



# **AFRICANS**

**in ASIA**

**CHINA AND MALAYSIA  
AS THE NEW DIRECTIONS  
FOR NIGERIAN MIGRATION**

**Malwina Bakalarska**



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**PROJECT REPORT**  
**Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures,**  
**Polish Academy of Sciences**

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**“Africans in Asia.  
China and Malaysia as the new  
directions for Nigerian migration”**

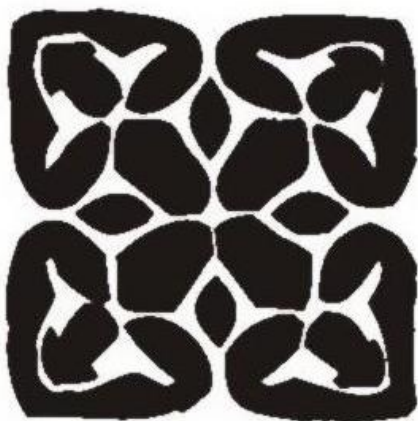
Research Project No. 2012/07/N/HS6/01377

**2013 - 2016**

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# "Africans in Asia. China and Malaysia as the new directions for Nigerian migration"

## Final report of research project 2013 - 2016

by

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**Malwina Bakalarska<sup>1</sup>**

**AFRICANS IN ASIA.  
CHINA AND MALAYSIA AS THE NEW DIRECTIONS  
FOR NIGERIAN MIGRATION<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract**

**Africans in Asia. China and Malaysia as the new directions for Nigerian migration** is a research project established for three-year duration (2013-2016). The research is sponsored by the National Science Centre, Poland and affiliated with the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland. This research project focuses on three countries: Nigeria, Malaysia and China in the context of the South-South cooperation and it aims to explore and evaluate the reasons, processes and results of short-term educational migration of Nigerian students into these two Asian countries on two levels; the individual and institutional level. The cultural and sociological aspects exposed to in this research will complement the political and economic background of the current Asian-African relations.

This document is a form of a general report on the assumptions and processes of the field research. Analysis of the result are presented in the academic papers available for download from the website [www.AfricansInAsia.com](http://www.AfricansInAsia.com).

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<sup>2</sup> Research project No. 2012/07/N/HS6/01377 was sponsored by National Science Centre, Poland [www.ncn.gov.pl](http://www.ncn.gov.pl)



## 1. Africans in Asia: outline of the topic

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African-Asian relations could be analyzed from a few different perspectives. Starting from the historic perspective, we take into consideration the evidence of African presence in Asia based on mutual contacts. “There is a long history of China-Africa contact, illustrated by Chinese classics such as dynastic histories and classics by Du Huan, Duan Chengshi, Zhou Qufei, Zhao Rukuo, Wang Dayuan, Fei Xin, Ma Huan, etc. [...] Chinese historians generally agree that African people came to China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) (Zhang, 1928, 1930; Xu, 1984; Ai 1987; Jing, 1998). Yet, archaeological discoveries seem to challenge the view. Archeological evidence indicates the possibility of contact between China and Africa in an earlier time. An excavation report on the Shang Dynasty (17th-11th century B.C.) sites at Anyang, the capital of Shang, shows similarities between the skulls that were discovered and those of the Oceanic Negroids and the people of Africa.”<sup>3</sup> Also on the Indian subcontinent, the presence of the African Diaspora was established due to the African slave trade routes through the Indian Ocean dating from the 800 century.<sup>4</sup>

From the political perspective also, we might be able to emphasis two periods which were highly influential for modern African – Asian relations. First, was at the Bandung Conference of 1955, where heads of 29 African and Asian states met to discuss their role in the Cold World, economic development and decolonization. This event began a systematic short-term educational migration of African students into China through the Chinese Communist Party scholarships in the 1960’s, 1970’s and up to early 1980’s. During these times, organizational structures such as Afro-Asian Friendship Association or Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee was established<sup>5</sup>.

A more contemporary educational cooperation with China was reactivated in 2000 as a result of the decision launched during the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing, the capital city of the Peoples Republic of China. After this time, the Chinese presence

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<sup>3</sup> Li Anshan, *African Diaspora in China: Reality, Research and Reflection*, „The Journal of Pan African Studies”, vol.7, no.10, May 201, p. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Robert O. Collins, „The African Slave Trade to Asia and the Indian Ocean Island”, in: *Uncovering the history of Africans in Asia*, ed. Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya & Jean-Pierre Angenot, Brill, Leiden 2008, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel John Hevi, *An African Student in China*, Frederick A. Praeger Publisher, London 1962.



in African countries increased through economic exploration and trade exchange. Each year, China also grants government scholarships to between 4000 to 5000 African students and the Chinese educational centers which were later named the Confucius Institutes began their activities across 30 Sub-Saharan African nations.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand however, Malaysia represents different tactic by trying to become the commercial hub for higher education for students from all over the world.

