—manufacturers and traders from Mainland China—who emerged as UNTL’s most formidable competitors at the end of that decade. UNTL’s market share rapidly shrank in the early 2000s, with many of its affiliated factories facing deficit and retrenchment. Nevertheless, Cha kept his promise amid the wave of textile-factory closures that swept Nigeria in early 2000s; but when he passed away in 2007, his daughter shut UNTL down before the end of the year.

¹ Sani Maliki, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016.

² James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 16, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author; Kassim Garba, 2nd Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 22, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 9, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016.

³ Cha Chi Ming Picture Album Editorial Committee, *Cha Chi Ming*, ed. Haining Municipal Committee of CCP and Haining Municipal People’s Government (Hong Kong International Art Press, 2008), 26-51.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Cha's life story is an excellent illustration of the transnational migration of Chinese people into Nigeria in the twentieth century. This dissertation argues that, far from being either homogeneous or recent, the Chinese presence in Nigeria, and in Africa more generally, was a complex, constantly evolving, long-term phenomenon. In the early twentieth century, Chinese migrants in Africa were often indentured laborers who worked in mines and plantations for European colonialists. From the 1950s to the 1980s, with Cha and other Chinese industrialists establishing factories in Nigeria and other African nations, the Chinese came to be valued as investors. And beginning in the 1990s, a dramatic influx of Mainland Chinese migrants dramatically changed and diversified the Chinese community in Nigeria, and posed a serious challenge to Cha's generation of Chinese industrialists by eating into the latter's market share with much cheaper made-in-China goods.

Cha's story also brings to bear the Chinese role in the history of post-colonial Nigeria: specifically, how Chinese migrants and the Nigerian state, workers, traders, and consumers interacted with and influenced one another. My dissertation examines how decolonization and the subsequent pursuit of industrialization by independent Nigeria's federal and regional governments both pressured and attracted Chinese industrialists to move to Nigeria. It also explores how those who did so survived and prospered from the late 1960s to the mid 1990s, through the Biafran War, Oil Boom, and decades of economic crisis. It further discusses how a new wave of Mainland Chinese migrants formed a community of shared interests with certain Nigerian government officials in the late 1990s. Beyond the sphere of the Nigerian state, my work looks into how Nigerian workers both benefited from, and suffered under, the influence of different groups of Chinese migrants over the past half century, and how the evolving

preferences of Nigerian consumers influenced the destinies of Chinese products, whether manufactured by Nigeria-based Chinese factories or made in China.

Literature Review

During the six decades that have passed since the beginning of decolonization, Chinese influence in, and upon Africa, has increased dramatically, yet the study of Chinese migrants in African history has remained marginal. Most of the scholarly literature on Chinese migrants has concentrated on their presence in Southeast Asia, North America, and Latin America. Moreover, whether indentured or free, Chinese migrants have mostly been examined in just three contexts: increasing demand for labor on plantations and in mines; the growth of a racialized global hierarchy; and the establishment of border controls by European colonies and the United States.⁵ In other words, the existing literature is largely limited to Chinese migration from a Western viewpoint.

Influenced by this main stream of Chinese migration scholarship, the few existing studies of the Chinese in African history have been more concerned with the British Empire and colonialism as systems, and with Chinese migrants as an unlimited pool of colonial labor, than with the myriad ways in which heterogeneous Chinese migrant groups encountered colonial and post-independence institutions in their daily lives.⁶ Persia Campbell, for example, focuses on the

⁵ Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Lok Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama*, 1 edition (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); Adam M. McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); Erika Lee and Judy Yung, *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kathleen M. Lopez, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁶ Persia Crawford Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire* (Negro Universities Press, 1969); Peter Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982); Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, "'We Cast about for a Remedy': Chinese Labor and African Opposition in the Gold Coast, 1874-1914," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, no. 2 (2001): 365–84; Rachel Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902-10: Race, Violence, and Global Spectacle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

importation of Chinese labor into the South African gold fields, and traces the origin, development, and failure of this phenomenon from the perspective of the British government.⁷ Looking at a broader context of the globalization of capital, labor, and resources, Peter Richardson argues that the importation of Chinese mine labor into the Transvaal was made possible by the structure of the international politico-economic relationship among Europe, Asia, and Africa.⁸ Rachel Bright shifts the focus of such work in a cultural direction, suggesting that the colonial knowledge, discourses and stereotypes of Chinese labor and African labor flowed horizontally within different Southern African states as well as among white English-language communities around the world.⁹

Qinghuang Yan pays more attention to the Chinese side of the so-called coolie trade (indentured or contract labor), and argues that because no official records were made of the Chinese in South Africa, the Qing government did not know of the existence of the South African Chinese until 1893; and that plans to establish a Chinese consulate to protect them arose in 1903 only due to petitioning by this community itself.¹⁰ Focusing on the period 1874-1914, Kwabena Akurang-Parry examines British colonial officials' idea of importing Chinese miners into the Gold Coast as the solution to labor issues there, and African responses, including intellectuals' refutation of the superiority of Chinese over African labor.¹¹

Other studies have attempted to put Chinese migrants at center stage, highlighting the formation of Chinese communities and the changing nature of the Chinese diaspora in Southern

⁷ Campbell, *Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire*.

⁸ Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal*.

⁹ Rachel Bright, *Chinese Labour in South Africa, 1902-10: Race, Violence, and Global Spectacle* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3, 5.

¹⁰ Qinghuang Yan, *Coolies and Mandarins : China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore, 1985), 335.

¹¹ Akurang-Parry, "We Cast about for a Remedy."

and Eastern Africa.¹² Melanie Yap and Diane Leong Man, for example, trace the history of the Chinese in South Africa back to the seventeenth-century exile of Chinese convicts, and narrate the origin and development of the early Chinese communities of laborers and traders there.¹³ They further record the discrimination of the Apartheid regime against Chinese settlers, and the resultant adaptation and resistance by their community.¹⁴ Yoon Park also explores the long history of the Chinese in South Africa, and argues that their identity was a fluid one, “constructed through often-contested processes of defining both the boundaries and content of ethnic identity.”¹⁵ Li Anshan greatly expands the discussion of the Chinese in African history in both geography and historical scope: covering eastern, southern, and parts of western Africa from medieval times to the early twentieth century, as well as the life stories of individual post-colonial Chinese migrants, mostly in southern and eastern African countries.¹⁶

As the above discussion implies, what is missing from this body of literature are the basic, yet geographically important, influences of Chinese migrants in postcolonial Nigeria. As this dissertation will show, the influence of Chinese migrants in postcolonial Nigeria profoundly shaped its economy as well as the social and economic lives of millions of Nigerians. As the first book-length work on Chinese migrants in Nigeria, my study will challenge the Eurocentric narrative of Chinese migrants’ role as laborers, and reveal how different groups of Chinese migrants—entrepreneurs, traders, and workers—were shaped by, and in turn shaped, the histories of both Nigeria and China.

¹² Melanie Yap and Dianne Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion & Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Univ Pr, 1996); Anshan Li, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* (Beijing: Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 1999); Yoon Jung Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009); Jamie Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania*, Reprint edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011); Anshan Li, *A History of Overseas Chinese in Africa to 1911* (Brooklyn, New York, NY: Diasporic Africa Press, 2012).

¹³ Yap and Man, *Colour, Confusion & Concessions*.

¹⁴ Yap and Man.

¹⁵ Yoon Jung Park, *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 4.

¹⁶ Li, *A History of Overseas Chinese in Africa to 1911*; Li, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa*.

However, this dissertation is also informed by literature from outside the discipline of history that focuses on China-Africa relations and the contemporary Chinese presence in Africa. At the macro level, scholars have devoted considerable attention to official China-Africa relations from a policy-driven or state-oriented perspective, within which the most-explored subjects are aspects of the state: foreign policies, China's aid to Africa, and state-owned enterprises and policy banks.¹⁷ However, Chinese migrants, the key foundation of the Chinese presence, have been largely ignored in such studies.

Other scholars, aware of the limitations of the state-oriented approach, have recently delved into the lives of Chinese migrants, their influence on African societies, and their interaction with Africans since the 2000s.¹⁸ They have also explored the practices of Chinese traders; social and cultural differences between Chinese and Africans; and African perceptions of Chinese people and Chinese goods, the two most visible symbols of China in African societies.¹⁹ Nevertheless, such studies assume that the Chinese presence in Africa is a twenty-first century

¹⁷ Deborah Brautigam, *Chinese Aid and African Development: Exporting Green Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Chris Alden, *China in Africa: Partner, Competitor or Hegemon?* (London ; New York: Zed Books, 2007); Christopher Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, eds., *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (Oxford University Press, 2008); Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press and World Peace Foundation, 2008); Meine Pieter van Dijk, ed., *New Presence of China in Africa* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*, Reprint edition (Oxford England; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); S. Hess and R. Aidoo, "Charting the Roots of Anti-Chinese Populism in Africa: A Comparison of Zambia and Ghana," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 49, no. 2 (April 1, 2014): 129–47.

¹⁸ Conal Ho, "Living in Liminality: Chinese Migrancy in Ghana" (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2012); G. Mohan and B. Lampert, "Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China-Africa Relations," *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (January 1, 2013): 92–110; Laurence Marfaing and Alena Thiel, "The Impact of Chinese Business on Market Entry in Ghana AND Senegal," *Africa* 83, no. 04 (November 2013): 646–69; Ben Lampert and Giles Mohan, "Sino-African Encounters in Ghana and Nigeria: From Conflict to Conviviality and Mutual Benefit," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2014): 9–39; Howard W. French, *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa*, First Edition edition (New York: Knopf, 2014).

¹⁹ Jing Jing Liu, "Contact and Identity: The Experience of 'China Goods' in a Ghanaian Marketplace," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010): 184–201, <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1028>; R. Z. Abid, S. A. Manan, and Z. A. Amir, "'Those Nation Wreckers Are Suffering from Inferiority Complex': The Depiction of Chinese Miners in the Ghanaian Press," *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language* 2 (2013): 34–50; Karsten Giese, "Same-Same But Different: Chinese Traders' Perspectives on African Labor," *The China Journal*, no. 69 (2013): 134–53; Karsten Giese and Alena Thiel, "The Vulnerable Other – Distorted Equity in Chinese–Ghanaian Employment Relations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 6 (May 12, 2014): 1101–20.

phenomenon, and ignore its earlier history. In the context of Nigeria, for instance, the dominance of made-in-China products in local markets is often treated as a *fait accompli*, and basic questions about when, how, and why Chinese goods came to prominence in the market have received scant attention. My dissertation will answer these and other neglected questions, thus lending some much-needed historical perspective to contemporary study of China-Africa relations.

As well as contributing to the historiography of Chinese migrants in Africa and to the body of research on contemporary China-Africa relations, my dissertation draws upon and contributes to post-colonial African labor studies. The activities of trade unions and workers' resistance to economic exploitation, being relatively easy to document, have understandably taken center stage in this sub-field, and represent the collective voice of workers to some extent.²⁰ However, as Robin Cohen has indicated, scholars' focus on overt forms of resistance such as strikes, political militancy, and unionization itself has meant that less obvious manifestations of labor consciousness remain understudied.²¹ In other words, because records made by and about unions mainly reflect their institutional relations with governments and employers, existing studies contain little information about the daily lives of individual workers beyond the workplace.

²⁰ Richard Sandbrook and Jack Arn, *The Labouring Poor & Urban Class Formation: The Case of Greater Accra* (Montreal: Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, 1977); Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners' Struggles 1870-1980* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1984); David Fashole Luke, *Labour and Parastatal Politics in Sierra Leone: A Study of African Working-Class Ambivalence* (Lanham & New York & London: University Press of America, 1984); Gunilla Andr , "Urban Workers as Farmers: Agro-Links of Nigerian Textile Workers in the Crisis of the 1980s," in *The Rural-Urban Interface in Africa: Expansion and Adaptation* (Uppsala & Copenhagen: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet in cooperation with Centre for Development Research, 1992), 200–222; Gunilla Andr  and Bjorn Beckman, *Union Power in the Nigerian Textile Industry: Labour Regime and Adjustment* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1999).

²¹ Robin Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers," *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 19 (1980): 8–22.

To break free of this institutional bias that has hitherto marked the study of workers' history in post-independence Africa, other scholars have approached the subject through the lens of African factory workers' individual experiences. Based on ethnographic work and social surveys, Margaret Peil examined workers' job satisfaction, occupational background, migration patterns, degree of adjustment to urban life, and family ties in 1960s Ghana,²² and argued that the Ghanaian worker was "becoming modern while maintaining many aspects of his traditional culture";²³ this complicated the industrial man thesis by adding a new category to it.²⁴ Social surveys conducted in Nigeria in 1963-64 and 1981-82 confirmed the applicability of Peil's argument about industrial man to the Nigerian or even the broader West African context.²⁵ Hans Seibel and his colleagues looked into how Nigerian factory workers and their families adjusted to industrialization, wage labor, and urban life from the 1960s to the early 1980s, and found that due to insufficient pay and the high cost of living in Lagos, the majority of them still lived at subsistence level; and that because industrial labor had failed to provide them with a sense of economic security, they always looked outside the factory for both extra income via petty trading and social security via extended family ties.²⁶ Based on another ethnographic study of Nigerian workers, conducted on the Ikeja Industrial Estate in 1970s Lagos, Adrian Peace likewise argued that young migrant workers had to rely for their survival on interpersonal connections, especially their hometown ties, because of job insecurity and low salaries;²⁷ and those who were most

²² Margaret Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

²³ Margaret Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 237.

²⁴ Alex Inkeles, "Industrial Man: The Relation of Status to Experience, Perception, and Value," *American Journal of Sociology* 66, no. 1 (1960): 1-31; Clark Kerr et al., *Industrialism and Industrial Man: The Problems of Labor and Management in Economic Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

²⁵ Hans Dieter Seibel et al., *Industrial Labour in Africa: Continuity and Change Among Nigerian Factory Workers* (Saarbrücken; Fort Lauderdale: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers, 1988).

²⁶ Seibel et al.

²⁷ Adrian J. Peace, *Choice, Class, and Conflict: A Study of Southern Nigerian Factory Workers* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 16.

eager to improve their living standards looked forward to leaving the factories and entering self-employment.²⁸ Similarly, Paul Lubeck found that Muslim workers in Kano had little or no expectation of promotion or upward mobility within factories, where they experienced alienation, injustice, and job insecurity; and that like their counterparts in Lagos, they looked towards futures of independent entrepreneurship as a means of resisting proletarianization.²⁹

These studies' consensus that Nigerian and Ghanaian workers barely considered factories as sources of economic and social security or upward mobility may be flawed, however, as all were based chiefly or entirely on the 'snapshots' provided by non-longitudinal social surveys. In other words, they provided detailed descriptions of workers' experience at a specific moment, but lacked data on their life trajectories and how their experiences changed over time. Using workers' life histories as primary sources, my dissertation contributes to post-independence Nigerian labor history by examining the changing situations of textile workers in a Kaduna-based Chinese factory against the broader context of Nigerian industrialization, the oil boom, economic crisis and globalization from the 1960s to the 2000s.

Methodology and Positionality

This dissertation is based on a combination of archival research and oral-history interviews. As a transnational project on Chinese migration to Nigeria, it required archival work in both Nigeria and China. During my year-long fieldwork in 2016, I made extensive use of archival material held by the National Archives of Nigeria at Kaduna, Arewa House Archive (Kaduna), the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, the Lagos State Record and Archives

²⁸ Peace, 10-15.

²⁹ Paul M. Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labor in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 215-19.

Bureau, the Hong Kong Public Records Office, the National Library of China (Beijing), and the corporate archives of a number of Chinese factories. Government documents, newspapers, economic yearbooks, annual reports of factories, and other written sources provided a general framework for understanding the history of the Chinese presence in Nigeria from the perspectives of the state and of Chinese industrialists.

However, the poor availability of archival records represents a major obstacle to research on postcolonial Nigerian history. Among the three major Nigerian national archives, at Ibadan, Enugu, and Kaduna, the first two contain very few government records from after independence; and while the Kaduna archive contains many important documents from the 1960s and a few from the early 1970s, its records from the mid 1970s onward were not available for consultation. Archivists I spoke to blamed this situation on lack of manpower and budgets for indexing the “tons” of papers from the northern states that they had been given, but which had been gathering dust for more than a decade. In short, as for postcolonial archival records in Nigeria, especially those since the 1970s, there are simply no available records out there.

Up to a point, newspapers and corporate documents were able to fill the gaps created by the non-availability or nonexistence of government records. Nigerian newspapers—notably the *Nigerian Citizen*, *New Nigerian*, *Daily Trust*, *Daily Champion*, *Vanguard*, and *This Day*—provided extensive coverage of the relevant period’s politics, economy, society, culture, and sports. In addition to Nigeria’s economic policies and general economic conditions, the vicissitudes of its manufacturing industries (including large-scale Chinese-owned factories) and the voices of its national trade unions often left their traces in the newspapers. However, newspaper-based research is not without its limitations. First, it is very time-consuming to read through every issue of even one major Nigerian newspaper from independence to the present,

and therefore one has to decide in advance which newspapers will best repay the effort. Second, every newspaper has an ingrained bias in favor of dramatic events, which often leads it to ignore the voices of ordinary consumers, workers, and petty traders, and to give little or no coverage to small-scale manufacturing businesses.

Fortunately, I found that corporate documents from the personal archives of several Chinese industrialists and the company archives of some Chinese factories in Nigeria and China, which had not previously been made available to researchers, provided a detailed record of the origin and development of Chinese enterprises in Nigeria. However, many Chinese factories either did not keep their historical records or were unwilling to share them with outsiders; and I was very grateful and perhaps lucky to gain access even to the somewhat limited range of corporate documents that I did see. In any case, such documents provide fresh if necessarily narrow perspectives on the internal dynamics of the development of Chinese-owned industry in Nigeria.

As noted above, the valuable written sources I collected from multiple types of archives generally ignored the voices of small-scale Chinese entrepreneurs and Nigerian workers, traders, and consumers. Therefore, my dissertation research also included 179 oral-history interviews, 120 with Nigerians and 59 with Chinese, conducted in Mandarin (my native language), English, Hausa, and Igbo. The Nigerian interviewees included traders, workers, and consumers in Kano, Kaduna, and Lagos, whose data enabled me to explore how workers in Chinese factories understood the meaning of their work; how traders took advantage of the retailing of made-in-China products; and how consumers made cultural sense of these products. The Chinese interviewees comprised industrialists, traders, workers, restaurant owners, and other professionals, and provided information that shed new light on how Chinese entrepreneurs

interacted with the Nigerian state, workers, and traders, as well as on the changing dynamics of Chinese community in Nigeria.

Just as Nwando Achebe has written about her need to negotiate her multiple identity – a daughter, wife, and guest in the Nigerian field, I too found that I had to do it myself.³⁰ As a Chinese national studying African history at an American university, I had to keep repositioning myself during my fieldwork in Nigeria and China. During my oral-history interviews with Nigerians, my Chineseness often placed me in dilemma. Though my Chinese face meant different things to different groups of Nigerians, none of them initially perceived me as a student/researcher. When I talked to Nigerian traders in Lagos and Kano, they always perceived me as a potential business partner and peppered me with questions about our future cooperation, sometimes impressing me with their knowledge of Mandarin. I found I had to put my U.S. student identity to the fore as a means of detaching myself from my Chineseness, which was tightly associated with business. Only after I had successfully shifted my interlocutors' focus to my American university student/researcher identity and impressed them with my knowledge of local languages did our conversation gradually turn from potential business partnership to their life histories.

When interviewing Nigerian factory workers, on the other hand, my Chinese appearance positioned me as an employer. For example, when I visited villages in Kano State, locals always approached me to ask about job opportunities because the Chinese-owned Lee Group of factories, established in the 1960s, was one of the major private employers there. Given that they had expectations of employment in mind, I worried that the life histories provided to me by workers in Chinese factories would be filled with praise for their former employers and

³⁰ Nwando Achebe, "Getting to the Source: Nwando Achebe—Daughter, Wife, and Guest—A Researcher at the Crossroads," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 9–31.

conditions and downplay or conceal their negative experiences. Therefore, just as with the Nigerian traders, I explained to the workers that I lived and studied in the United States, and assured them that what they told me would not be reported to any Chinese factories in any form. In addition, the individuals that I chose to interview were mainly retired workers in their sixties or seventies who had no intention of seeking factory employment. This approach succeeded, insofar as I was able to obtain data on both their positive and negative experiences with Chinese factories; indeed, the majority of these older workers actually seemed to enjoy complaining to me about the conditions of Chinese factories, in the hope that their comments would somehow filter through me to the owners, my promises to the contrary notwithstanding.

In contrast to Nigerian traders and workers, who welcomed me due to my Chineseness (albeit for reasons unrelated to my actual reasons for approaching them), Nigerians engaged in handicrafts were consistently suspicious of me. At handicrafts markets in Kano and Kaduna, local people who were making and selling aluminum, calabash, wood, copper, and grass products were very wary of my intentions. Many said that, in the past, Chinese people had bought their products and asked about the best-selling designs, and a few months later, made-in-China products of the exact design they had discussed would appear in the markets at much cheaper prices, ruining many craftspeople's livelihoods. To them, in other words, seeing a Chinese person made them fear that their work would be pirated and their businesses undercut. They were so unwilling to talk to me, in fact, that I had to produce a letter of introduction from my advisors and present my Michigan State University student ID before they would accept my overtures.

In the Chinese community, however, far from emphasizing my identity as a U.S. university student/researcher, I carefully reasserted my Chinese identity. As a young Chinese

researcher who was enthusiastic about writing the history of overseas Chinese in Nigeria, I was quickly accepted by Chinese industrialists, traders, restaurateurs, professionals, and diplomats there. However, merely being a Chinese national did not automatically grant me access to all the key members of the Chinese community. Indeed, in any given Chinese community, whether within or outside China, attempts to approach someone for the first time simply via self-introduction without previous networking often fail. Thus, I would first approach some other influential Chinese who was good friends with the targeted interviewee to introduce me to the latter beforehand. The real challenge lay in choosing the proper go-between. The situation was further complicated by the fact that, far from being a monolithic whole, the Chinese community in Nigeria in early 2016 was loosely organized, widely dispersed, and even to some extent divided against itself. One needed to understand the politics of the community, its major business factions, and the personal relations among influential Chinese entrepreneurs when deciding whom to approach for introductions. As such, I found that the best way to present myself was as a young student researcher who aspired to preserve the history of the Chinese in Nigeria and who had no intention to getting involved in the community's politics. In other words, I was only there to cultivate good personal relations with individual Chinese, but always keep my distance.

The Changing Landscape of Nigerian Administrative Boundaries

The early wave of Chinese migrants came to Nigeria during its late-colonial and early post-independence eras, both of which were marked by significant political change. As foreign investors, Chinese migrants interacted with the governments of colonial and independent Nigeria at the national, regional, and state levels, making it necessary to provide some details here of how the administrative boundaries of Nigeria changed through the twentieth century.

In 1900, having taken over the land previously controlled by the Royal Niger Company (a British chartered firm in charge of expanding British colonial influence between 1879 and 1900) in and around Lokoja (currently the capital of Kogi State), the British government formally renamed it the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.³¹ At the same time, the former Niger Coast Protectorate, a British protectorate established in 1884 in the Oil River areas, was renamed the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Thus, at the outset of the twentieth century, though wholly ruled by the British, the area of present-day Nigeria was administered as three separate parts, including the two Protectorates mentioned above and the Colony of Lagos.³² (See Figure 1) In 1914, Sir Frederick Lugard amalgamated all three to form the unified Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, with a governor-general in Lagos,³³ and lieutenant governors ruling the north and the south.³⁴ In 1939, the south was formally divided into western and eastern sections,³⁵ and from then until 1954, the resulting three (informal) regions of colonial Nigeria were divided into a total of twenty-four provinces.³⁶

³¹ Richard H. Dugate, *The Conquest of Northern Nigeria* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1985), 1; Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), xiv.

³² A. Orugbani, *Nigeria since the 19th Century* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Paragraphics, 2005), 98; Richard Bourne, *Nigeria : A New History of a Turbulent Century* (London: Zed Books, 2016), 3.

³³ Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), xv.

³⁴ F. O. Imuetinyan, *Issues in Nigerian Government and Administration* (Benin City, Nigeria: Denvic Publishing Company, 2002), 38.

³⁵ Bourne, *Nigeria : A New History of a Turbulent Century*, xiv; Orugbani, *Nigeria since the 19th Century*, 101.

³⁶ Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 23; A. Orugbani, *Nigeria since the 19th Century* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Paragraphics, 2005), 101.



Figure 1: *Nigeria 1900-1913* [map]. Scale not given. In: The Cartographic Department of the Oxford University Press. *Nigerian Primary Atlas for Social Studies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979, 25.

At the start of the British decolonization of Nigeria, in the wake of the Second World War, the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 established a fully federal system with five parts: the Federal Territory of Lagos; the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions; and Southern Cameroons.³⁷ (See Figure 2) The Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, each with its own governor, premier, legislature, and civil service, enjoyed significant powers of self-government, while the jurisdiction of the Federal Government in Lagos was limited to external affairs and interregional issues.³⁸ In the period from 1954 to 1967, during which Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 and then became a republic in 1964, this administrative framework remained largely unchanged, though a new Mid-West Region with the same level of self-government was carved out of the Western Region in 1964.³⁹ (See Figure 3)

³⁷ F. O. Imuetinyan, *Issues in Nigerian Government and Administration* (Benin City, Nigeria: Denvic Publishing Company, 2002), 49; Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001), 19.

³⁸ Imuetinyan, *Issues in Nigerian Government and Administration*, 49; F. O. Imuetinyan, *Issues in Nigerian Government and Administration* (Benin City, Nigeria: Denvic Publishing Company, 2002), 49; Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*, 19.

³⁹ Idris Tanu Ejenavwo, *Nigeria: The Making of the Republics, 1960-2008* (Kaduna: Risafu and Co., 2008), 27.



Figure 2: *Nigeria 1914-1962* [map]. Scale not given. In: The Cartographic Department of the Oxford University Press. *Nigerian Primary Atlas for Social Studies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979, 25.



Figure 3: *Nigeria 1963-1966* [map]. Scale not given. In: The Cartographic Department of the Oxford University Press. *Nigerian Primary Atlas for Social Studies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979, 25.

In 1967, to strengthen the power of the Federal Military Government, General Yakubu Gowon, the then head of the state, transformed the previous four regions into twelve states, and

launched a three-decade process of weakening local powers. (See Figure 4) Although people in Nigeria still refer to the country's northern, western, and eastern regions, they do so only in a geographical and not an administrative sense. In 1976, the Mohammed-Obasanjo administration, with General Murtala Mohammed as the then head of state and General Olusegun Obasanjo inheriting the former's policies after Mohammed's being assassinated, increased the number of states from twelve to nineteen, and "accented the move toward a more horizontally balanced and vertically centralized federalism."⁴⁰ This number has since increased further: to twenty-one in 1987, thirty in 1991, and most recently, to thirty-six in 1996.⁴¹

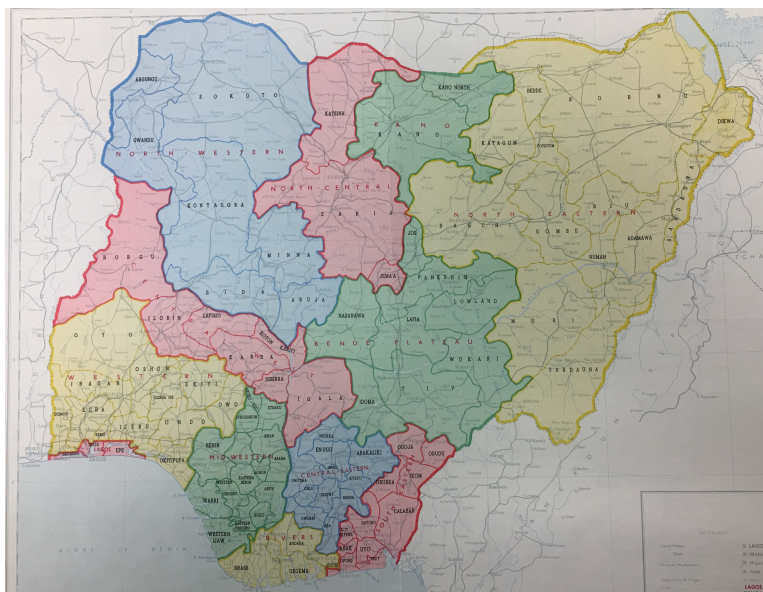


Figure 4: *Nigeria Administrative Map* [map]. Scale 1: 3,000,000. Federal Surveys, Lagos, Nigeria, 1967.

It was during the 1954 to 1967 period of Nigeria's administrative history that the first wave of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists set up factories in Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, and Port Harcourt. These incomers therefore had to deal with the Federal Government regarding customs, importation, and macroeconomic policy, but mainly with their respective regional governments

⁴⁰ Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*, 33.

⁴¹ Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*, xxv-xxvi & 40.

when it came to investment plans. Post-1967 waves of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists and Mainland Chinese traders, professionals, and other entrepreneurs, in contrast, would deal overwhelmingly with a Federal state whose power relative to that of the states was steadily increasing.

Organization of the Dissertation

I have divided this dissertation into six chapters, which appear in a broadly chronological order. The first four chapters focus on the early wave of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists and how Chinese-owned factories, their owners, and their products (mainly enamelware) were influenced by and in turn influenced Nigeria's economy, workers, and consumers from the 1950s to the early 1990s. The final two chapters deal with the recent wave of Mainland Chinese migrants in Nigeria and how they have dramatically transformed the make-up of the Chinese community, as well as how the changing patterns of Chinese presence have influenced Nigerians from the 1990s onward.

Chapter One focuses on the transnational migration of Chinese industrialists both within Asia and intercontinentally to Nigeria. Having started their businesses in Mainland China in the 1920s and 1930s, many Chinese industrialists chose to move their factories to Hong Kong when faced with the challenge of the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s. In the following decade, these enamelware and textile makers were initially satisfied to export their products from Hong Kong to Nigeria and other African markets via British trading companies. However, with Nigeria on a path to self-government and independence, its leaders started to pursue industrialization as a key means of achieving economic development. As Nigeria was Hong Kong's major market for textiles and enamelware, Nigeria's combination of increasingly protectionist trade policies and

attractive terms for inward investment both ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ Hong Kong-based leaders of these two industries to make their move. In other words, Nigeria’s pursuit of industrial development in the late 1950s and early 1960s was strong enough to be felt transnationally by Chinese industrialists in Hong Kong, and led to their migration to Nigeria.

Chapter Two explores the development of Chinese-owned factories in Nigeria from the 1960s to the 1990s, in the context of post-independence Nigerian economic history, centering the textile sector as its major focus. The pro-industrialization policies of the earlier 1960s led to a general boom in Nigerian textile manufacturing, but with the outbreak of the Biafran War (1967-1970), policies began to swing back and forth between full protection and openness to imports. From the early 1970s up to the early 1990s, decreasingly supportive government policies led to the gradual decline of Nigeria’s textile industries. UNTL, despite being as exposed as any other enterprise to this deteriorating policy environment, managed to outgrow its fellow Chinese-owned, European-owned, and Nigerian-owned competitors and become the largest textile-factory group in Nigeria. However, the Chinese identity of UNTL and other Chinese-owned factories sometimes became a liability. For example, during the Biafran War, when they had to prove their loyalty to the Nigerian Federal Government due to China’s support for the Biafran side. Loyalty was not always enough, however, and UNTL’s plan to acquire Kaduna Textile Ltd., the first large-scale modern textile factory in Nigeria, thus unifying the textile industries in the northern provinces, was denied due to its Chinese ownership.

Chapter Three turns to the lives of the Nigerian textile workers at UNTL from the 1960s to the 1990s: specifically, how macro-level industrialization efforts and the rise and fall of the Nigerian manufacturing sector were experienced and felt by these workers. Textile-factory jobs in Kaduna in the 1960s and 1970s seemed attractive and promising to young Nigerians whether

they were illiterate or educated; and in a surprising contrast to the findings of prior survey-based studies, many workers opted to work continually at UNTL for several decades, satisfied with their middle-class lifestyles and the upward economic and social mobility that the factory system provided.

Chapter Four delves into how products made by Chinese-owned factories influenced Nigerian consumers, based on the case of enamelware in northern Nigeria. In terms of ownership, management, design, and technology, enamelware had arguably the most distinctively Chinese characteristics of any product sold in the region between the 1960s and the late 1990s, and Chinese-owned Nigerian factories held a nearly 100 percent share of the Nigerian enamelware market during that period. Their enamelware dominated the kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms of ordinary Nigerians, gradually replacing traditional Nigerian articles made of calabash, wood, brass, grass, and clay, and along the way developed new, gendered meanings as a symbol of wealth and social prestige, especially in the context of marriage. Indeed, enamelware made by Nigeria-based Chinese factories became central to social prestige in northern Nigeria over several decades, and the chapter concludes that the importance of enamelware in post-independence Nigeria lies in its deep integration into local networks of gendered meaning, rather than in its representation of modernity.

Chapter Five focuses on the new wave of Mainland Chinese migrants who arrived in Nigeria beginning in the 1990s. It explores how the industrialization processes of Nigeria and China influenced each other, and how the coming of unprecedented numbers of Chinese traders and made-in-China products affected Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists, Nigerian workers, and the Nigerian manufacturing sector as a whole. While the demise of the Nigerian textile industry in the 2000s was caused chiefly by the long-term neglect of manufacturers' needs by successive

Nigerian governments, Mainland Chinese traders and their made-in-China products did accelerate this process. Nigerian textile workers, including those previously hired by Nigeria-based Chinese factories, suffered the most and struggled to adjust to the new conditions. Yet, this should not obscure how central Chinese migrants were to the collapse of the Nigerian textile sector, both as victims and villains.

Lastly, Chapter Six focuses on the rise and fall of China Town in Lagos, which emerges as a microcosm of the interaction between Chinese migrants and the Nigerian state, and of traders' and consumers' understandings of made-in-China products. Instead of accepting the dominance of made-in-China goods in Nigeria as a *fait accompli*, as most prior scholarship has done, the chapter delves into the historical process of the coming of such goods into Nigeria via the establishment and re-establishment of China Town in the 1990s and early 2000s. It argues that Nigeria's national, state, and local governments played contradictory roles in the rise and fall of Lagos' China Town by forming a shared community of interest with some Mainland Chinese traders, but at the same time frequently raiding China Town for real and imagined customs, immigration, and product-standards abuses. Despite public denunciations of made-in-China products as substandard by the Nigerian Federal Government, Nigerian traders kept dealing with Mainland Chinese importers, as local consumers continued to favor cheap made-in-China products irrespective of their quality.

CHAPTER 1

FROM CHINA TO NIGERIA: MIGRATION OF CHINESE INDUSTRIALISTS AND NIGERIAN INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE 1960s

Beginning in the 2000s, Chinese migrants, together with Chinese products, have profoundly influenced the economy of Africa and particularly Nigeria. However, the significant Chinese presence in Nigeria is not as recent a phenomenon as it might appear. As early as the 1960s, an influential yet understudied group of Chinese migrants began to dominate the country's key manufacturing industries, including textiles, footwear, and enamelware, eventually coming to control more than 50 percent of the Nigerian and wider West African market in these three product categories.¹

In this chapter, based on a broad range of archival sources and oral history interviews with Chinese industrialists, I will trace the movement of the first generation of Chinese industrialists from China to Nigeria and explore the forces that drove it. First, I will delve into the short-range migration of Chinese industrialists from Shanghai to Hong Kong in late 1940s and early 1950s, and how the latter decade witnessed the growth of commercial connections between Hong Kong Chinese industrialists and Nigeria. Second, I will examine the migration of Chinese industrialists from Hong Kong to Nigeria in the 1960s, against the backdrop of a federal/regional government consensus within Nigeria that industrialization should be pursued aggressively through the 1950s and the 1960s. And third, I argue that the influence of the Nigerian state's industrial policy was sufficiently strong to be felt transnationally, acting upon

¹ Shu Men Ho, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 27, 2016; M. L. Lee and S. F. Lee, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Francis Huang and Joseph Huang, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Hong Kong, November 28, 2016; Lawrence Tung, Interview by author, Notes taken, Lagos, Nigeria, November 9, 2016; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Advertisement," *New Nigerian*, September 20, 1974. As for enamelware, almost all enamelware factories in Nigeria have been owned or managed by Chinese since the 1960s, the current four existing enamelware factories are all owned by the Chinese. Cha Textile Group accounted for more than half of textiles in the Nigerian market since early 1970s, and Lee Group of Companies accounted for 80 to 95 per cent of footwear starting in late 1990s.

certain industries in Hong Kong as well as encouraging the migration of Chinese industrialists to Nigeria.

China and Hong Kong in the Postwar Period

The most populous countries on their respective continents, China and Nigeria both remained agricultural economies during the first six decades of the twentieth century, though both pursued industrial development to different extents. In the early days of Republican China, indigenous industrialists grasped the opportunities presented by World War I to establish various light industries, and achieved solid development. The number of Chinese-owned factories increased from 698 in 1913 to 1,759 in 1920, while the country's population of industrial workers increased from 270,717 to 557,622 over the same period.² The number of factories continued to increase during the 1930s, by which time half of them were located in or near Shanghai.³ Despite the destructive economic effects of Japanese invasion and occupation of 1937-45, the light industries in Shanghai managed to survive through World War II, and their management even planned ahead for postwar production of consumer goods such as textiles, household utensils, and footwear.⁴

However, such plans were derailed by the Chinese Civil War, which in addition to political instability brought economic hardship to areas controlled by the Kuomintang (thereafter KMT). Private enterprises and individual entrepreneurs suffered from the devaluation of currency, difficulties in accessing foreign exchange, escalating conflicts between management and labor, and insufficient supplies of raw materials, which led to a very low utilization of

² Albert Feuerwerker, *The Chinese Economy, 1870-1949*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies 71 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies The University of Michigan, 1995), 101.

³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴ Cha Chi Ming Picture Album Editorial Committee, *Cha Chi Ming*, ed. Haining Municipal Committee of CCP and Haining Municipal People's Government (Hong Kong International Art Press, 2008); Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014.

production capacity and even the closure of a number of factories.⁵ What was worse, as the KMT army lost major battles in 1947-48, industrialists had to come to terms with the fact that Shanghai, or even the whole of China, might be taken over by the Communists. Despite its slogan of uniting with all those who can be united with, the policy and practice of the Communist Party towards industrialists remained uncertain and confusing to the latter.⁶ Under such circumstances, some chose to stay, some left for Hong Kong immediately, and others opted for a wait-and-see approach while diverting part of their capital to Hong Kong.

Almost all of the Chinese industrialists who eventually moved to Nigeria in the 1960s had to make this difficult choice at the critical phase of the Chinese Civil War. Though they considered themselves (or their fathers) to be capitalists, most at one time held a belief—rooted in their familiarity with the changing warlord regimes of the Republican period—that the Communist Party might differ little from previous rulers.⁷ However, any reassuring effects of Communist slogans about uniting the national bourgeoisie were constantly undermined by socialist theories—and practices—of “workers taking charge.”⁸ Therefore, most Shanghai-based industrialists of the later 1940s chose to divert some capital toward the building of factories in Hong Kong, while keeping an eye on the local situation.⁹ When the Communist takeover of the Mainland was completed in 1949, it was still possible for this group of businesspeople to pass freely in and out of Hong Kong; but beginning in 1950, they were required to obtain

⁵ Suzanne Pepper, “The KMT-CCP Conflict 1945–1949,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 741-746; Brett Sheehan, *Industrial Eden: A Chinese Capitalist Vision* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 175-176.

⁶ Kuisong Yang, “The Evolution of the Chinese Communist Party’s Policy towards the Bourgeoisie before and after the Establishment of the People’s Republic of China,” *Modern Chinese History Studies*, no. 2 (2006): 1–25; Ji-jin Shi, “Change of National Bourgeoisies’ Psychology from 1949 to 1956,” *Journal of Anhui Normal University* 32, no. 1 (2004): 30–34.

⁷ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

⁸ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

⁹ Jieguo Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, July 15, 2014; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014.

authorization papers from the local police for doing so.¹⁰ Taken together, the limits on travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the rise of nationwide anti-capitalist political movements, and the suffering of those industrialists who remained in People's Republic of China (thereafter PRC) in the early 1950s finally led those who had left for Hong Kong abandon any idea of returning. Taken together, the limits on travel between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the rise of nationwide political movements, and the suffering of those industrialists who remained in the PRC in the early 1950s finally led those who had left for Hong Kong abandon any idea of returning.

Most Chinese industrialists who migrated to Hong Kong came from the Lower Yangtze region (current Shanghai, Jiangsu Province, and Zhejiang Province). Sociologist Siu-Lun Wong refers to these industrialists as “Shanghainese,” due to this shared geographic background and Wu dialect, and characterizes them as China's most entrepreneurial group.¹¹ Wong further argues that they began to form an ethnic group in Hong Kong in late 1940s, distinguished from the local Cantonese by their greater personal wealth and capital, more metropolitan outlook, better education, better connections to Europeans, and more advanced machinery.¹² Extending Wong's argument, I suggest that the identity of Shanghainese industrialists began to form as soon as they left Shanghai for Hong Kong, and grew even stronger when they departed for, and settled in, Nigeria. Indeed, all the Shanghainese industrialists I met in Nigeria talked proudly of their place of origin, and how their Shanghainese ethnic group dominated the manufacturing of enamelware, metal products, building materials, and footwear in that country.¹³ From the 1960s

¹⁰ Ho, Interview by author, 2016.

¹¹ Siu-Lun Wong, “The Migration of Shanghaiese Entrepreneurs to Hong Kong,” in *From Village to City: Studies in the Traditional Roots of Hong Kong Society* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1984), 222-223. Siu-Lun Wong, *Emigrant Entrepreneurs: Shanghai Industrialists in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

¹² Wong, “The Migration of Shanghaiese Entrepreneurs to Hong Kong,” 223-226.

¹³ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

through the 1990s, the official conference language used at annual meetings of the Nigerian association for manufacturers of enamelware and metal products was not English but the Wu dialect, for almost all enamelware factories in Nigeria were owned by these Shanghainese industrialists.¹⁴

Before the coming of large numbers of Chinese migrants to Hong Kong in the late 1940s, Hong Kong served as “the premier entrepot between China and the West.”¹⁵ After relocating their factories and families to Hong Kong, Shanghainese industrialists—who brought capital, machinery, technological knowledge, and management skills, and gained access to thousands of refugees from the Mainland as cheap labor—contributed greatly to the transition of Hong Kong from an entrepot to an industrial city. With the outbreak of the Korean War, a trade embargo against the PRC imposed by the United Nations had a severe negative impact on Hong Kong’s role in connecting China to the rest of the world. This further fueled the shift from trade to manufacturing that had already begun, as the latter was now seen as vital to the city’s survival and development. Shanghainese industrialists diverted to Hong Kong shipments of advanced machines that had originally been destined for Shanghai; they also brought with them sufficient capital, well-developed networks of connections with foreign banks and merchant firms, skilled technicians, and effective established systems for manufacturing day-to-day consumer goods.¹⁶ Cheap labor was readily available due to the inflow of Chinese migrants: the population of Hong Kong increased from 1.75 million in 1947 to over 3 million in 1960, and the number of workers in manufacturing increased from 47,356 in 1947 to 215,854 in 1960.¹⁷ In other words, it was

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Steve Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 158.

¹⁶ Ibid., 161-170.

¹⁷ *Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967* (Census & Statistics Department Hong Kong, 1969), 14, 48.

