

African Traders Beyond China: Delving Into Their Entrepreneurial Activities Following COVID-19

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Abstract : African traders in China have generated magnanimous attention from scholars because of their choices to take short-term trips to Guangzhou and other places in search of cheaper products taking advantage of the status of China as a "global manufacturing hub". Nevertheless, their activities only gained traction at the turn of the millennium, with their presence in China incrementally dwindling over the next two decades. Now, with the devastating effects of COVID-19, their journeys have had to be totally cut short by unending lockdowns and stiff migration rules due to China's zero-tolerance of COVID-19 policy. This unfortunate yet untimely occurrence has left many scholars wondering if this marks the end of African traders in China and, indeed, the end of their business careers. Between March and September 2022, 20 traders were followed back to Africa, Zimbabwe, to find out what they are doing after having been shut out of China. Data was collected through ethnographic immersion and purposive in-depth interviewing in and around the city of Bulawayo. Snowballing was employed to reach out to the traders until a saturation point was reached and interview transcripts were filed for analysis. The findings revealed that some still trading online in China, report different opinions and feelings about doing business during COVID-19. Others have left the Chinese marketplace, now pursuing European industries in Turkey and other places. Others are still getting Chinese goods but in African countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, and Botswana. Some are now into the second-hand clothing trade, whereas others have stopped doing business to pursue other life-course interests. These and other issues are addressed in this paper from the anthropology of migration and globalization perspectives.

Keywords : entrepreneurship, African traders, China, COVID-19, Africans in China

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