Among other Asian countries where African students migrate to study are Japan and Indonesia but India seems to be more popular when it comes to educational migration. Analogically competing with China, India launched the India-Africa Forum Summit in 2008 in Delhi, India. Such a move however has been perceived by experts as open.

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**Illustration 1:**

An advertisement in the Kenyan Airlines magazine.  
Photograph: Malwina Bakalarska,  
Nairobi, Kenya 2014

<sup>6</sup> [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm)





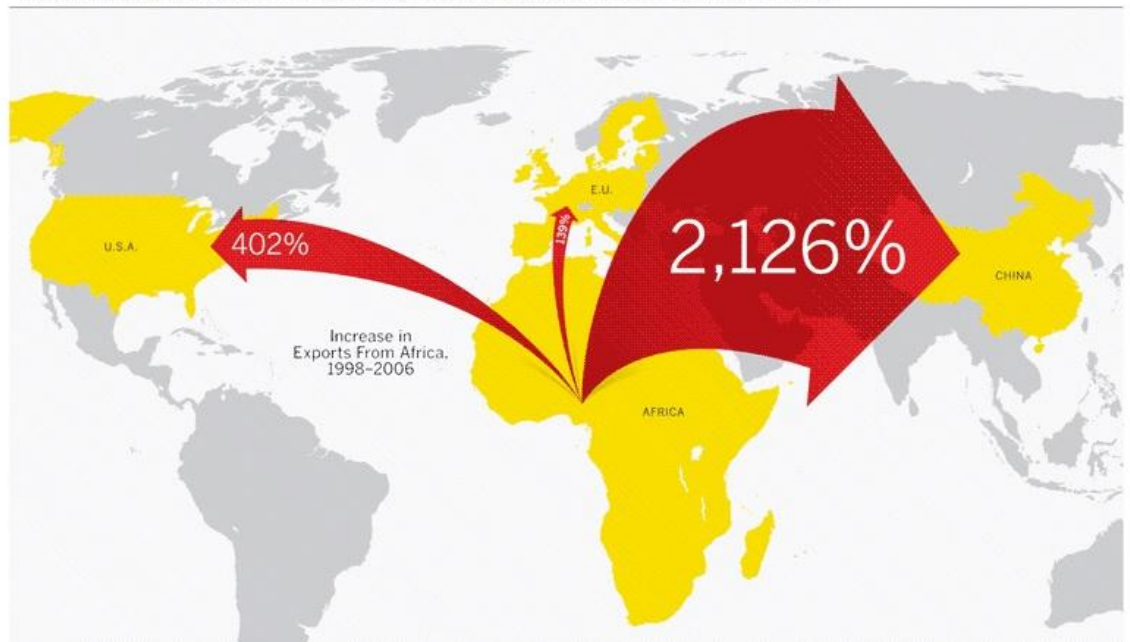
**Illustration 2:**

Chinese economic presence in Africa.

[http://theafricaneconomist.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/News\\_Ap prof\\_04\\_Detail\\_img1\\_Eng.jpg](http://theafricaneconomist.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/News_Ap prof_04_Detail_img1_Eng.jpg)

### The Race for Raw Materials

Thanks to aggressive deal making in the sub-Sahara, China has dramatically boosted its economic footprint in Africa.



**Illustration 3:**

The race of raw materials from the African continent.

<http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/wp-content/uploads/the-race-for-raw-materials2.gif>





From an economic perspective, it is also important to mention about BRICS, a coalition of the five countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which was established with the aim of empowering the role of developing countries in the context of the global financial system.<sup>7</sup>

China, a global power and a major actor in African-Asian relation uses the model of direct involvement, as the Chinese development aid has got a precise goal. Its priority focuses on hardware investments like construction of road, bridges, residential buildings and other objects of infrastructure. This dynamic growth in foreign investments could also be seen in many African countries, but there are some of these African nations which are regarded as high value and treated as important partners. Due to the Chinese internal economical development and the necessity to cover their own need and dependency on imported sources of energy, China has looked deep into Africa to meet up with these ever increasing demand of hers, making Africa her second-largest source of crude imports for the year 2015, “from which it imported 1.3 million barrels of crude oil per day which represents 23% of its total import of crude oil. Its largest African suppliers of crude oil are Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, and Sudan while lesser importation of crude oil comes from countries like Algeria, Chad, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, and Libya.”<sup>8</sup>

Among the above mentioned African nations, the biggest Chinese companies from the energetic sector are located-in and operate in Nigeria. Also the Nigerian government happens to be the largest recipient of Chinese investment on infrastructure in Africa. Thus the influence on Nigerian migration into China for trade and educational purposes also started to play a significant factor in Sino-Nigerian cooperation (approx. 1/3).