Shanghainese industrialists and technicians and Mainland laborers who, more than anyone else, “launched Hong Kong into rapid self-sustaining industrialization.”¹⁸

Enamelware and textiles, the two industries to which Shanghainese industrialists made the greatest contribution, were the largest and fastest-growing industries in 1950s Hong Kong, aside from rubber shoes.¹⁹ As of the end of World War II, Hong Kong had only one enamelware factory, but due to Shanghai industrialists’ expertise in this field and the equipment they brought with them, the number of such factories rocketed to 26 by the end of 1954.²⁰ Enamelware rapidly became Hong Kong’s third-largest source of jobs, employing just 187 people in 1947, but 3,699 in 1954, and nearly 6,000 in 1956 and 1957.²¹ The number of textile factories, meanwhile, increased by more than 100, and from fewer than 10,000 in 1947, the number of Hong Kong textile workers grew to 33,299 in 1954.²² In short, the entrepreneurial spirit of Shanghai industrialists, the hardworking refugee labor of mainland migrants, and the capital transferred from the Mainland together led to a rapid increase in the number and size of industrial establishments in Hong Kong.

As well as being labor-intensive, these new light-industrial concerns were constrained by the limited domestic market of Hong Kong, which rendered them heavily export-oriented and dependent on foreign markets.²³ Initially, Hong Kong enamelware factories targeted Southeast Asia as their main export destination; but new markets had to be sought beginning in the mid 1950s as consumers’ habits changed, and some key countries limited importation of Hong Kong

¹⁸ Joe England and John Rear, *Industrial Relations and Law in Hong Kong--An Extensive Rewritten Version of Chinese Labour under British Rule* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1981), 83.

¹⁹ *Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967*, 57-62.

²⁰ The Commerce and Industry Department of Hong Kong, “Enamelware—One of Hong Kong’s Oldest Industries,” *Hong Kong Trade Bulletin*, June 1959; *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1955* (Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao, 1955).

²¹ *Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967*, 57-59.

²² *Ibid.*, 49-51.

²³ Tsang, *A Modern History of Hong Kong*, 165.

products.²⁴ Similarly, Hong Kong's textile industries were heavily dependent on European and American export markets, but from time to time had to face quotas and other forms of trade protection from Western countries. Therefore, some Hong Kong textile factories were also seeking alternative markets by the end of the 1950s.

Under such circumstances, Hong Kong's light industries, but especially enamelware and textiles, looked towards the emerging markets of Africa in general and British West Africa in particular as targets for future expansion.²⁵ Upon discovering African consumers' preference for cheap enamelware utensils via the British trading firms that had already brought enamelware in since the early colonial period,²⁶ Hong Kong factories began to "specialize in highly coloured cheap quality household enamelware to suit the [so-called] tastes and purses of the native populations in the principal markets in Africa."²⁷ By the mid 1950s, between half and two-thirds of all Hong Kong enamelware exports went to Africa.²⁸ British West Africa was the fastest-growing market for Hong Kong enamelware on the African continent, increasing by 102% between 1955 and 1956, and accounting for more than half of all Hong Kong enamelware exports to Africa in mid-late 1950s.²⁹ The majority of Hong Kong enamelware manufacturers exported to the British West Africa with the help of large trading firms such as the United Africa Company (UAC) and John Holt. Meanwhile, the rapidly increasing volume of Hong Kong textiles being traded to Africa led to the formation of a broader web of economic connections. However, while Hong Kong enamelware factories and, to a lesser extent, textile factories, were

²⁴ The Commerce and Industry Department of Hong Kong, "Enamelware—One of Hong Kong's Oldest Industries," 7.

²⁵ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1956* (Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao, 1956).

²⁶ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

²⁷ The Commerce and Industry Department of Hong Kong, "Enamelware—One of Hong Kong's Oldest Industries," 7. The evolving preference of Nigerian consumers for household containers—from locally made pots of clay, wood, and calabash towards industrially manufactured enamelware and aluminum—is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

²⁸ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1955*; *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1956*; *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1957* (Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao, 1957).

²⁹ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1957*, 206.

enjoying strong orders and healthy profits from African consumers, they were by the same token becoming heavily dependent upon African markets. In short, Africa became an indispensable overseas market for Hong Kong light industries, and especially enamelware.

Nigeria in the Postwar Period

When Hong Kong industrialists of the early 1950s began looking to Africa as a potentially huge market into which they could expand, most sub-Saharan African countries were still under European colonial rule. But in Nigeria, the largest and most populous British colony in West Africa, political as well as economic changes were already underway. Both the colonizers and the colonized in that country had been greatly impacted by the experience of World War II. Nigerian soldiers fought side by side with their British colonial masters not only in Africa but in Southeast Asia, and witnessed human bravery, fragility, and brutality irrespective of race, which severely undermined the racial hierarchy of the colonial regime. Nigerian nationalist elites made use of the Atlantic Charter, which though aimed at self-determination for peoples oppressed by the Axis powers, could be applied to anti-colonial struggles within lands ruled by the Allies. And Nigerian farmers produced commodities that were critical to the war effort, and often felt that they had been exploited.³⁰ In short, a broad spectrum of Nigerians including educated elites, civil servants, ex-servicemen, traders, workers and even farmers had liberated themselves from the colonial mentality through their contribution to Britain's battle against the Nazis, and began to demand their country's full political and economic rights as an equal member of the British empire. However, the British colonial government was slow to respond. Between 1945 and 1950, amid protests by cocoa farmers, a general strike, and the

³⁰ Toyin Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965* (Kent State University Press, 2013), 18-21.

emergence of the Zikist Movement that represented a radical opposition to colonial rule, Nigerian nationalism—which had been limited in the interwar years—greatly expanded its base of support, and became more radical in the process.³¹

Facing the challenges posed by the rise of Nigerian nationalism, the British colonizers admitted the inevitability of change, and tried to keep the empire together by initiating political and economic reforms. They believed that the colonial system needed to correct itself by granting “many concessions by way of reforms in order to prolong British rule.”³² However, British-initiated reforms could never keep pace with the growing list of Nigerian nationalist demands: job creation and improvements to education and healthcare were all deemed too slow, and moves toward political autonomy too limited.³³ Each reform to one aspect of the colonial regime exposed the weakness of some other aspect, in a domino effect that finally brought colonial rule to an end.

Despite the ultimate failure of reform in terms of prolonging colonial rule, the British did set the tone for Nigeria’s political and economic trends in the 1950s and 1960s. First, the Richard Constitution of 1947, the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, and the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, established the principle of regional autonomy and enshrined it in a federal system.³⁴ With a relatively weak federal government, the Northern Region, Western Region, and Eastern Region had their own governor, premier, legislature, and civil service. Later when Nigeria achieved self-government and independence, the basic federal system and strong regional power remained

³¹ G. O. Olusanya, “The Zikist Movement-A Study in Political Radicalism, 1946-50,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 4, no. 3 (November 1966): 323–33; G. O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939-53* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1973), 72-129; Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 141-145.

³² Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965*, 24.

³³ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 136-157; Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965*, 31-107.

³⁴ Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965*, 32-37.

largely the same. Regions gained a variety of substantial powers, especially in the economic sphere. While the federal government retained power over general economic policies including taxation and customs, the regions could initiate their own economic programs. Second, the colonial government recognized the necessity of promoting economic development and providing welfare programs, as shown in its first development plan, launched in 1946.³⁵ Though this plan did not salvage colonial rule, its emphasis on the pursuit of development and modernization had an extensive legacy, as it was shared by Nigerian nationalist political elites. As Toyin Falola argues, the achievement of political independence had to be associated with economic development, improvement of living standards, and the banishment of poverty.³⁶ With the colonial system removed as a barrier to development, the nationalist leaders of each regional government had to prove their ability to deliver on the promises they had made to the people regarding development and modernization.

Among many potential pathways to development, industrialization became the favorite of all Nigerian regional governments as well as the federal government.³⁷ The leaders of regions and the federation believed in the magic effect of developing industries to get rid of poverty, reduce dependence on imported goods, and become as powerful as their former colonial masters.³⁸ In 1963, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's last Governor-General and later its first President, proudly declared while touring the Nortex textile factory in Kaduna that the “‘Industrial Revolution’ had now arrived not only in the North but also in the Federation as a

³⁵ A Ten-Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria by the Colonial Government, 1946, Sessional Paper No. 24 of 1945, Publication-DP-3/1, National Archives of Nigeria, Kaduna. .

³⁶ Falola, *Economic Reforms and Modernization in Nigeria, 1945-1965*, xii.

³⁷ For detailed discussion of Nigeria's administrative evolution from the colonial time to the post-independent era, please refer to the Introduction chapter.

³⁸ “ZIK Commends North's Nortex,” *Nigerian Citizen*, January 5, 1963; “Northern Nigeria Faces Industrial Revolution,” *Nigerian Citizen*, October 23, 1963.

whole.”³⁹ Clearly happy to see the factory prospering, and characterizing it as part of the solution to unemployment in the region, Azikiwe commented humorously to its manager that he would ask whether Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, then Premier of Northern Nigeria, was trying to transform the North into another Lancashire.⁴⁰ Similarly, Chief M. S. Sowole, chairman of the Western Nigeria Industrial Promotions Commission, stated in 1962 that the only way to sustain Nigeria’s economy was to very vigorously pursue large-scale industrialization side by side with agricultural development.⁴¹ A news report on the textile industry in the North reflected the thinking of Azikiwe and Sowole on the reason for Nigeria’s low incomes and poor standards of living—namely, a lack of industry; and it was therefore “only through industrialization that the material standard of living of the people and national income can be raised.”⁴²

The Federal Government of Nigeria and its Regional States: Longing for Industrial Development

Nigerian political leaders’ taken-for-granted belief in a close linkage between political independence and economic development set their country on a path of industrialization from the mid 1950s through the 1960s.⁴³ To achieve rapid progress in industrial development, Nigeria opened its gates and welcomed international trade, foreign investment, and external skills and entrepreneurship “to an unusual degree.”⁴⁴ In this section I argue that the strong determination of the federal government of Nigeria and the three regional governments in promoting industrialization was shown at both the federal and regional level with a case study of how the

³⁹ “ZIK Commends North’s Nortex.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Sowole on Industrialization,” *Nigerian Citizen*, February 17, 1962.

⁴² “Kaduna--Lancashire of Nigeria,” *New Nigerian*, May 27, 1967.

⁴³ R. Olufemi Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria, 1860-1960* (New York: Africana Pub. Co, 1973), 229.

⁴⁴ Peter Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy: Nigeria 1945-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1.

northern Nigerian government publicized its industrial potentials. In addition, I argue that the efforts of Nigerian governments in promoting industrial development had a transnational impact upon Hong Kong industrialists, influencing them to relocate there through a combination of push and pull factors.

Many definitions of industrial development have been deployed in various disciplines, but the federal and three regional Nigerian governments seem to have formed a consensus regarding what industrial development ought to be. First, labor arrangements should, over time, enable unskilled workers to become specialists or even experts in their industry; second, there should be capital investment in advanced machinery to make labor more productive; and third, capable management skills should be fostered to ensure efficiency and profitability.⁴⁵ Based on these three standards, the federal and three regional governments also made clear their own role in promoting industrial development. First, a government must provide a suitable legal framework for commerce, banking, trademarks, land tenure, labor relations, and other matters that will enable industrialists to develop their businesses in confidence. Second, the federal and three regional governments must provide adequate infrastructure for electrical power, water, roads, and so forth. Third, given Nigeria's relative lack of capital and industrial expertise, the federal and three regional governments must take measures to attract both, by providing financial incentives if necessary. And fourth, they should participate in the formation of advisory services and public funds for industrialists, so that manufacturing enterprises can survive and prosper.⁴⁶ As the Nigerian Federal Government had key members from all three regions at the time its policy statement on industrial development was issued, and because such policy was

⁴⁵ Federation of Nigeria, "The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria" (Federal Government Printer, 1958), Sessional Paper No.3 of 1958, INDU/1/2, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

implemented by all three regions, it is reasonable to suggest that the policy represented a national consensus. Addressing a group of Canadian businessmen, Chief Sowole said that both foreign capital and technological know-how were crucial to Nigeria's development.⁴⁷ Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello made it even more explicit in his statement on the attainment of Regional Self-Government:

My Government clearly recognizes the vital role that overseas capital, and managerial and technical skills must play in expanding the Northern Region's economy. We warmly welcome the industrialist from abroad who[se] capital, ability and experience can earn an ample reward and at the same time bring progress to the North.⁴⁸

The consensus regarding industrial development emerged in the form of multiple policy measures applying to the whole Federation. From the early 1950s to the early 1960s, Nigeria enacted a series of laws and ordinances providing tax and customs incentives for industrial development in all parts of the country. First, in 1952, even before the establishment of the Federal Government, "The Income Tax Ordinance" was passed to give generous allowance to investors to reduce their taxable income so that they could rapidly retrieve their initial capital for further investment.⁴⁹ In the same year, "The Aid to Pioneer Industries Ordinance" provided company tax relief between two and five years for those industrialists who built a new factory in pioneer industries. Here a pioneer industry referred to one "which either is not at present being carried on in Nigeria or is not established on a scale suitable to the economic development of Nigeria."⁵⁰ In subsequent years, revisions to the ordinance accorded this Pioneer status to major industries including textile and enamelware to attract foreign industrialists.⁵¹ Then, in 1957, the

⁴⁷ "Sowole on Industrialization."

⁴⁸ "Northern Nigeria Faces Industrial Revolution."

⁴⁹ Federation of Nigeria, "The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Declared Pioneer Industries," 1959, MIN-TRA JF 25 Vol. II, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

“Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Ordinance” relieved local industries from paying custom duties on imported raw and semi-processed goods, in an effort to make local products more competitive.⁵² In the early period of development down to late 1960s, the Federal Government also imposed protective tariffs on certain imported finished goods if local industries were deemed unable to compete with them.⁵³

In addition to providing these incentives to attract foreign investors, Nigeria’s federal and regional governments sent out economic missions to major industrial nations to seek capital and industrial expertise.⁵⁴ Between 1960 and 1962, such missions toured the United States, United Kingdom, various countries in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, the PRC, Hong Kong, and Japan to discuss bilateral economic cooperation, technical assistance, and trade. In every place the economic missions visited, they advertised the industrial potentials of Nigeria and the incentives that were available to industrialists willing to form or relocate enterprises there.⁵⁵ Sometimes, they even held seminars to allow those industrialists who had expressed some interest in investing in Nigeria to engage in more detailed discussion.⁵⁶

The joint efforts of Nigeria’s federal and regional governments to stand up for the interests of the domestic textile industry are clearly illustrated by the controversy over a 1959 application for import-duty relief on loom-state (i.e., undyed) grey cloth.⁵⁷ Most of the pioneer textile factories in Nigeria, including Kaduna Textile Ltd (KTL), Nigerian Textile Ltd (NTL), Kano Citizens Trading Company (KCTC), and Arewa Textile (ATL), were designed as vertical

⁵² Federation of Nigeria, “The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria”; “Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Policy,” 1957 1956, MIN-TRA JF 30-A, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁵³ Federation of Nigeria, “The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria”; “Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Policy.”

⁵⁴ “National Economic Meeting Council 12th Meeting,” 1961, MIN-ECON EP 3001/S.12, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Ho, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁷ “Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Application for Relief,” 1959, MIN TRA-IND JF 30-B, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

operations: spinning and weaving locally grown cotton into grey cloth, which they then dyed and printed before using it to manufacture finished clothing items.⁵⁸ Import-duty relief on grey cloth would benefit some factories that relied on imported cloth supplies, but only at the expense of local vertically integrated textile concerns, since grey cloth from Japan, Hong Kong, and India was already much cheaper than the local version.⁵⁹

Facing this challenge, multiple large textile factories joined forces with their respective regional governments in lodging their objections to the relief proposal with the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industries. KTL, NTL, KCTC, the Northern Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Western Ministry of Trade and Industry stood out to defend their interests; there was a collusion between factories from across the federation and regional governments.⁶⁰ They first argued that vertical textile factories were well-established models of partnership between foreign capital, technology, and management skills, on the one hand, and Nigerian labor, cotton, farmers, and markets, on the other; and that jeopardizing the interests of firms like KTL and NTL would greatly damage Nigeria's image as a nation genuinely pursuing industrialization, as well as the confidence of foreign industrialists.⁶¹ Second, they argued that one of the most important factors for the survival of KTL and similar textile factories in Nigeria was governmental protection against Asian competition; without protective tariffs, locally manufactured grey cloth was unable to compete against subsidized grey cloth from Japan and Hong Kong.⁶² KTL and NTL threatened that, if the federal government could not deliver on their promises to protect textile firms with Pioneer status, they would have to cancel their expansion plans or even shut down,

⁵⁸ Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy*, 108-123.

⁵⁹ "Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Application for Relief."

⁶⁰ "Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Applications for Pioneer Certificate," 1959, MIN TRA-IND JF 26, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁶¹ "Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Application for Relief."

⁶² Ibid.

which in turn might lead to a wave of closures among spinning and weaving factories and a tremendous setback for Nigerian industrialization.⁶³ Third, they argued that to protect vertically integrated textile manufacturing was to serve government's key goal of securing Nigeria's economic independence. If factories that could spin, weave, dye, print, and finish were shut down because of lack of government protection, then Nigeria would have to continue its pre-independence practice of buying grey cloth from abroad with its precious and limited foreign exchange.⁶⁴ In short, the controversies around import-duty relief on grey cloth became a test of the determination of the country's federal and three regional governments to protect not only the textile industry, but industrialization in general. The joint efforts of factories and multiple regional governments to oppose the measure were also indicative of the breadth of Nigeria's pro-industrialization consensus in the early days of independence.

With regard to promoting industrial development, the Northern Region was in accordance with the Federal Government and other regions. Actually, compared with the other two regions, the Northern Nigeria Government seemed more eager to embrace industry as the key symbol and tool of progress. In a 1960 joint committee meeting attended by senior officials from multiple Northern ministries, development agencies, and the premier's office, it was pointed out that in terms of industrial development, time was not on the North's side, as there was considerable pressure from below for improvement in living standards.⁶⁵ Amid such pressure, the Northern Government strove to promote industrial development, following the Federal Government's lead

⁶³ "Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Applications for Pioneer Certificate."

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Committee on Dispersal of Industrial Development in the Northern Region: General," 1960, MIN-TRA JB 201-A Vol. II, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

in providing a range of financial incentives and sending their own economic delegations around the world.

In addition, the newspaper press became a major avenue for demonstrating the North's enthusiasm for industrialization, as well as a site for showcasing the progress and development it had already achieved. The pursuit of progress, industrialization, and economic independence became dominant discourses in major Northern newspapers such as the *Nigerian Citizen* and the *New Nigerian* from the late 1950s to the outbreak of the Biafran War. And among many industries in the North, textiles became the most conspicuous symbol of these goals, with the establishment of every new textile factory in the region being heavily reported on and celebrated in the press. In the mid 1950s, when KTL was in the planning stage, it was referred to as the most modern and largest textile mill in West Africa; it also signified the confidence of foreign capital in the North, insofar as it had been established jointly by a British textile company and the Northern Government.⁶⁶ Upon its completion in late 1950s, KTL as the symbol of Nigerians' pride further signified an assured future for Northern Nigerians—all benefits of modern industrialization and the backbone of independence.⁶⁷ In 1964, when Norspin Limited (Norspin)—a large-scale modern textile factory was established in Kaduna, Northern newspapers again emphasized its benefits to cotton farming, foreign exchange, employment, and training, but above all its symbolic meaning as “irrefutable evidence of confidence in the future of Nigeria.”⁶⁸ The highly complimentary reporting on KTL and Norspin, replete with pride, happiness, and self-confidence, was mirrored in the coverage of almost every other new textile factory in the North.⁶⁹ In other words, northern newspapers celebrated the establishment of textile and other

⁶⁶ “£1,250,000 North Textile Factory Planned,” *Nigerian Citizen*, September 15, 1955.

⁶⁷ “Kaduna Cloth: A Story of Major Enterprise and Development within the Region,” *Nigerian Citizen*, May 13, 1959.

⁶⁸ “What’s so Important about NORSPIN?” *Nigerian Citizen*, March 21, 1964.

⁶⁹ “New Textile Factory for Kaduna,” *Nigerian Citizen*, May 23, 1962; “Era of Industrialisation: Sardauna Opens £1.6 M Textile

factories as both the culmination of efforts by the Northern Region Government, and as evidence that the North would achieve prosperity in the future.

It is also worth noting that, as compared to the Western and Eastern Regions, the Northern Region was relatively falling behind in terms of industrial development, and advertising and marketing it therefore required greater efforts. For example, in early 1960s, the Northern Nigerian Government invited the British firm Alexander Gibbs to conduct an industrial and economic survey of the North.⁷⁰ The Northern Government gave a great deal of assistance to the survey team and paid considerable attention to its results, with the Northern Ministry of Trade and Industry inviting comments from all other ministries on various drafts of the survey report.⁷¹ When the survey was completed, the Northern Government published it in book form, as *The Industrial Potentialities of Northern Nigeria*, and disseminated it throughout the industrialized world with the help of Link Information Service Ltd (the public-relations company of Unilever) and Lintas Ltd, the Unilever Advertising Agency.⁷² Lintas, Link, and the Northern Ministry of Trade and Industry worked together closely to ensure the book would achieve maximum impact. First, they organized a launch ceremony for the book at the House of Lords Dining Hall in London in 1964, hosted by Viscount St Davids. A great success, the launch was covered by the British Broadcasting Corporation and attended by representatives of the diplomatic corps, members of the British Parliament, and leading industrialists and other figures in commercial affairs, as well as the Northern Minister of Trade and Industry and the Agent-

Mills,” *Nigerian Citizen*, March 4, 1964; “THE NATION PROGRESS IN ‘Word and Worship’: £1.25m. Zamfara Textile Mills Opens,” *Nigerian Citizen*, June 23, 1965.

⁷⁰ “Alexander Gibbs I.P.E.C. Industry Survey: Administration Vol. I,” 1962, MIN-TRA JA 17, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Alexander Gibbs I.P.E.C. Industry Survey: Administration Vol. III,” 1962, MIN-TRA JA 17, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

General of Northern Nigeria in the United Kingdom.⁷³ The book itself, with “gilt lettering on the cover and spine,” presented “an excellent prestige appearance.”⁷⁴ Second, after the launch, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and their two publicity companies commenced a worldwide print-advertising campaign, primarily targeting industrial countries including the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada, and the United States.⁷⁵

The determination of the federal and three regional Nigerian governments to develop their own modern industries, and the organized manner in which they pursued this goal, had a transnational influence. Stephanie Decker has recently examined how decolonization and the discourse of economic development influenced the shifting strategies and practices of large British merchant firms like the UAC and John Holt.⁷⁶ Keen to distinguish themselves and their activities from colonialism, these merchant firms welcomed the development efforts of Nigerian governments in the 1950s and 1960s, which allowed them to “present themselves as one of the few sources of scarce capital, manpower, technology, and skills.”⁷⁷

However, the transnational influence of the industrialization of the federal and three regional Nigerian states was not limited to its former colonial master; it also had a fundamental impact on the destiny of enamelware and textile industrialists on the opposite side of the world. In 1956, enamelware and textile got “pioneer status” and became “the first pioneers” in the “Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Ordinance.”⁷⁸ In 1957, partly under the influence

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Alexander Gibbs I.P.E.C. Industry Survey: Administration Vol. IV,” 1962, MIN-TRA JA 17, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁷⁶ Stephanie Decker, “Corporate Legitimacy and Advertising: British Companies and the Rhetoric of Development in West Africa, 1950-1970,” *Business History Review* 81, no. 1 (2007): 59–86.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁸ “Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Declared Pioneer Industries.”

of the Ordinance's tax and other incentives, KTL—the first modern textile factory in Nigeria—was jointly established by the Northern Nigerian Government and David Whitehead Ltd.⁷⁹ The following year, the Northern Enamelware Company was jointly established by a Lebanese company and the Northern Region Development Corporation (NRDC), with management and technicians being brought in from Hong Kong.⁸⁰

Alongside the establishment of textile and enamelware industries on Nigerian soil, the country began to protect them by imposing tariffs on these two categories of finished goods. In the case of enamelware, Nigerian customs for finished products increased from 20% to 25% in 1959; to 33% in 1961;⁸¹ and then to 50% in 1964.⁸² These changes had a serious negative impact on Hong Kong's enamelware industry as a whole, as Nigeria was its largest market in the 1950s and early 1960s, accounting for 30-50% of exports.⁸³ As Nigerian tariffs increased, gradually but steeply, the value of Hong Kong enamelware brought in to the country fell from HK\$23 million in 1961, to around HK\$6.8 million in 1964, to just HK\$271,000 in 1966: a decline of 98.8% in just six years.⁸⁴ The all-but-total loss of the Nigerian market basically destroyed this heavily export-oriented industry, which never recovered its 1950s stature.

For its part, the Hong Kong textile industry encountered not only increased tariffs, but specific exclusions that developed into a total ban on Hong Kong goods in 1965.⁸⁵ Nigeria was the largest market for Hong Kong textiles in Africa, but only one of their major markets; so,

⁷⁹ "Kaduna Textiles LTD Press Cuttings," 1958, MIN TRA-IND E79-U5, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

⁸⁰ "Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Applications for Pioneer Certificate."

⁸¹ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1962* (Hong Kong: Economic Information & Agency, 1962), 1-433.

⁸² "ENAMELWARE INDUSTRY - INDUSTRY SURVEY," 1968, HKRS1056-1-201, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ "NIGERIA, TRADE WITH," 1961, HKRS70-3-337, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

while troublesome, Nigerian protectionism caused less distress to Hong Kong's textile industry than to its enamelware industry.⁸⁶

In addition to enacting protective tariffs and providing generalized financial incentives to inward investment, Nigerian governments reached out specifically to Hong Kong industrialists to encourage them to relocate to Nigeria. In 1961, Nigerian economic missions visited Hong Kong and invited local industrialists, including those in enamelware and textiles, to a seminar on Nigeria's industrial potential and policy.⁸⁷ The Northern Nigeria Government also published an advertisement for "The Industrial Potentialities of Northern Nigeria" in a leading Hong Kong newspaper, *Wah Kiu Yah Po*, and a well-known magazine called *Far Eastern Economic Review*, in hopes of attracting the attention of Hong Kong industrialists.⁸⁸

Hong Kong: Searching for Overseas Markets

The growing importance of African markets to Hong Kong manufacturers in the 1950s, coupled with the granting of independence of African countries from the late 1950s through the 1960s, led Hong Kong's government and industrialists to take measures to enhance mutual understanding between Hong Kong and African countries. On the eve of Nigerian independence, Hong Kong industrialists were worried about the associated political changes and possible policy shifts.⁸⁹ Manufacturers of enamelware and textiles, the two major products that Hong Kong exported to Nigeria in the 1950s, were naturally even more anxious than others about trade restrictions that the newly independent country might impose. Accordingly, the Hong Kong

⁸⁶ "'Nigeria, the Largest Customer for Hong Kong Textiles in Africa, Suddenly Bans Hong Kong Goods'," *Sing Tao Jih Pao* (*Sing Tao Daily*), August 27, 1965.

⁸⁷ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Jieguo Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 31, 2016.

⁸⁸ "Alexander Gibbs I.P.E.C. Industry Survey: Administration Vol. IV."

⁸⁹ "Nigerian Independence Worries HK Businessmen," *Hong Kong Standard*, July 24, 1960.

government established several economic missions, made up of officials and industrialists, to study the promotion of Nigeria-Hong Kong trade.⁹⁰

In 1960, a Hong Kong government economic delegation toured West Africa, with Nigeria being its most important destination, as its primary purpose was to expand the types as well as the overall quantity of Hong Kong's exports to Nigeria.⁹¹ The mission's official report characterized Nigeria as having huge potential as a market for almost all types of light-industrial products, and set forth specific steps that Hong Kong's government and manufacturers should take to publicize Hong Kong products there. Regarding the industrialization efforts of Nigeria's national and regional governments, the mission merely defended Hong Kong's model of free enterprise without any government protection, and made few comments on Nigeria's protection of industries.⁹² However, the report also suggested that, because capital and technology for Nigeria's industrialization were both in short supply, inward investment by Hong Kong manufacturers would likely be welcome there, and mitigate decreases in the volume of trade Nigerian protectionism was causing.⁹³

In 1962, Hong Kong sent a second economic mission to Nigeria, on the occasion of the Nigerian Trade Fair. Made up of five government officials and eight businessmen,⁹⁴ the delegation was the largest Hong Kong had ever sent to a foreign country, highlighting the importance of Nigerian markets for Hong Kong exports. The mission was led by Dr. Cha Chi Ming, the leading textile manufacturer in Hong Kong, and later the owner of the most valuable textile factories in Nigeria. During the trade fair, which was held in Lagos, the delegation

⁹⁰ Hong Kong Commerce and Industry Department, "Report of the Hong Kong Trade Mission to West Africa, Jan.-Feb. 1960," 1960, HKRS380.1 WE5, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "TRADE FAIRS/EXHIBITIONS - NIGERIAN TRADE FAIR (AFRICA)," 1962, HKRS70-1-413, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

displayed more than 1,400 products made by 150 different Hong Kong factories, specially selected to appeal to Nigerian markets; and distributed 75,000 leaflets promoting trade with Hong Kong.⁹⁵ The Hong Kong booth even tempted visitors with Northern Chinese food, cooked by a Chinese chef who had opened a restaurant in Lagos.⁹⁶ The mission reported that Nigeria could be one of the most important emerging markets for Hong Kong, potentially enabling the latter to drastically reduce its dependence on Western markets.⁹⁷

The reports of both of these trade missions were published and made widely available among Hong Kong industrialists. Despite trade promotion being their main focus, the information they conveyed regarding investment opportunities in Nigeria was sound and clear. As Cha put it, “the investment required may be appreciable and the difficulties considerable, but the rewards could be handsome.”⁹⁸

Some Hong Kong enamelware manufacturers, particularly those who had been on the missions, made excellent use of such information. As discussed in the previous section, Hong Kong enamelware factories in the early 1960s were suffering from Nigeria’s protective tariffs, and attracted by its financial incentives. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Hong Kong enamelware-making was marked by “internecine competition within the industry itself and a proclivity for small factories to spring up overnight to enjoy the advantage of sudden upsurges in export demands.”⁹⁹ In 1954, when exports of Hong Kong enamelware reached their historical peak, a large amount of capital surged into enamelware production, leading to a dramatic year-on-year increase in the number of factories (from 11 to 26) and furnaces (from 50

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ The Commerce and Industry Department of Hong Kong, “Enamelware—One of Hong Kong’s Oldest Industries.”

to 87).¹⁰⁰ However, with more factories came fierce competition; and when overseas demand fell, the pressure to survive drove individual factories—especially the small ones—to undercut each other. In 1955, the Hong Kong Enamelware Manufacturers' Association reached an agreement that no enamelware factory could lower its prices by more than 15%; but this was an exercise in futility, as many factories soon lowered their prices by much more than this, and some were even forced to undersell their major raw material, black plate steel.¹⁰¹ Customers were well aware of this undercutting situation, and took full advantage of it.¹⁰²

The profit margin of Hong Kong enamelware production fell to a mere 5% in 1961.¹⁰³ Four years later, the number of factories had dropped to just 10,¹⁰⁴ and by 1967, the number of enamelware workers had dropped from its 1950s peak of nearly 6,000 to just 2,404.¹⁰⁵ For enamelware manufacturers, Hong Kong had lost its luster, and some of them looked towards Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Even as early 1960s protectionism rendered Nigeria a dwindling or even hopeless export market to those who remained in Hong Kong, it emerged as a land of opportunity for those willing to relocate their manufacturing operations to it. Through the 1960s, around a dozen Hong Kong enamelware firms would make Nigeria their main base for manufacturing.¹⁰⁶

While the logic of relocating to Nigeria in the 1960s was straightforward for Hong Kong enamelware makers, it was less so for textile manufacturers. Western countries were still the major customers for Hong Kong textiles, despite the imposition of quotas and other protectionist

¹⁰⁰ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1955*, 145.

¹⁰¹ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1956*, 181-182.

¹⁰² *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1958* (Hong Kong: Ta Kung Pao, 1958), 170.

¹⁰³ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1961* (Hong Kong: Economic Information & Agency, 1961).

¹⁰⁴ *Hong Kong Economy Yearbook 1966* (Hong Kong: Economic Information & Agency, 1966), 1-65.

¹⁰⁵ *Hong Kong Statistics 1947-1967*, 59-61.

¹⁰⁶ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2014; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016; Junrong Lee, 2nd Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 19, 2016; Junrong Lee, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 30, 2016.

measures in both the United States and Europe. At first, Hong Kong textile manufacturers sought opportunities to increase their exports to Nigeria, but the game changed when Nigeria enacted its own trade protections, culminating in the total ban on Hong Kong textiles in 1965. Cha, who had led Hong Kong's mission to the Lagos Trade Fair in 1962, responded by transferring most of his machinery, Chinese skilled workers, and management to Nigeria by 1964, and established United Nigeria Textile Ltd (UNTL), which later became the largest textile factory in the country.

Going to Nigeria: The Earliest Wave of Chinese Migrants

Among the first wave of Chinese migrants to Nigeria in the 1960s, the majority were owners, managers, or technicians in the enamelware or textile industries. Kaduna became the first-choice location for Hong Kong textile manufacturers, due to its proximity to cotton-growing areas as well as its status as the capital of the Northern Region. However, Chinese industrialists also established textile factories in Lagos and Gusau (currently the capital of Zamfara State).

Enamelware makers chose to establish factories in major Nigerian cities, which had advantages over smaller settlements in terms of both basic and industrial infrastructure. In the 1960s, Nigerian Enamelware Co. (NEWCO), West Africa Household Utilities Manufacturing Company (WAHUM), Universal Steel Company, Universal Nigeria Industries Company Ltd (UNICO), and other enamelware factories were established in Lagos; Northern Enamelware Ltd and Grand Industries Ltd were established in Kano; and Eastern Enamelware Co. was established in Port Harcourt.¹⁰⁷ Lagos was a particularly sought-after location, being the then federal capital as well as an economic center not only for Western Nigeria but for neighboring coastal countries

¹⁰⁷ Hu, Interview by author, 2014; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2016; Lee, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016. Northern Enamelware was originally jointly established by a Lebanese businessman and Northern government, but later it fell into disorder and was bought jointly by multiple Chinese enamelware industrialists in Lagos and Kano.

such as Benin and Togo. It also had well-established port facilities, which lowered the cost of transporting raw materials to the factories. However, it was distant from northern Nigeria, which was the biggest market for enamelware. Kano was far from the ports, so the raw materials had to be transported overland from Lagos; but its Kurmi Market was the largest for enamelware in West Africa. As an ancient trading center, Kano attracted buyers and sellers not just from Nigeria but from many other countries, including Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, Cameroon, and even Sudan. Port Harcourt, meanwhile, had extensive dockyard facilities and covered the market of southern Cameroon as well as that of Eastern Nigeria.

The Chinese industrialists I interviewed spoke highly of the Nigerian federal and three regional governments of the 1960s and 1970s and the business environment they fostered, especially in comparison to those of the mid 1980s and later. This manifested itself, firstly, in terms of infrastructure: in contrast to the 2010s, there were hardly any supply failures of either electricity or water. Trust for the national grid and water supplies meant that they did not need to spend much on generators, diesel, or black oil, which would later add significantly to the cost of production.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, since the late 1980s, almost all Chinese-owned factories in Nigeria gave up on state electricity because of its unstable supply, and all equipped themselves with multiple generators or even their own power plants.¹⁰⁹ Secondly, they recalled Nigerian governments of the 1960s and 1970s as being staffed by honest bureaucrats, and said they had experienced little or no corruption.¹¹⁰ As one Chinese industrialist put it, “when we applied for licenses or certificates from the government in the 1960s, offering the official’s relative a job in the factory as a clerk or just a regular worker was a very good favor, and they did not ask for money back

¹⁰⁸ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Lee, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

then.”¹¹¹ Lastly, they felt that the country’s border was secure and well-guarded by the Nigeria Customs Service, and that the smuggling of cheaper enamelware or textile products from overseas would never become a major issue for them. In short, as of the 1970s, Chinese factory owners believed in the future of Nigeria as an emerging industrial nation with a great business environment and an honest, effective civil service.

Conclusion

The first generation of Chinese migrants in Nigeria started their industrial journey in the 1930s and 1940s during the era of Republican China. The Chinese Civil War interrupted their plan of restoring production after WWII in Mainland China, and the final take-over of Mainland by the Communist Party drove them to Hong Kong as either refugee industrialists or refugee workers. Confused or frightened by the policies and practices of the PRC, the majority of these industrialists never returned China until the 1980s. The flow of capital, workers, and factories from Mainland to Hong Kong, especially those Shanghaiese industrialists, contributed to Hong Kong’s shifting role from a premier entrepot of China Trade to an export-oriented industrial city. Shanghaiese industrialists quickly took control of major manufacturing industries such as textile and enamelware. As the single most important market for Hong Kong enamelware and an emerging market for Hong Kong textiles, Nigeria—a distant British West African colony before 1960 and a newly independent African country after that—became an indispensable part of the economic life of Hong Kong industrialists.

In Nigeria, WWII greatly shook British colonial rule, and the Nigerian nationalists, workers, ex-serviceman, and farmers together forced the colonial government to start the

¹¹¹ Ho, Interview by author, 2016.

decolonization process. With more political autonomy at the federal and region governments through the 1950s, Nigerian political elites considered economic progress to be the taken-for-granted result of political independence as well as the source of their legitimacy. Industrialization became the favorite symbol of progress of the Nigerian governments. Both the Federal Government and the Northern Nigerian Government were trying their best to promote the industrial development of Nigeria. They followed their three standards of industrialization and did what a good government must do to provide financial incentives, reach out to foreign capital and expertise, and effortlessly advertise themselves.

The industrialization efforts of Nigerian governments had a transnational influence upon Hong Kong industrialist in enamelware and textile industries. On the one hand, the financial incentives such as pioneer status and income tax relief, along with the effortless advertisement of Nigerian industrial potentials attracted Hong Kong industrialist. On the other hand, Nigeria's protection of its nascent industries seriously hit Hong Kong enamelware factories and to a lesser extent Hong Kong textile industries. These Hong Kong industrialists, under growing external pressure and increasing internal competition, finally made their move to Nigeria.

Chapter Two will further explore how these Hong Kong Chinese industrialists after settling down in Nigeria managed and developed their factories through the major political and economic events in post-independence Nigerian history. With the case of UNTL, it will also examine how the identity of Chineseness influenced the interaction between these Chinese industrialists and the Nigerian state.

CHAPTER 2

PROSPERITY, CRISIS, AND IDENTITY: CHINESE TEXTILE MANUFACTURERS IN POST-INDEPENDENCE NIGERIA

“If the Honourable Premier of the North were here, I would ask him whether he wants to transform the Region into another Lancashire.”¹

–Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe

“You see that time then, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, he wanted people to come to invest in the North here. He informed our ambassador in Hong Kong [to] bring your people [Chinese industrialists] to print here. When Cha Chi Ming came, they carried him to Sardauna, and then Sardauna told him, ‘From that place down, carry it, and build!’... You see how governments then had interests in their people. I think for the land UNTL paid very little amount.”²

–A senior textile worker in Kaduna

“The Company [KTL] is as good as dead.”³

–Memo by one a Military Governor on the resuscitation of KTL in 1991

As noted in Chapter One, industrialization efforts by Nigerian governments contributed to the movement of Chinese enamelware and textile manufacturers from Hong Kong to Nigeria. The entrepreneurial spirit of these Chinese industrialists, their extensive management and production experience, their relatively advanced equipment and technology, and supportive Nigerian policies worked together to enable them to put down roots in Africa in the 1960s. This chapter examines how their factories performed and developed in the following decades, and how Chinese industrialists interacted with the Nigerian states, media, and public, against the backdrop of post-independence Nigerian political and economic history. Based on archival records, newspaper content, company records, and oral-history interviews, I use the case of United Nigerian Textiles Limited (UNTL) to answer these questions.

¹ “ZIK Commends North’s Nortex,” *Nigerian Citizen*, January 5, 1963.

² Steven, Interview by author, digital recording, October 18, 2016.

³ “KTL: Submissions of a Governor (II),” *New Nigerian*, August 2, 1991.

I will discuss the rise of Kaduna as Northern Region's and subsequent northern states' dominant textile-manufacturing center, and the establishment of UNTL in the context of Nigerian industrialization. I will then delve into the Nigerian states' erratic policies regarding the textile industry from the 1970s to the 1990s, and argue that decreased government support contributed to its decline. I also argue that, despite the long-term success of UNTL from the 1960s to the 1990s, its foreign/Chinese identity eventually became disadvantageous to its further development.

As previously noted, enamelware and textiles were the two industries in which Chinese industrialists invested most heavily in post-independence Nigeria. The four enamelware factories in the country are still all Chinese-owned, and the official language of annual meetings of the Nigerian association for manufacturers of enamelware has been the Wu dialect of Chinese since the 1960s.⁴ After their initial establishment, Chinese-owned enamelware factories thrived, earning considerable profits until the late 1970s, when the Nigerian enamelware market became saturated. The manufacturers then diversified their offerings to include corrugated iron, electric cables, cardboard, footwear, and ceramics.⁵

Chinese textile makers, in contrast, never achieved a local monopoly on par with that of their enamelware-making counterparts, but they nevertheless rose slowly to the top of their sector. For instance, United Nigerian Textile Ltd. (UNTL), owned by Cha Chi Ming, grew from a finishing textile plant in 1964 into an integrated textile factory group with spinning, weaving, dyeing, finishing, and printing plants in the 1970s, and the largest such group in Nigeria in the

⁴ Shu Men Ho, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 27, 2016; M. L. Lee and S. F. Lee, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Francis Huang and Joseph Huang, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Hong Kong, November 28, 2016.

⁵ S. F. Lee, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Lawrence Tung, Interview by author, Notes taken, Lagos, Nigeria, November 9, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

decade that followed.⁶ Other Chinese-owned firms, including Speco Mills and Nichemtex, were also among the top textile factories in the country.

I focus on the textile industry in this chapter due to the relative greater importance of textiles in the Nigerian economy as well as the greater quantity of primary sources available. As Nigeria's second largest employer, second to the civil service, the textile industry directly employed 250,000 workers in the 1980s and indirectly contributed to the livelihoods of 800,000 other people.⁷ Enamelware factories were comparatively small, with only about 500 workers apiece, and the whole enamelware industry boasted no more than 10,000 workers from the 1960s through the 2000s.⁸ UNTL alone employed more than 10,000 workers in 1992.⁹ Just as importantly, the textile industry served as the most conspicuous symbol of Nigerian industrialization, and received considerable attention from the media as well as government agencies. In short, in terms of its economic and social importance, the textile industry is a better illustration than the enamelware industry of the post-independence economic history of Nigeria.

I also chose to focus on textiles here because, due to the enamelware industry's smaller size and lesser socio-economic importance, primary sources on it – whether in the form of government documents or newspaper coverage – are scarce. Moreover, no enamelware firms were listed on the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE), so none generated any publicly accessible company records. Oral-history interviews with enamelware-factory owners and workers shed some light on the economic history of these operations, but only in very general terms. The textile industry, on the other hand, has always been at center stage in Nigerian public discourse,

⁶ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1988" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1989).

⁷ Mohammed Hamza Kadpoly, "Textile Industry in Nigeria's Economic Development," *New Nigerian*, May 31, 1986; Steve Onyeiwu, "The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments," *Textile History* 28, no. 2 (1997): 234–49.

⁸ S. F. Lee, Interview by author, 2014; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

⁹ "United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1993).

generating various types of primary sources. A combination of government documents, newspaper articles, textile-company records, and oral-history interviews can therefore be utilized to explore the development of Chinese-owned textile factories against the larger historical backdrop of post-independence Nigerian economic history.