In past times, flow of Nigerians abroad “has been mainly to English speaking countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, but during the first decade after Macau’s transference of sovereignty to China, the Southeast Asia, mainly Hong Kong, Macau, and ultimately China are becoming the most popular destinations for these “*bushfallers*,” a term

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<sup>7</sup> Jim O'Neill, *Building Better Global Economic BRICs*, Goldman Sachs Global Economics Paper No: 66, November 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Mohammed Warsame, Why China is heavily investing in Africa, <http://www.cadceed.com/2016/08/why-china-is-heavily-investing-in-africa-by-mohammed-warsame.html>



which as became very common in different African speaking countries and refer to those Africans living in the Diaspora.”<sup>9</sup>

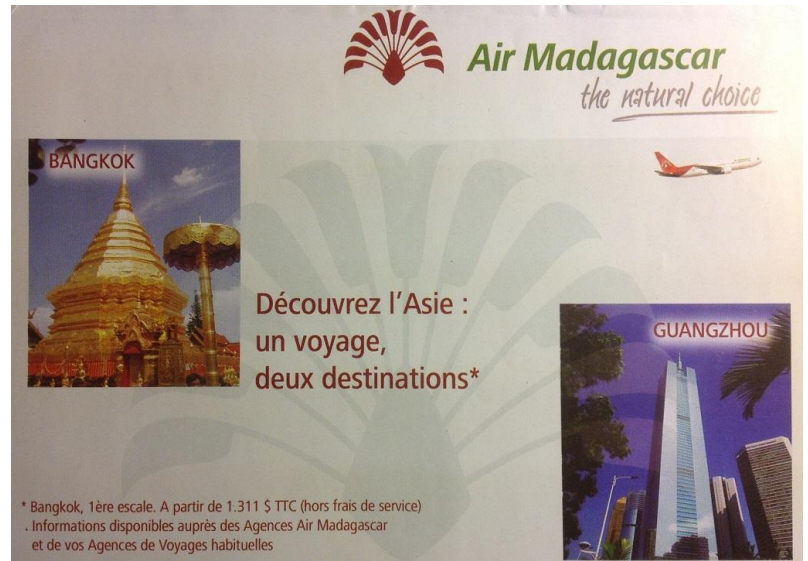
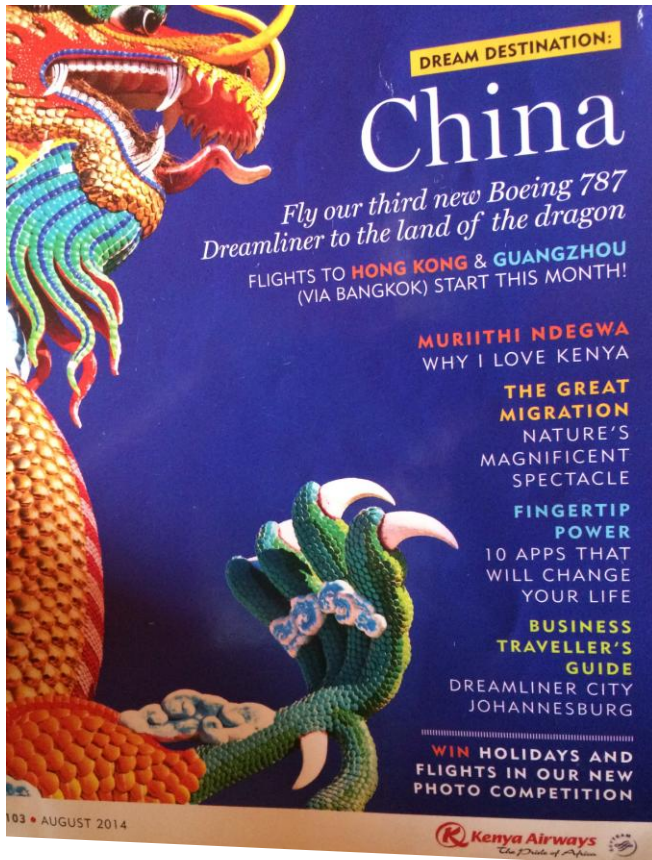


Illustration 4

Illustration 5

#### Illustrations 4 and 5:

Air Madagascar and Kenya Airways offer direct flights to Asian destinations like Bangkok, Hong Kong, Guangzhou. Photograph: Malwina Bakalarska, Nairobi, Kenya and Antananarivo, Madagascar 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Isabel Morais, 'China Wahala': the Tribulations of Nigerian 'Bushfallers' in a Chinese Territory, "Transtekstes, Transcultures, Journal of Global Cultural Studies", <http://transtexts.revues.org/281>.



## 2. Context and Purpose of the research

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The main aim to undertake this research topic emerged from a direct experience and observation of the changes that occurred between my first of my first stay in Nigeria in 2008 and while I was conducting the second field research in this country in 2011. In a period of three years, Nigeria seems to have rapidly developed in terms of infrastructure and social development. Then, I became interested in the factors that contributed to such a dynamic transformation of the country, so I began to analyze the local press and conducted interviews with Nigerian employees of international corporations, as well as the average citizens of Lagos which is the economic center of the country. Next, I noticed the increasing number of Chinese banks in the wealthy neighborhoods of Lagos metropolis, and the significant presence of the new China Town in Lagos. The direct result of the presence of Chinese companies in Nigeria has been an increase in the number of Chinese citizens seen daily in the Nigerian places of work, entertainment and entire public sphere.

This initial stage of subjective experience, which, I consider would be a very important and new research focus led me to a more systematic and in-depth analysis of this phenomena. However, it would make absolutely no sense to undertake the mundane topic on the presence of China in Africa. The fact remains that during my official and personal contacts with Nigerians, I have also noticed the new and emerging consequences of Asian – African cooperation, and while conducting the field research I came across a larger group of Nigerians who have completed their studies in Malaysia and China. Their positive feedback led me back to the scientific analysis of this issue, and I decided to track the problem and challenges that Nigerian students in Malaysia and China are confronted with. Results of my preliminary pilot studies show the need for a closer examination of the problems, including taking into account the context of how the media presents the topic of Africans in the East and South - East Asia.

Selection of migrant students from Nigeria to Malaysia and China, in addition to a good knowledge of the author of the internal situation in the country was also dictated by the fact that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Hence the background of the international mobility of Africans sited Nigerians as the largest group that makes decisions about migration. The country is also a major power in the region of West Africa, with the strongest economic



growth and social development. Also, compared to other African countries Nigeria is one of the richest, thanks to the crude oil reserves, abundant raw material and deposit of natural resources which are so important for these Asian countries. Also, the behavior of the newly formed middle class that have enriched the private market opens up new patterns of development already present in Europe, USA and Asia, through individual migration and as a result of the presence of foreigners in their country. Representatives of the educated and affluent segments of the Nigerian society are primarily interested in providing for themselves and to cater for their children's education at prestigious universities abroad. So far, the United States of America and the United Kingdom were the major educational centers chosen by Nigerians. So therefore, I was interested to know whether this African-Asian cooperation has changed the standard destination to the West for short-term migration.



**Illustration 6**





**Illustration 7**

**Illustrations 6 and 7:**

View of the China Town in Lagos.  
Photograph: Malwina Bakalarska,  
Lagos, Nigeria 2011



### 3. Theoretical Framework

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At the primary stage of the design research I was following the World Order Models Project (WOMP) according to Ali A. Mazuri's theory which assumes that the transformation of the knowledge between two different cultures or nations is the way for political and economic transformations.<sup>10</sup> I wanted to indicate how the Asian models of development in such countries like Malaysia, most especially China, well known for their technological know-how and industrialization boom in the last decade had somehow influenced the Nigerian local well-being structures. I planned to analyze the examples of the implementation of the Asian work-style and the development attitude into African background by Nigerians who came back from various Asian universities. This assumption actually was not achieved on a big scale. Firstly, I gathered only few individual cases on a biographic level.

But the second theoretical frame was very successful. According to the classical tip of the iceberg in French' and Bell' theory of Iceberg Model<sup>11</sup> I also applied cross-cultural relations analysis between African and Asians. This approach based on physical attributes and exposed customs. This is natural for any intercultural contact to first focus on what is visible in the behavior of a "stranger" in comparing to "their own group" and way of living.

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<sup>10</sup> Ali. A. Mazuri, "The African university as a multinational corporation: Problems of penetration and dependency", *Harvard Educational Review*, 45 (2), 191-210.

<sup>11</sup> Wendell French, Cecil Bell, *Organization development*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall International, New Jersey 1995.