The “Lancashire of Nigeria”:¹⁰ The Rise of the Textile Industry in the North

Chinese textile industrialists arrived to establish factories in northern Nigeria in an era when industrialization was pursued wholeheartedly and without controversy by various Nigerian governments. In this section, I explore the audacious industrialization policy of the Nigerian states and what they achieved on the ground in the north. Based on the case of the textile industry, I argue that Nigeria provided all-around support for textile factories, and not merely market protection. I chose northern Nigeria as my geographic focus because of its dominance in textile manufacturing within the country – with 98% of cotton grown,¹¹ nearly 70% of employment and power looms, and 80% of spindles in the mid-1960s.¹²

Northern Nigeria enjoyed unique advantages for the development of a textile industry, and among many northern cities, Kaduna became the location of choice for major textile factories. Like Kano and Gusau, Kaduna was close to the large cotton-growing areas of Sokoto, Zaria, Niger, Bauchi, Kano, and Kaduna, which ensured a sufficient and stable raw-cotton supply. Moreover, as the capital of the Northern Region in the 1950s and 1960s, Kaduna was already well equipped with infrastructure such as water and electricity in the immediate post-independence era. The Electricity Corporation of Nigeria expanded its Kaduna power station and

¹⁰ “Industrial Guide to Northern Nigeria 1967,” 1967, MIN TRA-IND JS-U10, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Peter Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy: Nigeria 1945-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 116.

cooperated closely with textile mills to meet the power needs of their day-to-day operations and of rapid extension work. The Kaduna River provided ample water supplies for the factories, and the Water Department of the Ministry of Works made successful efforts to guarantee sufficient water supplies for industrial purposes even in the dry season.¹³ Kaduna was well-connected to all three regions of the Federation via rail and road, which made it an ideal hub for the distribution of textile goods;¹⁴ finished products could easily reach not just the markets of Kano, Zaria, and Maiduguri within the north, but also those of Lagos, Onitsha, and Port Harcourt in other regions. Lastly, in addition to Kaduna's advantages in raw materials, infrastructure, and transportation, it had an abundant labor supply.

As discussed in Chapter One, a consensus on the desirability of industrialization was reached between Nigeria's Federal and regional governments by 1960s, and multiple measures were carried out to achieve this goal. For instance, the Aid to Pioneer Industries Ordinance relieved relevant industries of company income tax in the first five years after their establishment, and textile firms used this tax relief to invest and expand.¹⁵ Similarly, the Industrial Development (Import Duty Relief) Ordinance reimbursed textile factories for the import duty they paid on raw materials, dyestuffs, chemicals, and spare parts essential to the manufacturing process, or in some cases simply exempted them from import-duty payment altogether; and under the same ordinance, protective tariffs were imposed on imported textiles to shield the nascent indigenous textile industry from the foreign competition.¹⁶ In the early 1960s,

¹³ R. F. Miles, "Kaduna Textile Limited," *New Nigerian*, May 27, 1967.

¹⁴ "Kaduna--Lancashire of Nigeria," *New Nigerian*, May 27, 1967; Miles, "Kaduna Textile Limited"; "Industrial Guide to Northern Nigeria 1967."

¹⁵ Federation of Nigeria, "The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria" (Federal Government Printer, 1958), National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna); "Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Declared Pioneer Industries," 1959, MIN-TRA JF 25 Vol. II, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

¹⁶ Federation of Nigeria, "The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria"; "Government's Liberal Policy to Private Foreign Investment," *New Nigerian*, August 22, 1970.

the effective tariff protection that textile industries enjoyed (averaged across spinning, weaving, bleaching, and printing) was 105 per cent of value added,¹⁷ rising to 120 per cent in 1968.¹⁸ As the Federal Budget of the latter year indicated, textile industries, along with others, were thriving “as the result of the high tariff wall erected in the past against finished products imported from foreign countries.”¹⁹

Each of the textile factories established in Kaduna in the late 1950s and the 1960s signified the achievement of industrialization, progress, and economic independence. In 1956, Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Region, laid the foundation stone of Kaduna Textile Limited (KTL), the first large-scale modern textile mill in Nigeria. KTL was a joint venture between the British textile firm David Whitehead & Sons (DWS), the Northern Regional Marketing Board (NRMB), and the Northern Region Development Corporation (NRDC).²⁰ With an initial complement of 250 looms and 10,000 spindles, and a workforce of 900 employees, KTL went into operation in 1957.²¹ Its production target of 10 million yards of grey baft per year was achieved in 1958, and a three-shift working system was introduced, and further expansion was planned.²² The success and profitability of KTL so soon after its establishment clearly demonstrated Nigerian workers’ aptitude for and adaptability to modern textile operations; the high quality of Nigerian cotton; the reliability of Kaduna’s infrastructure; and the effectiveness of the industrialization policy carried out by the Northern Region and subsequent governments of North Central State and Kaduna State. Other industrialists took notice.²³ As

¹⁷ Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy*, 130.

¹⁸ Onyeiwu, “The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments.”

¹⁹ “Tough Budget for the Nation,” *New Nigerian*, April 29, 1968.

²⁰ “£1,250,000 North Textile Factory Planned,” *Nigerian Citizen*, September 15, 1955; Salihu Maiwada and Elisha Renne, “The Kaduna Textile Industry and the Decline of Textile Manufacturing in Northern Nigeria, 1955–2010,” *Textile History* 44, no. 2 (November 2013): 171–96, doi:10.1179/0040496913Z.000000000027.

²¹ Onyeiwu, “The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments”; “Kaduna Cloth: A Story of Major Enterprise and Development within the Region,” *Nigerian Citizen*, May 13, 1959.

²² “Kaduna Cloth: A Story of Major Enterprise and Development within the Region.”

²³ Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy*, 113–114.

Bello commented, KTL—the symbol of the industrial power of the north—had become the “wonder of Northern Nigeria.”²⁴

Following in the footsteps of KTL, several other large-scale textile mills were established in Kaduna in the 1960s. In October 1962, production commenced at Nortex: a joint venture between Sudanese businessman Mr. E. Serousi, NRDC, and Northern Nigerian Development Limited (NNDL).²⁵ Nortex had a share capital of £1 million, 1,200 workers, and a planned production capacity of 12 million yards per year.²⁶ Three months later, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, then Governor-General of the Federation of Nigeria, visited Nortex and commented that it and KTL represented the Industrial Revolution of the North.²⁷ In 1964, in the opening ceremony of Arewa Textile Limited (ATL), a factory co-owned by nine major Japanese textile firms, NRDC, and Northern Nigerian Investment Limited (NNIL), Bello spoke highly of the new venture and reassured foreign investors that the North provided “stable, liberal and attractive conditions” for industrial development.²⁸ Later the same year, Bello spoke again at the opening ceremony of Norspin Limited (Norspin)—a joint venture of the United Africa Company, NRDC, and NNIL—and reiterated the North’s staunch support for its developing textile industries and their overseas investors.²⁹ And in 1965, during the opening ceremony of Zamfara Textile Industry Limited (ZTIL), regional Minister of Economic Planning Sir Alhaji Bashir expressed his determination to keep projecting the pro-industrialization image of Northern Nigeria to the world, so that even more industrialists would come.³⁰

²⁴ “Nation Progresses—North’s Giant Industry—Kaduna Textiles Limited,” *Nigerian Citizen*, January 16, 1965.

²⁵ “New Textile Factory for Kaduna,” *Nigerian Citizen*, May 23, 1962; “Nortex Forges Ahead,” *Nigerian Citizen*, November 3, 1962.

²⁶ “New Textile Factory for Kaduna”; “Nortex Forges Ahead.”

²⁷ “ZIK Commends North’s Nortex.”

²⁸ “Era of Industrialisation: Sardauna Opens £1.6 M Textile Mills,” *Nigerian Citizen*, March 4, 1964; “Men at Work at Arewa Textiles,” *New Nigerian*, August 10, 1966.

²⁹ “Norspin Opens with a Bang,” *Nigerian Citizen*, March 28, 1964.

³⁰ “THE NATION PROGRESS IN ‘Word and Worship’: £1.25m. Zamfara Textile Mills Opens,” *Nigerian Citizen*, June 23, 1965.

As can be seen from the above, the major textile factories established in the 1950s and 1960s in the Northern Region—including KTL, Nortex, Norspin, ATL, ZTIL, and UNTL—tended to be backed both by foreign industrialists and by Northern Region government entities. While the former brought capital, equipment, technology, and management experience, the latter provided all-around policy and infrastructure support. Under such favorable circumstances, most textile factories in the north achieved solid results. For example, from 1957 until the early 1970s, KTL rapidly expanded in scale: with the number of mills increasing from one to three, looms from 250 to 950, spindles from 10,000 to 100,000, employees from 500 to 4,150, and output from 8.75 million to 76.55 million yards per annum.³¹ Other factories also expanded their production significantly over the same period. In short, full-spectrum government support for the Nigerian textile industry in the 1960s, which included financial incentives, market protection, provision of infrastructure, and open attitudes towards foreign capital—combined with ample supplies of cotton and skilled labor—accounted for the golden era of textiles in Nigeria.

Chinese Textile Manufacturers in the 1960s

Among the Chinese industrialists who established textile firms in Nigeria in the 1960s, Cha of UNTL was arguably the most representative. His firm's experience of the prosperous yet crisis-ridden 1960s was likewise typical of Chinese-owned textile factories in Kaduna. Accordingly, this section first narrates the development of UNTL in that decade, and explores how the company and the Chinese community responded to the Biafran War. Specifically, I argue that Chinese industrialists' dramatic flight from the Mainland in the late 1940s was not

³¹ Onyeiwu, "The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments."

sufficient in Nigerian eyes to disassociate them from People's Republic of China (PRC) foreign policy regarding Biafra, and that this placed them in an embarrassing, even dangerous, position.

Cha was part of the wave of Chinese industrialists who migrated from Shanghai to Hong Kong during the Chinese Civil War, and then from Hong Kong to Nigeria in the 1960s. In Hong Kong in 1949, he established China Dyeing Works Ltd. (CDW), which specialized in dyeing and printing textile piece-goods made from imported grey baft.³² Due to Nigeria's increasingly stringent restrictions on the importation of Hong Kong textiles, Cha began to investigate the textile markets of Nigeria, in his capacity as a member of Hong Kong's economic missions to West Africa.³³ After several such visits, having become convinced of the industrial potential of Nigeria and of the favorable attitude of its governments toward inward industrial investment, Cha decided to establish a new textile factory there.

UNTL commenced production on New Year's Day, 1965. At that time, it employed 850 workers including 70 Chinese technicians, an annual production target of 30 million yards of printed cloth, and share capital of £1.5 million.³⁴ A 99-year lease on nearly 75 acres of the Kaduna South Industrial Estate was obtained from the Northern Ministry of Lands and Survey, at a rent of £100 per acre per annum;³⁵ and UNTL received all the usual government incentives that were provided to textile and other factories at that time. An anecdote regarding the granting of industrial land to UNTL illustrates the support of the Northern Region government for industrialists. As one senior Nigerian UNTL worker recalled,

[W]hen the Hong Kong economic mission came to visit Kaduna and Cha asked about the industrial land for his potential factory, the Northern Minister of Trade

³² Cha Chi Ming Picture Album Editorial Committee, *Cha Chi Ming*, ed. Haining Municipal Committee of CCP and Haining Municipal People's Government (Hong Kong International Art Press, 2008), 152.

³³ "TRADE FAIRS/EXHIBITIONS - NIGERIAN TRADE FAIR (AFRICA)," 1962, HKRS70-1-413, Hong Kong Public Records Office.

³⁴ "Kaduna Mill Makes Big Stride in Textiles Manufacture: United Nigeria Textiles Is Pioneer in Colour-Printing Techniques," *New Nigerian*, February 20, 1967; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970," *New Nigerian*, September 30, 1971.

³⁵ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970."

and Industry just pointed to the current UNTL site in Kaduna South and said “Take this land” and then gave that land to Cha Chi Ming. Our government was really into [the] textile industry back then.³⁶

The actual processes of applying to use the land and negotiating the lease may not have been as easy as this UNTL worker believed they were, but his story reflected a widespread public perception that multiple types of valuable government support were available. Unlike KTL, Norspin, Nortex, ATL, and ZTIL, UNTL started as a finishing plant without any spinning or weaving facilities, instead printing a variety of patterns on textiles using grey cloth from China imported under a user license obtained at a concessionary rate with the Nigerian government’s approval.³⁷ Through the 1960s, UNTL would remain the only textile mill in Nigeria that manufactured colored textiles printed with either a wax or super-print process, and it made more than 60 per cent of the printed clothes that were worn in the Northern Region.³⁸ (See Figure 5)

³⁶ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 16, 2016.

³⁷ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970.”

³⁸ “Kaduna Mill Makes Big Stride in Textiles Manufacture: United Nigeria Textiles Is Pioneer in Colour-Printing Techniques.”

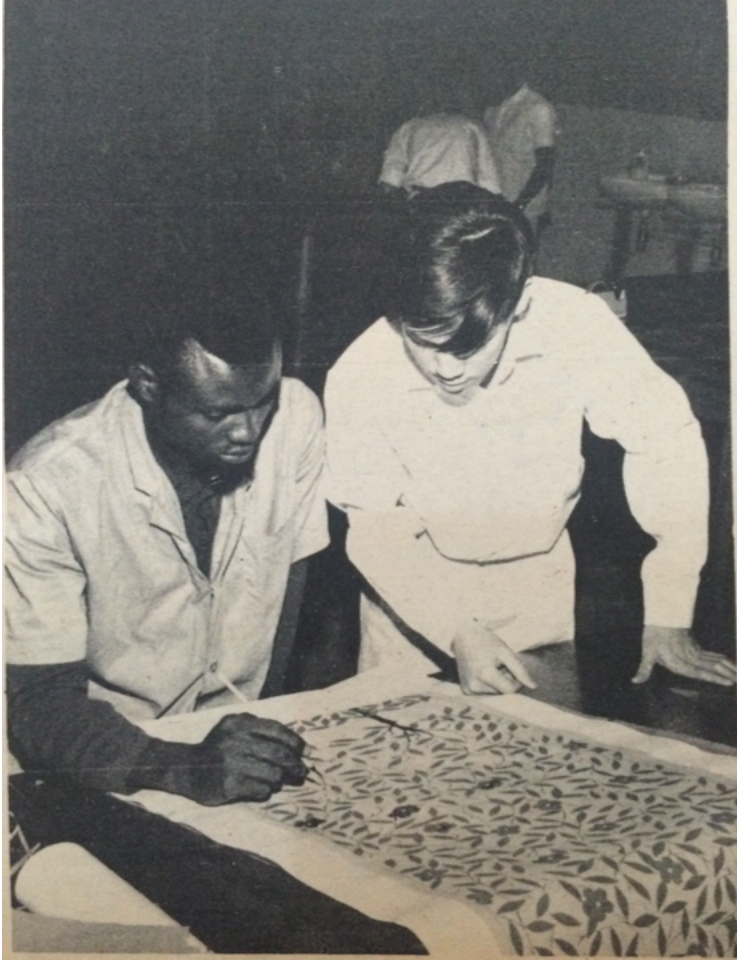


Figure 5: Mr. Wong Kai Ming, one of the Chinese experts working in the mill, assisted a Nigerian artist (name not given in the source) with the design of printed patterns. Source: “Kaduna Mill Makes Big Stride in Textiles Manufacture: United Nigeria Textiles Is Pioneer in Colour-Printing Techniques,” *New Nigerian*, February 20, 1967.

Responding to the governments’ call to build vertically integrated textile mills in Nigeria, UNTL added spinning and weaving operations that used local cotton to produce 20 million yards of grey baft per year, thus reducing the firm’s dependence on imported primary textiles.³⁹ UNTL also furthered its aim of vertical integration via acquisition, in 1967 acquiring ZTIL – the only major textile factory in the then North Western State – from its original owner, Serousi. Prior to this Chinese takeover, ZTIL had suffered due to inexperienced management, out-of-date

³⁹ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970.”

spinning and weaving machines that had been purchased second-hand, and chronic shortages of electricity and water.⁴⁰ Chinese managers and technicians, bringing with them technological know-how, advanced new machines, and a stand-by generator, worked hand-in-hand with Nigerian managers and workers to restore ZTIL to full operation.⁴¹ By 1969, ZTIL was able to produce 13 million yards of grey baft annually, using 10,580 spindles and 256 looms, thus providing a stable supply of primary textile materials for UNTL's finishing plant in Kaduna.⁴²

Thanks to the hard work of Nigerian and Chinese workers, proper management, advanced technology and machinery, the establishment of spinning and weaving plants, and government incentives, UNTL's pre-tax profits increased by a dramatic 375%: from £797,043 in 1966, to £3,782,904 in 1970.⁴³ Its workforce also increased, from 900 in 1965 to 4,600 in 1970; its finishing output (i.e., printing of cloth) from 30 million yards in 1965 to 100 million yards in 1971; and its spinning and weaving output from zero to 55 million yards over the same period.⁴⁴ In short, UNTL quickly became a prominent feature of Nigeria's economy and society.

However, the national loyalties of Chinese industrialists and workers came under suspicion during the Biafran War. When the war broke out, the PRC stood in support of the Biafrans, which led to strong resentment in Nigeria's government circles and media. Chairman Mao and the PRC were accused of supplying weapons to the rebels, sending mercenaries to train rebel soldiers in Maoist guerrilla tactics, and generally interfering the domestic affairs of Nigeria.⁴⁵ In 1968, for example, Col. Benjamin Adekunle of the Nigerian Federal 3rd Marine

⁴⁰ "Only Textile Mill in the State," *New Nigerian*, January 21, 1970; "Zamfara Mills Makes Great Strides," *New Nigerian*, February 11, 1970.

⁴¹ "Only Textile Mill in the State."

⁴² "Only Textile Mill in the State."; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970."

⁴³ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970."

⁴⁴ "Kaduna Mill Makes Big Stride in Textiles Manufacture: United Nigeria Textiles Is Pioneer in Colour-Printing Techniques"; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970."

⁴⁵ "Over 1,500 Mercenaries Plan Defence of Umuahia," *New Nigerian*, October 21, 1968; "Nigerian Crisis and Mao's China," *New Nigerian*, December 13, 1968.

Commandos disclosed to the press that his unit had killed several Tanzanians and Chinese during skirmishes near Port Harcourt.⁴⁶ He also disclosed that, on the battlefield, the rebels referred to their Tanzanian comrades by the code name “uncle,” and to the Chinese as “justice.”⁴⁷ Another news report from the same year indicated that seven Chinese mercenaries were training rebels in hidden camps at Umuahia, Orlu, and Bende, and that Chinese were also manning armored cars for the rebels.⁴⁸ Mao’s PRC was therefore seen as duplicitous: Mao, as the *New Nigerian* put it, “supports African unity on one hand, and on the other ... supplies the Nigerian rebels with arms to break their country and bifurcate African opinion.”⁴⁹ In short, the image of China and the Chinese was seriously damaged due to their anti-Nigerian stance and apparent direct interference in the Biafran War.

Hong Kong Chinese industrialists in Nigeria, despite being British in nationality, had always been identified by Nigeria’s governments and newspapers as Chinese, and had also applied this label to themselves.⁵⁰ It was therefore perhaps natural, if unfair, for their Chinese-ness to be seen by the Nigerian public as connected to the hostile communist regime in China. To dissociate themselves from the PRC, the Chinese community in Nigeria issued a joint statement in major newspapers and donated a sum of £650 to the Lagos State War Relief Fund, to demonstrate their support for the efforts of the Federal army to keep Nigeria together.⁵¹ Chinese industrialists told the press that they were embarrassed by the reported activities of Chinese mercenaries, and emphasized that all the Chinese in Nigeria were legitimate, law-abiding

⁴⁶ “Tanzanians—Chinese Fighting for Rebels,” *New Nigerian*, May 20, 1968.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Over 1,500 Mercenaries Plan Defence of Umuahia.”

⁴⁹ “Nigerian Crisis and Mao’s China.”

⁵⁰ Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2014; Lee, Interview by author, 2014; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016; Ho, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵¹ “Chinese in Lagos Condemn the Role of Chinese Mercenaries,” *New Nigerian*, December 1, 1967.

businessmen with no links to communist China.⁵² Lt.-Col. Mobolaji Johnson, the Military Governor of Lagos State, accepted the Chinese community's donation on behalf of the Federal government, but with a thinly veiled warning: saying he hoped that the Chinese community's gifts were not Trojan in character, and that they would demonstrate their support for Nigeria in all respects.⁵³

Cha's factories were among those that published the above-mentioned declaration of support for the Federal army. Cha went further, however, using high-profile investment and expansion plans to demonstrate his strong belief in the Nigerian economy. As early as 1966, when ethnic conflicts in Nigeria began to flare up, UNTL personnel manager Mr. T. H. Shen said that, even under such conditions, no industrialists or other investors should be scared away, and that UNTL would further expand its spinning and weaving operations.⁵⁴ In 1968, news about UNTL's expansion was again reported in the newspapers.⁵⁵

Expansion and Crisis of the Nigerian Textile Industry

In the wake of the Biafran War, Nigeria entered the prosperous oil-boom years of the 1970s before experiencing a long economic downturn in the 1980s and 1990s. The country's textile industry, having reached a peak of success in late 1960s and 1970s, gradually declined before reaching a crisis point in the 1990s. In this section, I first explore changes in government policy toward the textile market in the 1970s, and then point out multiple problems that led to the industry's crisis, arguing that the seeds of these problems were sown during the golden era of textiles in the 1960s. I also point out that the multidimensional government support that

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "Manufacturers Express Faith in Nigeria: Expansion Projects Will Not Be Stopped," *New Nigerian*, October 29, 1966.

⁵⁵ "New Mills Soon for Nigerian Textiles?" *New Nigerian*, May 23, 1968.

Nigeria's textile industry originally enjoyed was reduced to simple market protection from the late 1970s, and that the government created extra difficulties for the textile industrialists.

Major textile factories in the northern states, like those elsewhere in the Federation, achieved solid performance and considerable profits in the 1960s, and even enjoyed a windfall from the Biafran War, due to the even stricter import curbs (including a total ban on foreign textiles) that prevailed during the conflict.⁵⁶ However, this overprotection of the Nigerian textile market and the absence of competition did not benefit the average consumer, due to the high prices of made-in-Nigeria textile goods.⁵⁷ For example, plain cotton material that had cost 5 shillings per yard before the war was sold for £1 per yard or more during hostilities, a fourfold increase.⁵⁸ Once rebuilding the war-shattered nation became its major goal, the Federal government was eager to ease inflation to better the lives of ordinary citizens. It was for this reason that the wartime total ban on imported textiles was scrapped, and an "open general license" introduced in 1971; this had the effect of lowering import duty on textiles to just 50 per cent.⁵⁹

This dramatic policy change allowed the Nigerian market to be flooded with cheap and good quality foreign textile goods, and many textile factories in Kaduna quickly suspended or abandoned their expansion plans.⁶⁰ Many also reduced their working week from six to five days and placed workers on involuntary leave, while some laid off large numbers of workers or even shut down altogether.⁶¹ Some textile-factory owners complained that they were being unfairly

⁵⁶ Olajide Omolayo, "The Calamities of Textile Mills," *New Nigerian*, August 3, 1972.

⁵⁷ "Our Industries Too Protected," *New Nigerian*, September 25, 1971.

⁵⁸ Omolayo, "The Calamities of Textile Mills."

⁵⁹ Minso W. Gadzama, "Free Importation--a Threat to the Nigerian Textile Industry," *New Nigerian*, December 24, 1971; Omolayo, "The Calamities of Textile Mills."

⁶⁰ Shehu Abui, "Dilemma in Textile Industry: Thousands to Lose Their Jobs?" *New Nigerian*, December 20, 1971.

⁶¹ Ibid.; Gadzama, "Free Importation--a Threat to the Nigerian Textile Industry"; "Norspin Limited to Retrench Workers?" *New Nigerian*, March 3, 1972; "Notice for General Shut-down of Factory: Arewa Textiles Limited, Kaduna," *New Nigerian*, March 17, 1972.

treated: not only had the government lifted the ban and reduced the pre-war level of import duty on foreign textiles, but it had also increased excise duty on locally manufactured goods, including textiles, by 100 per cent, further undermining their uncompetitive position.⁶² Textile manufacturers called for a conversation with the Federal government on the subject of textile policy, including the threat of large-scale unemployment.⁶³

Appeals for government protection, however, was met by flat refusal; where the interests of consumers clashed with those of textile manufacturers, the Nigerian government sided firmly with the former. In February 1972, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the Federal Commissioner for Finance, announced that any unwarranted laying off of workers or organized reductions in production capacity aimed at causing labor unrest would be seen a blackmail against the government's post-Biafran War reconstruction efforts.⁶⁴ Shagari added that it was time for textile manufacturers to make sacrifices for the nation, following the huge profits they had earned thanks to full protection during the war.⁶⁵ In 1973, Mr. David Ogun, director of the National Standards Organisation, said that the government could only provide limited protection for the industry, and that this must be in the interest of the national economy, "not ... an incentive for manufacturers to exploit the consumers with the poor quality of their production."⁶⁶ Having been a key symbol of the nation's industrial pride in the 1960s, made-in-Nigeria textiles had come to be seen as a tool by which foreign industrialists exploited millions of Nigerian consumers.⁶⁷

⁶² Simon Shango, "Mass Retrenchment Threatens Textile Workers," *New Nigerian*, January 7, 1972; Gadzama, "Free Importation--a Threat to the Nigerian Textile Industry."

⁶³ Gadzama, "Free Importation--a Threat to the Nigerian Textile Industry"; Shango, "Mass Retrenchment Threatens Textile Workers"; Stephen Bamigbele, "Textile Workers Hit by Slump in Trade," *New Nigerian*, July 12, 1972.

⁶⁴ Joseph Angulu, "Industries Warned against Blackmail," *New Nigerian*, February 5, 1972.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ "Manufacturers Urged to Combat Wave of Smuggling," *New Nigerian*, April 3, 1973.

⁶⁷ Mohammed Jekada, "Nigerian Consumer versus Foreign Industrialist," *New Nigerian*, March 16, 1972; Omolayo, "The Calamities of Textile Mills"; "Manufacturers Urged to Combat Wave of Smuggling."

As challenging as facing an open market was, West Africa's Great Drought of 1972-1974 posed an even more serious and immediate threat to Nigeria's textile factories. In the second year of the drought, cotton production in the country dropped significantly, to just 170,000 bales, as against textile-industry demand of 400,000 bales per year; i.e., only 43 per cent of factories' need for raw cotton could be met.⁶⁸ Major Nigerian textile factories including KTL, UNTL, ATL, ZTIL, Nortex, Norspin, and Nigerian Textile Mills (NTM) placed everyone except maintenance workers in their spinning and weaving sections on compulsory leave, due to the lack of cotton lint; and they called on the government to allow free importation of cotton to save the industry from massive layoffs or total shutdown.⁶⁹

This situation forced the Federal Government to readjust its textile policy in July 1974. Customs duty on imported cotton lint was waived, to provide an alternative raw-cotton supply, and excise duty was lowered from 10 per cent to 5 per cent.⁷⁰ Then, in 1975, excise duty on locally manufactured textile goods was abolished, to further assist textile factories struggling to survive the aftermath of the cotton crisis as well as increased labor costs.⁷¹ Finally, in 1977, the government restored its full protectionist textile policy, by decreeing a second complete embargo on the importation of textile goods;⁷² and this regime remained in force until Nigeria joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

⁶⁸ "Compulsory Leave for Textile Workers," *New Nigerian*, March 29, 1974; "Textile Firms in a Fix over Shortage of Cotton Lint," *New Nigerian*, April 3, 1974.

⁶⁹ Innocent Adikwu, "Cotton Lint Shortage Hits Textile Factories—workers on Compulsory Leave," *New Nigerian*, January 18, 1974; Abubakar Aliyu, "Textile Firms Protests to FMG," *New Nigerian*, January 26, 1974; Jola Ogunlusi, "Cotton Lint Shortage Hits More Factories—1,500 Workers Sent on Compulsory Leave," *New Nigerian*, January 30, 1974; "Compulsory Leave for Textile Workers"; "Textile Firms in a Fix over Shortage of Cotton Lint"; "500 Textile Workers Laid Off," *New Nigerian*, April 13, 1974; Innocent Adikwu, "3,000 Textile Staff on Compulsory Leave Recalled," *New Nigerian*, April 19, 1974, 000; Abubakar Aliyu, "Cotton Lint Shortage—a Serious Problem Facing Textile Mills," *New Nigerian*, April 19, 1974.

⁷⁰ "Cotton Lint Now to Be Imported," *New Nigerian*, July 8, 1974; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1974" (Kaduna, Nigeria, July 1975).

⁷¹ Bisi Oloyede, "Excise Duty on Textiles Abolished," *New Nigerian*, April 2, 1975.

⁷² Mohammed Magaji, "Textile Manufacturers Told to Improve," *New Nigerian*, June 5, 1978; Onyeiwu, "The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments."

In summary, Nigeria's short-lived open market in textiles between 1971 and 1977 was an attempt by its government to address the unaffordability of textile goods after the Biafran War, and secondarily, to push industrialists to improve the quality of their products and the efficiency of their production techniques. Having initially stood firm behind its limited-protection policy in the face of pressure from major textile factories, trade unions, workers, and textile traders, the government caved in to their demands in the aftermath of the severe two-year drought in the northern states, to save the textile industry from extinction; and eventually, it went even further, restoring a policy regime as fully protectionist as the one that had been in force during the war.

However, the restoration full protectionism in the late 1970s did not guarantee a bright future for the Nigerian textile industry. Even without external competition, many factories experienced serious decline, and there were heated discussions about the crisis of the Nigerian textile industry in the media from the 1980s until the early 2000s, when it totally collapsed. However, the problems that eventually destroyed the country's textile industry had begun long before its crisis was identified as such in the press. Here, I argue that even in its most prosperous era, in the later 1960s, the industry's key problems had already emerged; and yet, they were persistently ignored by Nigerian governments. Despite restoring a fully protectionist textile policy in 1977 and maintaining it for nearly two decades thereafter, the state never resumed the all-around support for textile manufacturing that it had provided in the 1960s, and even created new obstacles to the industry's success.

In the early 1980s, there were 80,000 workers in Nigeria's textile industry, making it the country's largest private-sector employer; and a quarter of this workforce was employed by KTL, ATL, UNTL, Norspin, and Nortex, all of which had been established in Kaduna in the

1950s or 1960s.⁷³ However, three of these five firms encountered serious difficulties by the end of the 1970s. KTL was on the verge of immediate shutdown in 1980, as its two main products – grey baft and white shirting – were selling poorly; 836 junior workers, 22 senior workers, and three expatriates were let go.⁷⁴ Norspin and Nortex both closed down in the same year, with 3,000 workers losing their jobs at the former, and 2,000 at the latter.⁷⁵ In all, from 1979 to 1983, some 35,000 textile workers lost their jobs due to the general decline of the industry.⁷⁶ KTL remained in business, but its annual losses increased from 15 million naira in 1981, to 42 million in 1985, and 93.7 million in 1991, by which time it had to face the inevitability of being bought out.⁷⁷ The other major textile factories in Kaduna, apart from UNTL, were also in bad shape: keeping ATL's doors open required a bailout from its Japanese parent company; Norspin was formally taken over by UNTL, but never actually recommenced production; and Nortex was reopened by a foreign buyer, but only after a gap of several years.⁷⁸

Multiple factors accounted for this crisis. One was that the slump in the oil price had a serious negative impact on the Nigerian economy in general. The production of cotton, the most important raw material for textiles, also failed to keep up with the industry's needs. The country's output of cotton was about 300,000 bales in 1960-1961, and remained stable in most years of the 1960s before reaching a peak of 500,000 bales in 1970. This made Nigeria the largest cotton-producing country in West Africa for the first time.⁷⁹ However, cotton production gradually dropped in the 1970s and never subsequently managed to keep up with textile

⁷³ "Textiles: Time for Review," *New Nigerian*, December 4, 1980.

⁷⁴ "Kaduna Textiles in Serious Trouble--858 Workers Sacked," *New Nigerian*, October 15, 1980.

⁷⁵ "Textiles: Time for Review."

⁷⁶ "35,000 Textile Workers Lose Jobs...as Result of Austerity Measures," *New Nigerian*, December 2, 1983.

⁷⁷ "KTL: Submissions of a Governor," *New Nigerian*, July 31, 1991.

⁷⁸ "UNTL Buys over Assets of Norspin," *New Nigerian*, July 29, 1981; "KTL: Submissions of a Governor."

⁷⁹ Stephen Bamigbele, "Nigeria Takes Great Strides in Cotton Production," *New Nigerian*, April 16, 1971; J. E. Njoku, "Problems Facing Our Textile Industries," *New Nigerian*, August 15, 1981.

manufacturers' needs. In 1980, production of cotton was only 140,000 bales, as compared to industry demand of 600,000, meaning that more than three-quarters of cotton lint had to be imported.⁸⁰ In 1985, production grew to 200,000 bales, yet could still only meet one-third of the total demand, which had not changed;⁸¹ and in the early 1990s, 60 per cent of the cotton lint used by textile manufacturers was still imported due to low local output.⁸²

This problem can be traced to the general neglect of agriculture during the oil-boom era, and specifically, to the failure of the Cotton Board and other state agencies to encourage cotton growing, whether through price support or otherwise;⁸³ and large quantities of cotton were smuggled into Niger, due to the low prices that prevailed within Nigeria.⁸⁴ Moreover, Nigerian farmers, due to the unstable price of cotton, did not plant cotton until July or August, after planting their food crops, which further depressed cotton output.⁸⁵ In 1987, tons of cotton worth two million naira were laid waste in Borno State, having found no buyers as a result of abysmal marketing coordination between the state government, other relevant agencies, and textile mills. Following this incident, more than 50 per cent of cotton farmers in the Funne local government area decided to abandon cotton cultivation once and for all, "no matter the amount of persuasion and assurance from the government and textile mills"⁸⁶ they might receive.

Provision of basic industrial infrastructure, including electricity and water, also failed to meet the needs of the industry beginning in the late 1960s. Sufficient supplies of power and water, which were promised—and later, guaranteed—by federal, regional, state, and local governments in the late 1950s and early 1960s, were among the advantages of Kaduna, Kano,

⁸⁰ Fathu Abdullah, "Travails of the Textile Industry," *New Nigerian*, January 24, 1988.

⁸¹ Kadpoly, "Textile Industry in Nigeria's Economic Development."

⁸² Walid Jibrin, "For the Survival of the Textile Industry (I)," *New Nigerian*, May 13, 1995.

⁸³ "Year of Cotton," *New Nigerian*, April 15, 1981.

⁸⁴ Shitu Saude, "Cotton, Grains Smuggled to Niger Republic," *New Nigerian*, February 19, 1987.

⁸⁵ Leke Salau, "Decline in Cotton Production Blamed on Delay in Sowing," *New Nigerian*, July 29, 1981.

⁸⁶ "Cotton Glut Persists--Several Tonnes Lie Waste in Norno," *New Nigerian*, March 28, 1987.

and Lagos as industrial centers; and such supplies were also symbolic of governmental devotion to industrialization. As these resources became scarce, they became more significant as a proportion of all textile factories' operating costs. As early as 1969, when the Nigerian textile industry was at its peak of success, power failures had already started to affect many factories; from January 29 to February 13, outages in Kaduna resulted in losses of £259,000 to KTL, ATL, UNTL, Nortex, and Norspin.⁸⁷ In December 1977, irregular power supplies in Kaduna led to the loss of as many as 140 working hours, with an economic cost of nearly 10 million naira.⁸⁸ The Great Drought understandably cost ATL 12 working days due to total lack of water in 1973;⁸⁹ yet, in the 1980s and 1990s, instability in the provision of water as well as power only worsened. In the late 1960s and 1970s, interruptions in electricity provision were still rare enough to be thought highly newsworthy, but in the following two decades they became a chronic problem, rarely noted in the headlines, but mentioned in almost every report on the precarious state of textile factories, or that included the complaints of textile workers, managers, and owners. The Nigerian government had manifestly failed to keep its promises with respect to the provision of infrastructure vital to industrialization.

Nigeria's drive to attract foreign textile firms also faltered in the 1980s. Instead of supporting the industry with solid incentives, governments created extra barriers for textile manufacturers. In the late 1970s and through the 1980s, the Federal government required all importers to hold a new type of license called Form M, and either by accident or by design, this form proved extremely difficult to obtain.⁹⁰ As the majority of cotton lint, chemicals, spare parts, and dyestuffs used by textile factories depended on importation by this time, the lack of

⁸⁷ "Power Failure Cost Firms £259,000," *New Nigerian*, February 17, 1969.

⁸⁸ Abubakar A. Mani, "Power Failure in Kaduna: Textile Mills Lose N10m.," *New Nigerian*, December 17, 1977.

⁸⁹ Samuel Akanmode, "Water Shortage in Kaduna Worsens," *New Nigerian*, May 15, 1973.

⁹⁰ Dupe Motojehi, "Problems of Textile Mills Blamed on Govt Actions," *New Nigerian*, November 30, 1982.

Form M or equivalent import license meant textile production had to cease.⁹¹ This problem was not merely theoretical: Baguada Textiles Industry Limited (BTIL), a long-established Kano-based factory with 1,000 workers, faced closure in 1983 simply due to a lack of imported raw materials, caused by their inability to obtain Form M.⁹² ATL was also on the edge of shutting down in 1984 due to import-license problems.⁹³ Under both civilian and military rule, it was always party loyalists and the relatives of corrupt officials who had easy access to import licenses, while “genuine investors and industrialists were left in the cold.”⁹⁴ The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) adopted by the Federal government in 1986 eliminated Form M and liberalized trade more generally, and was initially welcomed by many textile manufacturers because it allowed them to request foreign exchange to purchase raw materials, spare parts, chemicals, and dyestuffs.⁹⁵ However, SAP caused a free-fall in the value of the naira, which created other problems for the textile industry: reducing the ability of firms to source raw materials, raising production costs, and shrinking the purchasing power of Nigerian consumers.

The fully protectionist policy with regard to textiles that was established during the Biafran War and restored in 1977 also ensured that smuggling remained profitable, and was never fully extinguished between the 1960s and the 1990s. As early as 1967, 200 bales of various kinds of textiles per month were smuggled into Northern Region via the Niger-Nigeria border.⁹⁶ Another smugglers’ route was via Cotonou in Benin, where many Nigerian smugglers based themselves.⁹⁷ In 1981, it was estimated that 40 per cent of the fabric in Nigeria had been

⁹¹ Abdullah, “Travails of the Textile Industry”; “Textile Union Wants Economic Stabilisation Act Repealed,” *New Nigerian*, December 2, 1983.

⁹² “Textile Factory to Close Down?” *New Nigerian*, March 13, 1983.

⁹³ Ibrahim Salihu, “Arewa Textiles May Be Shut down If...,” *New*, January 30, 1984.

⁹⁴ Abdullah, “Travails of the Textile Industry.”

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “North Is Being Swamped with Smuggled Textiles,” *New Nigerian*, September 5, 1967.

⁹⁷ Olu Akinsanya, “Threat to Nigerian Industries,” *New Nigerian*, June 11, 1981.

smuggled.⁹⁸ Smuggling of textiles worsened in the 1980s, to the extent that a foreigner who came to Nigeria could have been forgiven for assuming it was a free-for-all market.⁹⁹

Smuggling seriously affected Nigeria's textile mills in several ways. First, given the ready availability, great variety and lower cost of smuggled cloth, demand for local textile products dropped, along with their market share.¹⁰⁰ Second, as it became more difficult for legitimate textile mills to sell their stock, they experienced liquidity problems that forced them to cut production and lay off workers.¹⁰¹ And third, textile workers' worries about their job security led to increases in labor-relations problems.¹⁰² In short, the "same" government protection of the textile market that had been so effective in the late 1960s did not protect the industry during its second iteration.

In part, this was because—under conditions of full protectionism and high domestic demand—many textile factories in Nigeria had little incentive either to modernize their equipment or to improve the quality of their products. Indeed, some machinery in major Nigerian textile factories had already been outdated in the 1960s. Nortex, for example, experienced a serious crisis in the mid-1960s partly because its spinning and weaving machines were so old that they could not achieve even half of the company's original production targets.¹⁰³ And, after full protection of the market was re-established in 1977, outdated equipment gradually became the norm. As an editorial in the *New Nigerian* indicated in 1980,

Textile firms in this country are among the most conservative industries. Except a few forward looking ones, they have refused to diversify their production or even

⁹⁸ E. O. Iloanusi, "The Impact of Smuggling on Nigerian Textile Industry," *New Nigerian*, June 25, 1982.

⁹⁹ Akinsanya, "Threat to Nigerian Industries."

¹⁰⁰ Iloanusi, "The Impact of Smuggling on Nigerian Textile Industry"; Sadiq baba Gana, "Smuggling Identified as Factor Besetting Textile Industry," *New Nigerian*, May 12, 1980.

¹⁰¹ Iloanusi, "The Impact of Smuggling on Nigerian Textile Industry"; Suleiman Dangana, "Textile Companies Crippled by Smuggled Goods," *New Nigerian*, June 25, 1981.

¹⁰² Iloanusi, "The Impact of Smuggling on Nigerian Textile Industry."

¹⁰³ Dan Agbese, "For Nortex—Certainly the Sad Days Are Over," *New Nigerian*, November 22, 1968.

modernize the technology. Most still used the same looms installed some two decades ago.¹⁰⁴

As well as slowing production, outdated technology resulted in a relatively low quality and limited variety of textile products, which by the 1980s lagged far behind the offerings of Nigerian firms' foreign counterparts.¹⁰⁵

In short, the textile industry in Nigeria began to encounter problems in its golden era that neither the government nor the mills themselves ever properly addressed. Moreover, the original comprehensive package of governmental support for textile manufacturing, including the encouragement of cotton production, solid financial incentives, and the provision of reliable infrastructure, had been reduced by the 1980s to market protection alone.

UNTL: Becoming the Best in an Era of Decline

As discussed above, multiple factors contributed to the general decline of the textile industry in Nigeria. However, some forward-looking factories managed to overcome these obstacles, and expanded and developed from the 1970s through the mid-1990s. UNTL, though relatively small by Kaduna standards when founded, grew to become the largest textile factory group in Nigeria from late 1970s onward. In this section, I explore the history of UNTL's expansion and development down to the mid-1990s, and delve into the reasons for its success. I will also look at UNTL's attempted acquisition of KTL in 1991 in terms of the image of Chinese-owned textile factories in Nigeria.

¹⁰⁴ "Textiles: Time for Review."

¹⁰⁵ Magaji, "Textile Manufacturers Told to Improve"; Biola Ajoni, "Why Nigeria's Textile Mill Suffer—Tahir," *New Nigerian*, October 20, 1981.

UNTL expanded rapidly and posted decent profits from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s. In 1976, it invested 11 million naira in an expansion of the spinning and weaving factories of its subsidiary ZTIL.¹⁰⁶ Two years later, UNTL established a new subsidiary factory, Funtua Textile Limited (FTL), with a share capital of 8.5 million naira; the new enterprise manufactured bedsheets and denim, as part of UNTL's product-diversification plan.¹⁰⁷ In 1980, UNTL acquired Norspin and changed its name to Unitex;¹⁰⁸ and in 1983 established another subsidiary factory, Supertex, that specialized in products for export to other countries within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United States. The profits of UNTL increased from 3.78 million naira in 1970, to 5.9 million in 1979, 26.88 million in 1988, and 92.11 million in 1992.¹⁰⁹ Its turnover also increased, from 74 million naira in 1975 to 136 million in 1980, and 2.6 billion in 1992.¹¹⁰ UNTL was also the first textile manufacturer in Nigeria to record a turnover of more than a billion naira, in 1991.¹¹¹ Its workforce increased from 4,600 to 8,074 over the course of the 1970s, and to 10,442 by 1992.¹¹² From a single finishing plant in 1964, UNTL grew by the end of the 1980s into a group of five factories – UNTL, ZTIL, FTL, Unitex, and Supertex – as well as the biggest employer and most productive entity in Nigeria's textile sector.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1977" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1978).

¹⁰⁷ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1978" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1979).

¹⁰⁸ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1980" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1981).

¹⁰⁹ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970"; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1979" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1980); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1988"; "United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992."

¹¹⁰ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1975" (Kaduna, Nigeria, July 1976); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1980"; "United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992."

¹¹¹ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1991" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1992).