#### 4. Research questions and methodology

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Based on a preliminary analysis of the literature and discussions collected in Nigeria during my other research topics in 2008 and 2011, different questions started to appear, such as: What motives Nigerians to choose education in Malaysia and China? How Nigerian students perceive the relationship between the opening of the Chinese market to African education and the effectiveness of China's interests in Africa? What do Nigerians consider to be attractive in Asian universities offer? What cultural elements are familiar to them, and what is regarded alien in dealing with Asian culture? Do Nigerian students wish to stay in Southeast Asia or rather to return to Nigeria? Do they feel more affiliate in dealing with Asians than in dealing with the Europeans? Are African students experiencing symptoms of hostility or racism towards them, and if so, where they feel less alienated, in Malaysia or in China? What are the similarities and cultural differences for Nigerian students during their stay in the Malaysian and Chinese universities? Are there any, and if so what kind of difficulties do Nigerian university graduates face in the context of the Nigerian labor market? Do they keep contact with their Asian colleagues or professors and if so, for what purpose do such contacts serve?

All these questions relate to phases of study abroad, but also I wanted to cover the consequences of educational migration from Nigeria to Asia in the context of individual student's career and for local African development. Additionally to complete the full picture of the situation I planned to relate to the dominant media discourses about the Africans/Nigerians in China and Malaysia.

I have decided to do this research in the mode of qualitative methodology due to my previous experience in African field research and due to the complexity and sensitivity of the research subject. I prepared a semi-structured questionnaire for individual in-depth biographical interviews and Focus Group Discussions.



#### 4.1. Process of field research

In February 2014, I spent one month in Malaysia and visited 4 universities. Two (one public and one private) in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, one university in Sintok, a city in the far north of the country and another located on the Penang Island in the West-Northern part of Malaysian Peninsula.



##### Map of Malaysia:

Source:

<https://www.vectorstock.com/royalty-free-vector/map-of-malaysia-vector-1607161>

Between the 8th of June and 20th of July 2015, I spent 6 weeks in China. I visited 17 academic centres in 9 locations: Hong Kong (Hong Kong University, Polytechnic University, City University); Guangzhou (South China Agricultural University, South China University of Technology); Changsha (Hunan University, Central South University - Xiangya Medical School); Wuhan (China University of Geosciences, Central China University of Sciences & Technology); Nanjing (South East University, South East University-Medical Campus) Suzhou



(Suzhou University); Shanghai (New York University Shanghai), Tianjin (Tianjin University of Technology & Education) and Beijing (Chinese Academy of Science, China University of Geosciences, Tsinghua University, University of Scientific and Technology).



**Map of China:**

Source:

<https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/368873025703250216/>



In both Malaysia and China, I used the snowball method to reach my informants. In Malaysia I started from the contacts of students given to me by some Nigerian academic colleagues. From these students, I was able to obtain additional and new contacts too. At two universities I visited, I was introduced to the Nigerian Community Presidents<sup>12</sup> who helped me to organize informants according to factors such as gender, university degree and religion so as to obtain a proper balance results.

Before going to China I used Facebook to identify representatives of the Association of Nigerian Students in China (ANSIC), which is the main body that brings together most of Nigerians who study at the Chinese universities. From those ANSIC members<sup>13</sup> who replied to my request, I was able to collect contacts to the local Association's coordinators. At each university located in some of the Chinese cities mentioned earlier, I introduced myself to the local Presidents<sup>14</sup> of Nigerian Community who helped me to gather students for focus group and individual interviews.

For the Hong Kong part of the research I was connected with a local Chinese<sup>15</sup> student whose work focuses on the study of African-Chinese relation. He helped me to organize some of the Nigerian students at the Hong-Kong University. The rest of respondents from other universities were also organized by snowball method from one student to his friend, from him to another colleague, etc. This fact is important to understand that all of them had something in common such as honesty, ambition, diligence and serious attitude to study. But from their individual stories, different motivations, social backgrounds and intercultural experiences emerged.

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<sup>12</sup> Special thanks to Mr. Aminu G. Waziri.

<sup>13</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Hassan Tukur Tingilin.

<sup>14</sup> Special thanks to Mr. Adeji Idowu, Mr. Adekunle Abiodun, Mr. Osun Omega and Mr. Ahmed Bangida.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. Gordon Tsui.



## 5. Students profile

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Because this research is not based on a statistical big scale sampling, I need to present the context of my informants, respondents and their backgrounds. Interviews took place in open areas on the student campuses, at the student dormitories and in the private flats of selected students. For the Malaysia field research in Kuala Lumpur, I interviewed 9 students at the University of Malaya, 6 students at Lincoln University College, and a student from KDU University College. In Sintok in the northern part of the country, I was able to interview 15 student from the University Utara Malaysia, and 12 students at the University Sains Malaysia on the Penang Island. I also went further to interview 4 students of the Linton University College in a small city of Mantin located in the South of the capital. All together, I interviewed 46 students and 1 Nigerian lecturer employed at a local university. I gathered 6 Focus Groups (with 23 students) and 24 individual semi-structured interviews.

In Nigeria there are 3 main ethnic groups – Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani, and my informants represent majority of these ethnic groups. I interviewed 21 Yoruba students (7 female, 14 male), 19 Hausa-Fulani (2 female, 17 male), 4 Ibo students (all male) and 3 male from other minority ethnic groups from the Niger-Delta region. 29 informants were Muslims and 18 were Christians with different denomination (mostly Pentecostal). Also I spent hours on informal discussions with Malaysian university lecturers, the University administration officers and random citizens (artists, policemen, traders, taxi drives, etc.) asking about their opinion of the Nigerian students in Malaysia.

For the Chinese part of the research there were students from the following universities: Hong Kong: Hong Kong University (2 students); City University (3 students); Polytechnic University of Hong Kong (1 student); Guangzhou: South China Agricultural University (2 students) and South China University of Technology (1 student); Changsha: Hunan University (2 students), Central South University - Xiangya Medical School (3 students); Wuhan: China University of Geosciences (4 students), Central China University of Sciences & Technology (1 student); Nanjing: South East University (5 students), South East University, Medical Campus (3 students); Shanghai: New York University Shanghai (0 students, I was not allowed to conduct interviews with students), Suzhou: Suzhou University (12 students); Tianjin: Tianjin University of Technology & Education (9 students); Beijing: Chinese Academy of Sciences (2 students),





China University of Geosciences (1 student), Beijing Normal University (1 student), University of Science & Technology (2 students), Tsinghua University (2 students). Altogether 56 students were interviewed. I also had an interview with 1 of the officers of the Nigerian Embassy in China and 2 other Chinese scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. I gathered 7 Focus Groups (of 28 students) and 28 individual semi-structured interviews. I was able to interview 21 Yoruba students (5 females, 16 males), 14 Hausa-Fulani (all males), 12 Igbo students (1 female, 11 males) and 9 students from other ethnic groups (2 females, 7 males). 22 informants were Muslims and 34 were Christians representing different denomination (mostly Pentecostal). I also spent numerous hours on informal discussions about the research topic with Nigerian traders working in China and Hong Kong, Chinese students and lecturers employed at local universities.





**Table 5.1: Location, universities and the number of interviewed students at each location**

<b>MALAYSIA</b> 	No. of students	<b>CHINA</b> 	No. of students
<b>Kuala Lumpur</b>		<b>Beijing</b>	
University of Malaya	9	Chinese Academy of Sciences	2
Lincoln University College	6	China University of Geosciences	1
KDU University College	1	Beijing Normal University	1
<b>Mantin</b>		University of Science & Technology	2
Linton University College	4	Tsinhua University	2
<b>Penang</b>		<b>Tianjin</b>	
University Sains Malaysia	12	Tianjin University of Technology & Education	9
<b>Sintok</b>		<b>Suzhou</b>	
University Utara Malaysia	16	Suzhou University	12
		<b>Nanjing</b>	
		South East University	3
		South East University, Medical Campus	5
		<b>Wuhan</b>	
		China University of Geosciences	4
		Central China University of Sciences & Technology	1
		<b>Changsha</b>	
		Hunan University	2
		Central South University - Xiangya Medical School	3
		<b>Guangzhou</b>	
		South China Agricultural University	2
		South China University of Technology	1
		<b>Hong Kong</b>	
		Hong Kong University	2
		City University	3
		Polytechnic University of Hong Kong	1



**Table 5.2: Number of interviewed students and the type of interview**

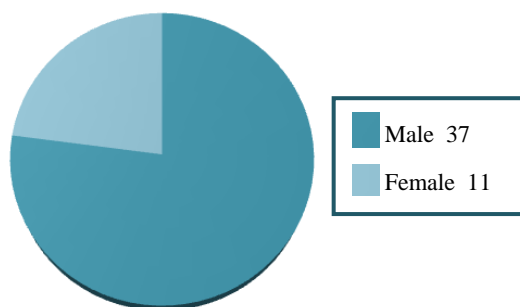
<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>CHINA</b>
46 students interviewed	56 Students Interviewed
6 Focus Group Discussions	7 Focus Group Discussions
24 individual Semi-structured Interviews	28 Individual Semi-structured Interviews

**Table 5.3: Ethnic identity of interviewed students**

<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>CHINA</b>
21 Yoruba Students	22 Yoruba Students
19 Hausa-Fulani students	14 Hausa-Fulani Students
4 Igbo students	12 Igbo students
3 Other Ethnic Group Students	9 Other Ethnic Group Students