¹¹² "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970"; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1979"; "United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992."

¹¹³ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1988"; Yakubu Adele and Muhammad Musa, "Walid Jibril, the Textile Administrator," *New Nigerian*, February 28, 1993.

Though UNTL experienced the same array of obstacles as its peers, it performed far better than they did. In the early 1970s, facing the challenge of a market suddenly flooded with cheaper imported textiles, UNTL managed to maintain its production at normal levels, and earned pre-tax profit of about 2.76 million naira in 1972 – a fall of 27% as compared to 1970, but a profit nonetheless.¹¹⁴ In 1973, the United Nigerian Textiles Workers' Union (UNTWU) announced that the textiles slump was definitely not a national problem, and that only those factories that “failed to live up to [consumers'] expectations” would be affected.¹¹⁵ UNTWU claimed that UNTL was not affected by the open-market policy at all, because of the high quality, great variety, and good design of its products; and indeed, UNTL not only kept a firm grip on its market share, but operated on Sundays due to high demand for its products.¹¹⁶ Even during the Great Drought of 1973-1974, UNTL achieved a pre-tax profit of 4.19 million naira, and was able to avoid layoffs by putting workers on two weeks' compulsory leave and shortening the working week.¹¹⁷ In 1977, to deal with more frequent power disruptions, the company purchased and installed a generating plant with sufficient capacity to satisfy all its own needs, at a cost of 4.4 million naira.¹¹⁸

UNTL could do nothing to remedy reduced policy support, declining cotton production, crumbling infrastructure, or increasingly bold smuggling; and yet, the firm not only survived but expanded, thanks to its investment in advanced technology and relentless attention to design and other aspects of product quality. In 1971, UNTL became the first company in the six northern states of Nigeria to install a computer, an IBM 360 model 20.¹¹⁹ It was capable of “solving

¹¹⁴ Abidina Coomassie, “In Spite of Market Slump in Textiles--United Nigerian Textiles Records N1m Profits,” *New Nigerian*, August 15, 1973.

¹¹⁵ “Slump in Textile Market Is No National Problem,” *New Nigerian*, August 18, 1973.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1974.”

¹¹⁸ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1977.”

¹¹⁹ Abidina Coomassie, “Computer to Ease U.N.T.L. Market Research Getting Ready,” *New Nigerian*, June 11, 1971.

commercial accounting problems, production control, statistical analysis, market research, information data and inventory control.”¹²⁰ The only other entities in the whole of Nigeria that were equipped with computers at that time were Shell; U.A.C.; the Federal Department of Statistics; and the Universities of Lagos, Ibadan, and Ife.¹²¹

UNTL also sought to improve its textile technology by learning from and cooperating with advanced textile institutions in Western Europe. In the 1970s, UNTL signed contracts with the Textile Research Establishment in Liechtenstein, which provided the company with technology, information, and expertise relating to wax printing, Java printing, and processes involved in the finishing of synthetics and synthetic/cotton blends.¹²² UNTL was thus able to keep up with the latest textile technologies and fashions from Europe, which were key to it retaining a leading role in Nigeria. This strategy also required UNTL to equip all its plants with the most advanced machines, to better compete against European wax-printed products in the 1980s and 1990s.¹²³

With advanced textile technology and fashionable designs in hand, UNTL was able to provide a wide variety of high-quality products—real wax prints, Java prints, African prints, dress prints, dyed shirting, and dyed drill—and proudly declared in 1974 that one out of every two Nigerians wore its products.¹²⁴ The next year, UNTL was the only textile manufacturer awarded a Certificate of Product Quality by the Nigerian Standards Organisation (NSO), which conferred the right to affix the NSO mark to its products (Figure 6).¹²⁵ UNTL also won the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report 1970.”

¹²³ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1989,” 1990; “United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992.”

¹²⁴ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Advertisement,” *New Nigerian*, September 20, 1974.

¹²⁵ “United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1975”; “Congratulation the New Nigerian Newspapers Ltd.,” *New Nigerian*, January 3, 1976; “United Nigerian Textiles Ltd. The Biggest The Best,” *New Nigerian*, March 1, 1976.

National Productivity Merit Award (Figure 7), the Swiss Gold Medal for Quality (Figure 8), and the NSE President's Merit Award.¹²⁶ Within the Nigerian market from the 1970s to the 1990s, the quality of UNTL's products, especially wax prints, was second to none—and sometimes even outsold the famed Hollandais line of imported Dutch wax prints.¹²⁷ In fact, beginning in the 1980s, some traders purchased UNTL wax prints, relabeled them with the Hollandais name, and sold them in the market in Kano at a higher price.¹²⁸ In early 1990s, having caught on to this, UNTL launched a new brand called “Hollanda”, a high-quality imitation of Hollandais sold at a lower price, and almost succeeded in driving the Dutch original out of the Nigerian market.¹²⁹ In short, due to its forward-looking strategies regarding advanced technology and product quality and variety, UNTL managed to adapt “remarkably” to “the changing scenario of the economy”,¹³⁰ to become the largest and best textile manufacturer in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s.

¹²⁶ “United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992”; “Celebrate with Us United Nigerian Textiles PLC,” *New Nigerian*, December 5, 1994.

¹²⁷ Williams Alege, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 9, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

¹²⁸ Danladi Abude, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 19, 2016.

¹²⁹ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 20, 2016.

¹³⁰ “KTL: Submissions of a Governor.”

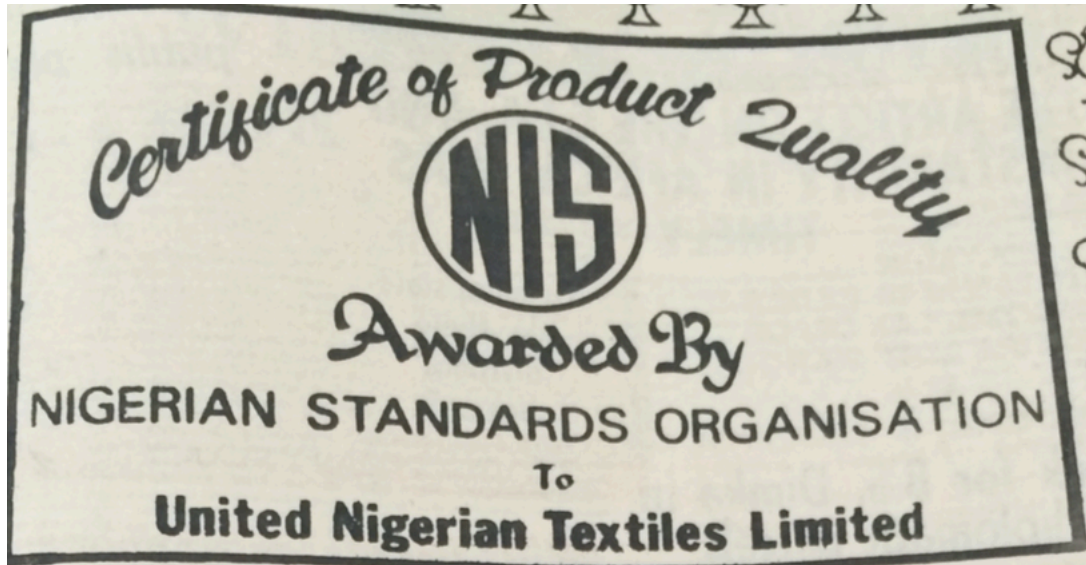


Figure 6: Certificate of Product Quality issued by the NSO in 1975. Source: *New Nigerian*, March 1, 1976.

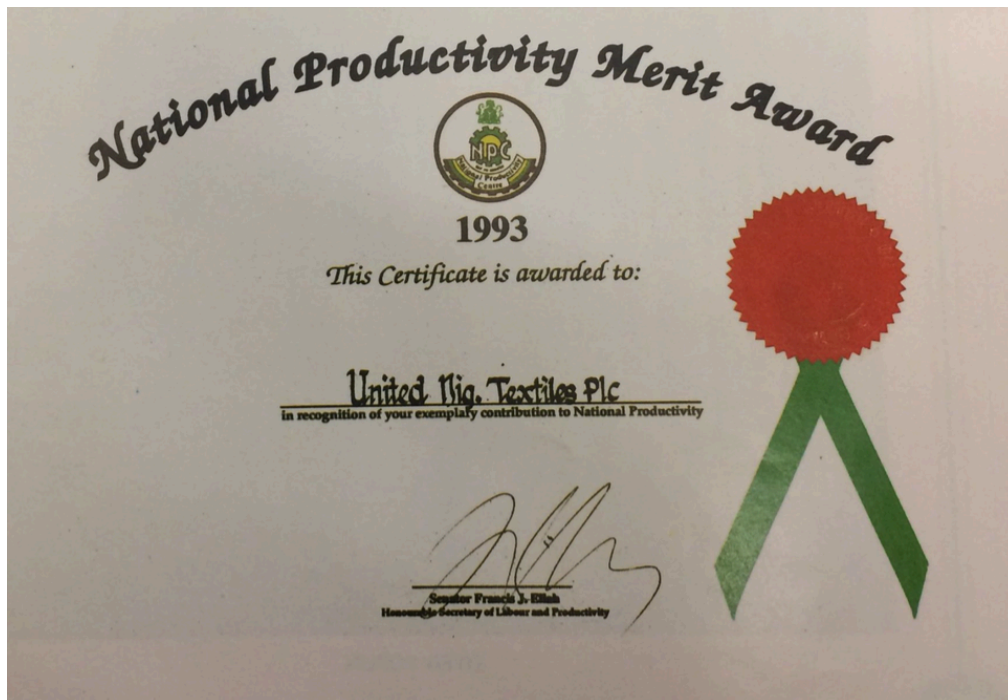


Figure 7: National Productivity Merit Award won by UNTL in 1993. Source: *United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992*.



Figure 8: Swiss Gold Medal for Quality awarded to UNTL in 1987. Source: *United Nigerian Textiles Plc. Annual Report 1992*.

In 1991, as mentioned above, UNTL attempted to acquire the bankrupt KTL, which had been the first large-scale modern textile mill in Nigeria. This move would have allowed UNTL to monopolize the whole textile industry of northern states. KTL had huge debts by this time, so its major shareholder—the (Northern) States Investment Companies (previously the Northern Nigerian Investment Company)—decided to resuscitate it by selling most of all of their shares.¹³¹ Among multiple proposals for the acquisition of KTL, UNTL's and that of Churchgate Investment were given the most serious consideration.

Heated discussions of the merits of the two proposals revealed that UNTL had some advantages over the rival bidders. First, it was considered the most stable and best-performing textile factory in Nigeria, despite the economic turbulence of the previous three decades.¹³²

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

Second, as UNTL was a public company with strong financial track record, its promise that it would repay all KTL's debts in full to relieve the northern States of their debt position was taken quite seriously; and it had also invested much more working capital in the updating of machinery than Churchgate had.¹³³ And third, UNTL was seen as a truly northern company, with its headquarters and all factories in the north, and nine northern states owning 9.4 per cent of its shares; whereas Churchgate, based in Lagos, was seen as having a southern identity.¹³⁴

The northern-ness of UNTL, however, did not erase its identity as a giant Chinese-owned textile company with the intention of creating a northern textile monopoly. It insisted on taking a controlling interest in KTL, of 51 per cent, with only 33 per cent left to the northern states; Churchgate, on the other hand, proposed to take only a 20 per cent of share, and to leave 60 per cent to the states.¹³⁵ As well as skepticism about the benefits of allowing a monopoly to be created, KTL's existing shareholders expressed concern that if it became a subsidiary of UNTL, its glorious history of independent achievements would in effect be swept under the rug and forgotten.¹³⁶ Churchgate, despite being based in the South, was owned by naturalized Nigerians, whose lack of previous northern attachments might be a blessing in disguise. In other words, the northern-yet-foreign UNTL appeared to be trying to seize control of KTL, the lodestar of northern industrialization, whereas the southern-yet-Nigerian Churchgate was merely trying to manage and improve KTL temporarily, without fully acquiring it. After weighing up the two proposals, KTL's Board of Directors accepted Churchgate's offer; and the failure of UNTL's

¹³³ "KTL: Submissions of a Governor (II)."

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Muhammad Umar, "KTL Controversy: Chairman Defends Contract," *New Nigerian*, August 2, 1991.

¹³⁶ "KTL: The True Position—Statement on the Selection of Churchgate Industries Limited as Managing Agent for Kaduna Textiles Limited," *New Nigerian*, August 22, 1991.

acquisition bid reflected its dual image: as both a true northern enterprise and a giant, aggressive Chinese-owned conglomerate.

Conclusion

The history of Chinese textile manufacturers in post-colonial Nigeria is part of the broader economic history of the country, and of its textile sector in particular. In the immediate post-independence era of the 1960s, with comprehensive government support including solid financial incentives, provision of infrastructure, sufficient supplies of cotton, and protective tariff walls, Kaduna and Northern Region became a paradise for textile makers. Most of the factories established in that decade grew rapidly until the early 1970s, when the Federal government removed the textile importation ban it had imposed during the Biafran War and set tariffs on textiles well below their pre-ban levels, in an effort to lower ordinary consumers' living costs as much as to push textile manufacturers to become more efficient and quality-focused. However, after the Great Drought of 1972-1974 placed the whole textile industry in imminent danger of collapse, the government reversed its more open policy and eventually restored full protectionism.

However, the restoration of the total ban on imported textiles in 1977 did not save most textile factories from serious decline in the 1980s and 1990s. Reductions in the overall range of governmental support, poor provision of electricity, water, and fuel oils, a steep decline in cotton production, smuggling through the country's porous borders, and the unwillingness of most factories to modernize their equipment or improve product quality worked together to ruin Nigeria's textile industry.

Cha, the founder of UNTL, and other Chinese manufacturers who came to Nigeria in the 1960s experienced the golden era of Nigerian textiles. However, during the Biafran War, the PRC's policy of supporting the Biafran rebels led many Nigerians to make erroneous links between these businesspeople's Chinese-ness and Mainland China, and therefore to question their fidelity to the Federal government. The newcomers felt the need to publish statements in the media, donate money to the Federal army, and invest more in factory expansion schemes to prove their loyalty.

Between the 1970s and the early 1990s, UNTL grew into the largest textile factory group in Nigeria, despite the multiple negative factors that led to the decline and fall of so many of their competitors. The exceptional efforts UNTL made to introduce advanced technology, keep pace with the latest European fashions, diversify product ranges, modernize equipment, and improve quality enabled it to prosper despite Nigeria's chronic textile crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. UNTL's aim of unifying or monopolizing the whole northern textile industry in 1991 via the acquisition of KTL failed for political reasons. In the eyes KTL's board, which chiefly consisted of representatives of 11 northern states, UNTL's strong northern roots were trumped by its foreign/Chinese identity.

In 1995, the destiny of UNTL and the Nigerian textile industry as a whole took another significant turn, when Nigeria joined the WTO, promising to abandon its protectionist policies and open its textile market to the world. In UNTL's 1996 annual report, Cha looked forward optimistically to the handover of Hong Kong to the PRC, in the belief that UNTL's Chinese background could enhance its trade with China. The fate of the Nigerian textile industry, Nigeria's opening of its markets, and the arrival of Chinese traders beginning in the mid-1990s were all closely interrelated, as will be shown in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Four, I will explore how the rise and fall of the Nigerian textile industries influenced the life choices of textile workers in Kaduna as well as their interaction with the Chinese factories from the 1960s to the 1990s.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOOD OLD DAYS: WORK AND LIFE OF NIGERIAN TEXTILE WORKERS AT CHINESE-OWNED TEXTILE FACTORIES

Chapter Two discussed the origin, expansion, and crisis of the Nigerian textile industry in general and the history of United Nigerian Textile Ltd. (UNTL) in particular from the 1960s to the early 1990s, from the perspective of Nigerian governments and Chinese industrialists. Absent from that narrative was the voice of Nigerian textile workers: whether and why they migrated to Kaduna; why they chose to join and remain with textile concerns; and what their work and leisure activities comprised before, during, and after the industry's heyday.

Based on oral history interviews with senior UNTL workers, UNTL company reports, and newspaper articles, this chapter delves into how the establishment and expansion of Chinese-owned UNTL influenced the life of Nigerian textile workers from the mid 1960s through the late 1990s. Following the life histories of these workers, I will first explore their decisions to come to Kaduna and to work in the textile industry and for UNTL in the 1960s. Then, I will examine what led to their decades-long service at UNTL, and discuss the working conditions there. I argue that until the mid 1990s, UNTL provided a certain degree of upward mobility both materially and socially for at least some of its workers, and this was key to their long-term loyalty. Access to leisure activities, meanwhile, became the symbol of some workers' better control over their time and therefore a distinguishing mark of their higher status.

The existing literature on post-independence African labor history revolves around the activities of trade unions and resistance of workers. For instance, David Luke's study of the colonial and post-colonial political economy of labor in the ports of Sierra Leone focused on the

formation and performance of the Dock Workers' Union.¹ Jeffries produced a detailed political history of Ghanaian railway unionism including its origin, development, culture, and organization.² Crisp explored the political and economic struggle of Ghanaian workers from 1870 to 1980,³ and Andr  and Beckman provided a well-rounded study of the rise of the Nigerian textile unions against the background of national economic crisis from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.⁴ As Robin Cohen has indicated, overt forms of resistance such as strikes, unionization and political militancy take center stage in such work, while covert forms of labor consciousness remain understudied.⁵

Admittedly, trade unions are more organized and better documented than individual workers, and do represent the collective voice of workers to an extent; but unions' most important role—to negotiate with the state and management regarding workers' pay and conditions—limits their value as producers and repositories of historical evidence, since their records reflect mostly their institutional relations with governments and manufacturers, and contain little about the everyday life of individual workers beyond the workplace, or even within it. To break free of the institutional bias that the study of workers' history in post-independence Africa has hitherto entailed, this chapter adopts a worker-centered approach, focusing on the life-histories of 23 individual senior textile workers in Kaduna, with a particular interest in how their sense of social class emerged and changed over time.

¹ David Fashole Luke, *Labour and Parastatal Politics in Sierra Leone: A Study of African Working-Class Ambivalence* (Lanham & New York & London: University Press of America, 1984).

² Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

³ Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners' Struggles 1870-1980* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1984).

⁴ Gunilla Andr , "Urban Workers as Farmers: Agro-Links of Nigerian Textile Workers in the Crisis of the 1980s," in *The Rural-Urban Interface in Africa: Expansion and Adaptation* (Uppsala & Copenhagen: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet in cooperation with Centre for Development Research, 1992), 200–222.

⁵ Robin Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers," *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 19 (1980): 8–22.

Heading for Kaduna, Heading for Textiles

As noted in Chapter Two, Kaduna became home to large-scale integrated textile mills, including KTL, Nortex, ATL, Norspin, and UNTL. These factories' rapid expansion in the 1960s created a high demand for skilled and unskilled labor from both within and outside the city. The availability of textile jobs in multiple factories led many young people to look to Kaduna as the ideal place to start their working lives.⁶ Muhammed Abu, who went to work for UNTL in 1968, explained his choices as follows:

Back then all the textile were booming and everybody wanted to join textile. That's why I chose to join UNTL: because of the good of the production. [the prosperity of the business] Textile was reigning during that time in Nigeria, especially in the northern part of the country. I myself come from the South, and I came here to find a job. [...] In the 1960s, all over Nigeria people heard about the plenty of jobs in textile factories in Kaduna, many many companies [...] . When we came here, we had a lot of option to choose from. Like when you go to market, you look for the best and choose it. It was much easier to find a job back then because the economy was booming.⁷

Sani Maliki, who also joined UNTL in 1968, recalled the prosperous years of textiles in similar terms.

That time, those good years, Kaduna was booming in terms of work and employment. Anywhere you finish school, they ask you where you want to go, you just mention Kaduna or Lagos. Kaduna was more peaceful at that time and that is why I came. Kaduna was the industrial center and it was very peaceful. UNTL was the only textile back then to handle matters: they were paying regularly, no disturbances, nothing trouble. When we know that this is the only company that paid you what you need, so we joined UNTL. KTL, Norspin,

⁶ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 16, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 16, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 18, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 18, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 19, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 20, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 23, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 29, 2016.

⁷ Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016.

Arewa, Nortex, Finetex were also there, but I decided to join UNTL. In 1968, my salary was 5 shilling 4 pence [per day].⁸

Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, who joined UNTL in 1977, described the attractiveness of textile factories to the young graduates of Kaduna Polytechnic at that time:

Back then I chose textile as major [at school] because in the whole North only the textile factories were so many and they paid so high. You know, my schoolmates, who were my seniors at school, after they finished school [and joined UNTL or other textile firms], I saw them with new cars, new houses, and many new things – I see their progress. At that time they give things that attract people to start working in textile.⁹

From these narratives and similar ones provided to me by other textile workers, it is clear that Kaduna and its emerging textile industry represented a large, easily accessible pool of job opportunities, particularly for young people with little or no prior experience.¹⁰ Adding to the attractiveness of the textile industry in general and UNTL in particular were the relatively high salaries paid, which – taking account of basic pay, overtime, bonuses, and various allowances – was higher in the 1960s and 1970s than for equivalent work in Nigerian Breweries (Kaduna) or the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).¹¹ Sadiq Musa, who joined UNTL in 1979, recalled that even government workers in the 1970s and 1980s would find ways to jump to UNTL due to the latter's higher salaries.¹²

However, none of this is to suggest that anyone could simply walk into a textile factory, introduce himself and be offered a job; the process was more complex, with some UNTL

⁸ Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹ Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

¹¹ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 22, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

¹² Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016.

workers recalling three distinct ways of applying for a job in any Kaduna textile mill. First, one could seek sponsorship from the Northern Ministry of Labor (in the 1960s) or the Kaduna State Ministry of Labor (in the 1970s).¹³ After the job-seeker submitted a formal application, the relevant government office would issue him/her a recommendation letter to present to the factory, by way of requesting an interview with its personnel manager.¹⁴ Second, applicants who had relatives or friends who worked at UNTL or similar factories could generally secure a position or at least an interview opportunity due to their influence.¹⁵ Even in such cases, however, UNTL would administer physical as well as written competency tests during interviews. As Frederick Abah recalled of his interview with the firm's Chinese personnel manager, a Mr. Chen:

Mr. Chen let me go through physical test first. The test was to lift heavy iron and push your hands up [above your head]. After I finished that one, we went in for written test: mathematics, English, dictation, comprehension. I did it. We [applicants] were plenty, [but] only four of us passed the test [...]. We were qualified, and they sent me to Finishing 2.¹⁶

In other words, it seems that only a minority of applicants were accepted even when they had obtained recommendation letters from the labor office or from former or current UNTL workers.

The third path to textile-factory employment was via recruitment events for new graduates, run by the manufacturers themselves at Kaduna Polytechnic and other higher-education institutions.¹⁷ Unlike their less-educated counterparts, who were forced to rely on the

¹³ Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 9, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁴ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁵ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁶ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁷ Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

recommendations of relatives or labor-office sponsorship, graduates of Kaduna Polytechnic in the late 1960s and 1970s entered a seller's market, often securing jobs even before they graduated. As Abdul (last name not given) recalled of his time as a student at Kaduna Polytechnic in early 1970s,

Back then when you were about to graduate, all the factories would come to Kaduna Polytechnic to recruit graduates – technical, electrical, engineers – all types of talents. These factories would go to schools to employ. Luckily I got interviewed by UNTL and was admitted. Other classmates went to KTL or Arewa or others. These factories, they were asking people to come to work, and job opportunities were plenty out there for us [graduates].¹⁸

Other workers who attended Kaduna Polytechnic before joining UNTL related similar experiences; with job offers from each of the major textile factories in Kaduna, they had the freedom to pick their favorites.¹⁹

In short, the overall prosperity of textile factories in Kaduna, the availability of jobs in them, and the relatively high salaries of textile workers operated together to draw workers in from across the Federation. Educated applicants enjoyed considerable freedom of choice in terms of which factory they would end up working in, but others had to pass tests set by the factories even after obtaining formal or informal endorsements of their skills.

Staying at UNTL: Promotion and Upward Mobility in a Chinese-owned Factory

As noted in Chapter Two, UNTL managed to expand and achieve solid results from the late 1960s through the 1990s despite instability in Nigeria's wider economy and increasingly unhelpful government policies. Many workers, including all of my informants, stayed with the

¹⁸ Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁹ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

factory through both its prosperous and difficult years. In this section, I will discuss these workers' reasons for staying with UNTL for such lengthy periods.

Studies of Nigerian workers in the post-independence era usually dismiss out of hand the possibility of upward mobility within a factory. In his ethnography of Nigerian workers on the Ikeja industrial estate in Lagos in the early 1970s, Adrian Peace argues that young migrant workers – who were educated, yet on Lagos' bottom socio-economic strata – had to rely for their survival on interpersonal connections, especially with their home towns, due to their very low salaries and job insecurity.²⁰ Rather than looking to promotion within the factory as way of improving their lives, the Ikeja workers aimed to leave it as soon as they were able to become self-employed entrepreneurs.²¹ Similarly, in his study of the Muslim working class in Kano, Paul Lubeck argues that, controlled and exploited by both foreign and Nigerian management, workers experienced alienation, injustice, and job insecurity, and therefore had “little aspiration for mobility within the firm.”²² Kano workers would resort to becoming petty commodity traders as a means of resisting the process of proletarianization.²³ In short, a historical consensus has emerged that there was no possibility of upward mobility for post-independence Nigerian factory workers; but this consensus is called into question by the case of UNTL workers, at least some of whom were able to rise both socially and materially without exiting the factory system.

All of Kaduna's major textile factories, along with other industrial establishments, were located in Kakuri, also known as Kaduna South, which lies south of the downtown area.²⁴ From an emerging industrial estate in the late 1950s, Kakuri gradually developed into an independent

²⁰ Adrian J. Peace, *Choice, Class, and Conflict: A Study of Southern Nigerian Factory Workers* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), 16.

²¹ Ibid., 10-15.

²² Paul M. Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labor in Northern Nigeria: The Making of a Muslim Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 219.

²³ Ibid., 215.

²⁴ “Kakuri: The Industrial Village of Kaduna,” *New Nigerian*, October 4, 1969.

town over the following decades. By the late 1960s it had three sections: the industrial estate where the majority of textile and other factories were situated; a mixed residential and commercial district of houses, markets, restaurants, and other local services; and government facilities such as schools, hospitals, the prison, military reservations, and police stations.²⁵ In other words, textile workers could meet most of their day-to-day needs without setting foot outside of Kakuri.²⁶ As one UNTL worker put it,

Ninety-nine percent of us [textile workers], including me, in 10 years we never cross the Kaduna River into the [Kaduna] town: you see, we had market in Kakuri, we had house, we had everything we need here. We had markets on pay day for our workers, and you can get everything you need. Just be careful not spending all your money at once.²⁷

Like other textile factories in Kakuri, UNTL operated 24 hours a day on three shifts, each of eight hours: in this case, from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.²⁸ From Monday to Friday, almost all workers worked overtime (an extension of the eight-hour regular shift to 12 hours) when orders were strong; workers were also frequently asked to work on Saturdays and Sundays and even some major public holidays like Sallah and Christmas.²⁹ Some of my informants said that the basic salaries UNTL workers received for their regular shifts were a bit lower than those paid by KTL and ATL, but all agreed that the overtime pay at UNTL rendered their total incomes much higher than those of their counterparts, not only at other textile factories, but in NNPC and the civil service as well.³⁰ The rate of

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, 2nd Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 21, 2016, 2016.

²⁷ Sadiq Musa, 2nd Interview by author, 2016.

²⁸ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Garba, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, May 28, 2016.

²⁹ "Slump in Textile Market Is No National Problem," *New Nigerian*, August 18, 1973; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁰ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author,

overtime pay was double the normal rate during weekends and triple on public holidays, and UNTL's market dominance guaranteed high demand for its products and therefore regular overtime for its employees.³¹ As Steven (last name not given), who joined UNTL and stayed for nearly 40 years recalled,

UNTIL produced the best quality, and market was going, and money was flowing, so both Saturdays and Sundays, we did overtime. The overtime that you were going to take, were more than the salary you were going to take [from regular shifts]. We take even more [total income] than the NNPC...[Steven smiled and looked very proud whenever he talked about his past higher-than-NNPC salary.]...It depended on the overtime and life was going. That's why I decided to stay. That overtime covered. Instead of fighting for increase, they [UNTIL] deceives us with overtime. [Steven smiled happily talking about it.] At that time, we enjoyed the salary because the economy was good. I had nine children, but I was able to manage feeding them and educate them. Government made everything easy: cost of feeding not much, school fees little, medically we didn't need to pay anything at hospital and hospital even provided food; forbid us to carry food inside because they provided. I had almost six graduates and the three younger ones were on their way to university level.³²

Nigerian UNTL employees were graded into 16 levels. Entry-level workers were deemed either level 1 or level 2. Through in-department promotion, they could rise to level 5, with the title of department overlooker. Each November or December, all workers would be evaluated for possible promotion; above level 5, the grades were level 6 (technician), 7 (assistant supervisor), 8 (senior assistant supervisor), 9 (supervisor), 10 (senior supervisor), 11 (chief supervisor), 12 (assistant manager), 13 (senior assistant manager), 14 (production manager), 15 (assistant general manager), and 16 (general manager).³³ Workers were deemed "junior" at levels 1

2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saanga, Interview by author, 2016; Kassim Garba, 2nd Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 22, 2016.

³¹ Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, Kaduna, Nigeria, digital recording, October 8, 2016; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016.

³² Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

³³ Liam, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 23, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author,

through 8, and “senior” at level 9 and above. Musa provided a direct comparison of the wages he received before and after joining UNTL, and after his subsequent promotion to level 5:

When I came in 1979, I was paid 126 naira for a month at level 2, and that is entry level for new workers. The year before I taught in secondary school and my salary was 97 naira a month, and the regular salary for other teachers was only 75 naira a month. So you can see the high salary of UNTL. Later they promoted me in the same year, I came in February and got promoted in August to level 5, and my salary was 185 naira a month ... That 185 naira a month, I could not get it anywhere else in government work or parastatal. That was just the basic salary, excluding housing, transport, food allowance, and overtime. If you add those together, it could reach 300 naira a month.³⁴

In addition to providing high and stable salaries due to the long-term availability of overtime shifts, UNTL always paid its workers on time. Many reported that the company never delayed, short-paid, or missed a single payment to them during their entire careers, and that the money due to them was always paid on the 23rd of the month.³⁵ This stability helped ensure decent lives for workers, and partly explains why so many remained at UNTL for so long. Yet it is worth to mention that the salary of Nigerian workers/managers at UNTL was still far below the Chinese engineers and managers, sometimes a quarter or even one tenth of the latter.

UNTL’s benefits package also encouraged workers to stay for long periods. First, the company provided full medical coverage for all its employees. Each entry-level worker received free care at its in-factory clinic, and was provided with a limited allowance for outside care if the clinic could not deal with the ailment.³⁶ All senior workers, and some junior ones who were above level 6, were entitled to free medical care for themselves and their immediately family members; these workers nominated up to three local hospitals, any medical bills they

2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁴ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁵ Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁶ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, Notes taking, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 10, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

subsequently incurred would be sent directly to UNTL.³⁷ As Ibrahim explained regarding his medical experience with UNTL:

I worked from six to six, and the Chinese took care of my family. Let's say, if my child is sick and my wife takes my child to the doctor, any nearing hospital, they allow us to register the three, four nearest hospital; all my wife needs to do is to just take the child there and the company would pay, no matter the bill. We don't need to worry about the medical bills so that we could concentrate on the work.³⁸

Second, UNTL built living quarters and provided housing allowances for its workers. Its housing scheme for junior staff was launched in the mid 1970s and its first phase of building – comprising 90 apartments, 70 for married couples and 20 for bachelors – was completed in 1978.³⁹ In the same year, UNTL purchased 36 bungalows (each with three bedrooms) at a cost of 1.03 million naira, to serve as senior staff quarters.⁴⁰ Junior staff members' rent was deducted from their salaries, but these deductions amounted to no more than half, and sometimes as little as one-fifth, of market rents in the area; and the housing allowances received by junior workers who did not live in UNTL-built housing defrayed their private rents by a similar percentage.⁴¹ Senior workers in company quarters stayed for free, and those who lived outside received housing allowances that matched the full market rent of a three-bedroom flat in Kaduna.⁴² Located in Kakuri, which was wealthier than other parts of Kaduna the senior staff quarters were equipped with six security guards, several generators, a well, and a bus to take the residents' children back and forth to school.⁴³

³⁷ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁸ Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁹ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1976" (Kaduna, Nigeria, July 1977); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1977" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1978); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1978" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1979).

⁴⁰ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1978."

⁴¹ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴² Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴³ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016.

Third, UNTL supported their workers' transportation needs. From the mid 1960s through the early 1990s, limited public transit and Kaduna's unstable political situation were the main factors that negatively influenced UNTL workers' attendance rates.⁴⁴ Thus, UNTL purchased large numbers of bicycles from abroad and provided one free of charge to each entry-level worker, in an attempt to improve their attendance.⁴⁵ Junior workers at levels 4 to 6 could apply to the firm for loans to buy motorcycles, and senior workers from level 7 upward could apply for car loans, which would cover up to 100 per cent of the cost of a car provided that it was small-size hatchback or sedan.⁴⁶ During the 48-month repayment period for their motorcycle and car loans, moreover, employees received fuel allowances; and once a loan was paid off, the same employee could apply for another and use it to update their vehicle.⁴⁷

Medical, housing, and transportation benefits were not the only ones UNTL offered, however. For instance, workers were given annual bonuses worth between one and three months of their basic salary, depending on the level of profits UNTL had earned that year. They also had one month of paid annual leave, received free clothes and food during public holidays like Sallah and Christmas, and could buy the factory's own products at a discount.⁴⁸

In short, UNTL's generous benefits package and its clear-cut career ladder combined to provide workers with a sense that they could achieve upward social and material mobility without leaving the factory. In principle, promotion was available to all workers based on their individual efforts and performance.⁴⁹ All my informants agreed that they earned their level-by-

⁴⁴ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁵ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁶ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁷ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁸ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁹ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016;

level promotion at UNTL by hard work, excellent performance, and a relationship of mutual trust with the factory's Chinese management.⁵⁰ Allen Scott, who joined UNTL in 1970, described the process as follows:

In 1972, one Chinese – Mr. Lam – came to me when I was working and singing during production; my production stood out among the three shifts and nobody could compare with me. That was why the Chinese manager came to see me; he said I could be a leader [...]. I was promoted within the department in the following years. In 1975, I was promoted to acting technician, and then full technician in 1976; I was in charge of warping, cone winding, pound winding, and all these in weaving department. In 1978, I was promoted to assistant supervisor; in 1982, I was given senior assistant supervisor at level 8. Everyone who worked with me recognized my hard work and quality. In 1988, I was promoted to a supervisor at level 9.⁵¹

In all, it took 18 years for Scott to reach level 9 and thus obtain senior worker status. Other informants shared similar experiences of promotion: hard work and outstanding performance earning them the trust of their Chinese managers, who promoted them one level at a time, and their journeys from entry levels to senior levels taking between 15 and 25 years in each case.⁵²

However, hard work and performance alone did not guarantee steady promotion for every worker. On the one hand, Chinese managers, due to language barriers and their lack of prior links to any of Nigeria's ethnic groups, were always regarded as fair arbiters of strictly merit-

Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁰ Eric Paul, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 16, 2016; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Gabriel Julius, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Samuel, Interview by author, Kaduna, Nigeria, digital recording, October 19, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Jamieson, Interview by author, Kaduna, Nigeria, digital recording, October 20, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016; Liam, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵¹ Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵² Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

based promotion;⁵³ on the other, the numbers of Chinese managers were limited, meaning that they could not develop detailed first-hand knowledge of every worker's performance, and relied on their personal connections with Nigerian managers and senior workers when deciding whom to promote.⁵⁴ As William Alege, who joined UNTL in 1970, explained:

Chinese is great because they judge people on merit. They assess you based on your quality of work. If you understand their standard, you are their best friend. They will give promotion to you for your good work because they don't want you to go. We Nigerians, I can promote my brother. But Chinese had nothing to do with that one; they promoted quality people who were the best to the production. That is why we like them. No need to be anyone's brother. [laughed loudly.] You become their [Chinese] brother when you did your work well. And it will also increase your salary.⁵⁵

Eric Paul, a senior worker who worked at UNTL for 25 years, recalled the necessity of working one's connections with Nigerian managers:

It is not easy to get promoted here. If you are not brother [of Nigerian management], or keep "yes sir yes sir yes sir", whether you work, nobody see you. But if you are brother [of management], you will get promotion. Usually it is Nigerian supervisor who decide and tell the Chinese [whom to promote], and then Chinese made the decision. The Chinese is the one in charge, but it is the Nigerians who told them. You need to get closer to the Nigerian supervisor, godfather. [Eric laughed loudly when calling Nigerian supervisors "godfather".] It is not just about hard working, you also need to pull some connections.⁵⁶

Some hard-working employees, meanwhile, did not simply wait for the Chinese managers to recognize their work, or reach out to the Nigerian managers, but used job-hopping as a strategy to earn promotion. If a worker obtained a job offer from another factory or the civil service, he/she could start negotiating with UNTL for promotion. For instance, Joseph Adacha, who

⁵³ Eric Paul, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁴ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁵ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁶ Eric Paul, Interview by author, 2016.

joined UNTL in 1968, said that after the management refused his promotion request he applied for a job at Nigerian Breweries and was accepted.⁵⁷ Then, when UNTL's management heard about the possibility of his leaving, they immediately promoted him to assistant supervisor (level 7).⁵⁸ In short, promotion was available to all UNTL workers based on hard work and performance, yet it was also a slow, arduous process influenced by one's personal connections with Chinese and/or Nigerian management. Nevertheless, UNTL did provide limited upward mobility for its workers.

Alongside this material and social upward mobility, promotion at UNTL could involve educational mobility. First, the firm encouraged its workers to pursue both in-service training and external educational opportunities. Via the Industrial Training Fund, UNTL invited textile specialists from Kaduna Polytechnic to give lectures and hold workshops at UNTL for its employees, sent workers to Kaduna Polytechnic or even to Hong Kong or Britain to study, and provided adult-literacy and Hausa-English classes.⁵⁹ The number of UNTL employees who participated in training courses in Nigeria and overseas increased in both absolute and proportional terms: from 156 in 1974 (3.3 per cent of the total workforce of 477 employees), to 920 in 1989 (10.3 per cent of 8,935 employees), and 2,017 in 1998 (20.9 per cent of 9,634 employees).⁶⁰ As Maliki recalled,

[UNTL] sent us to further education. They had us to have course at Kaduna Polytechnic to have certificates. UNTL sponsored. Concerning what you did in your department, you would get comprehensive training in that aspect. UNTL would select people to go for those courses at Kaduna Polytechnic ... I spent more than two years in [learning] the spinning knowledge at Kaduna Polytechnic;

⁵⁷ Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1974" (Kaduna, Nigeria, July 1975); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1982" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1983); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1990" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1991); "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1991" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1992).

⁶⁰ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1974"; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1989," 1990; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1998" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1999).

as a supervisor, we should know everything in our department so we learned a lot there at school. The government and the factory cooperated to improve the workers. Not every worker would be sent to training, only those whose job needs the training.⁶¹

Other informants confirmed that the access to further education they received while working for UNTL enabled them to improve their knowledge and skills, which in turn facilitated their ascent of the career ladder.⁶²

Workers' salaries increased with their levels, as did the quality and type of housing, medical, and transportation benefits that they (and their families) received, as discussed above. These level-based differences in salary and welfare did not just represent senior workers' greater material well-being; they were also indicators of social position. Based on their level at UNTL, possession of multiple-bedroom houses, and buying a new car every 10 years, senior workers categorized themselves as middle class, in contrast to junior and entry-level workers who were lower class.⁶³ As Mr. Patrick, who joined UNTL in 1971, said,

At that time, I would say that we were middle class. In general, the standard of living, the people of the lower class, lived in one room plus one parlor in a compound place. If you move to the middle class, then you live in a three-bedroom flat with only you in it, and you got a car loan. You see how you move to a certain class? Symbol of middle class, [is] multiple-bedroom, a flat and a car. Back then we senior staff could be categorized to middle class. Other things, like TV or furniture, everybody can buy, both junior staff and senior staff. The key is flat and car. Also, our job nature is to supervise, not to actually operate; you have production under you. You are a supervisor and officer.⁶⁴

As this indicates, among many symbols of becoming middle class, owning a car was arguably the most conspicuous one due to its mobility. Senior workers' access to UNTL's generous car

⁶¹ Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶² Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶³ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁴ Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016.

loans made it financially possible for them to purchase new as well as second-hand cars from the 1970s through the 1990s.⁶⁵ In 1982, for example, Musa bought a Volkswagen for 3,400 naira using a company car loan of 4,000 naira, which he paid off in the usual four years; he then upgraded to a new car in 1990, and another in 2004.⁶⁶

Senior UNTL workers were accorded high levels of respect in their communities and housing-association meetings. As Frederick Abah, who started working for UNTL in 1965 explained,

Anywhere when we can [drop by], even the family meeting, they give us respect [because we are [senior] UNTL workers]. So when we go to our community, whenever we want to talk, they will give us chance or respect to talk because we are in possession of money! In position of money! [laughed loudly.]⁶⁷

When one UNTL worker went to Hong Kong with his Chinese manager in the 1980s and told people there that he had a three-bedroom flat, a big back yard, and a car, they were very surprised and began calling him “big man.”⁶⁸ Despite the stark difference in the value of real estate between Kaduna and Hong Kong, the UNTL worker was still very proud when recalling this incident.

In short, promotion within UNTL enabled workers to access educational opportunities, better medical coverage, bigger homes, and better personal vehicles, and not merely higher pay. This integrated salary and welfare system made this remarkably successful company even more attractive to its workers, and encouraged their long-term loyal service. It is worth noting here that although senior textile workers unanimously spoke highly of UNTL’s salary and welfare

⁶⁵ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Garba, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Samuel, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁶ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, 2nd Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁷ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁸ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

between the 1960s and the 1990s during the heyday of the factory they were actually projecting their current disappointment of unemployment in the 2010s into the conversation and therefore cherishing the good old days.

Hard Work and the “Chinese Mentality”⁶⁹

UNTL consistently ensured that its workers’ upward mobility, as well as their incomes, was based on their hard work, and in particular their willingness to perform overtime work. The Chinese approach to hard work at UNTL, referred to by one senior Nigerian worker as the “Chinese mentality.”⁷⁰ was generally understood by workers as the valorization not only of overtime work, but of sacrifice for the family in a more general sense.⁷¹ In her study of the TAZARA Railway, Jamie Monson examines how ideologically driven ideals of self-reliance were demonstrated via the hard work of Chinese engineers, and the various ways that Tanzanian and Zambian workers responded to the Chinese approach.⁷² This section argues that, far from being exclusively Chinese, the “Chinese mentality” at UNTL crucially depended on the willing participation of Nigerian workers.

Hard work became an important part of UNTL’s corporate culture for both Nigerian workers and Chinese managers, and agreeing to perform large amounts of overtime work was the best proof of one’s industriousness. First, neither type of overtime work – i.e., extension of one’s regular weekday shift from eight to 12 hours, and working on weekends and public holidays – was compulsory; in practice, however, refusing to do it meant little possibility of promotion, as

⁶⁹ Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷² Jamie Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania*, Reprint edition (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 49-54.

well as lower overall pay in the short term. Individuals' willingness to perform overtime work was an important standard even at the initial hiring stage. As James Elaigwe recalled of his interview with a Chinese UNTL personnel manager,

for example, before they employed you, [they] interviewed first: "You would like to come work overtime?" If you say no, beng! you got no chance [of getting the job].⁷³

In other words, to maximize its output and therefore its profits, UNTL used "soft" discipline to cultivate a corporate culture of hard work. Notably, Chinese managers – including even the chairman, Cha – worked side by side with Nigerian workers, and sometimes for even longer hours. Many of my informants recalled that every time they entered the factory, they would find their Chinese supervisors already at work, and even wondered if they used the factory as their house, as they never saw them leave, either.⁷⁴ As one worker recalled,

During that time, any time by then, they entered the place [factory], work with us, folding with us, doing everything with us. Mr. Cha, by then, he would work everywhere and check and work by himself on the operation line.⁷⁵

My informants expressed mixed feelings about the overtime culture at UNTL: being both proud of the company's long run of prosperity, and regretful that their lives had been so dominated by work.⁷⁶ As Elaigwe recalled,

When we were working for United [UNTL], they had so many customers. No Christmas, No Salah. Every day work, work, work! Sometimes maybe eight in the morning and only come back home until nine in the night. Because of too much consumers, too much production, to meet up the demand, the demand is too much. They would not allow you [to rest]; even Saturday, Sunday, overtime. No time to go church, no time to do Salah. Every day work, everyday work. That's common at United.⁷⁷

⁷³ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁴ Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016. In reality, the Chinese had houses outside the UNTL complex.