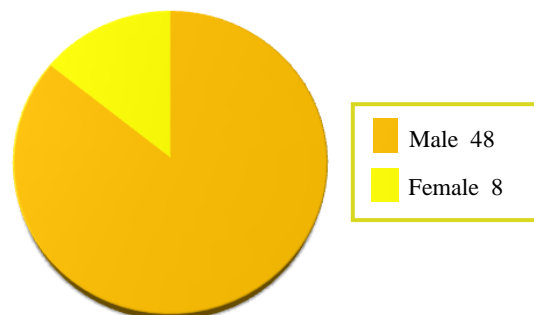
The graphs 5.1 and 5.2: **Gender distribution of interviewed students**

**MALAYSIA**



**Graph 5.1**

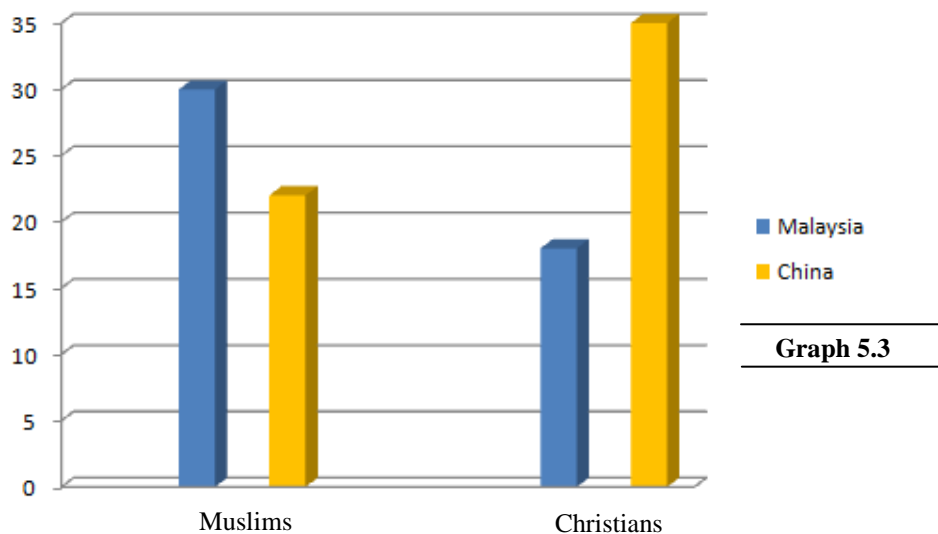
**CHINA**



**Graph 5.2**



Graph 5.3: Religious status of interviewed students



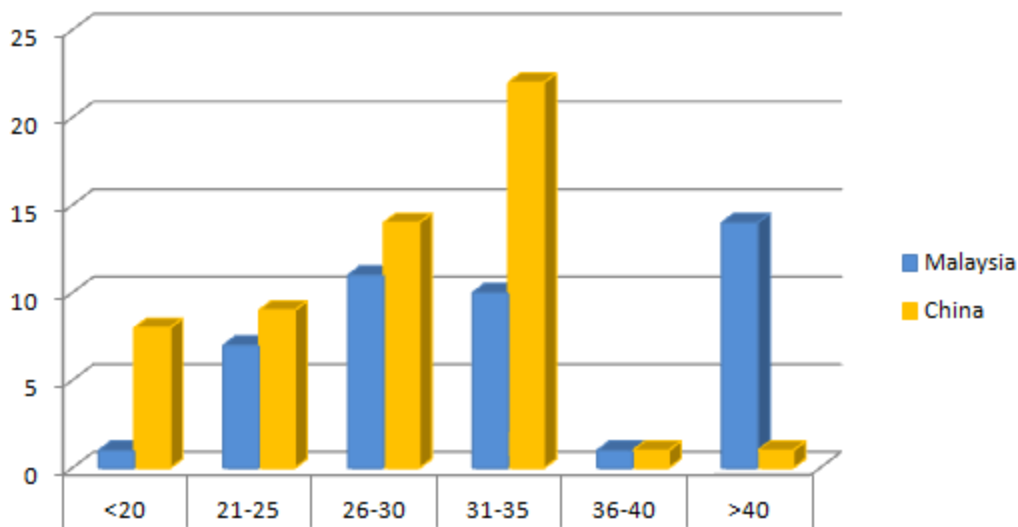
From a graph 5.3 we can identify more Muslims in Malaysia than in China. One of the reasons of such situation is of course the fact that Islam is a national religion in Malaysia. As Muslims, they are more likely to comply with the principles of Sharia and the Koranic teachings, for example, in relation to food intake.