⁷⁵ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁶ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁷ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016.

Despite having so little time to spend with their families, perform their religious duties, or enjoy a work/life balance generally, UNTL workers welcomed the high overtime pay (and, in many cases, the access to promotion that came with it), especially because it enabled them to send their children to school, maintain middle-class living standards, and build safety nets for their retirement.⁷⁸ In short, though sometimes characterized as distinctively Chinese, the corporate culture and mentality of UNTL was critically dependent on Nigerian workers' willingness to participate in it fully.

Although UNTL senior workers I interviewed barely mentioned the resistance of workers against the working load imposed by Chinese management, it does not mean such resistance did not exist at UNTL or other Chinese-owned factories. For instance, Nigerian workers in other Chinese-owned enamelware factories in Kano often used strikes, sick/personal leaves, absence from work, and stealing from the factory to both actively and passively resist the high working load at Chinese factories.

Away from Work: Leisure as Symbol of Prestige

Because working overtime was the norm at UNTL, as discussed above, leisure became a luxury for the firm's employees. Even under intense work pressures, however, leisure activities – especially sports – remained available. This section explores the leisure activities provided by UNTL management, and how workers claimed access to leisure as a symbol of their prestige within the factory. Historians' interpretations of the role of leisure in colonial Africa have emphasized the agency of African commoners and the symbolic meaning of leisure against the backdrop of the political and economic order of colonialism.⁷⁹ After colonial rule drew to a

⁷⁸ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁹ Terence O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (London: Heinemann Educational

close, however, the anti-colonial meaning of leisure vanished with it. Here, I argue that leisure activities – as indices of control over time and space – became a key means of differentiating Nigerian workers’ status positions in the post-independence era.

First, UNTL provided football (soccer) fields, both in the factory complex and at the junior staff quarters. The spinning, weaving, and finishing departments of UNTL each had their own field, open to whichever of their workers were not on duty.⁸⁰ From the early 1970s to the late 1990s, UNTL management organized inter-departmental football games every September. Each of the three above-mentioned departments, plus the administration department, fielded its own team and would compete for a trophy cup provided by the management; individual players on the winning team would also receive prizes of UNTL-made goods.⁸¹ Chinese managers would join their departments’ teams and play alongside with the Nigerian workers, and employees who were not on shift were encouraged either to play or to watch and cheer for their respective departments.⁸² UNTL’s management believed that the annual departmental football games, as well as helping workers relax and enjoy themselves, strengthened their physical ability for production work.⁸³

Separately from its four departmental football teams, the firm sponsored the UNTL Football Club, a member of the Nigerian Football Association. A powerful professional team in the 1970s and 1980s, it made it to the First Division (i.e., highest level) of the Nigerian National

Books, 1975); Phyllis Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Drink, Power, and Cultural Change: A Social History of Alcohol in Ghana, c. 1800 to Recent Times* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey: Heinemann, 1996); Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890-1945* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001); Peter Alegi, *Laduma!: Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa, from Its Origins to 2010*, 2 edition (Scottsville, South Africa: University Of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).

⁸⁰ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸¹ Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸² Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸³ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

League,⁸⁴ and because of its elegant playing style was nicknamed “Kaduna Brazil.”⁸⁵ The Club not only hired professional footballers from across Nigeria and other West African countries, but also picked good players from among UNTL’s workers.⁸⁶ For example, Rashidi Yekini, who won the title of African Footballer of the Year in 1993 and scored Nigeria’s first-ever goal in the World Cup the following year, started his career at UNTL in 1981, and he was employed as a level 4 junior worker.⁸⁷ He left UNTL for the Shooting Stars Sports Club at Ibadan in 1982, but UNTL workers remain very proud of his record, referring to him as “our UNTL product”, “UNTL boy” or “textile boy.”⁸⁸

The UNTL Football Club’s league games were usually held at Ahmadu Bello Stadium on Wednesday or Saturday night, and were very popular with UNTL workers. However, UNTL management never stopped production simply to make time for all workers to watch a game.⁸⁹ Workers on the afternoon shift from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. would certainly miss these games, as did some of their colleagues working overtime after the previous shift; thus, only workers on the night shift – and some senior staff who were enjoying a certain degree of control over their time, regardless of their shift – could consistently attend.⁹⁰ As Williams Alege, who served UNTL for 37 years, recalled:

I can even excuse myself because of football in those days, to watch football in the evening [...]. They respected me while we were working. I can tell my [Chinese] manager that I wanted to go doing so so; I will tell the head of the department, I was allowed because I reported directly to the [Chinese] production manager, not under anybody, directly to the production manager. I could just tell him that I wanted to go somewhere [watch football]; he would say “Yes, you can

⁸⁴ Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁵ Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁶ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁷ Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁸ James Elaigwe, 2nd Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁹ Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁰ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

go”. I could have someone to cover for my duty to watch for me while I am not around.⁹¹

Like Alege, other senior staff attended the UNTL Football Club’s games with the permission of the Chinese production manager, and some even watched English Premier League games on TV with the Chinese managers during working hours.⁹² Among my informants, senior workers in supervisory positions were uniformly proud of the prestige they enjoyed and the freedom they had – at least in comparison to junior workers, who were rarely allowed to leave the production line. Indeed, this limited control that senior workers had over their leisure time was important in distinguishing them from their juniors.

UNTL’s senior staff club, located near the senior staff quarters and well-maintained until the late 1990s, was another place senior workers could relax after work. It had a dart room, a ping-pong room, and basketball, tennis, squash, and handball courts. Use of the facilities was completely free to senior workers, and food and drinks were provided at low prices.⁹³ Annual darts, squash, and ping-pong competitions were held there, and the winners awarded trophies.⁹⁴ The club even hosted the All-Nigerian Darts Federation National Conference and Championships in 1992, playing host to 1,000 competitors and 5,000 spectators.⁹⁵ In the evening after work, senior workers would typically come to drink beer, play their favorite sports, watch TV, and talk to their colleagues. No junior UNTL workers had access to the club’s facilities or services, but they would not in any event have had much time to do so. The club therefore

⁹¹ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹² Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹³ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Abdul, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁴ Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Allen Scott, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁵ Saidu Abubakar, “UNT Plc Staff Club Set to Host Darts Meet,” *New Nigerian*, October 12, 1992.

became – like access to UNTL Football Club games – a site where senior workers declared their control over their free time.

Conclusion

Departing from the previous chapter's "top-down" focus on the state and industrialists, this chapter has examined interactions between the Nigerian textile industry and its workers, using the self-reported life histories of a group of UNTL workers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the booming Kaduna textile industry – characterized by high salaries and the relative ease of applying for jobs in it – attracted large numbers of workers from across Nigeria. While uneducated applicants needed to seek recommendations from the labor office or former or current workers, as well as undergoing interviews and tests, graduates from Kaduna Polytechnic or other higher-education institutions could secure textile-factory jobs even before they set foot off campus.

Textile workers eventually had to confront the slow-motion crisis of their whole industry, yet UNTL's workforce by and large remained loyal to their Chinese employer through good times and bad. The excellent overall performance of UNTL, the high wages it consistently paid (due to long-term need for overtime work), and its generous benefits package were among the reasons for this. Perhaps more importantly, UNTL's salary- and career-progression structure and its benefits system could be seen as an integrated and effective, albeit limited, avenue of socioeconomic upward mobility. The longer a worker stayed and the harder-working and more productive he/she was, the more material benefits he/she would reap. Promotion through UNTL's rank structure provided educational as well as material and social upward mobility for some workers, and this further distinguished them from their junior counterparts. Many Nigerian

UNTL workers proved willing and able to work exceptionally hard and long hours, and often conceived of this in terms of making sacrifices for their families.

With upward mobility, some workers earned relatively high levels of control over their leisure time, including the freedom to watch football games during business hours, and access to various leisure facilities and services in the senior staff quarters. These perks became symbolic of their high prestige relative to junior workers. Both groups were under great pressure, but their leisure activities clearly marked them as distinct.

Most workers recalled their time at UNTL from the 1960s to the 1990s nostalgically, or even as a golden era, despite the heavy demands of their work. As Abdul said, “I can work, relax, and drive my own car; it was a good life, [a] good job, in good years.”⁹⁶ But as mentioned in Chapter Two, the fate of the textile industry, including UNTL, reached another turning point in the late 1990s with the opening of Nigeria’s market and the coming of Mainland Chinese traders. I will discuss the total collapse of the Nigerian textile industry in the 2000s and how textile workers coped with this adverse situation in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Four, I will focus on enamelware—another major product made by Chinese industrialists in Nigeria from the 1960s. Turning away from the development of factories and the life of workers, Chapter Four will delve into how enamelware products manufactured in Chinese-owned factories influenced and in turn shaped by the preferences of Nigerian consumers in their everyday lives as well the gendered meaning of network in northern Nigeria.

⁹⁶ Abdul, Interview by author, 2016.

CHAPTER 4

FROM CHINESE FACTORIES INTO EVERYDAY LIVES: ENAMELWARE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

As discussed in Chapter One, the establishment of enamelware factories in Nigeria was the culmination of joint efforts by Nigerian governments and Hong Kong Chinese industrialists in the 1950s and 1960s. The former's pursuit of industrialization worked hand in hand with the latter's quest for an alternative manufacturing base beyond Hong Kong. Chapter Two and Three explores the ways in which the establishment, development, and crisis of the Chinese-owned Nigerian textile industry over the past half century influenced the lives of thousands of Nigerian workers who were directly employed by it. However, the establishment of Chinese-owned factories was not merely a top-down industrialization effort involving only the state and Chinese industrialists, nor was its influence limited to these enterprises' own workers. In fact, the end products of enamelware manufacturing—water cups, trays, buckets, bowls, and other food containers—became indispensable objects in the daily life of Nigerians, the meanings of which went far beyond their practical day-to-day uses.

Based on an analysis of Nigerian newspapers and oral-history interviews with Chinese enamelware technicians, Nigerian enamelware traders, and Nigerian consumers, this chapter explores the social and economic meanings of Chinese-made enamelware in northern Nigeria from the late colonial period to the 1990s. First, I trace the history of indigenous household containers made in pre-colonial northern Nigeria in the late 19th century particularly the Kano Emirate from calabash, pottery, and other traditional materials, and the role that these locally made containers played in marriage processes among northern Nigerian groups of Hausa. Second, I examine the introduction of enamelware into Nigeria against the background of

increasing commercial activity by European trading companies during the colonial period, and how the importation of enamelware and other modern containers initially impacted upon the handicrafts-based industry of containers. Third, I delve into how and why enamelware took the place of traditional household containers in the late colonial and early independence eras, and argue that the conflicting policies of governments in northern Nigeria towards enamelware manufacturing and indigenous container-making partly accounted for the rise of the former and the fall of the latter. And fourth, I explore the gendered meaning of enamelware as a symbol of wealth and social prestige, especially in the context of marriage, and propose that enamelware made by Nigeria-based Chinese factories became central to social prestige in northern Nigeria over the past several decades. I also argue that the importance of enamelware in post-independence Nigeria lies in its deep integration into local networks of gendered meaning, rather than in its representation of modernity.

I argue that enamelware, rather than textiles, were more representative of Chinese factory products due to the former's uniqueness. Unlike the Nigerian textile market, in which Chinese-owned enterprises have never held a market share of more than 50 percent, nearly 100 percent of enamelware production in Nigeria was accounted for by Chinese-owned factories.¹ As such, of these two sectors, enamelware has the most distinctively Chinese characteristics, whether in terms of ownership, management, design, or technology. Chinese-made enamelware dominated the kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms of ordinary northern Nigerians from the 1960s to the

¹ Shu Men Ho, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 27, 2016; M. L. Lee and S. F. Lee, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Francis Huang and Joseph Huang, Group Interview by author, Hong Kong, digital recording, November 28, 2016; Lawrence Tung, Interview by author, Notes taken, Lagos, Nigeria, November 9, 2016; "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Advertisement," *New Nigerian*, September 20, 1974. As for enamelware, almost all enamelware factories in Nigeria have been owned or managed by Chinese since the 1960s, the current four existing enamelware factories are all owned by the Chinese.

early 1990s, gradually replacing traditional Nigerian articles made of calabash, wood, brass, grass, and clay due to its greater durability, better sanitary properties, and excellent aesthetics.²

I chose Kano as the major research site for this chapter due to its importance in the trading, manufacturing, and consumption of enamelware. As the commercial center of northern Nigeria and the largest enamelware market in West Africa, Kano attracts traders from various neighboring countries who buy in large quantities.³ To the northwest via Sokoto, enamelware is exported to Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Mali; to the north it is exported to Niger; and to the northeast via Maiduguri it is sold to Chad, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and northern Cameroon.⁴ The most experienced and senior enamelware traders are concentrated in Kano, and some of them or their fathers entered the business in the late colonial period.⁵

In addition to its pivotal role in West African enamelware distribution, as the home of two major factories—Northern Enamelware Ltd and Grand Industry Ltd—Kano is the manufacturing center for enamelware in northern Nigeria. Even enamelware factories in Lagos and Port Harcourt regularly send representatives to Kano to conduct surveys or seek traders' opinions and recommendations.⁶ In short, Kano is the best place from which to gain access to, and a clear understanding of, the enamelware industry as a whole. Lastly, unlike in Lagos—where enamelware is nowadays barely found in use—enamelware still plays an important role in

² John B. King, "A Commentary on Contemporary Nigerian Pottery," *Nigeria Magazine*, 1962; Gloria Chuku, "Women in the Economy of Igboland, 1900 to 1970: A Survey," *African Economic History*, no. 23 (1995): 37–50; Editha Platte, "Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women's Rooms (Northern Nigeria)," *Paideuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde* 50 (2004): 173–92.

³ Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 30, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 7, 2016; Yahaya, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, September 2, 2016; Yusha'u, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 3, 2016; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2016; Junrong Lee, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 30, 2016.

⁴ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee, 1st Interview by author, 2016.

⁵ Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Yahaya, Interview by author, 2016; Yusha'u, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016; Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Yahaya, Interview by author, 2016.

the social and cultural life of Nigerians who live in Kano City and its hinterland. The experience of Kano enamelware consumers therefore sheds additional light on its past and current cultural meanings.

The chapter covers from the late pre-colonial period in the late 19th century to the post-independence era in northern Nigeria. My oral history interviewees dated their or their ancestors' earliest experiences using household containers to the time before the British conquest, and they frequently used "the North" or "Northern Nigeria" to relate such experience to the broader northern states of Nigeria. However, the administrative boundaries of northern Nigeria constantly changed through the 20th century: as part of the Sokoto Caliphate in late 19th and early 20th century, as the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria from 1900 to 1914, as the northern provinces of Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria from 1914 to 1954, as the Northern Region from 1954 to 1967, and then as multiple northern states from 1967 onwards. When my interviewees referred to "Northern Nigeria", they were actually talking about the Northern Region (1954-1967) and all northern states divided from it since 1967. Given the changing nature of northern Nigeria in terms of administration as well as the preferences of my interviewees, here I use northern Nigeria to represent a geographical region that is identical to the historical Northern Region during the 1954-1967 period. (See Figure 9)



Figure 9: *Nigeria 1914-1962* [map]. Scale not given. In: The Cartographic Department of the Oxford University Press. *Nigerian Primary Atlas for Social Studies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1979. 25.

Household Containers in Late Pre-colonial Northern Nigeria

Nigerians have a long history of fashioning, trading, and using household containers made from a wide variety of natural materials. Of these, clay pottery is the best represented in the archaeological record, with the production of terracotta sculptures and pottery containers by northern Nigeria's Nok culture dating back up to 2,500 years.⁷ Beyond this Nok context, archaeological evidence for the production and use of pottery has been found across the whole of Nigeria, including Illorin, Benin, Igbo-Ukwu, Jos, Naraguta, and Borno.⁸

⁷ Angela Fagg, "A Preliminary Report on an Occupation Site in the Nok Valley, Nigeria: Samun Dukiya, AF/70/1," *West African Journal of Archaeology* 2 (1972): 75–79; S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of Their Historical Traditions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 38.

⁸ C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria. An Ethnographical Account of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Together with a Report on the 1921 Decennial Census* (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 54; Bernard Fagg, "A Preliminary Note on a New Series of Pottery Figures from Northern Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 15, no. 1 (1945): 21–22; Thurstan Shaw, "The Mystery of the Buried Bronzes: Discoveries at Igbo-Ukwu, Eastern Nigeria," *Nigeria Magazine*, 1967; D. D. Hartle, "Archaeology in Eastern Nigeria," *Nigeria Magazine*, 1967; Graham Connah and S. G. H. Daniels, "Mining the Archives: A Pottery Sequence for Borno, Nigeria," *Journal of African Archaeology* 1, no. 1 (2003): 39–76; Emeka E. Okonkwo and A. M. Ibeanu, "Nigeria's Archaeological Heritage: Resource Exploitation and Technology," *SAGE Open* 6, no. 2 (2016), doi:10.1177/2158244016651111.

Pottery containers long played an important role in the everyday life of Hausa-speaking people in northern Nigeria. *Tukunya kasa*, large cooking pots, were used by Hausa women to cook soup or solid food for their families in the last quarter of the 19th century.⁹ *Randa*, large water jars, were used to store and cool water, acting in effect as refrigerators; and *tulu*, smaller water pots, to fetch water from *randa*.¹⁰ In addition to their utilitarian use, *randa* and *tulu* were used to cover the bodies of the deceased in burial ceremonies, and this function has remained unchallenged through the colonial and post-independence eras. Pottery containers were also used as piggy banks, teacups, and kettles for bathing; occasionally, well-painted pottery pots were used simply for household decoration.¹¹

Containers made from calabash, wood, grass, and brass were also widely used in late pre-colonial northern Nigeria. The calabash-made bowls known as *kwarya* can be categorized into two different types: undecorated ones used as containers for both solid food and soup that had been prepared in *tukunya kasa*, and decorated ones made by specialist craftspeople. Calabash gourds were easy to grow on farms, and could be cut when they reached a particular target size.¹² After removing the whole calabash from the vine, one could then cut it into half, hollow it out, and wash and dry it for future use as a food container.¹³ In other words, the ease and low cost of making plain calabash bowls in northern Nigeria meant that basically everyone could become a

⁹ Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 18, 2016; Zakaryawu, 2nd interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 23, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, October 1, 2016; Pottery traders at Kurmi Market, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 24, 2016.

¹⁰ Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, 2016. Pottery containers also played an important role in both functional uses and rituals in the Nsukka Division of eastern Nigeria. See Nwando Achebe, "Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960" (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), 223-25.

¹¹ Yacuba, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Kano, Nigeria, September 26, 2016; Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, 2016.

¹² Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 13, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 18, 2016; Maryam, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 30, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 24, 2016; Danlami Tukur, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 13, 2016.

¹³ Ibid.

calabash bowl-maker, and this ensured that such bowls were widely used as food containers before the importation of European metal ones began.¹⁴

In the case of decorated *kwarya*, the specialist crafts men and women sought out calabashes of good quality, in shapes that would allow them to balance, and in a variety of sizes, and used knives to cut them into halves. Following cleaning, drying, and polishing, images were either painted or burned into their surfaces.¹⁵ (See Figure 10) The images chosen varied by geographic area and according to the *kwarya*-makers' individual style preferences, but often included fish, lizards, turtles, rabbits, scorpions, camels, snakes, birds, palm trees, and flowers.¹⁶ These images represent animals and plants in Kano and the broader northern Nigeria, and there was a slight difference of popularity of images among different states in the north. (See Figure 11) Design quality was key to the appeal of decorated *kwarya*, since (decoration apart), ordinary consumers could have made their own calabashes, rather than resorting to the local market.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mildred A. Konan, "Calabashes in Northern Nigeria," *Expedition*, Fall 1974; Carolyn F. Sargent and David A. Friedel, "From Clay to Metal: Culture Change and Container Usage among the Bariba of Northern Bénin, West Africa," *The African Archaeological Review* 4 (1986): 177–95.

¹⁵ Musa Zabo, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 18, 2016; Musa Zabo, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 23, 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Maryam, Interview by author, 2016.



Figure 10: Musa Zabo, a *kwarya* maker, is carving and burning images of animals onto the surface of a decorated calabash bowls. Photo taken by the author at Kode Village, Kano State, Nigeria, September 23, 2016



Figure 11: Beautiful images of animals on calabash bowls. Photo taken by the author at Kode Village, Kano State, Nigeria, September 23, 2016.

Palm-tree wood bowls known as *akushi* were another major type of food container in the late pre-colonial northern Nigeria. (See Figure 12) Unlike the fashioning of plain *kwarya*, which

could be achieved by anyone, *akushi*-making required a significant level of professional skill.¹⁸ *Akushi* were also much heavier and more solid than *kwarya*, and more expensive than decorated *kwarya*, which meant it was usually the rich who could afford to use them in large quantities.¹⁹ Also in contrast to *kwarya*, which were eaten from by both males and females, *akushi* were usually reserved for the use of males.²⁰



Figure 12: Palm-tree wood bowls. Photo taken by the author at Kano City, Nigeria, September 6, 2016.

¹⁸ Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Danlami Tukur, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁹ Danlami Tukur, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁰ Saidu Abdu, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 10, 2016.

Two important products of indigenous grass-weaving were *adudu* (baskets) and *faifai* (circular trays/covers). *Adudu* were mainly used for storing apparel and jewelry, or for transporting agricultural products over long distances.²¹ With regard to the former use, the small holes in *adudu* provided ventilation, helping to keep clothes dry and odor-free.²² *Faifai* served both as covers for food containers like *kwarya* and *akushi*, and as trays for drying foodstuffs in the sun and separating husks from flour.²³ Some colorful *faifai* were also used for household decoration.

Tasa, small round brass bowls/trays, were mainly used for home decoration, and *kumbo* were larger versions. Unlike the production of *kwarya*, *akushi* and *adudu*, which was dispersed widely across northern Nigeria's villages and towns, the handicraft of *tasa*-making concentrated in a limited number of places, with Bida (current Niger State) being particularly famous for the production of brassware using imported brass.²⁴ Bida's origin can be traced to the early nineteenth century when slavery, slave trading, and warfare were commonplace in Nigeria.²⁵ Emirs fighting wars were in need of metal weapons such as spears and swords, as well as luxuries such as well-designed bowls, kettles, trays, and rings, and this demand led a group of brass- and silversmiths to come to Bida to offer their services to the Emir of Nupe.²⁶ Because of their attractiveness and distinctive designs, *tasa* and *kumbo* made in Bida were much sought after by traders and consumers.²⁷

²¹ Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 17, 2016.

²² Yusuf Usman Yakudima, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, September 6, 2016; Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, 2016.

²³ E. F. Martin, "87. Notes on Some Native Objects from Northern Nigeria," *Man* 3 (1903): 150–51; S. Gimba Ahmed, "Grass Weaving," *Nigeria Magazine*, September 1962, 10–15; Abdullahi Garba, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁴ Eugenia Herbert, *Red Gold of Africa: Copper in Precolonial History and Culture* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 77. In addition to Bida, the production of beaten brassware in Northern Nigeria was also found in Kano and Katsina, which was believed to be the migration of the Nupe people from Bida.

²⁵ "Ancient Industry: A Craft That Cannot Be Practiced Elsewhere," *Nigerian Citizen*, June 11, 1958; Hugh Vernon-Jackson, "Craft Work in Bida," *Journal of the International African Institute* 30, no. 1 (1960): 51–61.

²⁶ "Ancient Industry: A Craft That Cannot Be Practiced Elsewhere"; Vernon-Jackson, "Craft Work in Bida."

²⁷ "Ancient Industry: A Craft That Cannot Be Practiced Elsewhere"; Brassware dealer at Kurmi Market, Interview by author,

The various types of indigenous household containers discussed above were not limited to everyday utilitarian purposes, but were deeply integrated into marriage customs in pre-colonial northern Nigeria. Hausa engagements, wedding ceremonies, bride-price or *lefe*²⁸ and *kayan daki*²⁹ (i.e. gifts that bride's family sends her to her new home with) all imbued household containers with indispensable symbolic meaning.³⁰

In Kano, after both a young man's parents and a young woman's parents agreed that their children could marry, the groom's family would be obligated to pay bride price. To successfully set up a wedding date, the groom's family needed to send *lefe* or *kayan lefe* to the bride's family. *Lefe* was mainly made up of different clothing items, shoes, bags, jewelry, cosmetics, and perfumes, and *adudu* were almost universally deemed the proper containers in which to send it.³¹ The bride's parents, meanwhile, needed to prepare their daughter's *kayan daki*, in which containers such as *tasa*, *kumbo*, *akushi*, *kwarya*, and *paipai* were considered essential.³² *Kayan* literally means "the items" that a bride is sent to her husband's home with; and *daki* is the "room" in which the items are placed. The enamel bowls are normally lined up in rows in the room of the bride from the ground to the ceiling level. Sometimes they are placed inside a wooden cupboard. These lined up rows are called *jere*, meaning "arrangement in sequence."³³ During and after the wedding ceremony, relatives, friends, and guests would come to the bride's

digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, September 6, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁸ *Lefe* is also called *sadaki*, Idris Abubakar, Education Ph.D. candidate, and Hausa Language Teacher, Michigan State University, email correspondence with Dr. Nwando Achebe, Saturday June 24, 2017.

²⁹ Idris Abubakar, email correspondence with Dr. Nwando Achebe.

³⁰ Enid Schildkrout, "Dependence and Autonomy: The Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria," in *Women and Work in Africa* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), 55–81; Barbara Callaway, *Muslim Hausa Women in Nigeria: Tradition and Change* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 69–70; Barbara Cooper, *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger, 1900–1989* (Portsmouth, NH: Oxford: Heinemann, 1997), 90–109.

³¹ Yakudima, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, 2016.

³² Brassware dealer at Kurmi Market, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, June 26, 2016, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 4, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016.

³³ Idris Abubakar, email correspondence with Dr. Nwando Achebe.

room to inspect the preparedness of the bride for her new married life, as well as the internal decoration of her new home, and the display of containers was an essential element of this ritual.

The type, quantity, and quality of household containers presented during the marriage symbolized one's social and economic status. The quantity and size of the *adudu*, as the containers in which bride-price is placed, directly showcased the wealth of the groom's family. When sending *lefe*, it was deemed unacceptably impolite for an *adudu* not to be filled to capacity; thus, the groom had to choose a size of *adudu* that best fit his family's wealth.³⁴ Of course, this enabled others to immediately gauge the economic power of the groom's family. The rich tended to prepare three sets of *adudu*—the biggest one for clothes, the middle-sized one for shoes and bags, and the smallest for jewelry, cosmetics, and perfume—whereas the poor would prepare one or two sets of *adudu*, in smaller sizes.³⁵

Similarly, the containers included in a bride's *kayan daki* symbolized the social ties and economic capital of the bride's family. As Barbara Cooper has argued, based on the case of Hausa marriage in pre-colonial Maradi, the number of calabashes deployed in a bride's *kayan daki* materialized her social capital, allowing the public to see “how many friends and kin she and her mother could turn to for support” in times of need.³⁶ Cooper correctly points out the importance of calabash containers for domestic decoration, and thus as representations of the social status of the bride; however, the case of Kano (and northern Nigeria more generally) makes it clear that not only calabashes, but a mix of brass, calabashes, wood, and clay containers were used in Hausa marriages, depending on the wealth of the bride's family—with specific combinations of these different container types representing social capital as well as economic

³⁴ Yakudima, Interview by author; Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, 2016.

³⁵ Yakudima, Interview by author; Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, 2016.

³⁶ Barbara Cooper, “Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange in Maradi, Niger, 1907-89,” *Journal of African History* 36 (1995): 127.

status. In the last quarter of the nineteenth-century Kano, for example, rich families mainly used high-value brass *kumbo* and *tasa* for decoration; the middle ranks of society tended to choose a small quantity of *tasa* combined with large quantity of *kwarya*, covering all the walls in the bride's room; and the poor decorated with a small number of *kwarya*, on only one or two walls.³⁷ A woman with a certain quantity of *tasa* or *kumbo* and large numbers of *kwarya* for decoration was called *yar gata*, meaning daughter of the rich, a title coveted by every bride.³⁸ Visits to the bride's room by relatives, friends, and guests were therefore also detailed explorations of the social status and actual economic power of her family, based on the type, quantity, and quality of the containers used for decoration there.

In short, indigenous household containers were widely used in pre-colonial Kano and the broader northern Nigeria for both practical and symbolic purposes. On the one hand, containers made of clay, wood, calabash, and grass were indispensable tools of daily life, especially among women engaged in domestic work like cleaning, cooking, and serving food. On the other, some indigenous containers became indicators of one's social capital and/or economic status.

Introduction of Enamelware during the Colonial Period

The dominance of indigenous household containers for both utilitarian and symbolic purposes in northern Nigerian society remained almost unchallenged during the late pre-colonial period when Euro-African contacts were largely limited to coastal areas.³⁹ Yet, these items did encounter some competition from European containers during the colonial period. In this section, I explore how European trading companies introduced enamelware to early colonial northern

³⁷ Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016. Idris Abubakar, email correspondence with Dr. Nwando Achebe.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Nasidi Maitasa, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 1, 2016.

Nigeria, and the impact of this pattern of European importation on traditional container-making handicrafts.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, with the annexation of Lagos and the establishment of Oil Rivers Protectorate, British influence rapidly increased in southern parts of Nigeria. Via the trading activities of the Royal Niger Company, the United African Company (UAC), the London and Kano Trading Company, Lagos Stores, and other trading firms, the British gradually infiltrated into the northern parts of the country, supplying imported goods and exporting local produce.⁴⁰ When they took over Kano in 1903 and connected it to the colonial railway system in 1911, the export trade in groundnuts and the importation of European goods both began to increase.⁴¹ European trading firms established an elaborate wholesaling and retailing network, with trading stations, warehouses, local agents, and sub-wholesalers extending from the center of Kano city to remote villages.⁴² As early as the 1910s, enamelware was listed among the products imported into northern Nigeria by these companies.⁴³

Though enamelware would go on to dominate the northern Nigerian household-container market for several decades from the late colonial period into the 1990s,⁴⁴ its ascendancy was not established overnight. When introducing this product in the early colonial period, European trading firms conducted commercial tests in Kano's Kurmi Market very cautiously. Established in the 15th century, Kurmi Market was the oldest and largest market in Kano selling all different

⁴⁰ Gina Porter, "Competing Interests: Company Rivalry and Indigenous Markets in Nigeria in the Early Colonial Period," *Journal of Macromarketing* 16, no. 1 (1996): 91–102; Frederick Pedler, *The Lion and The Unicorn in Africa: A History of the Origins of the United Africa Company 1787-1931* (London: Heinemann, 1974); Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 120–121.

⁴¹ Porter, "Competing Interests: Company Rivalry and Indigenous Markets in Nigeria in the Early Colonial Period"; Pedler, *The Lion and The Unicorn in Africa: A History of the Origins of the United Africa Company 1787-1931*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 120–121; Arthur Norton Cook, *British Enterprise in Nigeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), 212–241.

⁴² Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁴³ Porter, "Competing Interests: Company Rivalry and Indigenous Markets in Nigeria in the Early Colonial Period," 96.

⁴⁴ Maikudi, Interview by author, notes taking, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 1, 2016; Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Nasidi Maitasa, Interview by author, 2016.

types of products during pre-colonial and colonial period with wholesalers and retailers from both with northern Nigeria and neighboring countries.⁴⁵ Initially, they only brought a limited number of types of enamelware in small batches to gauge consumers' responses, and even gave out free samples of enamelware trays, bowls and buckets.⁴⁶ Only after observing their potential customers' preferences over a long period did they start to bring in a broader range of enamelware product types in large quantities.⁴⁷ As recalled by Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, a trader born in the late 1920s,

Initially our people didn't like enamelware, because we were using our local containers like *kwarya* and *akushi*. When they [Europeans] started to bring it, they gave some free samples and then sold it in a small quantity at a lower price. They would say, "please, take this one, go and try it." As time went on, our people started to use it [enamelware] small small, but still less often than our own.⁴⁸

Some European companies set up enamelware showrooms at Kurmi Market.⁴⁹ UAC, the *Compagnie Française de l'Afrique Occidentale* (CFAO) and John Holt all did so, and invited indigenous dealers to come in and identify their favorite designs and models, while subtly praising the advantages of such products for daily use during the colonial period.⁵⁰ To attract more sellers and further promote sales, European companies also sold enamelware to local traders on low-cost credit, and this succeeded in extending the market for it beyond Kano city and deep into the hinterland.⁵¹

⁴⁵ "Kano, City of a Thousand Markets," *Daily Trust*, November 10, 2003; Ismail Adebayo, "Kurmi - Kano's 600-Year-Old Slave Market Now Sanctuary for Artifacts," *Daily Trust*, October 19, 2015; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁶ Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁷ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁸ Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁹ Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 21, 2016.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

Regarding the impact of European importation on local industries in West Africa, Anthony Hopkins has argued that traditional handicrafts like pottery-making were able to survive and develop due to their close physical proximity to their major markets, coupled with what might be termed brand loyalty, particularly in the case of containers.⁵²

In colonial southeastern Nigeria, pottery products were able to maintain their market position in the face of the challenge from European enamelware in the 1930s because of pottery's lower price, better refrigeration function, and "higher heat-retentive capacity."⁵³ The same advantages of indigenous pottery products over their European enamelware counterparts were also observed in early colonial northern Nigeria.⁵⁴ Indeed, according to Kano traders and consumers interviewed during my research, most people only started to use enamelware in the late colonial period or after independence, with the use of imported enamelware being limited to a handful of rich people in urban areas.⁵⁵ In short, colonial-era efforts by European trading firms to introduce enamelware only managed to secure a very small portion of the market in household containers, and the dominance of indigenous containers was barely shaken prior to the 1950s.

The Dominance of Enamelware in the Post-independence Era

Enamelware containers started to take the place of traditional ones in northern Nigeria from the 1950s and continued to dominate the market until the early 1990s.⁵⁶ In this section, I begin by discussing the reasons for the rise of enamelware and the decline of indigenous

⁵² Anthony Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973), 250.

⁵³ Chuku, "Women in the Economy of Igboland, 1900 to 1970: A Survey," *African Economic History*, no. 23 (1995): 42; Simon E. Majuk, Patience O. Erim, and Rev. Joseph O. Ajor, "Bakor Women in Pottery Production in Colonial Southeastern Nigeria," *The Journal of International Social Research* 3, no. 11 (2010): 416–20. Achebe, "Farmers, Traders, Warriors and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960," 223-25.

⁵⁴ "Pottery Manufacture in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 61, no. 3152 (1913): 571–72.

⁵⁵ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai), Interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁶ Maikudi, Interview by author, 2016; Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016.

containers from the perspective of consumers. Then, I explore this transformation from the perspective of the state: in particular, the motives behind the doomed efforts of Northern Region Government and later state governments in the northern part of the country to simultaneously revive traditional handicrafts and develop local enamelware-making on an industrial scale.

Multiple studies have shown that pottery-making, along with other traditional container-making handicrafts, went into serious decline in the 1950s and 1960s due to competition from the rising enamelware industry across all regions of Nigeria;⁵⁷ and a parallel trend was observed in other West African countries including Cameroon and Benin in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁸ Kano traders and Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists who had business connections with Niger, Sudan, Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso also recalled that their exportation of enamelware to these West African countries increased dramatically between the 1960s and the 1980s, as enamelware containers became the most popular type in these countries.⁵⁹ John King's observations about southwestern Nigeria, clearly illustrate the changing situation:

In 1955 there were some forty-eight stalls selling earthenware in one Ibadan market [that has since disappeared]. In 1957 the corresponding number was fifteen and in 1959 it was four. Without claiming scientific accuracy for these figures, they are sufficiently correct to underline the extent to which traditional functional pottery is being replaced by enamelware which all too often has the most hideous superimposed design. Nor will there be any reversal of this trend because these metal basins are infinitely more durable and functional than the vessels which they are replacing.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Chuku, "Women in the Economy of Igboland, 1900 to 1970: A Survey"; Vincent Egwu Ali, "An Investigation into the Influence of Modernity on the Traditional Pottery Industry of the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria during the Colonial and Post-Colonial Eras," *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 26, no. 2 (2010): 75–89; Platte, "Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women's Rooms (Northern Nigeria)"; King, "A Commentary on Contemporary Nigerian Pottery," 42.

⁵⁸ Nicholas David and Hilke Hennig, *Ethnography of Pottery: A Fulani Case Seen in Archeological Perspective*, Addison-Wesley Modular Publications: A McCaleb Module in Anthropology 21 (Reading, MASS: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1972); Carolyn F. Sargent and David A. Friedel, "From Clay to Metal: Culture Change and Container Usage among the Bariba of Northern Bénin, West Africa," *The African Archaeological Review* 4 (1986): 177–95.

⁵⁹ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Alhamad Abudullah, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 23, 2016; Lee, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Ho, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁰ King, "A Commentary on Contemporary Nigerian Pottery," 15.

As King observed, being made largely of metal, enamelware was much stronger than pottery and calabashes. If dropped or struck hard, it might lose some decorative elements but would remain functionally intact, unlike calabash bowls or pottery containers that would break into pieces and be rendered useless.⁶¹ Therefore, even though enamelware was more expensive than traditional containers, its durability and solidity made it welcome among consumers.⁶² Additionally, as will be discussed in the next section, the variety of designs and colors featured on high-value enamelware made it (despite King's skepticism) both aesthetically and socially attractive as household decor among Nigerian consumers, especially women.⁶³ And, in addition to its superior durability and beauty, enamelware was believed to be more hygienic than wood, calabash, and pottery containers.⁶⁴ Hausa women could clean their enamelware bowls, trays, cups, and buckets easily using water, even in the absence of detergent, whereas it was time-consuming and difficult to fully clean traditional containers, particularly those that had been exposed to grease or oil.⁶⁵

Apart from cooking, different types of enamelware came to be involved in almost every aspect of food-related activity in northern Nigeria, and their importance earned them Hausa names during the colonial period. When eating at home or with a few friends, those who could afford enamelware served food on a standardized set of four pieces: a *langa miya* (curry dish for soup), a *langa tuwo* (curry dish for solid food), a *kwanon sha* (water bowl), and a *faranti* (round

⁶¹ Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶² Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Salamatu, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 24, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁶³ Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Alhamad Abudullah, Interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁴ Danlami Tukur, Interview by author, 2016; Salamatu, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁵ Danlami Tukur, Interview by author, 2016; Salamatu, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

tray) (see Figure 13). As shown in Figure 14, on his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1966, an elderly man brought this standard combination of enamelware pieces with him.⁶⁶ For wedding parties, naming ceremonies, and other major events that featured large numbers of guests, *fanteka* (food basins) of different sizes or large *langa* became must-haves for the host. In Figure 15, a photograph taken during the wedding of the Emir of Kano to a daughter of the Sultan of Sokoto in 1974, the then-police commissioner Audu Bako can be seen taking food from a communal *fanteka* to his personal tray.

Not all uses of enamelware in northern Nigeria were food-related, however. For example, *kwalla* (straight pots) were used to store water or clothing (See Figure 16), and *daro* to wash clothes (See Figure 17).



Figure 13: A typical set of enamelware. On top of a *faranti* are (clockwise from left) a *kwanon sha*, a *langa miya*, and a *langa tuwo*. Photo taken by the author at Hwa Chong Enamelware Factory, Kano, Nigeria, June 3, 2016.

⁶⁶ “Faith and Hope on Pilgrims Progress,” *New Nigerian*, March 18, 1966.



Figure 14: Pilgrim eating at the airport while waiting for his plane to Mecca, 1966. Source: "Faith and Hope on Pilgrims Progress." *New Nigerian*, March 18, 1966.



Figure 15: Reception of wedding ceremony of the Emir of Kano. Source: *New Nigerian*, May 2, 1974.



Figure 16: *Kwalla* (straight pot) was used to store water or clothing. Photo taken by the author at Kurmi Market, Kano, Nigeria, June 7, 2016.



Figure 17: *Daro* (wash basin) was used to wash clothes. Photo taken by the author at Kano, Nigeria, September 4, 2016.

As well as by consumer preferences, the rise of enamelware was driven by the contradictory policies of the northern Nigerian government. On the one hand, officials encouraged the development of traditional handicrafts in the villages as a means of promoting employment, boosting the economy, and preserving traditions.⁶⁷ For example, the Small Industries Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, set up in 1964, sought to improve the condition of the handloom centers at Sokoto and Kano and the Abuja Pottery Training Center, and provided assistance for other small-scale indigenous craftspeople.⁶⁸ In addition, the regional government and local governments worked together to organize art festivals, agricultural shows, and traditional-crafts shows.⁶⁹ During these events, craftsmen from across northern Nigeria demonstrated their skills; there were even pottery-making, *akushi*-making, and *kwarya*-making contests, with the winners given medals and monetary prizes.⁷⁰ However, senior container-making craftsmen recalled that they did not receive any practical help from the government, and received no response even after they spoke to a TV reporter about the decline of indigenous containers; some even believed that corrupt government officials had diverted handicrafts-contest prize money into their own pockets.⁷¹

Despite attempts to portray traditional handicrafts as the “harbinger of an industrialised self-sufficient Northern Nigeria,”⁷² the region’s government provided solid incentives for Hong

⁶⁷ Usman Adebayo Durosinlorun, “Small Scale Industries Develop in Northern Nigeria,” *Nigerian Citizen*, January 7, 1965.

⁶⁸ “New Move to Encourage Handicraft in North,” *New Nigerian*, December 13, 1966; Durosinlorun, “Small Scale Industries Develop in Northern Nigeria.”

⁶⁹ Mustafa Danbatta, “Kano Festival--Something Never Attempted before in Nigeria,” *Nigerian Citizen*, January 7, 1959; S. Gimba Ahmed, “Northern Nigeria Festival of Arts,” *Nigerian Citizen*, March 21, 1962; Seoud Mohamed, “Northern Nigeria Festival of Arts,” *April 7 1962*, n.d.; “North Festival of Arts Opened,” *Nigerian Citizen*, April 7, 1962; “Northern Nigeria Festival of Arts Opens in Kaduna Today,” *New Nigerian*, March 11, 1967; Musa Zabo, Interview by author, September 18, 2016; Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁰ “Arts Festival Prize Winners,” *Nigerian Citizen*, April 14, 1962; Musa Zabo, Interview by author, September 18, 2016; Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁷¹ Musa Zabo, Interview by author, September 18, 2016; Zakaryawu, 1st interview by author, 2016; Ado and Shuwawale, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁷² Citizen Staff Reporters, “The Nation Progresses ‘In Work and Worship,’” *Nigerian Citizen*, June 17, 1964.

Kong Chinese industrialists to set up enamelware factories. As discussed in Chapter One, the Federal Government and the Northern Regional Government granted “pioneer” status to the enamelware industry, provided its members with income-tax relief, imposed protective tariffs on enamelware importation, and even invested government money in several enamelware factories.⁷³ Thus supported by both governments, Chinese-owned enamelware factories were able to put down roots in Nigeria, and soon expanded their production to a point that the market for household containers was dramatically transformed. At a stroke, the establishment of enamelware factories in Kano, Lagos, and Port Harcourt eliminated the disadvantages of importing enamelware from overseas, and placed its manufacturers in the same close proximity to their end-users as indigenous container-makers were to theirs. Indeed, the two Chinese-owned enamelware factories on the Bompai Industrial Estate in Kano City were much closer to Kurmi Market than were the villages specializing in indigenous container-making. In short, the changing preferences of consumers, an industrial policy that strongly supported enamelware factories, and mere lip-service to the economic and social value of indigenous handicrafts worked together to ensure enamelware’s replacement of indigenous containers in the immediate post-independence era.

The Gendered Meanings of Enamelware in Post-independence Northern Nigeria

As discussed above, enamelware gradually replaced various kinds of indigenous containers in people’s everyday lives, due to a combination of consumers’ changing preferences and government policies. Yet, enamelware also gradually supplanted indigenous containers as a

⁷³ Federation of Nigeria, “The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria” (Federal Government Printer, 1958), National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna); “Industrial Development (Income Tax Relief) Declared Pioneer Industries,” 1959, MIN-TRA JF 25 Vol. II, National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

symbol of wealth and prestige in the late colonial and post-independence eras, as observed by researchers in northern Nigeria and in neighboring countries including Benin, Mali, and Niger.⁷⁴ In this section, I explore the gendered social and economic meanings of enamelware in marriage customs and in women's lives more generally, arguing that enamelware made in Chinese-owned factories became central to the social and economic status of northern Nigerian women between the 1950s and the late 1980s.

Like indigenous containers, enamelware—despite being industrially produced—was deeply integrated into the established social institutions of post-independence northern Nigeria. However, previous studies have focused exclusively on the meanings of enamelware for the bride's family,⁷⁵ and have overlooked its importance to the groom's. For instance, enamel food basins (*fanteka*) and straight pots (*kwalla*) became the preferred carriers in which the groom's side would send gifts or bride-price, replacing grass-made *adudu*.⁷⁶ During the 1950s and 1960s, when enamelware did not yet dominate the Nigerian market for household containers, people used both *adudu* and enamel basins/straight pots when sending bride-price, with the latter implying that the groom was rich.⁷⁷ A *yar gata* who received her bride-price in *adudu*, having expected enamelware, might refuse the *adudu* along with the bride-price in it, sending it back to the groom and asking for enamelware in its place.⁷⁸ By the 1970s and 1980s, when enamelware

⁷⁴ Abner Cohen, *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 66-68; Sargent and Friedel, "From Clay to Metal: Culture Change and Container Usage among the Bariba of Northern Bénin, West Africa"; Cooper, "Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange in Maradi, Niger, 1907-89"; Platte, "Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women's Rooms (Northern Nigeria)"; Jeremy J. Cunningham, "Pots and Political Economy: Enamel-Wealth, Gender, and Patriarchy in Mali," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 2 (2009): 276-94.

⁷⁵ Sargent and Friedel, "From Clay to Metal: Culture Change and Container Usage among the Bariba of Northern Bénin, West Africa"; Cooper, "Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange in Maradi, Niger, 1907-89"; Platte, "Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women's Rooms (Northern Nigeria)"; Cunningham, "Pots and Political Economy: Enamel-Wealth, Gender, and Patriarchy in Mali."

⁷⁶ Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullah Umar, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 10, 2016.

⁷⁷ Musa Ali, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, September 14, 2016; Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁸ Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

had fully supplanted its indigenous equivalents, a groom from an ordinary family would need to prepare a set of three enamel basins or straight pots to send the bride-price in: the biggest one for clothes, the middle-sized one for shoes and bags, and the smallest one for cosmetics, perfume, and jewelry. All had to be full. A rich family might use up to five straight pots to hold the same categories of items, while the poor would use no more than two.⁷⁹ Though basins and straight pots had covers, observers could easily judge the wealth of the groom's family by the number, size, design, and quality of the containers themselves.⁸⁰ *Adudu* were no longer considered proper containers for bride-price by families at any socio-economic level.⁸¹

Apart from this importance among men as carrier of bride-price, however, enamelware operated almost exclusively in the female sphere, in terms of purchase, use, maintenance, exhibition, and resale; in other words, enamelware joined women's "enclaved commodities."⁸² Cooper and Jerimy Cunningham both reported that enamelware inherited calabash's role as a key symbol of social capital, but then developed further into symbol of economic capital that women could manipulate to challenge patriarchal control.⁸³ However, both scholars seem to limit the marital role of enamelware to a short period of perhaps three to five years after the wedding. Here, I argue that among Hausa women in post-independence northern Nigeria, the collecting of enamelware was both a lifetime pursuit and a source of considerable pressure.

As an important element of her *kayan daki*, enamelware became a symbol of wealth and prestige for a newly married woman. The more enamelware the bride brought from her family,

⁷⁹ Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, 2016; Yahaya Hamza, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, June 15, 2016.

⁸⁰ Yahaya Hamza, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸¹ Salamatu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸² Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 25.

⁸³ Cooper, "Women's Worth and Wedding Gift Exchange in Maradi, Niger, 1907-89"; Cunningham, "Pots and Political Economy: Enamel-Wealth, Gender, and Patriarchy in Mali."

the higher her social and economic status in the community.⁸⁴ A very rich family would fill two or three rooms with enamelware for the decoration of their daughter's new house; a middle-class one would cover three walls of one room; and a poor one would decorate no more than two walls with enamelware, or a combination of enamelware and *kwarya*.⁸⁵ During a wedding, relatives, friends, and other guests would visit the bride's room and conduct an examination of her economic status. While a bride from a rich family could expect to win the visitors' compliments and establish her social and economic status in the community via an extensive display of enamelware, a poor bride who had only cheap indigenous containers like *kwarya* or a small quantity of enamelware might be looked down upon in her community or even openly laughed at. The bride's room therefore became a space of social pressure.

The pressures that attended enamelware as a status indicator also pushed brides into a new mode of pursuing the title of *yar gata*, which (as we have seen) had previously been connected to the type, quantity and quality of indigenous containers they owned. In the 1950s, however, the prior emphasis on a complex evaluation of a bride's *kumbo*, *tasa*, *kwarya*, and *akushi* shifted to a strictly quantitative assessment of her enamelware alone.⁸⁶ In the transitional period of the 1950s and 1960s, when the use of enamelware in *kayan daki* in Kano City was still limited to the rich and the middle class, parents in the outlying villages who could add any enamelware to the *kayan daki* of their daughter would automatically earn her the title of *yar gata*. As my interviewee Bilkisu recalled,

It was a new thing. If people bought those things [enamelware] for their daughters, then they must be called *yar gata*. They pasted it to the wall as

⁸⁴ Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁵ Abdullah Umar, Interview by author, 2016; Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, 2016; Maryam, Interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016; Safiya, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 29, 2016; Asama'u Ali, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 30, 2016.

⁸⁶ Tijjani Yusuf, Interview by author, 2016; Hussaina, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016; Talatuwa, Interview by author, digital recording, trans. Yusha'u, Kano, Nigeria, September 15, 2016; Safiya, Interview by author, 2016.

decoration, and people in the whole village rushed to see. If one woman saw enamelware in the room, she would go around the houses to tell people that she had seen interesting new things, and she would shout “that family is rich, you people go and see, you people go and see!”⁸⁷

By the 1970s and 1980s, with enamelware more commonly seen in both city and villages, the threshold for *yar gata* status was also increased, with the key being the number of walls the bride could decorate with it. A *yar gata* was expected to decorate three walls with enamelware: one hung line by line with small round enamel trays, a second lined with shelves holding middle-sized enamel bowls, water cups, and basins, and a third piled layer by layer with larger enamel straight pots, buckets, and wash basins.⁸⁸

In short, the quantity of enamelware possessed by a Hausa bride directly indicated her status in her community, and women pursuing the title of *yar gata* had to do so in the face of detailed examination of their socio-economic status as measured by these possessions. Moreover, such social pressure did not end with the completion of the wedding ceremony. Rather, anxieties around purchasing, maintaining, and updating her enamelware collection followed a Hausa woman across her life stages. Whether she was newly married woman, a new mother, or marrying off her daughter, she had to renew her collection of enamelware time and time again.⁸⁹ As a new mother, for example, she needed to update her collection to ensure an adequate welcome to visiting family and friends, who came to see the enamelware as well as the newborn. As my informant Fatuwa put it,

When getting pregnant, I started to think about re-decorating the wall as people would come to see me and the baby after I gave birth. So, I took down old ones, sold them, and then added money to buy some new ones.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁸ Safiya, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁹ Salamatu, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁰ Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

While rich and middle-class women could simply replace old enamelware items with new, poor ones could redecorate by washing, repositioning, and rearranging their collection.⁹¹

The lifelong importance of enamelware to women lay not just in its symbolic value, but also in its gendered economic value as women's property. In post-independence northern Nigeria down to the 1980s, buying enamelware was one of the best strategies by which women could preserve the value of the money they earned through their daily work, whether from government service, factory employment, small business or handicrafts. As well as being a form of insurance against adverse life changes and economic difficulties, including inflation, enamelware collecting could be a profitable investment.⁹² Every time a new design of enamelware was released, large numbers of women would try their best to add it to their collection; if the design was highly desirable but produced in small numbers, its value skyrocketed and those who had managed to obtain it could sell it at a profit.⁹³ Enamelware items were also deemed highly appropriate as gifts to friends and relatives on occasions like weddings and naming ceremonies.⁹⁴ In some cases, women accumulated such a large amount of high-quality enamelware that they were able to sell it for enough money to build or buy houses or obtain other major assets.⁹⁵ As such, the enamelware component of her *kayan daki* was "the economic start for a newly married woman";⁹⁶ it was regarded as her own property, independent from her husband, and thus represented her economic independence. A wife who wanted to buy something but lacked sufficient funds had the unquestioned freedom to sell her enamelware for

⁹¹ Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016; Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016; Maryam, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹² Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016; Talatuwa, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁹³ Talatuwa, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁴ Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁵ Ladidi and Balaraba, Group interview by author, 2016..

⁹⁶ Platte, "Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women's Rooms (Northern Nigeria)." 185.

cash. She might mention such decisions to her husband, but they did not require his approval.⁹⁷

As Alhamed Muhammed commented when I asked him about his wife selling enamelware, “[I]t is her property from her parents. If she wants to buy something, she could sell enamelware she had and no one can say a thing. It is her property.”⁹⁸

In short, despite its modern and industrial provenance, enamelware became deeply integrated into established social institutions in post-independence northern Nigeria. Specifically, it inherited the roles previously played by calabash as symbolic of social ties, and by brass containers as symbolic of wealth and prestige, and indeed unified their respective symbolic meanings into one. As the single most important type of household container in post-independence northern Nigeria, the significance of enamelware went far beyond Hausa women’s wedding ceremonies. For good or ill, the collecting, maintaining, selling and gifting of enamelware became a central, lifelong habit for almost every Hausa woman.

Modernity Coming In or “Tradition” Reaching Out?

Enamelware, along with other imported European goods, has often been seen as a symbol of modernity, both by scholars and by certain African consumers, standing in opposition to indigenous containers as symbolic of “tradition.”⁹⁹ As Michael Rowlands argued, based on the case of post-independence Cameroon, material consumption was a strategy for materializing personal success, and the consumption of imported Western goods often symbolized one’s level

⁹⁷ Abdullah Umar, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁸ Alhamed Muhammed, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁹ Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*, trans. Peter Geschiere and Janet Roitman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 137-138; James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1999), 83-86; Editha Platte, “Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women’s Rooms (Northern Nigeria),” *Paideuma: Mitteilungen Zur Kulturkunde* 50 (2004): 173-92; Vincent Egwu Ali, “An Investigation into the Influence of Modernity on the Traditional Pottery Industry of the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria during the Colonial and Post-Colonial Eras,” *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 26, no. 2 (2010): 75-89.

of personal achievement.¹⁰⁰ Especially if they were industrially produced, such goods have often been seen as carriers of modernity, and pursued by African consumers who wished to access their underlying symbolic prestige.¹⁰¹

Certainly, both imported and locally manufactured enamelware represented the popular pursuit for modernity in northern Nigeria between the 1950s and the 1980s. As Editha Platte has argued, enamelware and other modern containers—seen as emblematic of “the exotic European world”—were consumed, ritualized, celebrated, and idealized as prestige goods in the region.¹⁰² During the previously discussed era of transition from indigenous containers to enamelware, only enamelware basins and straight pots were deemed appropriate carriers for bride-price, and only enamelware containers were viewed as proper for presenting gifts at naming ceremonies, weddings, or other social occasions, and this was in part due to their status as representative of modernity.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, enamelware’s desirable newness and modernity was inescapably bound up with its inheritance of old and “traditional” qualities. In other words, in attempting to account for enamelware’s success, its deep integration into the pre-colonial social institutions of northern Nigeria was as important as (or arguably more important than) its representation of modernity. Enamelware swept the market for household containers, defeating all its indigenous competitors including *tasa*, *kumbo*, *kwarya*, and *akushi*, but it simultaneously transformed itself to fit into local networks of meaning – in effect becoming everything that it had displaced. When the same Chinese industrialists had manufactured enamelware in Shanghai and Hong Kong for the

¹⁰⁰ Michael Rowlands, “The Consumption of an African Modernity,” in *African Material Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 190.

¹⁰¹ Rowlands.

¹⁰² Platte, “Towards an African Modernity: Plastic Pots and Enamel Ware in Kanuri-Women’s Rooms (Northern Nigeria)”, 174.

¹⁰³ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Abdullah Umar, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

Mainland Chinese and Southeast Asian markets in the 1930s and 1940s, the product types had been very different, in keeping with their different social meanings.¹⁰⁴ But when Hong Kong Chinese industrialists started to export enamelware to Nigeria in the 1950s, they had already heard about the social and economic differences in which enamelware was implicated there; therefore, they did not merely divert to Nigeria the mundane household containers that were popular in Asia, but targeted African meaning networks in hopes of boosting their sales.¹⁰⁵ In some respects, enamelware that was manufactured in Hong Kong and exported to Nigeria in the 1950s had already been indigenized before it left the production line: with design, size, and color all aimed at Nigerian consumers. Subsequently, when this “modern” enamelware entered the local gendered meaning network and became a key symbol of wealth and prestige, it became fully indigenized. In short, it was not its immediately obvious “modern” advantages (in price, durability, or hygiene) that enabled enamelware to dominate northern Nigeria’s market; rather, it was its integration into local, socio-cultural meaning networks that granted it a significance far beyond its practical use.

Similarly, from the perspective of northern Nigerian traders and consumers, the relation between enamelware and traditional containers was one of inheritance and development rather than of opposition and discontinuity. Discussions of the origin of enamelware in Nigeria tend to take it for granted that these wares originated with the importation activities of the European trading companies. However, Nigerian traders and consumers tell a sharply different story. They argue that Nigerians had all types of domestic containers before the coming of Europeans – various types of pottery, *kwarya*, *akushi*, *paipai*, *adudu*, and *tasa* – and that Europeans took these

¹⁰⁴ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Lee, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Lee and Lee, Group Interview by author, 2016; Huang and Huang, Group Interview by author, 2016.

back to their own countries to study and emulate, later returning with enamelware containers based on the designs, patterns, and sizes of traditional Nigerian ones.¹⁰⁶ As Alhaji Nasidi put it, Europeans,

first took this *akushi* and left with it, then they made the same design and the same size of enamelware [as *akushi*]. They brought and replaced that *akushi* ... Also the cover, they took *paipai* as their design for the enamelware cover; later they brought the *faranti* [enamel cover] to replace the *paipai* for cover. That was the origin [of how] they started to produce enamelware. From then even this *kwanonsha* [enamel water cup], you know *kwarya* had different sizes, they took one *kwarya* with them and then turned it to *kwanonsha*.¹⁰⁷

To put it another way, enamelware in northern Nigeria was no longer European enamelware, nor was it pure imported modernity. Instead, it was just the replication of *kwarya*, *akushi*, and *paipai* using metal raw materials; the production process might be industrial and modern, but the originality of enamelware came from indigenous sources. In short, it was not simply modern containers coming in, but indigenous ones reaching out.

Conclusion

Indigenous domestic containers made of pottery, calabash, wood, grass, and brass had been of great importance in the everyday life of northern Nigerians since pre-colonial times. Indigenous household containers were also indispensable to pre-colonial social institutions, particularly marriage, serving as symbols of wealth and prestige. The type, quantity, and quality of domestic containers one's family gave or received as dowries became indicators of social and economic status. The introduction of enamelware by European trading companies during the colonial period influenced the northern Nigerian market for domestic containers only gradually

¹⁰⁶ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016; Alhaji Abdullah Usmar, Interview by author, 2016; Bilkisu and Fatuwa, Group interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Alhaji Nasidi, Interview by author, 2016.

until the 1950s. In that decade, enamelware's convenience, durability, aesthetics, and hygiene led to its widespread acceptance by consumers. At the same time, the Hong Kong Chinese who had been encouraged to set up factories by the industrialization policy of northern Nigeria's government lowered the cost of enamelware in Nigeria and thus boosted its consumption. Despite the government's highly visible efforts to promote and preserve the indigenous container-making industry, such support was far from sufficient to sustain its further development or to allow it to retain its market share; and enamelware came to dominate the living rooms, bedrooms, and kitchens of northern Nigerians.

Into the 1980s, enamelware also served as symbol of the wealth and prestige of northern Nigerian women, just as indigenous containers had in the pre-colonial and colonial eras. As an important element of dowries, the types, quality, and quantity of enamelware became indicators of the bride's social and economic status. Formalized visits to the bride's room by friends, relatives, and other guests during her wedding were *de facto* inspections of her initial wealth as a newly married woman. This imposed profound social pressure upon the bride and her parents, which did not fade away when the wedding ceremonies came to an end. Rather, the pressure to purchase new enamelware or to cleanse and rearrange her existing collection followed a woman throughout her life. In short, despite its origin as a European innovation, enamelware's indigenization in terms of design – coupled with its integration into local, gendered networks of meaning – allowed it to attain a dominance in northern Nigeria that lasted for decades.

Northern Nigeria experienced a serious decline. This was due to encroachment on its market share by cheaper and less dated-seeming plastic, ceramic, and stainless-steel containers imported from China. A room in the Kano Museum dedicated to Hausa marriage traditions includes a small round enamelware tray alongside indigenous containers made of pottery,

calabash, wood, brass, and grass. Thus, has enamelware been memorialized and crystalized as a part of northern Nigerian tradition, despite its former (and contested) status as an emblem of European modernity.

While the first four chapters focus on the migration of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists, their locally manufactured products like enamelware and textile, and the development of these factories in a broader background of Nigerian economy before the 1990s, Chapter Five will delve into the changing dynamics of Chinese migration to Nigeria and how it influenced the established generation of Chinese industrialists, Nigerian manufacturing industries, workers, and consumers from the early 1990s into the 2000s.

CHAPTER 5

BRINGING GOODS IN & TAKING INDUSTRIES DOWN: THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN NIGERIA SINCE THE 1990s

In the three decades that followed the arrival of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists attracted by the pro-industrialization policies of the Nigerian state, the enamelware and textile firms they established managed to remain competitive, even to the point of monopolizing those industries and expanding their influence into others. Despite civil war, the gradual decline of the Nigerian economy from the late 1970s onward, and frequent changes of regime, these Chinese manufacturers brought job opportunities as well as upward economic and social mobility to thousands of Nigerian workers. But the mid 1990s represented a significant turning point for Nigerian industrialization, impacting Chinese manufacturers and Nigerian workers, consumers, and traders. When Nigeria abandoned its protectionist industrial policies and opened the floodgates to external competition, Chinese dealers in large quantities of made-in-China products steadily made inroads into the Nigerian market.

This chapter explores how the industrialization processes of Nigeria and China influenced each other, and how the coming of Chinese traders and products affected Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists, Nigerian workers, and Nigerian manufacturing in general, based on Nigerian newspaper reports and oral-history interviews with Chinese entrepreneurs and Nigerian workers. First, it will argue that the total collapse of the Nigerian textile industry in the 2000s was an accumulated effect of the long-term ignorance of manufacturing industries by successive Nigerian governments, and that the coming of Chinese traders and products beginning in the mid 1990s accelerated this crisis but was not its principal cause. Second, it proposes that the new wave of Mainland Chinese migrants brought a new structure to the established Chinese

community and reshaped the image of China in Nigeria. In contrast to the early-wave Chinese industrialists, who had limited their influence by locally manufacturing certain types of products that were already familiar to Nigerians, and employing people who lived near their factories, the latter wave of Chinese traders had a much more dramatic influence upon the life of Nigerians, not merely through the relative unfamiliarity of their goods, but because they undermined local manufacturing industries on a broader scale and the web of socio-economic relationships that these had articulated.

Opening up: A Tale of Two Nations

Though both began the twentieth century with economies dominated by agriculture, Nigeria and China pursued industrialization avidly in the decades after 1950. However, their attitudes towards foreign investment and external competition differed from one another and varied over time. This section first explores the historical swings of Nigeria's industrial policy between a protectionist stance and an open-for-competition one, and discusses the controversies surrounding the opening of Nigeria's markets in the late 1990s. Then, it delves into China's accelerated industrialization and opening-up in the 1980s and 1990s, as a basis for the further discussion of the movement of Chinese traders and made-in-China products in section that follows.

In the late colonial and immediate post-independence eras, Nigeria's federal government and three regional governments adopted an industrialization strategy based on import substitution. By attracting foreign investment into local manufacturing, limiting or banning the importation of certain foreign products, and imposing protective tariffs, Nigeria aimed to develop its domestic industries in an artificially less-competitive environment, as a path to economic

independence.¹ The textile industry, as Nigeria's largest private-sector employer, was held to be representative of the country's manufacturing industry as a whole.² The effective tariff protection that textile industries enjoyed (averaged across spinning, weaving, bleaching, and printing) was 105 per cent of value added in the early 1960s,³ rising to 120 per cent in 1968.⁴ As the Federal Budget of the latter year indicated, the textile and other industries were thriving "as the result of the high tariff wall erected in the past against finished products imported from foreign countries."⁵

The protection of domestic manufacturing industries reached its peak when a total ban on imported products was imposed during the Biafran War.⁶ In the early 1970s, however, Nigerian industrial policy began to move away from this protectionist stance and towards an "open general license" policy that not only lifted the wartime ban but greatly lowered the import duties on textiles and other consumer goods, as compared to their pre-war rates.⁷ Despite strong opposition from domestic textile manufacturers, the federal government stuck to this new policy of encouraging a degree of market competition from international players, with the dual aim of lowering Nigerian consumers' costs of living and pushing domestic textile manufacturers to improve their technology, efficiency, and productivity.⁸

The open-market policy, however, was relatively short-lived. In 1977, in the wake of West Africa's Great Drought of 1972-1974 and with the situation of textile manufacturers

¹ Federation of Nigeria, "The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Industrial Development in Nigeria" (Federal Government Printer, 1958), National Archives of Nigeria (Kaduna).

² Mohammed Hamza Kadpoly, "Textile Industry in Nigeria's Economic Development," *New Nigerian*, May 31, 1986.

³ Peter Kilby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy: Nigeria 1945-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 130.

⁴ Steve Onyeiwu, "The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments," *Textile History* 28, no. 2 (1997): 234-49.

⁵ "Tough Budget for the Nation," *New Nigerian*, April 29, 1968.

⁶ Olajide Omolayo, "The Calamities of Textile Mills," *New Nigerian*, August 3, 1972.

⁷ Minso W. Gadzama, "Free Importation--a Threat to the Nigerian Textile Industry," *New Nigerian*, December 24, 1971.

⁸ Gadzama; Joseph Angulu, "Industries Warned against Blackmail," *New Nigerian*, February 5, 1972; Stephen Bamigbele, "Textile Workers Hit by Slump in Trade," *New Nigerian*, July 12, 1972; "Manufacturers Urged to Combat Wave of Smuggling," *New Nigerian*, April 3, 1973.

steadily deteriorating, the federal government restored full protectionism to textiles, by decreeing a second complete embargo on their importation.⁹ Domestic manufacturers of enamelware and footwear, among other products, also benefited from the return of import prohibition and import licensing. From the mid-1970s onwards, then, Nigeria developed a domestic market that was highly protective, even to the point of isolation.¹⁰

Nigeria's protectionist industrial policy remained essentially unchanged until 1995 when it joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and embarked upon a process of trade liberalization. Among all categories of Nigerian manufacturing, the textile industry was both the largest and the most adversely influenced by the ensuing changes. The Multifibre Arrangement (MFA), which had allowed Nigeria to impose quantitative restrictions to protect this sector, was replaced in 1995 by the WTO's new Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC), following the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).¹¹ The ATC arranged for gradual trade liberalization by all participating countries,¹² and Nigeria offered to eliminate all import-prohibition measures by early 1997.¹³ In that year, the federal government of Nigeria duly lifted its outright ban on the importation of textiles, and replaced it with a 50 per cent customs duty—considerably lower than the level that had prevailed in the 1960s.¹⁴ Although textile manufacturers and other Nigerian industrialists initially called for renegotiation with the

⁹ Mohammed Magaji, "Textile Manufacturers Told to Improve," *New Nigerian*, June 5, 1978; Onyeiwu, "The Modern Textile Industry in Nigeria: History, Structural Change, and Recent Developments."

¹⁰ Ademola Oyejide, Olawale Ogunkola, and Abiodun Bankole, "Import Prohibition as a Trade Policy Instrument: The Nigerian Experience," in *Managing the Challenges of WTO Participation: 45 Case Studies*, ed. Peter Gallagher, Patrick Low, and Andrew L. Stoler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 438–49.

¹¹ World Trade Organization, "Textiles Monitoring Body (TMB) The Agreement on Textiles and Clothing," *World Trade Organization*, 2017. Accessed October 3, 2017. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/texti_e/textintro_e.htm

¹² Daniel Obi, "Revive Textile Industry--FG Urged," *New Nigerian*, June 22, 1995.

¹³ Oyejide, Ogunkola, and Bankole, "Import Prohibition as a Trade Policy Instrument: The Nigerian Experience."

¹⁴ Segun Olanrewaju, "The State of the Industry," *New Nigerian*, September 24, 1997.

WTO or even the reversal of the trade-liberalization process,¹⁵ this opposition was short-lived, and in the following decade the opening of Nigerian markets would go unchallenged.

While Nigeria lingered in the borderlands between full protectionism and full market liberalization, post-Mao-era China had stepped out of its isolation and into world markets via Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening-up initiatives, and braced itself for both foreign investment and external competition. Setting up five special economic zones and 14 coastal open cities, China encouraged foreign investment in a variety of manufacturing industries in these areas, with the long-term aim of enhancing the global competitiveness of made-in-China products through better access to foreign capital, technology, skills, and information.¹⁶ The rapid development of private enterprise and Sino-foreign joint ventures also raised domestic competition to an unprecedented level, leaving many state-owned factories and some private ones bankrupt and their workers jobless.¹⁷ The surviving manufacturers updated machinery and other technology, built more reliable infrastructure, utilized cheap labor force, and improved product quality, and generally prepared themselves well for competition in world markets. As China did not become a member of the WTO until 2001, however, export-oriented Chinese manufacturers frequently encountered barriers to their products, including quota restrictions from the United States and Europe that had to be negotiated each year. The countries of Southeast Asia represented another major market for Chinese manufacturers, but the 1997 Asian Financial

¹⁵ "Industrialist Derides IMF Policies," *New Nigerian*, April 25, 1995; Olanrewaju, "The State of the Industry"; Walid Jibrin, "The Textile Industry at 30 (I)," *New Nigerian*, December 15, 1997, 30; "Crises in Textile Industry: Our Stand, Our Prayers," *New Nigerian*, December 24, 1998.

¹⁶ Douglas Zhihua Zeng, "How Do Special Economic Zones and Industrial Clusters Drive China's Rapid Development?" Policy Research Working Paper No. 5583 (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2011); Elisha P. Renne, "The Changing Contexts of Chinese-Nigerian Textile Production and Trade," *Textile* 13, no. 3 (2015): 212–33.

¹⁷ Xiaoming Xue, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 19, 2016; Jieguo Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 31, 2016; Guoping Sun, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 27, 2016.

Crisis greatly lowered their purchasing power; and thereafter, Chinese industry was eager to find outlets in less-explored markets in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.¹⁸

In short, in the mid 1990s, just as Nigeria abandoned its protectionist policies and pushed its domestic manufactures to improve their productivity to make them more competitive on the world stage, Chinese manufacturers were already well-prepared—and indeed anxious—to find markets outside the increasingly protective European and American ones.

Going Abroad: The Steps of Mainland Chinese Migrants

The opening of the Nigerian economy to the wider world and the eagerness of Chinese manufacturers to explore it and other African markets seemed to have set the stage for the arrival of Chinese imports. Nevertheless, this process was gradual, and some questions remain about it: most importantly, about the people who promoted and grew trade between Nigeria and China. This section will therefore address how Chinese trading firms and individuals and Nigerian traders and consumers discovered each other in an increasingly globalized world from the 1990s onwards.

Scholars of this period have tended to focus their attention on the practices of Chinese traders already resident in Africa, their influence on African societies, their interactions with local consumers and traders, and African perceptions of them and their goods.¹⁹ As such, they

¹⁸ Xiaoming Xue, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, July 23, 2014.

¹⁹ Jing Jing Liu, “Contact and Identity: The Experience of ‘China Goods’ in a Ghanaian Marketplace,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010): 184–201, <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1028>; Conal Ho, “Living in Liminality: Chinese Migrancy in Ghana” (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2012); Laurence Marfaing and Alena Thiel, “The Impact of Chinese Business on Market Entry in Ghana AND Senegal,” *Africa* 83, no. 04 (November 2013): 646–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972013000491>; G. Mohan and B. Lampert, “Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China-Africa Relations,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (January 1, 2013): 92–110, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads065>; Karsten Giese, “Same-Same But Different: Chinese Traders’ Perspectives on African Labor,” *The China Journal*, no. 69 (2013): 134–53; Ben Lampert and Giles Mohan, “Sino-African Encounters in Ghana and Nigeria: From Conflict to Conviviality and Mutual Benefit,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43, no. 1 (2014): 9–39; Karsten Giese and Alena Thiel, “The Vulnerable Other – Distorted Equity in Chinese–Ghanaian Employment Relations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 6 (May 12, 2014): 1101–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.681676>.

have largely taken it for granted that trade networks between China and Africa sprang into being ‘naturally’ in the 2000s amid the influx of Chinese products, and ignored the historical processes by which such trade emerged, expanded, and developed into its current shape. In the case of China-Nigeria trade, certainly, scholars have roundly ignored the historical importance of Chinese traders as agents of ever-closer economic relations between these two otherwise poorly connected countries. In this context, it is useful to trace the journeys of Chinese traders before and after they settled in Nigeria.

China’s economy transformed enormously in the 1980s and 1990s, and along with it, the mentality of many Chinese. As the country moved from egalitarian socialism to a market-based system, an unprecedented income gap between public employees and private businesspeople emerged, leading the former to turn to independent business to earn more money. This trend first became noticeable in the eastern coastal cities before spreading into the interior provinces. The Chinese term *Xiahai*, which literally means “jumping into the sea of business”, reflects both the high risk and considerable fortunes that were associated with turning to business in that era. Despite the above-mentioned economic reforms already being underway in the 1980s, however, the majority of Chinese non-farm employment remained within the sphere of the civil service, public institutions, and state-owned or collectively-owned enterprises, which were widely regarded as providing reliable, stable, and decent jobs.²⁰ Many still saw private business as a last resort, and self-employed entrepreneurs—whether traders or craftspeople—as individuals who had been denied access to traditional occupations because they had criminal records.²¹ However,

²⁰ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Zhiliang Xu, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 31, 2016; Jun Feng, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 24, 2016; Jun Zhou, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 18, 2016; Liuqing Zhao, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 9, 2016; Guanghua Feng, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 18, 2016; Qirui Yu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 30, 2016.

²¹ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, May 24, 2016.

it was precisely these ‘out-of-the-system’ Chinese who made fortunes beginning in the 1980s that seemed astronomical in comparison to public-sector salaries. For example, a textile trader from Jiangsu Province in the 1980s could earn ¥ 10,000 annually while the yearly pay of an engineer in a state-owned factory was only about ¥ 600.²² Awareness of such disparities seriously impacted those who remained ‘in the system’, and pushed many to leave their stable careers in the uncertain pursuit of fortune.

Another important new trend in post-Mao China was going abroad. A belief in the superiority of everything foreign, which was widespread in China in the 1980s, applied not only to the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, but also to Russia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, since going abroad was popularly equated with the making of large fortunes.²³ Many Chinese who went to Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s remembered that, even though it was not their first choice of foreign destination, the incomes they earned there were much higher than those of their friends and family who had remained in China.²⁴ For instance, as Mr. Xu recalled,

When I first came here and my business was at a low ebb, I had to work in a Chinese restaurant in Lagos just to live, for a monthly salary of 200-300 U.S. dollars. It seemed quite low, but if I worked back in China my salary was at most 45-60 Chinese Yuan per month, which was only about 7-10 U.S. dollars monthly at the exchange rate around 1990. [Xu smiled]... [So] one month of work in Africa equaled three years of work in China.²⁵

The two trends described above combined to drive many Chinese to seek business opportunities abroad. Among the Mainland Chinese who came to Nigeria in the 1980s and

²² Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

²³ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, May 24, 2016.

²⁴ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, May 24, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁵ Xu, Interview by author, 2016.

1990s, there were four categories of migrants. The first consisted of early arrivals who mostly had some prior connection to Nigeria, such as relatives who had moved there from Hong Kong many years before.²⁶ For instance, Jieguo Hu, the first Mainland Chinese person to arrive in Nigeria in the immediate wake of China's Reform and Opening-up policies, was invited by his father in 1978.²⁷ Hu's father had known Dr. Cha Chi Ming since the 1950s in Hong Kong and had followed him to Nigeria to help establish UNTL in the 1960s.²⁸ Hu's father later contributed greatly to the opening of diplomatic relations between China and Nigeria in 1971, after which his family was referred to as "Red Fort in Nigeria."²⁹ In recognition of Hu's father's contribution to China's drive for diplomatic recognition around the world, Hu—then a middle-school teacher—was allowed to leave for Nigeria to reunite with his father.³⁰ Similarly, Xinmin Lu, who was born in 1955 and grew up in Shanghai, worked as an engineer in a state-owned factory, but via his family's connections with Chinese-owned factories in Nigeria, he managed to leave for that country in 1992. In his interview with me, he said that most of the Mainland Chinese in the factory he went to work for there were relatives of the Chinese boss.³¹

The second category of Mainland Chinese migrants comprised those who came via introductions from friends or immigration agents. This group mainly came from Shanghai, where in the 1980s people tended to be open-minded about business, and indeed anxious to pursue new lives overseas as a panacea for poverty and all the other ills of their lives. Those who failed to make it to the developed nations frequently chose to move to Nigeria, despite barely knowing

²⁶ Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Xinmin Lu, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 20, 2016; Zhou, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, June 11, 2016; Dashan Long, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, September 22, 2016.

²⁷ Hu, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁸ Hu, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁹ Hu, Interview by author, 2016. "Red Fort in Nigeria" referred to overseas Chinese who contributed to the diplomatic cause of the People's Republic China after 1949.

³⁰ Hu, Interview by author, 2016.

³¹ Lu, Interview by author, 2016.

anything about it.³² Memories of the political upheaval and national isolation of the Mao era led to widespread concern that China might once again shut the gates to emigration at any time. As Jun Feng recalled of the late 1980s,

Many Shanghai people wanted to go abroad. Japan was a popular destination. I was 31 back then and one had to be under 30 to apply for the Japanese visa, so I could not get it. But going abroad was all I had in my mind, and I had no more interest in working [in the factory]. That was in 1988. My schoolmate had gone to Nigeria two years before, and when I remembered this it seemed to me like a good alternative way of going abroad. Via his introduction, I came here [Nigeria]. I knew nothing about Nigeria back then, and I could not speak English, but it was the only way for me to go abroad because I had no other overseas connections. I believed that wherever there were Chinese in foreign countries there would be opportunities for me to survive and live better than in China. A one-way ticket to Nigeria on Air France cost ¥ 7,760, very expensive. I only brought \$40, but I knew things would get better for me. That was the trend then in China.³³

Like Feng, most of this group of Chinese migrants did not have any specific professional plans upon landing in Nigeria, and they therefore ended up working in Chinese-related industries such as Chinese restaurants, hotels, casinos, and factories. In some cases, they planned to come to Nigeria simply as a springboard for immigration to Britain, Canada, or the United States, but failed for financial reasons or because they were cheated by the immigration agents, and so had to stay there.³⁴

The third category consisted of representatives of state-owned Chinese trading companies. Because Chinese traders are now ubiquitous in Nigeria, it is easy to forget that it was state-owned Chinese trading companies that first discovered the Nigerian market for made-in-China manufactured goods in the early 1990s. At that time, private entrepreneurs were allowed to engage in trade within Mainland China, but access to international trade (both export and

³² Yu, Interview by author, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, May 24, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016.

³³ Feng, Interview by author, May 24, 2016.

³⁴ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Guochang Yuan, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 23, 2016.

import) was still in the firm control of the Chinese state.³⁵ Specifically, only state-owned trading firms could obtain permits to export made-in-China goods to foreign markets; and, facing an excess of domestic production capacity and import restrictions from developed countries in the early 1990s, such firms took very seriously their responsibility to develop more overseas markets for Chinese factories.³⁶ However, having no prior links to the broader African markets, many Chinese trading firms dealt with African customers only indirectly. For example, Jiangsu Foreign Trade Corporation (JFTC) initially only exported their hardware made in Jiangsu Province to Dubai, without realizing that it was in strong demand from African customers.³⁷ Later, after participating in several trade fairs in Dubai in the early 1990s, JFTC's management recognized that many of its products' end-users actually came from Africa; and more importantly, that African countries—in contrast to the U.S. and Europe—did not impose quotas or harsh quality restrictions.³⁸ Therefore, JFTC eliminated its Dubai-centered re-exportation process and started to directly trade with African customers, even bringing them to China to meet with Chinese manufacturers.³⁹ As for the Nigerian market specifically, JFTC organized a trade fair at the Eko Hotel in Lagos in 1994, introducing products made in Jiangsu Province including the famous Jincheng Motorcycle.⁴⁰ The next year, JFTC established an overseas office in Lagos to facilitate business with Nigerian and other West African customers. For the remainder of the decade, state-owned Chinese trading firms like JFTC virtually monopolized direct China-Nigeria trade, being the only entities with access both to African markets and to the sources of made-in-China

³⁵ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Yuan, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁶ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Yuan, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁷ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

³⁸ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

³⁹ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

⁴⁰ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

products. Such was its advantage that JFTC only accepted the orders of Nigerian wholesalers if the latter could pay in full in advance, at which point JFTC would send their orders to manufactures in China for production.⁴¹ In the later 1990s, JFTC achieved an astonishingly high profit margin of 100 per cent from their trade with Nigeria. Nigerian customers, on the other hand, put great trust in JFTC due to the latter's state-owned nature and decent quality of products, and they could also profit a lot because of the cheaper price of JFTC's products.⁴²

Starting in 1999, with the liberalization of China's domestic trade system, state-owned trading firms no longer monopolized the access to exporting made-in-China products, and they were soon replaced by the fourth and final category of Mainland Chinese migrants: hundreds of private traders backed by private manufacturers based in China.⁴³ These individuals were soon joined by representatives of state-owned Chinese trading firms who resigned their Nigeria-based posts and started their own businesses there instead. The majority of private Chinese traders in Nigeria came from Zhejiang Province, where private manufacturing and trading were growing very rapidly, and whose industrialists and traders were gaining a reputation as the most entrepreneurial in China.⁴⁴ Before heading for Nigeria in the late 1990s and early 2000s, most migrants in this category had already been pioneering businesspeople in the 1980s and early 1990s, when such activity was still thought of as barely legal. For example, Ms. Yuzhen Huang, who arrived in Nigeria in the early 2000s, had left her job in a local public hospital in Wenzhou some 10 years earlier to go into business with her parents and brothers.⁴⁵ Guochang Yuan, who arrived at Lagos in 1998, had left Wenling in 1979 to start a career as a private trader of shoes,

⁴¹ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

⁴² Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016.

⁴³ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁴ Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Mengxiao Ni, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 19, 2016; Wayne Ma, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 11, 2016; Yuzhen Huang, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 12, 2016.

⁴⁵ Huang, Interview by author, 2016.

which led him to travel to Guangzhou in the far southeast and Urumuqi in the far northwest, as well as most major cities in China.⁴⁶ Others had traveled far beyond China's borders trading in made-in-China products, including to Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Pakistan.⁴⁷ For instance, Ms. Liuqin Zhao, after leaving a state-owned machinery factory in late 1980s to go into business in Shanghai and later in Heilongjiang Province, went to Neryungri, Ussuriysk, and Yakutsk in Russia to sell Chinese products, and left Russia for Nigeria after the collapse of the ruble in 1998.⁴⁸ Ms. Guanghua Feng went to Turkey as a trader in 1994, and then on to Nigeria in 2001, after hearing about the great potential of the Nigerian market.⁴⁹ Whether trading within China or in Russia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, or Africa, these private Chinese traders represented the leading edge of China's economic reform and newfound openness. The evolving web of their trading routes was evidence of their great mobility, entrepreneurial spirit, and pursuit of profits as much as of the increasing global prominence of Chinese manufacturing.

In short, the first two types of Mainland Chinese migrants emerged mainly from the 1980s craze for going abroad, and depended on established employment networks centered on Nigeria-based Hong Kong Chinese industrialists rather than on opening up new areas of business. The latter two categories of Chinese migrants, on the other hand, established a new pattern of China-Nigeria trade. Other types of Chinese migrants, including employees of state-owned construction companies, were relatively few and lacking in social prominence compared to their entrepreneur compatriots.

⁴⁶ Yuan, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁷ Zhao, Interview by author, 2016; Linian Xing et al., Group interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, November 9, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, March 18, 2016; Ni, Interview by author, 2016; Xiaohui Ji, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, August 2, 2016.

⁴⁸ Zhao, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁹ Feng, Interview by author, March 18, 2016.

The Changing Dynamics of the Chinese Community in Nigeria

The influx of Mainland Chinese migration to Nigeria that commenced in the late 1990s has dramatically changed the make-up of the Chinese community there, not least by fostering the formation of a Chinese community in Lagos. This section delves into these changes, and the resultant patterns of influence of this new Chinese presence on Nigeria's economy.

The occupational and geographical structure of the Chinese population in Nigeria has undergone a significant change since the late 1990s. Up to that time, the majority of Chinese migrants in post-independence Nigeria were Hong Kong industrialists, engineers, other professionals, and their relatives;⁵⁰ as such, almost all the Chinese in Nigeria were connected in some way to Chinese-owned factories, and their numbers remained relatively small: with estimates from 1989 through 1996 ranging between 4,000 and 6,000 people.⁵¹ The coming of Mainland Chinese migrants—mainly private traders and independent entrepreneurs—caused the total number of Chinese in Nigeria to increase by nearly 40 times, to 200,000 in the 2010s.⁵² The occupational profiles of the Chinese in Nigeria have also diversified considerably, to include not only factory personnel and private traders, but also restaurant and hotel owners, workers for official infrastructure projects, representatives of state-owned companies, and even sex workers. The geographical origins of Chinese migrants have also changed: from Hong Kong alone to at least ten different provinces of Mainland China.

⁵⁰ Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵¹ Anshan Li, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* (Beijing: Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 1999), 569. According to Li, the number of Chinese in Nigeria was 5,100 in 1996. Guoping Sun recalled that there were about 4,000 Chinese in 1989 in Nigeria including those from Hong Kong, mainland, and Taiwan, and he got the figure from the Chinese embassy in Lagos. Other senior Chinese in Nigeria also recalled the number was about 6,000 in early 1990s.

⁵² Xinfeng Li, "On the Number of Overseas Chinese in Africa," Article, *Africa Forum at Institute of West-Asian and African Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, February 5, 2013, http://iwaas.cssn.cn/xslt/fzlt/201508/t20150831_2609329.shtml. Accessed on October 11, 2017.

The vastly increased number and occupational diversity of Nigeria's Chinese population led to the formation of the first Chinese communities in Lagos, Kano, and other major cities. Intra-ethnic communication and contacts also increased, as compared to the prevailing situation of the 1960s through the mid 1990s, when most Hong Kong Chinese barely set foot outside their factories; and to even speak of a national-level Chinese community in that period is probably mistaken.

Mainland Chinese entrepreneurs, in contrast, routinely looked beyond their factories, stores, warehouses, restaurants, companies, and apartments to mingle with other Chinese, seeking opportunities for cooperation, the accumulation of social capital, and business deals. In Lagos, these patterns of frequent interaction promoted the formation of four Chinese neighborhoods, complete with service industries, associations, newspapers, and well-organized cultural activities. The first of these neighborhoods formed in Ikeja, mainly of Chinese factory owners and employees from both Hong Kong and the Mainland. Second, the Lagos Island/Victoria Island area attracted Chinese diplomats, wealthy private traders, and representatives of state-owned and large private Chinese companies. Third, a few hundred Chinese traders gathered together inside the China Town Shopping Complex in the Ojota area, beginning in the early 2000s. And fourth, the most recently arrived Chinese traders have tended to cluster in the town of Festac, in the western part of Lagos near the Trade Fair Complex, the largest wholesale market in Nigeria. These Chinese residential areas are all served by Mainland Chinese-owned services including restaurants, supermarkets, hotels, karaoke clubs, casinos, and houses of prostitution. As well as serving their stated purposes, such venues have emerged as key places of social interaction and business negotiation.

Mainland Chinese migrants have also organized a range of national clubs and associations, including the West Africa and Nigeria Overseas Chinese Joint Association and the Nigeria Chinese Business Association, as well as more specialized groups for younger businesspeople, women, timber merchants, wigmakers, and people originally from Fujian, Shandong, and Zhejiang, among other categories. Two Chinese newspapers—*West Africa Business Weekly* and *Voice of China (West Africa) Weekly*—were both established in the 2000s and are widely distributed in Nigeria, serving Chinese migrants’ needs for information about both Nigeria and China. To mark major traditional Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and China’s National Day, as well as the anniversaries of some Chinese associations, large-scale cultural activities are organized by the Chinese community.

Not unexpectedly, these dramatic structural changes in the Chinese population of Nigeria have led to changes in the patterns of Chinese influence on the local economy and people. From the 1960s down to the mid 1990s, when almost all Chinese migrants were concentrated in the manufacturing sector, their influence on the Nigerian economy and people’s lives was largely invisible. First, despite producing more than half the enamelware, textiles, and slippers purchased by Nigerian consumers, Nigeria-based Chinese factories remained physically distant from the country’s major population centers, and their products carried few or no Chinese associations: being marked “Made in Nigeria”, distributed by Nigerian wholesalers, sold by Nigerian retailers, and in the specific case of enamelware, even conceptualized as part of Nigerian tradition. This appears to have been part of a conscious strategy by Hong Kong Chinese of concentrating their capital in upstream manufacturing industries and leaving the middle and downstream industries to Nigerian partners, which enabled them to maintain long-term

harmonious relations with local business communities.⁵³ And second, despite employing thousands of Nigerian workers, the influence of Chinese factories as employers was limited to the adjoining villages and towns. Large-scale Chinese-owned factories like UNTL directly employed up to 10,000 Nigerian workers, and smaller ones between 500 and 2,000, but they remained mere names to people from other districts or states.

As a result of the large Mainland influx that began in the late 1990s, the visibility of Nigeria's Chinese population has become much greater, as well as more controversial. Chinese wholesalers have been distributing their goods to Nigerian traders, Chinese retailers selling products directly to Nigerian consumers, and Chinese restaurants welcoming Nigerian customers. Moreover, instead of offering a limited number of product types like their Hong Kong predecessors, Mainland Chinese traders now deal in made-in-China goods aimed at nearly every aspect of Nigerians' lives, in larger quantities and at cheaper prices. Made-in-China textiles, electronics, toys, household utensils, motorcycles, and other products quickly swept the Nigerian market and became essential components of Nigerian consumers' lifestyles. This increased profile—especially in wholesaling and retailing—has rendered the Chinese presence a controversial issue.⁵⁴ In extreme cases, private Chinese traders traveled to Nigeria to investigate the market, identified the best-selling textiles, sent samples of them back to China to imitate and manufacture, imported the resulting cloth into Nigeria, and distributed it to other Chinese traders or even opened their own shops to sell directly to Nigerian customers, thus not only hitting the profits of Nigerian manufacturers, but also cutting Nigerian importers, wholesalers, and retailers out of the China-Nigeria trade.⁵⁵ Such short-sighted behavior greatly disrupted the market and

⁵³ S. F. Lee, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Zhou, Interview by author, 2016; Shu Men Ho, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 27, 2016; Francis Huang and Joseph Huang, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Hong Kong, November 28, 2016.

⁵⁴ Lee, Interview by author, 2014; Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Ni, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁵ Lee, Interview by author, 2014; Xue, Interview by author, March 19, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Ni, Interview by

hurt the interests of many Nigerian businesspeople, and for that reason was also looked down upon by Nigeria-based Chinese manufacturers and other traders as having brought shame to the whole Chinese community.⁵⁶

Old China versus New China: The Collapse of UNTL and the Nigerian Textile Industry

Sudden changes in the patterns of Chinese influence in Nigeria also led to friction between the early wave of Hong Kong Chinese industrialists and later migrants from the Mainland. With the opening of the Nigerian market to the world and the meteoric rise of China's export-oriented manufacturing industry in the 1990s, all sectors of the Nigerian economy felt the impact of the importation of huge quantities of made-in-China products, but it was the manufacturing sector that suffered the most. Nigeria-based Chinese-owned factories, which were among the most competitive in the country, were at the forefront of the fight against these cheap foreign imports, and were hit just as badly as their Nigerian counterparts. This section traces the collapse of the Chinese-owned textile factories and of the wider Nigerian textile industry, and goes on to explore both the chronic internal problems of the Nigerian economy and the serious external challenges represented by Mainland Chinese traders and their products.

Following a decades-long decline, the Nigerian textile industry reached a state of total collapse at the turn of the twenty-first century, when Chinese traders and made-in-China textiles made their way into the Nigerian market simultaneously and quickly came to dominate it. Within two years of Nigeria joining the WTO and liberalizing the importation of textile materials, 31 textile factories closed down.⁵⁷ By 2007, 160 out of the 170 remaining textile factories in

author, 2016.

⁵⁶ Lee, Interview by author, 2014; Ho, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, 2016; Ni, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵⁷ Olanrewaju, "The State of the Industry."

Nigeria had shut down, having lost 80 per cent of the textile market to imported goods from China and other Asian countries; and the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) also lost nearly half its members.⁵⁸ In the same year, the closure of UNTL, the largest textile factory in Nigeria and the last to survive in Kaduna State, emblemized the total collapse of the Nigerian textile industry—not least because it had survived and prospered for so long amid the adverse conditions that had led to the decline and fall of so many of its competitors.⁵⁹ As Issa Aremu, the former Vice President of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), commented pessimistically in a newspaper report on UNTL's closure, the company's history was one of

industry, productivity and quality prints, investment, positive economic climate, industrial policy consistency, mass employment, training and skills acquisition, research and development, market, consumption, communities (Kakuri, Trikania and Nasarawa) and value adding activities in general. An end to that robust industrial history means an end to history of enterprise in Nigeria.⁶⁰

Many scholars and journalists blamed China for Nigeria's de-industrialization in general and the collapse of the Nigerian textile industry in particular.⁶¹ China was accused of pursuing a policy of de-industrialization via its traders in Lagos' Chinatown, and of turning Nigeria into a dumping ground for made-in-China products.⁶² Chief Michael Adeayo, an executive of the Nigerian Textile Manufacturers' Association (NTMA), said that China had already destroyed the

⁵⁸ Hamisu Muhammad, "Nigeria: Country Loses 160 Textile Companies," *Daily Trust*, May 2, 2007, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200705020253.html>; "Nigeria: Country's Industrial Sector Collapse," *Daily Trust*, May 11, 2007; Reuben Buhari, "Kaduna Textiles, Last of the Titans, Lays Prostrate," *This Day*, October 15, 2007.

⁵⁹ Musa Simon Reef, "UNTL Closure Spells Doom for Thousands of Families -Lukman," *Daily Trust*, October 14, 2007; Buhari, "Kaduna Textiles, Last of the Titans, Lays Prostrate."

⁶⁰ Issa Aremu, "UNTL Closure and the End of History," *Daily Trust*, October 8, 2007; Issa Aremu, *Reflections on Industry and Economy* (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press Limited, 2015), 127.

⁶¹ Adeola Daramola, "From China with Fakes," *The News*, September 27, 2004; Ebere Nwoji, "Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities," *Daily Champion*, April 5, 2005; Godfrey Bivbere and Tina Anthony, "Asian Firms Grounds Nigerian Textile Industry," *Vanguard*, October 12, 2005; Aremu, "UNTL Closure and the End of History"; Sola Akinrinade and Olukoya Ogen, "Globalization and De-Industrialization: South-South Neo-Liberalism and the Collapse of the Nigerian Textile Industry," *The Global South* 2, no. 2 (2008): 159–170; Vanguard Reporters, "Product Dumping - How Asians Are Killing Made-in-Nigeria Goods," *Vanguard*, April 2, 2012; Sanusi Lamido, "Development or De-Industrialisation - A New Look At Chinese Engagement With Africa," *Vanguard*, March 19, 2013; Aremu, *Reflections on Industry and Economy*.

⁶² Akinrinade and Ogen, "Globalization and De-Industrialization"; Lamido, "Development or De-Industrialisation - A New Look at Chinese Engagement With Africa."

European and U.S. markets and was now targeting Nigeria and “ready for the ‘kill’.”⁶³ However, Aremu’s comments in *Daily Trust* may best illustrate Nigerians’ perceptions of China’s threat to their manufacturing industries at this time:

In fact the real industrial challenge for Nigeria is *China, China and China*. We must be romantic as well as strategic about China [...] Nigeria needs Chinese factories NOT ‘China Towns’ selling China-made products via Nigerian traders.⁶⁴

In fact, such traders and products were merely the last straw leading to the industry’s collapse, rather than the primary cause, for it had been on a path of decline and crisis from the late 1970s onwards. As discussed in Chapter Two, from the 1970s down to the early 1990s, reductions in the overall range of governmental support, poor provision of electricity, water, and fuel oils, a steep decline in cotton production, smuggling through the country’s porous borders, and the unwillingness of most factories to modernize their equipment or improve product quality worked together to derail Nigeria’s textile industry. Moreover, Nigeria opened its textile market to external competition without even attempting to address these problems first, leaving its domestic manufacturers defenseless against more efficient Chinese competitors. No longer protected by import restrictions in an increasingly globalized and liberalized trade order, Nigeria’s textile factories were totally defeated.

The multiple roles that China and Chinese people played in Nigeria’s industrialization and deindustrialization processes have generally been overlooked, or misunderstood: reduced to a simple affair of made-in-China goods and Mainland Chinese traders. Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists were key players in Nigerian industrialization from independence onward, and remained competitive down to the late 1990s despite major changes in the country’s political

⁶³ Nwoji, “Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities.”

⁶⁴ Aremu, “UNTL Closure and the End of History”; Aremu, *Reflections on Industry and Economy*, 130.

economy. Yet, the indiscriminate negative influence of their fellow Chinese traders hurt them as badly as it did non-Chinese manufacturers. In addition to UNTL, Chinese-owned factories including SPECO Mill, Universal Steel, Northern Enamelware, Grand Enamelware, were ruined. As many Chinese migrants in Nigeria commented, in the “war” between Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists and newly arrived Mainland Chinese traders, “it was the [new] Chinese who defeated the [old] Chinese.”⁶⁵

From the perspective of Nigerian textile workers, China also had two different images. On the one hand, the Chinese industrialists and engineers who worked alongside them in the factories were considered friendly and diligent; they brought job opportunities to Nigerians, and strove to produce the best quality textiles for the market.⁶⁶ On the other, the Mainland Chinese brought unemployment by pirating the designs of Nigeria-based textile factories, manufacturing copycat versions back in China, importing them into the Nigerian market and undercutting the originators.⁶⁷ As James Elaigwe, a senior Nigerian textile worker who was with UNTL for more than 30 years, explained:

You know China they are the one who brought the company here to Nigeria, and they are the one who want to kill the company [...]. I like the old China who build the factory here, not the new China who brought goods from China. The old China provide Nigerians something, opportunity to work. But to carry [goods] come, no correct. Make factory and machine, that is correct.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ M. L. Lee and S. F. Lee, Group Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, July 21, 2014; Xue, Interview by author, July 23, 2014; Hu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁶ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 16, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, Notes taking, Kaduna, Nigeria, July 10, 2016; Gabriel Julius, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 15, 2016.

⁶⁷ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Anyebe Daniel, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁸ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016.

Suffering and Adjustment: The Lives of Textile Workers

The most visible and immediate impact of the collapse of the Nigerian textile industry in the 2000s was the laying-off of thousands of textile workers. In its most prosperous years in the 1970s, nearly 200 textile factories employed more than one million workers, but by 2007 the total size of Nigeria's textile workforce had dwindled to just 20,000.⁶⁹ In the case of UNTL, which alone had employed more than 10,000 workers as recently as the 1990s,⁷⁰ closure meant a sudden cutting off of the incomes of all its workers and their families. Based on newspaper reports and oral-history interviews, this section explores how former UNTL workers coped with this adverse situation in the 2000s.

Many textile workers suffered after their factories were closed. Some major textile firms, including KTL and ATL, failed to provide their workers with any severance pay, leaving them at a severe disadvantage when it came to starting their own businesses or even just searching for other waged work.⁷¹ Many soon died; others had to become *Okada* (commercial motorcyclists) or security guards on low salaries, or live on the proceeds of small businesses run by their wives.⁷² And despite having planned to stay in Kaduna for their retirement, many were forced to return to their home states to take up farming.⁷³ Some junior workers even resorted to crime.⁷⁴

Even those textile workers (including UNTL's) who were given decent severance packages based on their level and length of service sometimes found the transition difficult.

⁶⁹ Sani Babadoko, "The Death of Northern Textiles," *Daily Trust*, October 14, 2007.

⁷⁰ "United Nigerian Textiles Limited Annual Report & Accounts 1992" (Kaduna, Nigeria, 1993).

⁷¹ Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 8, 2016.

⁷² Akinrinade and Ogen, "Globalization and De-Industrialization"; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author; Kassim Garba, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 18, 2016; James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Garba Morison, Interview by author, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷³ Babadoko, "The Death of Northern Textiles"; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 16, 2016.

⁷⁴ Babadoko, "The Death of Northern Textiles."

Some UNTL workers chose to start their own business, but the majority of this group soon lost their capital.⁷⁵ For example, William Alege bought some vehicles and established a transportation business connecting Lagos, Kaduna, and Maiduguri, but it soon failed due to his lack of experience and the negative economic environment.⁷⁶ Other workers chose to invest in land and built houses for both residential and commercial use, which proved to be safer and more rewarding than starting businesses or buying shares.⁷⁷ For instance, Frederick Abah used 1.5 millions of his 2.1 million naira severance to build a large compound with 18 rooms near Kaduna City in 2007; since then, he has lived on a combination of rent from the house and support from his children, with no other sources of income.⁷⁸

With the shutting down of UNTL, experienced senior workers' expectations of leisured retirements with stable pensions were shattered. Their pension rights disappeared with the closure, and the lump sums they received as severance were far too low to sustain their previous middle-class lifestyles. Most UNTL workers, even those who invested their severance wisely in building rental properties, experienced rapid declines in their living standards. With incomes that were no longer either large or stable, they could not own cars, live in multi-bedroom flats, or pay their younger children's school fees, and had to depend on their older children's support.⁷⁹ Having once been envied by their peers in the civil service or state-owned enterprises for their

⁷⁵ Gabriel Julius, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 9, 2016; Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016.

⁷⁶ Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁷ James Elaigwe, 1st Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Frederick Abah, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 23, 2016; Abu Musa Saamga, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 29, 2016.

⁷⁸ Frederick Abah, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁹ Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Joseph Adacha, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 17, 2016; Edward Obasemhe, Interview by author, digital recording, Kaduna, Nigeria, October 18, 2016.

high and regularly paid salaries, UNTL workers' advantages quickly dissolved and the position reversed. As Mr. Jamieson, who worked at UNTL for 35 years, recalled:

One of my classmates at Kaduna Polytechnic, he was also with me at UNTL in the first place, but later he chose to quit and then joined NNPC. Look at him, he has a better life: good pay, good houses, good pension, great lifestyle. But me, I don't have pension, I have to depend on my children.⁸⁰

Such profound gaps between their peers and themselves, as well as between their own past and present living situations, led to feelings of deep disappointment and regret regarding their whole lives in the textile industry. Having devoted all their time, energy, and even physical health to textile manufacturing over several decades, most had not learned any skills that were not directly related to their jobs.⁸¹ Unlike farming, handicrafts, or general business skills, the professional knowledge they had so painstakingly acquired turned out to be totally useless when the Nigerian textile industry all but disappeared. As one senior worker put it, "there was no future in textile. If I die, my ghost can never allow my children to work for textile."⁸²

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of increasingly liberalized international trade and a globalized world economy in the 1990s and 2000s, economic relations between China and Nigeria reached an unprecedented level. On the one hand, Nigeria opened its markets to foreign competition to fulfill promises it had made during the Uruguay Round of WTO negotiations, despite its domestic manufacturers being ill-prepared for the coming impact of cheap imports. On the other, manufacturers in China on the fast track of export-oriented industrial development eagerly

⁸⁰ Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸¹ Mr. Patrick, Interview by author, 2016; Sadiq Musa, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Jamieson, Interview by author, 2016; Williams Alege, Interview by author, 2016; Sani Maliki, Interview by author, 2016; Steven, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸² Muhammed Abu, Interview by author, 2016.

sought overseas markets beyond their traditional ones in the United States, Europe, and Southeast Asia. The newly unprotected Nigerian market thus emerged as an ideal destination for made-in-China products.

Mainland Chinese firms and individual entrepreneurs pioneered new forms of trade between Nigeria and China. The state-owned Chinese trading firms, initially quite unaware of the enormous potential of Nigeria as an export market, dealt with their Nigerian customers indirectly, by exporting their products to Dubai. As their knowledge of the purchasing power of Nigerians increased, however, these state-owned trading firms cut out the middlemen and began selling directly to Nigerian wholesalers, even bringing some to China to meet with Chinese manufacturers. Later, when China fully liberalized its economic systems and dissolved many state-owned trading firms in the late 1990s, thousands of private Chinese traders stepped into the gap.

The coming of a large, diverse, often self-employed population of Mainland Chinese fundamentally changed the structure of Nigeria's Chinese community and dramatically transformed its patterns of influence. The early wave of Chinese industrialists and workers had overwhelmingly remained within Nigeria's manufacturing sector, barely emerging from their factories and factory-owned housing developments, and manufactured a narrow range of products, chiefly enamelware, textiles, and slippers. In addition to being more numerous and thus more visible, the new Mainland Chinese migrants were also characterized by their higher mobility; and the immensely greater variety of the goods that they sold had an altogether more pervasive influence upon the Nigerian economy and the livelihoods of Nigerian consumers, workers, industrialists, and traders. Among those Nigerians who were impacted by these changes, those in the textile industry suffered the most. Despite accelerating the demise of the

Nigerian textile industry, however, the coming of Chinese traders and made-in-China products were a proximate rather than an underlying cause of that industry's collapse. The main problem lay in the decades-long ignorance of manufacturing problems and solutions on the part of successive Nigerian governments.

Nigerian textile workers, even those UNTL workers who had enjoyed generous salaries and middle-class lifestyle from the 1960s to the mid 1990s, had great difficulty adjusting to their industry's collapse. Ironically, the job opportunities and upward mobility that Nigerian workers received from one group of Chinese businesspeople was terminated by another such group who arrived 30 to 40 years later. China's changing image among Nigerians, the controversies surrounding cheap Chinese imports, and the all-around influence of Chinese people upon Nigerian socio-economic life from the late 1990s onward will be further illustrated in the next chapter, via a case study of China Town in Lagos.

CHAPTER 6

BETWEEN THE NIGERIAN STATE AND CONSUMERS: THE RISE AND FALL OF CHINA TOWN IN LAGOS

China Shopping Complex Lagos, commonly known as China Town,¹ has been Nigeria's most visible symbol of Mainland Chinese migrancy and of its broader Chinese community since the late 1990s. Together with the Chinese traders and made-in-China products inside it, China Town has constituted a microcosm of the changing image of China and the Chinese, the controversies about such traders and products, and the shifting relation between Chinese migrants and the Nigerian state. Based on Nigerian newspaper reports and oral-history interviews with Chinese migrants and Nigerian traders, consumers, and workers, this chapter will delve into the rise and decline of China Town; its influence upon Nigeria; and its role as a locus of interactions between migrants and the state.

First, I will argue that the Nigerian federal, state, and local governments played contradictory roles in the rise and fall of Lagos' China Town. On the one hand, Nigerian government officials' acquiescence, and even participation, in both legal and illegal importation of made-in-China products created a legally loose and economically profitable space for Mainland Chinese traders and helped drive the prosperity of China Town in the early 2000s. On the other, the increasingly negative influence of Chinese traders upon local manufacturing industries and controversies over sub-standard made-in-China products in Nigerian markets frequently pushed federal and local officials to force temporary closures of China Town, and this gradually led to its decline. I will also argue that Nigerian traders' and consumers' perspectives on substandard made-in-China products differed sharply from those of the Nigerian state and

¹ China Shopping Complex Lagos was first established at Ikoyi in 1999, and then relocated to Ojota in 2003. Both Chinese and Nigerians referred to China Shopping Complex Lagos as China Town, and it has been thus far the only China Town in Nigeria.

manufacturers. Specifically, local traders' decisions to keep dealing with Chinese importers, coupled with local consumers' demand for cheaper products irrespective of quality, ultimately undermined all efforts by Nigerian officials to contain or reverse Chinese products' domination of the Nigerian market. Lastly, I will explore employment relationships between Chinese traders and Nigerian employees within China Town and argue that these should not simply be reduced to binary categories of "Chinese" and "Nigerian" but instead be understood as varying with the personalities, management styles, and language skills of the Chinese traders.

I chose China Town in Lagos as the focus of this chapter for several reasons. First, it was the single largest Chinese commercial and residential community in Nigeria in the late 1990s and early 2000s. At the outset of that period, the Chinese population in Nigeria was estimated at between 4,000 and 6,000,² widely dispersed, but mostly in major cities: Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, and Port Harcourt. The coming of Mainland Chinese traders led to a dramatic increase in the Chinese population, with Lagos China Town alone hosting more than 1,000 Chinese traders, and thus becoming both the largest and the densest Chinese community in Nigeria at the turn of the millennium.³ Second, Lagos China Town represented a major structural change in Chinese migration to Nigeria starting in the late 1990s: with Mainland Chinese traders taking the baton from their Hong Kong Chinese compatriots who had mainly been involved in manufacturing. Third, China Town emerged in the early 2000s as the major business and information center among Chinese migrants, with even those who traded outside it, or who worked in the manufacturing and service sectors, often choosing China Town as their first stop in Nigeria to

² Anshan Li, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* (Beijing: Chinese Overseas Publishing House, 1999). According to Li, the number of Chinese in Nigeria was 5,100 in 1996. Guoping Sun recalled that there were about 4,000 Chinese in 1989 in Nigeria including those from Hong Kong, mainland, and Taiwan, and he got the figure from the Chinese embassy in Lagos. Other senior Chinese in Nigeria also recalled the number was about 6,000 in early 1990s.

³ Guoping Sun, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 27, 2016; Qirui Yu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 30, 2016.

gather information.⁴ Last but not least, China Town became the most visible symbol of the Chinese presence in Nigeria, to the point of becoming almost a synonym for China in major Nigerian newspapers in the 2000s. As such, the case of China Town is pivotal to any clear understanding of the new wave of Mainland Chinese migrants that began in the 1990s, and how this group interacted with Nigerian officials, traders, manufacturers, and consumers.

The Rise of China Town in Lagos

The existing scholarly literature on the contemporary Chinese presence in African countries mainly focuses on Chinese traders' practices and their influence on African societies; social and cultural differences between Chinese and Africans; and African perceptions of Chinese people and Chinese goods.⁵ However, most such studies have treated the dominance of made-in-China products in modern Africa as a *fait accompli* and have failed to examine the gradual rise of these products in either its historical or global context. This section historicizes the processes that made popular Chinese products in West Africa.

As discussed in Chapter Five, Nigeria opened its markets to foreign competition to fulfill promises it had made upon joining the WTO in the mid 1990s; and at the same time, China's Reform and Opening Up policies had placed it on the fast track of export-oriented industrial development. Mainland Chinese manufacturers, encountering barriers to their goods in many of

⁴ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Liuqing Zhao, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 9, 2016; Linian Xing et al., Group interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, November 9, 2016.

⁵ Sola Akinrinade and Olukoya Ogen, "Globalization and De-Industrialization: South-South Neo-Liberalism and the Collapse of the Nigerian Textile Industry," *The Global South* 2, no. 2 (2008): 159–170; Jing Jing Liu, "Contact and Identity: The Experience of 'China Goods' in a Ghanaian Marketplace," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20, no. 3 (2010): 184–201, <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1028>; Linn. Axelsson, "Making Borders: Engaging the Threat of Chinese Textiles in Ghana" (Stockholm University, 2012); Conal Ho, "Living in Liminality: Chinese Migrancy in Ghana" (University of California, Santa Cruz, 2012); G. Mohan and B. Lampert, "Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China-Africa Relations," *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (January 1, 2013): 92–110, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads065>; Laurence Marfaing and Alena Thiel, "The Impact of Chinese Business on Market Entry in Ghana AND Senegal," *Africa* 83, no. 04 (November 2013): 646–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972013000491>; Karsten Giese and Alena Thiel, "The Vulnerable Other – Distorted Equity in Chinese–Ghanaian Employment Relations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37, no. 6 (May 12, 2014): 1101–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.681676>.

the developed nations, were eager to find new outlets; and the newly opened and unprotected Nigerian market thus emerged as an ideal destination. However, despite the arrival of some made-in-China products and a limited number of state-owned Chinese trading firms in Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the majority of Nigerian consumers and even many Nigerian traders at that time were more familiar with cheap imported goods from Dubai than those from Mainland China.⁶ Indeed, until the late 1990s, there were no direct trading connections between China and Nigeria, and Dubai served as an entrepôt connecting the two countries.⁷ As it was mainly Nigerian traders who brought back made-in-China goods from Dubai, the Chinese presence in Nigeria—especially as traders—was barely noticed by most Nigerians. In other words, made-in-China products had already come to occupy a great chunk of the market long before many Chinese faces were seen there, and Nigerians initially made few mental connections between the emergence of such products and China or the Chinese. As Guoping Sun, the founder of Lagos China Town, recalled of his time in Nigeria in the early 1990s,

Our [Chinese] products had taken 70 per cent of the [Lagos] market back then, including textiles, shoes, hats, electronics, and household containers, but they were not well displayed. [Chinese] [h]ousehold containers were sold in one market, electronics in another market, furniture in another market, and textiles in another market; you simply could not tell it was our product. Our products had the market, but we did not have a good platform to show them. The different markets here [in Lagos], they were not managed by Chinese, and made-in-China products were not introduced or sold by Chinese. Our manufacturers and traders were isolated from the Nigerian market, and technicians and managers in Chinese factories did not even know that their products were sold in Nigeria.⁸

⁶ Adenowo Jane, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 5, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 7, 2016; Onyechachi Ndukwe, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 9, 2016; Olufajude Juliana, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 11, 2016; Xiaoming Xue, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 19, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷ Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Ndukwe, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸ Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

With the formation of direct trading links between China and Nigeria, the liberalization of China's external trade, and Nigeria's lifting of importation bans in the mid 1990s, private Mainland Chinese manufacturers and traders started to look into the possibility of exporting to Nigeria. However, West Africa remained a remote and mysterious place to the majority of Chinese in the 1990s, and there was very little information in China about Nigeria's politics, economy, legal system, or business environment. The major sources of such information were individual pioneers: representatives of state-owned Chinese trading firms who had left the public sector and started their own businesses in Nigeria; Chinese who had emigrated to Nigeria on the basis of their private overseas connections; and Chinese employees of Nigeria-based Hong Kong Chinese factories. Among these, Sun was arguably the most dedicated to establishing a platform for made-in-China products in Nigeria and attracting large numbers of Chinese traders to the country. His ambition of creating an exclusively Chinese marketplace in Nigeria—Lagos China Town—and his advertisements for the market potential of Nigeria dovetailed neatly with the needs of Chinese manufacturers and traders in need of new markets and information about them.

In 1999, Sun rented a five-story building in Ikoyi, Lagos at the cost of US\$24,000 per year, and transformed it into a shopping complex with showrooms, warehouse space, and living quarters.⁹ The 80 retail spaces, all on the ground floor, had 24 square meters of floor space apiece; and the four remaining floors contained a total of 46 renovated apartments for Chinese traders.¹⁰ During the preparation of this site, Sun did not merely wait for Chinese traders and products to come, but traveled back to China to promote it, citing Nigeria's huge market potential.¹¹ In early 2000, Sun convened a two-day conference for potential investors at the

⁹ Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Jieguo Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 31, 2016.

¹⁰ Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

Xinxing Hotel in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province,¹² sending out more than 1,600 invitations to manufacturers and traders in Jiangsu and Zhejiang, and engaging Mr. Li—retired chief reporter for the Xinhua News Agency in West Africa—as his co-host. Li gave a lecture on West Africa’s general political, economic, and cultural situation, while Sun mainly introduced the Nigerian market and trade.¹³ The event received an enthusiastic response from its attendees, representatives of more than 300 separate manufacturing and trading enterprises, who were eager to obtain information about the Nigerian market.¹⁴

The effects of Sun’s conference were almost immediate: with hundreds of Chinese manufacturers and traders electing to leave for Nigeria, and to select China Town in Ikoyi as their base.¹⁵ Within six months, all 80 showrooms and all 46 apartments had been rented out, and many Chinese traders who had been unable to secure a commercial space in China Town chose to rent one nearby, sometimes even in an alley between shops.¹⁶ The initiative’s promise was then quickly confirmed, as the made-in-China goods sold in China Town—seen locally as offering a reasonable quality at lower-than-expected prices—quickly swept the Nigerian market. For instance, made-in-China lace fabric, which was often used to make traditional Nigerian dress, was only half or even a quarter as expensive as its made-in-Nigeria equivalent, despite the quality of both being roughly the same, at least at first glance.¹⁷ The sharply lower prices of made-in-China products led Nigerian traders to treat China Town’s tenants as wholesalers, and to rush to buy from them in bulk. Sometimes, the goods in newly arrived containers were sold

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Guanghua Feng, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 18, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016.

¹⁶ Monday A. Charles, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 9, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Qi An, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 14, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁷ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Mohammed Shosanya, “This Is China Town Where Products Are Cheap,” *Daily Trust*, February 8, 2009.

before any of them could be placed in the shops.¹⁸ This did not mean, however, that the Chinese traders' own profit margins were not also high. In the early 2000s, China Town tenants who imported one container of lace fabrics at a cost of US\$100,000 could make a net profit of US\$100,000, after taking into account all relevant expenses including customs duties, other fees, and transportation.¹⁹

Despite its obvious appeal to both Mainland Chinese manufacturers/traders and Nigerian wholesalers/retailers, however, residents of Lagos Island frequently complained about China Town due to the high noise levels associated with transporting containers at night, and the traffic jams that were created by thousands of traders coming and going.²⁰ Moreover, the initial capacity of China Town eventually failed to meet Chinese traders' growing needs for space. In Sun's words, "shops were in short supply, apartments in short supply, warehouses in short supply, and made-in-China products in short supply."²¹

This situation drove Sun to establish a new and bigger China Town shopping complex in Ojota, Lagos, and to relocate all his existing Chinese tenants to it in 2003 (see Figs. 18 and 19). This time, however, instead of renting an existing building, Sun spent US\$1.8 million buying the land and built the new China Town himself, on the outskirts of Ikeja along the Third Axial Road to Lagos Island.²² In addition to 300 shops, 100 apartments, and several warehouses, Sun built a Chinese hotel with more than 50 guest rooms, a Chinese restaurant capable of catering for all the center's Chinese residents as well as hosting large parties, a Chinese grocery store, a Chinese clinic, a barbershop, and entertainment facilities including a Karaoke bar and game rooms.²³ In

¹⁸ Wayne Ma, Interview by author, Lagos, Nigeria, digital recording, May 11, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁹ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁰ Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

²¹ Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

²² Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Charles, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016.

²³ Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

short, the new China Town comprised a much more diverse portfolio of business, living, and entertainment facilities than the old one, enabling it to meet almost every day-to-day need of its Chinese business community.



Figure 18: Main Gate of China Town, Ojota, Lagos. Photo by the author, May 13, 2016.



Figure 19: China Town in Ojota, Lagos. Photo by the author, May 2, 2016.

Moreover, despite its much larger size, the new China Town was tenanted to full capacity almost immediately after it was established, just like its older counterpart in Ikoyi. Some spaces were rented while still under construction, and all annexes outside the shops as well as alley spaces were also rapidly snapped up, in some cases by Nigerian traders.²⁴ Even for Nigerian retailers and small wholesalers who could only afford a small space outside the complex from which to resell items bought from the Chinese traders inside, profits could still be very considerable. For example, a Mrs. Bandms, who had little capital, started a business in the early 2000s by buying textiles from Chinese traders on credit, and repaying them out of her sales receipts. She told me that, on an average day, she had been able to sell five bills of guinea cloth (about 2,250 yards) at a profit of 25,000 naira, or roughly US\$250 at the 2004 exchange rate.²⁵

²⁴ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016.

²⁵ Mrs. Bandms, Interview by author, Lagos, Nigeria, digital recording, May 10, 2016. First name not given.

As she recalled: “the market was so good and I wanted to laugh every day, and I thanked God for this.”²⁶

In short, the establishment of China Town in Ikoyi and its subsequent expansion and relocation to Ojota created Nigeria’s first Chinese-owned marketplace, and its first site at which Chinese traders sold made-in-China goods in high volumes. This was a profound change from the previous situation, in which made-in-China items were sold in small quantities in widely dispersed markets by Nigerian traders, who obtained them indirectly via trade with Dubai. In China Town, therefore, Chinese products, traders, and trading practices could be seen for the first time as a single entity, which perhaps unsurprisingly became emblematic of the Chinese presence in Nigeria.

Behind the Prosperity: China Town and the Nigerian State

As discussed above, the broader context of Nigeria opening its markets and China’s eagerness to find new ones in an increasingly liberalized global economy paved the way for the coming of made-in-China products; and the early Chinese arrivals in Nigeria established a bridgehead for direct China-Nigeria trade via transnational Chinese information networks. Thereafter, made-in-China goods dominated the Nigerian market due to their combination of adequate quality and much lower prices. In addition to the above factors, this section will explore some underlying reasons for the meteoric rise of Lagos China Town, and argue that the shared interests of Chinese traders and the Nigerian state engendered a framework of political support that was essential to the prosperity of China Town in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

²⁶ Mrs. Bandms, 2016.

First, in the initial four to five years of its existence, China Town's management maintained good relations with high-level Nigerian political leaders. For example, China Town founder Sun had been a good friend of Bola Tinubu, Governor of Lagos State from 1999 to 2007, even before the latter became a politician: becoming his tenant on arrival in Lagos in 1989, and subsequently his business partner.²⁷ In the early 1990s, Sun and Tinubu formed Sino-Nigeria Mechanical Equipment Ltd. to import Chinese machinery into Nigeria, with Tinubu serving as chairman and Sun as general manager.²⁸ Then, in 1993, Sun and Tinubu joined forces again, to establish a salt factory with the participation of state-owned Chinese firms; but Tinubu's campaign for election to the Nigerian Senate and his subsequent exile after the military takeover of 1994 totally ruined their nascent businesses.²⁹ In 1999, however, Tinubu became the 12th Governor of Lagos State, and in the same year the first Lagos China Town was established in Ikoyi. There is no evidence indicating Tinubu's participation in the China Town enterprise, but his friendship remained a valuable political resource for Sun. Moreover, Sun was widely seen as having obtained the official endorsement of the Nigerian federal government when, on March 10, 2005, then-First Lady Stella Obasanjo formally inaugurated the new China Town in Ojota (see Fig. 20).³⁰

²⁷ Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ufomba Uzuegbu, "Stella Obasanjo Commissions Ojota Chinese Shopping Complex," *Daily Champion*, March 14, 2005; Ebere Nwoji, "Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities," *Daily Champion*, April 5, 2005; "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule," *This Day*, May 20, 2005; Shosanya, "This Is China Town Where Products Are Cheap"; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.



Figure 20: A Tablet at the Main Gate of China Town in Ojota, Recording its Official Opening by the Late Stella Obasanjo. Photo by the Author, May 4, 2016.

The second underlying reason for Lagos China Town's rapid rise was that many of its Chinese traders and some Nigerian government officials formed a community of shared interests via smuggling, "grey" customs clearance, and bribery. Smuggling of foreign goods had always taken place in Nigeria, but the coming of Chinese traders and made-in-China products increased its scale. There were two major avenues for smuggling such products into Nigeria: a southern route from the free port of Cotonou in Benin across the Benin-Nigeria border and directly into Lagos, and a northern route from Cotonou northwards along the Benin-Nigeria border all the way into Niger, and then south to Kano.³¹ As a Chinese said of the Nigeria-Niger border,

[I]t was a magnificent scene [...]. There were at least one thousand big trucks full of cloth on the Niger side. When it got dark and the Customs went off duty, all trucks immediately rushed into Nigeria. Sometimes even during the day, after negotiating a deal [i.e., bribe] the Customs would open the gate for 30 minutes to let all trucks in.³²

³¹ Jieguo Hu, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, July 15, 2014; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Qiang Wang, Interview by author, digital recording, Kano, Nigeria, May 24, 2016; Adeola Daramola, "From China with Fakes," *The News*, September 27, 2004; Issa Aremu, "UNTL Closure and the End of History," *Daily Trust*, October 8, 2007; Victor Ahiuma-Young, "Chinese Exporters Destroy Nigerian Textile Industry, Lament Man, NTMA," *Vanguard*, October 27, 2008.

³² Hu, Interview by author, July 15, 2014.

Chinese traders, Nigerian traders, and their Nigerian partners in the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) worked together to ensure that both licit and illicit made-in-China goods passed through the border safely and at the lowest possible cost.³³

Only a small number of Chinese traders appear to have colluded with NCS officials in the smuggling of goods that were on the prohibited-imports list. However, most of them chose to import their goods via “grey” customs-clearance practices. With little knowledge of English or of the NCS’s complicated procedures, recently arrived Chinese traders would scarcely have been able to navigate successfully the clearance process without help, and most therefore turned to specialist Nigerian customs-clearance agents or companies.³⁴ These agents, with the approval or at least acquiescence of their Chinese clients, tended to pay duty on only a small proportion of the imported goods, and to clear the rest via bribery of customs officials; this was referred to as grey customs clearance.³⁵ Apart from the state itself, all parties to such transactions benefited handsomely: the traders, by saving both money and time; the agents, by earning considerable service fees; and the officials, by obtaining considerable un-taxed income on top of their regular salaries. The state was not the only victim, however, since the high priority given to clearing Chinese containers by bribed officials meant that Nigerian importers’ containers were dealt with more slowly than usual.³⁶

In addition to dealing with customs at the ports and frontier posts, Chinese importers needed to maintain good relations with immigration, NCS, and police officers after their goods

³³ Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Wang, Interview by author, 2016; “Traders’ Revolt Against New Contraband Rule”; Emmanuel Aziken, “Chinatown a Threat to Economy, Says Customs Boss,” *Vanguard*, March 9, 2006; Omo Gabriel, “Organised Private Sector Accused of Smuggling,” *Vanguard*, April 20, 2009.

³⁴ Hu, Interview by author, July 15, 2014; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Mengxiao Ni, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 19, 2016; Guochang Yuan, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 23, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 4, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016; Wang, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁵ Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁶ Colin Chow, Interview by author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria March 2, 2016; Gary Liu, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, April 16, 2016; Shu Men Ho, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 27, 2016.

were safely within Nigeria's borders. In addition to engaging in the smuggling and "grey market" practices discussed above, many Chinese businesspeople did not have proper immigration documentation, having entered the country on tourist visas despite being deeply engaged in business activities, and/or overstaying their visas.³⁷ This made Chinese traders easy targets of the extortion by corrupt Nigerian officials from a range of different law-enforcement agencies.³⁸ However, far from being scared away by these additional demands for bribes, Chinese traders quickly adapted to the corrupt environment. As pioneers of China's Reform and Opening Up initiatives, these traders had mostly managed to accumulate considerable capital back in China, in part because they had been courageous enough to bend or break the rules to maximize their profits; and when they came to Nigeria, their willingness to take similar risks led them to show little respect for Nigerian laws.³⁹ In other words, coming from Mainland China—where making friends with corrupt government officials was an essential part of doing business—Chinese businesspeople understood, and in some cases even preferred, the Nigerian mode of corruption. As one Chinese entrepreneur explained,

A few years ago, when my company had problems on immigration documents, I just sent one and a half million naira to the Immigration office, with 250,000 naira for the comptroller general, 200,000 for the assistant comptrollers general, 100,000 for the superintendent, and then 50,000, 30,000, and 20,000 or smaller amounts for lower-level officers. It might seem expensive at first glance, but compared to China, the cost of corruption for us businessmen is far lower! In China, even if you had prepared all proper documents, you still needed to invite government officials to have dinner at fancy restaurants, provide services like karaoke, massage, and even prostitutes, and at the same time send money, cigarettes, liquor [...]. It was much more expensive in China, and even when you

³⁷ Lao Zhang, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 1, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Haijiang Wang, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 2, 2016; Yuan, Interview by author, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁸ Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016.

³⁹ Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Monday, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 22, 2016.

spent all this money, you might not get things done, because you did not know whether you had given them enough to be their ‘friends’.⁴⁰

In other words, not only was the sheer financial cost of corruption in Nigeria much lower than it had been in China, but the effectiveness of bribery—in terms of its relation to its intended results—was much higher.⁴¹ Thus, far from being a barrier to Chinese traders, corruption struck them as one of the country’s advantages. As many Chinese put it, if money could solve a problem in Nigeria, then it was not a problem at all.⁴²

Given such beliefs and habits, Chinese traders both inside China Town and in other parts of Lagos made effective use of their money to ensure speedy, often duty-free importation of their goods, and that a blind eye would be turned to their other infractions such as using improper immigration visas, and even traffic violations. Moreover, when it came to extortion, they did not simply sit back and wait for Nigerian officials to approach them, but proactively befriended them.⁴³ In the 2000s, for example, all the Chinese wholesalers based in Great Nigeria House, Lagos Island, contributed to a pool of funds destined for Nigerian law-enforcement agencies.⁴⁴ Every month or two, representatives of this group of Chinese traders delivered a payment from this pool to NCS, immigration, and police officers at the Oceanview Restaurant in the Eko Hotel; the total amount paid to the customs officers alone in 2009 was about 6 million naira.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Lao Yu, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 27, 2016.

⁴¹ Xuguang Zheng, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, April 9, 2016; Lao Yu, Short conversation with author, 2016.

⁴² Lao Zhang, Short conversation with author, 2016; Jun Zhou, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 18, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Zheng, Interview by author, 2016; Biao Xu, Interview by author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 9, 2016.

⁴³ Wang, Short conversation with author, 2016.

⁴⁴ An, Interview by author, 2016; Ni, Interview by author, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016; Yuan, Interview by author, 2016.

⁴⁵ Ni, Interview by author, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016; Yuan, Interview by author, 2016.

Crisis and Decline of China Town

China Town in Lagos enjoyed booming business from 1999 until the mid 2000s, thanks to its *de facto* monopoly of cheap made-in-China goods, support from Nigerian political leaders, and cozy relationship with corrupt lower-ranking Nigerian officials. However, its astonishing prosperity concealed many potential problems, including not only the long-term sustainability of smuggling and dubious customs-clearance practices, but also controversies over the quality of its products; complaints from manufacturers based in Nigeria; and pendulum swings in the attitude of the Nigerian state. This section discusses the crisis and gradual decline of Lagos China Town that began in the mid 2000s, and argues that the seemingly good relationship that prevailed between Chinese traders and the Nigerian government in China Town's early years was actually very fragile.

On the morning of December 22, 2004, a joint force of NCS and police officers suddenly surrounded China Town, sealed all of its shops and warehouses, and forbade the Chinese occupants from coming out of the complex.⁴⁶ Several Chinese traders, including Sun, were arrested and taken to the Customs Office, where they were accused of smuggling prohibited goods, evading duties, and sabotaging the Nigerian economy.⁴⁷ The NCS then confiscated all the goods in China Town and had them removed in trucks, a process that lasted a whole week.⁴⁸ A number of Chinese traders lost all their capital in the incident; many who tried to escape from China Town were injured by the Nigerian officers who had surrounded it; and some even

⁴⁶ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016; Dr. Ren, Interview by author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 4, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Sam, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2, 2016.

⁴⁷ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016.

⁴⁸ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016.

attempted suicide.⁴⁹ China Town remained sealed for more than three months, i.e., until late February 2005, and in hindsight, this incident clearly marked the start of its decline.⁵⁰

China Town had once been sealed by the NCS prior to this massive raid, in 2003, but on that occasion it had managed to recover very quickly and with few losses, due to Sun's political connections.⁵¹ Another key difference between the two incidents was that after 2004, China Town continued to be the target of negative attention from the NCS, which seized textiles worth 1.2 billion naira there in 2005; and in the following year, Alhaji Umar Daura, the Comptroller of the NCS's Federal Operation Unit, described the complex as "a haven for smugglers of textiles."⁵² Thereafter, down to 2010, China Town was periodically raided by almost every Nigerian law-enforcement agency, including the NCS, immigration, police, the State Security Service, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Federal Inland Revenue Service.⁵³ Due largely to the atmosphere of insecurity that these actions produced, the number of Chinese shops that remained open in China Town decreased sharply: from the original 300 to just 150 over the course of 2005, then to 100 in 2008, 80 in 2010, and about 30 in 2016.⁵⁴ In short, China Town as a whole never managed to regain its pre-2005 prosperity. The seemingly cordial relations between Chinese traders and the Nigerian state had turned out to be fragile and unstable. The common interests of Chinese traders and some dishonest Nigerian officials did not save China Town from being shut down, despite the level of state protection seemingly implied by Obasanjo's endorsement and Sun's long-term friendship with Tinubu.

⁴⁹ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016.

⁵⁰ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016.

⁵¹ Kingsley Anaroke and Eguono Odjegba, "Customs Position On China Town, a Smokescreen?" *Vanguard*, November 2, 2003; Godfrey Biybere, "Closure of China Town Retail Market: Two Sides of the Coin," *Vanguard*, November 14, 2003.

⁵² Francis Ugwoke, "N1.2bn Smuggled Textiles Seized At China Town," *This Day*, February 14, 2006.

⁵³ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Aziken, "Chinatown a Threat to Economy, Says Customs Boss."

⁵⁴ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Charles, Interview by author, 2016.

The enforcement actions against China Town were driven by strong pressure from Nigerian manufacturers. In the mid 1990s, when the country joined the WTO and lifted its ban on the importation of textiles, the previously gradual decline of its manufacturing industries suddenly accelerated.⁵⁵ The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), the Nigerian Textiles Manufacturers Association (NTMA) and other similar organizations blamed both the Nigerian government and Chinese traders for the collapse of hundreds of Nigeria-based factories and the laying off of nearly a million Nigerian workers.⁵⁶ In addition to condemning the government's decision to join the WTO, which they saw as the main cause of Chinese imports' domination of the market,⁵⁷ the manufacturers' associations leveled credible accusations of corruption against NCS officials—especially those working at the ports of Apapa, Tin Can Island, and Roro in Lagos⁵⁸—and claimed that Mainland Chinese factories had extensively pirated the designs of Nigerian-made products and used them to create substandard fake versions.⁵⁹

In the face of such pressure from Nigerian manufacturers, the federal government was compelled to take a stand to prevent the collapse of domestic manufacturing industries and to protect Nigerian consumers from substandard goods. First, it imposed a temporary ban on certain types of textiles, shoes, and other products in 2003-2004. The government's second line of attack

⁵⁵ Aminu Mohammed, "Zamfara Textile Still Strong - Comrade Yahuza," *Weekly Trust*, November 1, 2003; Nwoji, "Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities"; Godfrey Bivbere and Tina Anthony, "Asian Firms Grounds Nigerian Textile Industry," *Vanguard*, October 12, 2005; Aziken, "Chinatown a Threat to Economy, Says Customs Boss"; Aremu, "UNTL Closure and the End of History"; Ahiuma-Young, "Chinese Exporters Destroy Nigerian Textile Industry, Lament Man, NTMA"; Sunday Williams, "Textile - FG Set to Battle Counterfeiting, Smuggling," *Daily Trust*, February 9, 2009.

⁵⁶ Mohammed, "Zamfara Textile Still Strong - Comrade Yahuza"; Daramola, "From China with Fakes"; Nwoji, "Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities"; Eugene Agha, "Customs Indicted On Importation of Textile Materials," *This Day*, September 28, 2005; Sani Babadoko, "Blame FG's Policy Inconsistency for Textile Collapse -Walid Jibrin," *Daily Trust*, October 14, 2007.

⁵⁷ Mohammed, "Zamfara Textile Still Strong - Comrade Yahuza"; Nwoji, "Manufacturers Groan Under Chinese Activities"; Babadoko, "Blame FG's Policy Inconsistency for Textile Collapse -Walid Jibrin"; Williams, "Textile - FG Set to Battle Counterfeiting, Smuggling."

⁵⁸ Agha, "Customs Indicted On Importation of Textile Materials"; Aziken, "Chinatown a Threat to Economy, Says Customs Boss."

⁵⁹ Daramola, "From China with Fakes"; Ahiuma-Young, "Chinese Exporters Destroy Nigerian Textile Industry, Lament Man, NTMA"; Franklin Alli, "Checkmate for Substandard Product Importers," *Vanguard*, April 27, 2009; Richard Onyekwere, Interview by author, digital recording, May 6, 2016; Liu, Interview by author.

consisted of a series of raids and goods seizures, including but not limited to those against Lagos China Town that were described above, coupled with investigations of corruption within the NCS.⁶⁰ And third, it set up a Textile Revitalization Fund to help revive what had been, until relatively recently, the largest manufacturing industry in Nigeria.⁶¹ Both collectively and individually, however, all of the above measures failed to halt (let alone reverse) the serious deterioration of the Nigerian manufacturing sector, or to break the dominance of made-in-China products in the Nigerian market, which they retain to this day. Essentially, the only long-term effect of the government crackdown on Lagos China Town was to push Chinese traders to disperse more widely around the city and the country, where they continued doing business in a similar, albeit less visible way.

In addition to government interference driven by pressure from Nigerian manufacturers, however, China Town's crisis was rooted in its own problems. First, the above-mentioned impunity with which its Chinese traders engaged in smuggling, bribery, and illegal immigration may have appeared as a sign of strength at the time, such corner-cutting proved to be a source of weakness over the longer term.⁶² Second, China Town's audacious concentration of Chinese traders and made-in-China goods in an almost exclusively Chinese marketplace had maximized its brand effect and caused its business to boom; but the prominence it achieved as an emblem of made-in-China products was later transformed into notoriety, as it came to symbolize smuggling

⁶⁰ Anaroke and Odjegba, "Customs Position On China Town, a Smokescreen?"; Biybere, "Closure of China Town Retail Market: Two Sides of the Coin"; Ugwoke, "N1.2bn Smuggled Textiles Seized At China Town"; Aziken, "Chinatown a Threat to Economy, Says Customs Boss"; Williams, "Textile - FG Set to Battle Counterfeiting, Smuggling"; Henry Umoru, "FG Tasks Chinese Government On Counterfeiting," *Vanguard*, March 9, 2009; Oladunjoye Philip, "Goods Coming Into Country Must Meet International Standard - Udenwa," *Daily Independent*, April 3, 2009; Alli, "Checkmate for Substandard Product Importers"; Vanguard Reporters, "Product Dumping - How Asians Are Killing Made-in-Nigeria Goods," *Vanguard*, April 2, 2012.

⁶¹ "FG Sets to Revitalise Textile Industries," *This Day*, September 6, 2007; Ujudud Shariff, "Collapse of the Textile Industries," *Daily Trust*, November 13, 2007; Kayode Ekundayo, "FG Unveils Three-Point Agenda for Textile Revival - Raises Panel Over N70 Billion Fund," *Daily Trust*, April 20, 2009; Liu, Interview by author.

⁶² Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Charles, Interview by author, 2016.

and substandard products and emerged as an easy target for Nigerian law-enforcement agencies. By the mid 2000s, the number of Mainland Chinese trading in Nigeria outside China Town considerably exceeded the numbers trading within it, and the quantities of goods they traded reflected this; as such, they became much more difficult for the Nigerian state to police.⁶³ And third, the effective monopoly of Nigerian imports of made-in-China goods that Lagos China Town had enjoyed upon its establishment in 1999 was eventually broken by Nigerian traders, who—not content to simply watch the most lucrative part of Sino-Nigerian trade reaped by the Chinese—started to find ways to reach Chinese manufacturers directly; and this squeezed the pricing power and profit margins of the Chinese traders further.⁶⁴

Revolt of the Nigerian Traders and Consumers: Who Decides Quality?

Despite having been instigated by Nigerian manufacturers, the 2003 and subsequent government raids against China Town and other markets to seize illegally imported made-in-China goods were actively resisted by Nigerian traders.⁶⁵ Governmental calls for the public to abandon substandard made-in-China goods and patronize made-in-Nigeria products⁶⁶ had little impact on Nigerian consumers, who quietly resisted such pleas. To meet ongoing consumer demand, Nigerian retailers and small wholesalers continued buying from Chinese traders, and in some cases even traveled to China to make their own import deals. This section delves into traders' and consumers' silent resistance to buy-Nigerian initiatives, and explores how their

⁶³ Hu, Interview by author, May 31, 2016; Xue, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Ni, Interview by author, 2016; An, Interview by author, 2016; Yu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁴ Dr. Ren, Interview by author, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

⁶⁵ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule"; Agbebi, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, March 22, 2016.

⁶⁶ Henry Umoru, "Meltdown - Yar'Adua Tasks Nigerians on Consumer Patriotism," *Vanguard*, October 14, 2009.

assessments of the quality of made-in-China goods differed from those of manufacturers and the state.

In early 2005, the NCS issued an ultimatum to all traders and supermarket owners, stating that if they did not rid their shops of contraband and substandard made-in-China goods by April 4, they would face the raids and seizures by customs officers.⁶⁷ Nigerian traders were outraged by what they perceived as a threat, and mobilized on a nationwide scale to collectively resist entry to their shops by customs officials in search of banned items; and in the face of such well-coordinated resistance, the federal government was forced to postpone the original deadline.⁶⁸ Foremost among the traders' complaints was that the government unfairly prioritized the interests of manufacturers over those of traders. Mr. Onuora Ebeledike, the president of the Lagos Island Traders Association, commented:

Most times government don't consider or listen to local traders; they listen to only the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria ... They don't realise that most times a considerable volume of business is done by petty traders.⁶⁹

Secondly, the Nigerian traders accused the NCS of failing to fulfill its duties at the ports and borders to stop the flow of contraband and substandard goods.⁷⁰ This, they said, amounted to trying to make money twice: first by extracting a mixture of duties and bribes from the importers when these goods entered the country, and then extorting the traders when the same goods came to market.⁷¹ Lastly, the traders claimed that, if a policy of arbitrary confiscation of imported goods were diligently pursued, it would lead to job losses that impacted half of Nigeria's population, and thus cause a deterioration in national security.⁷²

⁶⁷ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule."

⁶⁸ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule."

⁶⁹ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule."

⁷⁰ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule"; Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Charles, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷¹ "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule."

⁷² "Traders' Revolt Against New Contraband Rule."

As for the quality of made-in-China goods, Nigerian traders tended to frame the discussion in terms of market demand and their own profitability, rather than *a priori* definitions of quality. In any event, the made-in-China goods imported in the 1990s and early 2000s were mostly overstock items that had originally been produced for sale in the United States and Europe, so arguments that they were of a lower quality than their made-in-Nigeria equivalents are questionable.⁷³ It was only in the mid 2000s, when Mainland Chinese manufacturers began to design and manufacture products specifically for the Nigerian market, that the lower quality of made-in-China goods became apparent.⁷⁴ Many Nigerian traders and consumers emphasized that it was not the Chinese who had decided to reduce product quality; rather, it was Nigerians who had requested that Chinese traders and manufacturers bring in low-quality, cheap products.⁷⁵ As one Nigerian consumer explained,

They [Chinese] want to do quality, but we [Nigerians] say “no no, do inferior.” ... So we teach them how to do most of the things [i.e., fake/inferior textiles]. Good teacher. To make it inferior and cheaper, there is a big market for it here.⁷⁶

It is worth noting that despite the fact that some Nigerian consumers and traders emphasized Nigerians’ initiatives in bringing in inferior goods Chinese traders and manufactures also played important roles. As factory to the world, China was willing to make products at almost any price and corresponding quality to satisfy their customers, and this was admired by many Nigerian traders.⁷⁷ As one said,

⁷³ Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Mike Echedom, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 3, 2016; Jane, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Tony, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 11, 2016; Sam, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016.

⁷⁴ Echedom, Interview by author, 2016; Jane, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Tony, Interview by author, 2016; Sam, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁵ Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Monday, Interview by author, 2016; Vincent Anayo, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 4, 2016; Sam, Interview by author, 2016; Lily, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 9, 2016; Ndukwe, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁶ Monday, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁷ Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Anayo, Interview by author, 2016; Sam, Interview by author, 2016; Lily, Interview by author, 2016; Ndukwe, Interview by author, 2016.

[T]he Chinese have one mentality that I love... If I come to China and need the quality at the cost of one thousand naira and the Chinese factory has the quality of selling at two thousand naira. Rather than allowing me go home with my thousand naira, they will make a quality of one thousand naira for me. That is what I understand the Chinese philosophy; that is why they could always be in business. They could always adjust to the needs of everyone. It doesn't really matter the quality; it doesn't matter the cost; they could produce something for somebody at any time. They can make what you want. If you want a good quality, they can make it for you; if you want a lesser quality, they could also make it for you.⁷⁸

Nigerian consumers' attitudes towards quality were, if anything, even more flexible, being rooted in a combination of considerations that also included affordability and availability. From the perspective of consumers, in other words, the definition of quality in the Nigerian context is what satisfies people's everyday needs *at a particular moment*.⁷⁹ In the case of clothing, for example, they did not think much about technical details of quality or international standards, but instead about whether they would be able to find affordable new outfits two to three times per year, as part of keeping up the appearance of a decent life.⁸⁰ Such preference certainly did not apply to the much wealthier upper classes, yet it did resonate with the needs of the lower strata of the population. The majority of Nigerians' low disposable incomes meant that they had very limited buying choices, and would normally opt for cheaper imported goods over expensive Nigerian-made ones. As one Nigerian textile manufacturer commented, "it is part of our culture to buy and change fabrics with what we have."⁸¹ Lagos resident Timothy (last name not given) further elaborated on this mentality:

⁷⁸ Ndukwe, Interview by author, 2016.

⁷⁹ Dorothy Ezeokonkwo, "WTO Is Not the Problem of Textile Industry," *The Post Express*, June 9, 2000; Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Cordalia, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 23, 2016; Timothy Odusanya et al., Group interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, April 4, 2016; Florence Oguntala, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, April 13, 2016; Monday, Interview by author, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Agugustina, Interview by author, Lagos, Nigeria, Notes taking, May 10, 2016; Judith and Blessing, Group interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 12, 2016; Charles, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Tony, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁰ Ezeokonkwo, "WTO Is Not the Problem of Textile Industry."

⁸¹ Ibid.

There are many standards out there. But we like cheap, we don't have money... [Timothy and other interviewees laughing.] The substandard products are accepted because of the economic incapability of the country. Affordable price. We don't care much about whether the products are standard or substandard, as long as we can make use of it. The Chinese give out what people need.⁸²

In short, during Nigeria's decades-long economic deterioration that began in the 1980s, the country's consumers responded to their decreased incomes and buying power by focusing on the affordability and availability of everyday products, rather than their quality, and therefore continued buying inferior made-in-China goods despite governmental exhortations to buy locally made equivalents.

Life and Work in Lagos China Town

As Nigeria's first Mainland Chinese community and preeminent symbol of China, Lagos China Town represents an excellent case study, not only of the Chinese community's interactions with the Nigerian state and public, but of the detailed dynamics of that community's life and work. This section discusses these matters, along with the entrepreneurial spirit of China Town and Chinese-Nigerian employment relations.

The traders of Lagos China Town maintained daily routines that were very regular, even boring, and some likened it to living in a prison.⁸³ They opened their shops at nine o'clock in the morning and closed at five in the afternoon from Monday to Saturday, and either cooked for themselves in their upstairs apartments or bought cut-rate dining plans from the complex's restaurant. At weekends, during the day, they would go grocery shopping, or have barbecues and drink beer with friends while exchanging business news and information; and at night, sing

⁸² Odusanya et al., Group interview by author, 2016.

⁸³ Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Yang, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 10, 2016.

karaoke or play poker, Mahjong, or basketball. The center also incorporated a small church, a hair salon, and a Chinese clinic.⁸⁴ During traditional Chinese holidays like the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Spring Festival, large parties were usually held there and attended by many Lagos-based Chinese entrepreneurs, professionals, and diplomats.⁸⁵ Many Chinese traders said that they chose to live and do business in China Town because it was an almost exclusively Chinese community, containing everything they needed, which largely freed them from dealing with Nigerian institutions. However, in spite of all the basic living and leisure activities provided within China Town, many Chinese traders—especially older ones with very limited English-language abilities—felt trapped there.⁸⁶ As Mr. Gao put it,

How could we dare go out? In the day we are afraid of police, at night we are afraid of robbers. Some of us came to Nigeria for a few months and even never stepped outside of the gate! It cost many hundred thousand [naira] if caught or extorted by the police.⁸⁷

The architecture of China Town's buildings also gave people an initial impression more of a well-guarded castle than of a shopping complex. In the case of the new complex at Ojota, the high walls were designed in imitation of the Great Wall, and were augmented by solid iron gates, barbed wire, and 24-hour patrols of armed Nigerian police.⁸⁸ These heavy security measures evolved in response to multiple armed robberies, and the fortress-like design did give Chinese traders a strong sense of security as well as a sense of being locked up.

Despite the boredom of this constrained and immobile lifestyle, many Chinese traders based themselves in China Town for years, sustained by their entrepreneurial spirit and pursuit of

⁸⁴ Sun, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Mr. Zheng, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, March 27, 2016; Feng, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016; Lvfang Ma, Interview by author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 2, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁵ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Sun, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁶ Feng, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁷ Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016.

⁸⁸ Maduabuchi Ubani, "Rendezvous in Chinatown," *This Day*, February 7, 2014.

profit. Moreover, such a spirit was not exclusive to the Chinese, but also applied to China Town's Nigerian petty traders and the Chinese traders' Nigerian employees. As briefly noted above, some Nigerians who had little or no capital obtained small quantities of goods from Chinese traders on credit and then resold them to Nigerian end-users.⁸⁹ Then, as they accumulated capital, many established their own shops, both in China Town and elsewhere.⁹⁰ Many of the Chinese traders' Nigerian employees, meanwhile, were not content to simply draw their salaries; rather, in the hope of starting their own businesses someday, they assiduously studied their customers' preferences, the sources within China Town of the products they were selling, and the management skills of their Chinese employers.⁹¹ One of my informants, a woman named Marry, worked for a Chinese trader for five years beginning in 2006, and when her boss moved back to China she used her accumulated salary to rent a space in China Town for her own business.⁹² Many other Nigerian employees and petty traders who lacked sufficient initial capital likewise sought to emulate the center's Chinese business community by starting small and working hard.

Despite this shared entrepreneurial spirit, however, employment relations between Chinese traders and their Nigerian staff were marked by a certain degree of mutual distrust and stereotyped generalizations. Some Chinese traders accused their Nigerian employees of stealing stock and cash, lying about the sales figures, and being ungrateful, often using racially discriminatory language.⁹³ The employees, for their part, claimed that the Chinese traders were

⁸⁹ Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Bandms, Interview by author, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Juliana, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁰ Agbebi, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Bandms, Interview by author, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Juliana, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹¹ Happy, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 3, 2016; Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 3, 2016; Marry, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 4, 2016.

⁹² Marry, Interview by author, 2016.

⁹³ Feng, Interview by author, 2016; Ma, Interview by author, May 2, 2016; Zhao, Interview by author, 2016; Mr. Gao, Interview by author, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Mrs. Yang, Short conversation with author, 2016.

always yelling at them, showed no respect for their culture and religion, and (despite being rich) gave them salaries only, without any fringe benefits.⁹⁴ Karsten Giese and Alena Thiel also observed similar stereotypes and distrust in the relations between Chinese traders and their Ghanaian employees, with the former showing little empathy for the latter's vulnerability, and the Ghanaians failing to meet Chinese expectations of how dedicated they should be to their work.⁹⁵ In other words, the Chinese understood the employer/employee relationship as a pure, contractually specified exchange of salary for labor, with no additional benefits, while the Africans felt that employers should also be "providers of fully fledged social security",⁹⁶ in the manner of the elders within an extended family.

However, these binary oppositions do not reflect the full picture, because—far from being solely governed by racial and national boundaries—understandings of labor relations diverged along class lines, and depended heavily upon individuals' personalities and skills. Moreover, some Nigerian workers also complained that their Nigerian employers gave them low pay, no benefits, and little individual attention, and most said they actually preferred working for Chinese traders due to the higher salaries they offered.⁹⁷ Conversely, some Chinese traders in China Town were seen as more than mere employers, and often referred to by their Nigerian employees and other Nigerians as father, mother, or senior sister/brother: terms of high respect.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Agugustina, Interview by author, 2016; Lucy, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 10, 2016; Grace, Short conversation with author, notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 10, 2016; Doris, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 11, 2016; Judith and Blessing, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁵ Karsten Giese, "Same-Same But Different: Chinese Traders' Perspectives on African Labor," *The China Journal*, no. 69 (2013): 134–53; Giese and Thiel, "The Vulnerable Other – Distorted Equity in Chinese–Ghanaian Employment Relations."

⁹⁶ Giese, "Same-Same But Different: Chinese Traders' Perspectives on African Labor," 1116.

⁹⁷ Happy, Interview by author, 2016; Susan, Interview by author, digital recording, Lagos, Nigeria, May 3, 2016; Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, 2016; Marry, Interview by author, 2016; Agugustina, Interview by author, 2016; Esther, Interview by author, Notes taking, Lagos, Nigeria, May 10, 2016; Lucy, Interview by author, 2016; Grace, Short conversation with author, 2016; Judith and Blessing, Group interview by author, 2016.

⁹⁸ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016; Susan, Interview by author, 2016; Happy, Interview by author, 2016; Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, 2016; Marry, Interview by author, 2016; Doris, Interview by author, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Lucy, Interview by author, 2016.

The Chinese traders who fell into the latter category had several traits in common. They appeared to fully trust their Nigerian employees, and allowed them to run their shops when they were absent in China. Generally, this would involve leaving the keys to the shop and warehouses in the care of the Nigerian employees, counting the stock before leaving, stipulating a detailed list of prices of the items for sale, requiring that accounts be kept of all items sold; and then, on their return from Asia, re-counting the remaining stock and examining the company's bank account and account books.⁹⁹ Beyond providing their workers' regular salaries, this group of Chinese employers played familial roles in their lives: for instance, by paying their medical bills and those of their family members; giving them occasional gifts of pocket money or clothes, bags, shoes, and food; providing transportation allowances in certain circumstances; sending baby products when employees' children were born; and providing sizeable Christmas bonuses.¹⁰⁰ Some of these Chinese spoke often about business principles and their personal experiences as traders to their Nigerian employees, and encouraged the latter to work hard, accumulate capital, and start small in the future.¹⁰¹ As two Nigerian employees commented of their Chinese employer Sophia: "to us she is a very nice woman, a teacher, and a mother".¹⁰² Through trust, proper management, solid provision of social security, and mentoring, these Chinese traders earned the loyalty of their Nigerian employees, who dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to their work. As Susan commented on her Chinese boss, Wayne Ma,

he is like a father to me; and me, I took him as a father. So I don't take the shop as sales representative, I take the shop as my own, like my father's own, I am handling my own business.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016; Xu, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Susan, Interview by author, 2016; Happy, Interview by author, 2016; Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, 2016; Marry, Interview by author, 2016; Doris, Interview by author, 2016; Omowumni, Interview by author, 2016; Lucy, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, 2016; Esther, Interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰² Osas and Esther, Group interview by author, 2016.

¹⁰³ Susan, Interview by author, 2016.

Ma himself explained the different modes of dealing with Nigerian employees within China Town as follows:

Some Chinese traders did not understand [the Nigerian situation], and they dared not leave their shops to the Nigerian employees. They treated them only as a tool for selling rather than as a person to take care of, and they were totally wrong. I told them, the Chinese came to Nigeria to do business, and Nigerian employees are not here to be your maid or servant. You hired them, and if you are not nice enough to them, then how can you expect them to be nice to you? You cannot simply treat Nigerians as regular workers; instead, you should regard them as your families.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Made-in-China products captured a big chunk of the Nigerian market in the late 1980s and 1990s, but at that time were mainly sold by Nigerian traders and imported indirectly via Dubai; thus, Nigerian consumers were only dimly aware of their connection to China or its people. Many Chinese manufacturers were likewise completely unaware that their products were sold in Nigeria. However, when direct China-Nigeria trade was facilitated by the liberalization of China's economy and Nigeria's ending of its ban on importation, Chinese manufacturers and traders were eager to explore the huge Nigerian market, despite its remoteness and mysteriousness. From a Mainland Chinese perspective, the establishment of Lagos China Town in the late 1990s was the perfect answer to their hopes: providing market information, a sales platform, and relevant support services for Chinese manufacturers and traders who wished to sell their products in Nigeria. The center made Nigeria famous in China as the most profitable and largest market in Africa. On the Nigerian side, China Town's status as the first marketplace in Nigeria where Chinese traders sold made-in-China products in a Chinese-managed shopping complex rendered it symbolic of the Mainland Chinese community as a whole, and created a

¹⁰⁴ Ma, Interview by author, May 11, 2016.

strong brand. In its early days as the cornerstone of the newly established direct trading relationship between China and Nigeria, China Town was characterized by its bargain prices and by the wide variety and decent quality of its products, and these factors enabled it to rapidly sweep the Nigerian market in the early 2000s.

In addition to the advantages conferred on it by its early products' good reputation, China Town in its first years enjoyed a *de facto* monopoly of Chinese imports into Nigeria, underpinned both by strong connections to Nigerian political leaders and by its shady but mutually beneficial relationships with numerous Nigerian government officials. Having been important players in the 'cowboy' phase of China's economic reform, China Town's merchants were just as comfortable with operating on the margins of legality in Nigeria as they had been in their homeland—and even praised Nigerian bribery culture for its relatively low cost and high efficiency.

However, Chinese traders' seemingly cozy relationship with the Nigerian state turned out to be fragile. Facing pressure from Nigeria-based manufacturers, and harboring its own concerns about the potential demise of textile manufacturing and other domestic industries, the federal government changed its stance towards imported goods beginning in 2003. Raided and shuttered regularly by various federal government law-enforcement agencies, Lagos China Town fell into an inexorable downward spiral, hastened by Nigerian traders' new habit of obtaining the wholesale goods they needed directly from manufacturers in China.

Nevertheless, the popularity of made-in-China products among Nigerians was not influenced at all. The majority of local traders and consumers showed little sympathy for their own country's manufacturing industries, and silently resisted the federal government's call to boycott substandard made-in-China goods, as the traders' profits and the customers' levels of

satisfaction were both high. Nigerian consumers, amid decades-long economic deterioration and ever-shrinking disposable income, had come to define quality more in terms of affordability and availability than technical specifications.

Similarly, the commercial and reputational collapse of China Town did nothing to stem the arrival of Mainland Chinese migrants, whose numbers kept growing through the 2000s and 2010s. As the principal emblem of both Nigeria's Chinese community and imported Chinese products, China Town drew a great deal of fire from Nigeria's government and business community, so to some extent its existence had eased the burdens of those Chinese traders who operated in other parts of Lagos and beyond. China Town's vicissitudes also convinced some Mainland Chinese migrants of the perils of pure trading, and they started to invest in manufacturing and service industries, thus greatly diversifying the community's business portfolio. China Town itself also gradually transformed from a shopping complex into a more comprehensive business and service center.

CONCLUSION

As well as being one of the few studies of the Chinese presence in African history, this dissertation is the first and only book-length examination of Chinese migrants in late-colonial and post-independence Nigeria. In it, I have traced successive generations of Chinese migrants from their origins in Mainland China, especially the Shanghai area, to the then-British colony of Hong Kong, and then intercontinentally to Africa, and Nigeria in particular. I have explored how different groups of Chinese—industrialists, traders, workers, restaurant owners, and other professionals—were shaped by the changing policies of Nigerian governments and the evolving preferences of Nigerian consumers, and in turn influenced Nigeria's economy and the daily lives of its citizens.

With regard to change over time in the interactions between Chinese migrants and the Nigerian state, I have argued that the pursuit of industrialization by Nigeria's federal and regional governments in the 1950s and 1960s was sufficiently strong to be felt transnationally by Hong Kong Chinese industrialists. By promulgating both an increasingly protective trade policy and incentives aimed at attracting inward industrial investment, these governments succeeded in convincing Chinese industrialists to relocate their operations to Nigeria. Despite their excellent performance in the sphere of production, however, these Chinese industrialists' loyalty was sometimes questioned due to their status as foreigners: for example, during the Biafran War, when the Mainland Chinese government took the side of the Biafrans. Yet the majority of Chinese industrialists chose to stay in Nigeria due to its less competitive, isolated, and protected market even after Nigerian government policies became less supportive of their activities and the overall economic environment deteriorated from the 1970s onward.

Nigeria's decision to join the WTO and open its market to external competition in the mid-1990s undermined its manufacturing industries, including the many firms owned by Chinese industrialists. Moreover, the same policy change simultaneously led Mainland China-based traders and manufacturers to flood the Nigerian market with their cheap made-in-China products. After this opening of the floodgates, the Nigerian state played important roles in both encouraging and discouraging the importation and sale of such products. On the one hand, by allowing smuggling, grey customs clearance, and taking bribes, some Nigerian government officials formed a shared community of interest with large numbers of Chinese traders, enabling the latter to gain a firm foothold in Nigeria. On the other, faced with vociferous complaints from Nigerian manufacturers including Nigeria-based Chinese industrialists, government agencies repeatedly raided Lagos China Town and other Chinese trading centers in the name of protecting local industries, investigating smuggling, and confiscating sub-standard products. Though these raids inflicted great commercial damage on these Chinese entrepôts, they neither reversed the decline of Nigerian manufacturing, nor stopped—or even slowed down—the capture of the Nigerian market by made-in-China products.

Turning my attention to the hundreds of thousands of Nigerians whose lives were affected by the Chinese presence, I have made two broad arguments. First, Nigerian workers in Chinese-owned factories both directly benefited from and indirectly suffered under the respective influences of distinct Chinese migrant groups. As one of the major private employers in Kaduna, for example, Chinese-owned UNTL provided job opportunities for thousands of Nigerians from the 1960s to the early 2000s. Initially attracted by the relatively high salaries offered by its textile factories, many Nigerian workers chose to remain with UNTL for several decades, as it represented a well-worn path to upward career- and social mobility and a middle-

class lifestyle, so long as its own prosperity continued. However, due to Mainland Chinese competition, UNTL failed in the 2000s along with almost the whole of the Nigerian textile industry, and Nigerian textile workers went from ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ to struggling for survival in a world where their textile-production skills were no longer in demand. In short, the collapse of Nigeria’s textile industries featured Chinese migrants in starring roles on both sides: with the early wave of Chinese industrialists and their Nigerian workers as victims, and the new wave of Chinese traders and their China-based manufacturing partners as perpetrators and beneficiaries, of the destruction of the old order.

I have also explored the roles played by Chinese products in the daily lives of Nigerian consumers. From the late colonial period to the 1990s, for instance, Chinese-designed made-in-Nigeria enamelware dominated the kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms of ordinary Nigerians in the northern part of the country, gradually replacing traditional Nigerian articles made of calabash, wood, brass, grass, and clay. In the end, these new articles fully inherited the gendered social and economic meanings of indigenous containers in the sphere of marriage customs, and thus became central to the status of northern Nigerian women. Therefore, though initially seen as carriers of modernity in the late colonial period, enamelware objects (whether imported or locally manufactured) soon became bound up with indigenous social institutions, and in the course of defeating indigenous containers in the marketplace were transformed to fit into local networks of meaning, becoming everything that they had displaced. This was quite intentional, for arguably, even the enamelware produced by Chinese factories in 1950s Hong Kong had already been indigenized before it left the production line: with design, size, and color all tailored to the preferences of Nigerian consumers. From the perspective of Nigerian consumers, meanwhile, enamelware’s raw materials and manufacturing processes might be industrial and

modern, but its appeal was rooted in indigenous sources, especially those containers that it replaced. In other words, Nigerian consumer demand, the design of previous types of Nigerian household containers, and the social institutions and customs of Nigeria worked together in shaping the physical appearance and symbolic meaning of the enamelware made by Chinese-owned factories both within and outside Nigeria.

In addition to detailing Chinese migrants' interactions with the state, workers, and consumers in Nigeria, my dissertation points to new directions for the study of the Chinese presence in African history as well as in contemporary Africa. Traditionally, historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have viewed Chinese migrants in Africa either as free or indentured laborers for European colonialism, while observers of the twenty-first century have tended to see them as petty traders and infrastructural workers. The few prior studies of the 1950-2000 period, meanwhile, have tend to focus on diplomatic relations between China and Africa and state-sponsored aid projects like the TAZARA Railway, and to give the history of non-state-sponsored Chinese migrants scant attention, despite their disproportionate significance to Nigeria's economy, society, and public policy. Thus, by focusing on the group of Chinese industrialists who arrived in Nigeria beginning in the 1950s, my dissertation has opened up new perspectives on the Chinese presence in African history. As investors with capital, technology, and management skills, Chinese industrialists were warmly welcomed by Nigerian governments; the jobs their factories offered were highly sought after by local workers; and their products were favored by local consumers. Moreover, this situation was not unique to Nigeria, as Chinese entrepreneurs set off to other African countries in the mid-twentieth century to establish factories, shops, and restaurants: a rich vein of social and economic history for future scholars to explore.

As the most conspicuous symbol of the present-day Chinese presence in Africa, made-in-China products and Chinese traders receive considerable scholarly (and media) attention, yet the majority of studies have focused on the phenomenon itself rather than its historical roots. In other words, while researchers generally acknowledge the popularity of made-in-China products and the prevalence of Chinese traders in Africa, none seem concerned with questions of why, how or exactly when so many Chinese with modest foreign-language skills migrated to various African countries, or how their products came to dominate the local markets. My dissertation has therefore contributed some much-needed historical perspective to the contemporary study of the Chinese presence in Africa, by demonstrating how these processes were influenced by China's economic reforms—especially the liberalization of external trade since the 1980s; how they were connected to the early wave of migration by Chinese industrialists; and how Mainland Chinese traders and products managed to gain such firm footholds in Nigeria in the late 1990s.

To conclude, as one of the few book-length works on the history of Chinese migrants in Africa, my dissertation contributes to our knowledge by demonstrating successive Chinese migrations' deep connections with Nigerian governments, workers, traders, and consumers against the background of the industrialization and deindustrialization of Nigeria since the 1950s.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ARCHIVES CONSULTED

Beijing	National Library of China
Hong Kong	Hong Kong Public Records Office
Kaduna	Arewa House Library and Archive National Archives of Nigeria at Kaduna
Kano	Kano State History and Culture Bureau
Lagos	Lagos State Record and Archives Bureau

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWS

Chinese Interviewees

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place</u>
Andrew Tam	Kano, Nigeria
Baiyan Chen	Lagos, Nigeria
Biao Xu	Lagos, Nigeria
Chang'an Liu	Lagos, Nigeria
Colin Chow	Lagos, Nigeria
Dashan Long	Kano, Nigeria
Dr. Ren	Lagos, Nigeria
Du	Kano, Nigeria
Francis Huang	Hong Kong, China
Gary Liu	Lagos, Nigeria
Guanghua Feng	Lagos, Nigeria
Guochang Yuan	Lagos, Nigeria
Guoping Sun	Lagos, Nigeria
Haijiang Wang	Lagos, Nigeria
Hefeng Liu	Lagos, Nigeria
Jieguo Hu	Lagos, Nigeria
Joseph Huang	Hong Kong, China
Jun Feng	Kano, Nigeria
Jun Zhou	Lagos, Nigeria
Junrong Lee	Kano, Nigeria
Lawrence Tung	Lagos, Nigeria
Linian Xing	Lagos, Nigeria
Liuqing Zhao	Lagos, Nigeria
Liwei Xu	Lagos, Nigeria
Lvfeng Ma	Lagos, Nigeria
M. L. Lee	Kano, Nigeria
Mengxiao Ni	Lagos, Nigeria
Minfu Zhou	Kano, Nigeria
Mr. Fan	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Gao	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Hu	Kano, Nigeria
Mr. Yu	Duste, Nigeria
Mr. Yu	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Zhang	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Zhu	Kano, Nigeria
Mrs. Luo	Lagos, Nigeria
Mrs. Yang	Lagos, Nigeria
Qi An	Lagos, Nigeria
Qiang Song	Lagos, Nigeria
Qiang Wang	Lagos, Nigeria
Qingcai Cao	Lagos, Nigeria

Qirui Yu	Lagos, Nigeria
S. F. Lee	Kano, Nigeria
Saihua Zheng	Lagos, Nigeria
Shu Men Ho	Lagos, Nigeria
Tingting Lu	Lagos, Nigeria
Wang	Lagos, Nigeria
Wayne Ma	Lagos, Nigeria
Xiang Xu	Lagos, Nigeria
Xiaohui Ji	Lagos, Nigeria
Xiaoming Xue	Lagos, Nigeria
Xinmin Lu	Kano, Nigeria
Xuguang Zheng	Lagos, Nigeria
Xusheng Zheng	Lagos, Nigeria
Yajun Lin	Lagos, Nigeria
Y. T. Chu	Lagos, Nigeria
Yingjun Li	Lagos, Nigeria
Yuzhen Huang	Lagos, Nigeria
Zhiliang Xu	Lagos, Nigeria

Nigerian Interviewees

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place</u>
Abdu	Kano, Nigeria
Abdul	Kaduna, Nigeria
Abdullahi Garba	Kano, Nigeria
Abdullahi Garba (Yakasai)	Kano, Nigeria
Abu Musa Saamga	Kaduna, Nigeria
Abudullah Umar	Kano, Nigeria
Adenowo Jane	Lagos, Nigeria
Ado	Kano, Nigeria
Agbebi	Lagos, Nigeria
Alhaji Abdullah Usmar	Kano, Nigeria
Alhaji Alhamad Abudullah	Kano, Nigeria
Alhaji Ibrahim	Kano, Nigeria
Alhaji Nasidi	Kano, Nigeria
Alhaji Sanusi Ibrahim	Kaduna, Nigeria
Alhamed Muhammed	Kano, Nigeria
Ali	Kano, Nigeria
Andy Oguntala	Lagos, Nigeria
Anyebe Daniel	Kaduna, Nigeria
Asama'u Ali	Kano, Nigeria
Audu Musa	Kano, Nigeria
Augustina	Lagos, Nigeria
Balaraba	Kano, Nigeria
Bilkisu	Kano, Nigeria
Blessing	Lagos, Nigeria
Dalha Mati	Kano, Nigeria
Danladi Abude	Kaduna, Nigeria
Danladi Sale	Kano, Nigeria
Danlami Tukur	Kano, Nigeria
Dante	Lagos, Nigeria
Doris	Lagos, Nigeria
Edward Obasemhe	Kaduna, Nigeria
Eric Paul	Kaduna, Nigeria
Esther	Lagos, Nigeria
Fatuwa	Kano, Nigeria
Florence Oguntala	Lagos, Nigeria
Frederick Aba	Kaduna, Nigeria
Gabriel Julius	Kaduna, Nigeria
Gambo	Kano, Nigeria
Gambo Hassan	Kano, Nigeria
Garba Abdu	Kano, Nigeria
Garba Morison	Kaduna, Nigeria
Garba Musa	Kano, Nigeria
Goodwin	Lagos, Nigeria

Grace	Lagos, Nigeria
Haladu	Kano, Nigeria
Hammed Tijani	Lagos, Nigeria
Hamza Ibrahim	Kano, Nigeria
Hamza Sule	Kano, Nigeria
Happy	Lagos, Nigeria
Haruna Umar	Kano, Nigeria
Hussaina	Kano, Nigeria
Inusa Musa	Kano, Nigeria
James Elaigwe	Kaduna, Nigeria
Joseph Adacha	Kaduna, Nigeria
Joshua	Kano, Nigeria
Judith	Lagos, Nigeria
Kassim Garba	Kaduna, Nigeria
Ladidi	Kano, Nigeria
Liam	Kaduna, Nigeria
Lily	Lagos, Nigeria
Lucy	Lagos, Nigeria
Maikudi	Kano, Nigeria
Marry	Lagos, Nigeria
Maryam	Kano, Nigeria
Mike Echedom	Lagos, Nigeria
Monday	Lagos, Nigeria
Monday Archibong Charles	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Jamieson	Kaduna, Nigeria
Mr. John	Lagos, Nigeria
Mr. Tony	Lagos, Nigeria
Mrs. Bandms	Lagos, Nigeria
Mrs. Jamieson	Kaduna, Nigeria
Olufajude Juliana	Lagos, Nigeria
Muhammad Kabir	Kano, Nigeria
Muhammed Abu	Kaduna, Nigeria
Musa Ali	Kano, Nigeria
Musa Zabo	Kano, Nigeria
Muyiwa Mustabha	Lagos, Nigeria
Omowumni	Lagos, Nigeria
Onyechachi Ndukwe	Lagos, Nigeria
Osas	Lagos, Nigeria
Patrick	Kaduna, Nigeria
Richard Onyekwere	Lagos, Nigeria
Sadiq Musa	Kaduna, Nigeria
Safiya	Kano, Nigeria
Saidu Abdu	Kano, Nigeria
Salamatu	Kano, Nigeria
Sali	Kano, Nigeria
Salisu Buhari	Kano, Nigeria

Sam	Lagos, Nigeria
Samuel	Kaduna, Nigeria
Sani Maliki	Kaduna, Nigeria
Sha'aibu Miko	Kano, Nigeria
Shehu Amadu	Kano, Nigeria
Shuwawale Ado	Kano, Nigeria
Steven	Kaduna, Nigeria
Susan	Lagos, Nigeria
Talatuwa	Kano, Nigeria
Tijjani Yusuf	Kano, Nigeria
Tilawa	Kano, Nigeria
Timothy	Kano, Nigeria
Timothy Odusanya	Lagos, Nigeria
Usmar Abdullah	Kano, Nigeria
Victor	Lagos, Nigeria
Vincent Anayo	Lagos, Nigeria
Williams Alege	Kaduna, Nigeria
Yacuba	Kano, Nigeria
Yahaya	Kano, Nigeria
Yahaya Hamza	Kano, Nigeria
Yusha'u	Kano, Nigeria
Yusuf Usman Yakudima	Kano, Nigeria
Zakaryawu	Kano, Nigeria
Zubairu Amadu	Kano, Nigeria

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