But also I have to admit that in my research I met merely students on the legal scholarships recommended by Muslim lecturers from Northern Nigeria. In Malaysia there are also a lot of Nigerian students identifying themselves as Christians and actually some of them they form the group of the trouble-making representatives of Africans in this Asian society. „Nigerians are the ones with student visa but not attending any schools! Soon, Malaysia will stop giving Nigerians visa based on our reputation.”<sup>16</sup> This is a common problem as those Nigerians who do not intended to study but obtain student visas to escape their homeland in a search for better life, and without the required job permit, they become involved in criminal related activities such as drug trafficking and financial fraud. This further shapes the bad image of the Nigerian population in Asia.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nairaland.com/824249/nigerians-malaysia>



The graphs 5.4: Age of interviewed students



Graph 5.4

On the graph 5.4 the most visible disproportion between the ages of the Nigerian students residing in Malaysia and those based in China are the first and the last age groups. It seems that China is a much more natural way to begin higher education for young Nigerians than for adults, while for the Malaysian region there is a structural dependence to send old academic staff to enable the upgrade of their university degree. This is apparently due to the fact that a lot Nigerian lecturers still hold only the Master degree and are sent to do a Ph.D doctorate degree abroad by dean of the universities faculties where they work. *“It is cheaper to educate 5 academicians in Asia than spending the same amount of money to send just one to Europe”* (said the Head of Department of Sociology at one of the Northern Nigerian Universities).



Table 5.4: **Marital status of interviewed students**

	<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>CHINA</b>
<b>Married</b>	Total = <b>23</b>	Total = <b>12</b>
Spouse left in Nigeria	20	2
Spouse in Asia	3	10
<b>Married with children</b>	Total = <b>19</b>	Total = <b>5</b>
Children in Nigeria	14 (all males)	2 (all males)
Children in Asia	5 (2 females, 3 males)	3 (all males)
<b>Engaged</b>	Total = <b>1</b>	Total = <b>6</b>
With Asian partner	1	0
With Nigerian partner	0	6
<b>Single</b>	Total = <b>21</b>	Total = <b>38</b>
With extended family	Total = 2 (young females)	Total = 0

The above table indicates the marital status of interviewed students. These numbers reflect the age of students as well as their dependency on relatives, which correlates with their future plans and ambition after graduation from an Asian university. The Nigerian students in Malaysia are more obliged to come back home due to the families they left in Nigeria. But in China, the students I met are staying in Asia with their wife or husband trying to study together on Chinese scholarships or at least apply for grant just for one partner.

Referring to those data, the following classifications of Nigerian students in China and Malaysia can be specified.



## 5.1 Classification of Nigerian Students Groups

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**There are 3 types of groups of Nigerian students present in Malaysia.**

One classification deals with the type of degree, and could be seen in the following groups:

- Young students (20-25 years old) who came to Malaysia to get their first academic degree or Master Degree. They chose studying abroad to obtain better level of education on a more prestigious level.
- Young students (25-30 years old) who study in Malaysia to do their Ph.D. degree. These people are not obliged to develop their academic career, but at the same time they want to hold prestigious title and to later on find a better and well paid job in the private sector of the Nigeria economy.
- Older students (30-50 years old) who work in Nigeria as academicians and were obliged to do Ph.D. degree as a requirement from their college, university or employer.

**The second classification can be analyzed according to the financial factor. In this case we can indicate following groups:**

- Self-sponsored adults
- Young students sponsored by their parents or other family members
- Ph.D. students sponsored by Nigerian National Educational Programme (mostly for academic staff) – TET Fund programme
- Ph.D. students sponsored by Malaysian local universities (only for foreigners who already became their alumni and applied for Ph.D. programme with the higher scores and with outstanding academic performance).

**Also we have the classification by referring to family obligation, and I have decided to distinguish them into:**

1. Individual migration
  - a) Single students
  - b) Students who left their spouse and children back home in Nigeria
2. Family migration
  - a) Female students with one or all children (who left her husband in Nigeria)
  - b) Male students who came to Malaysia with his wife and children





### **What groups of Nigerian students are found in China?**

The main classification could be analyzed according to the financial factor. In this case we can indicate following groups:

1. Self-sponsored adult, master students and bachelor students sponsored by parents
2. Students on various programmes of the Chinese or Hong-Kong government scholarships or university exchange

**Also we found out the classification by referring to their family obligations, and I have decided to distinguish them into:**

1. Individual migration of single students
2. Family migration – mainly married male students who invite their wife to join them in China (with the excuse of offering them a formal education).



## **6. Reasons to study in Malaysia and China**

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### **6.1. Who helped those Nigerians in their decision to look for higher education particularly in Malaysia?**

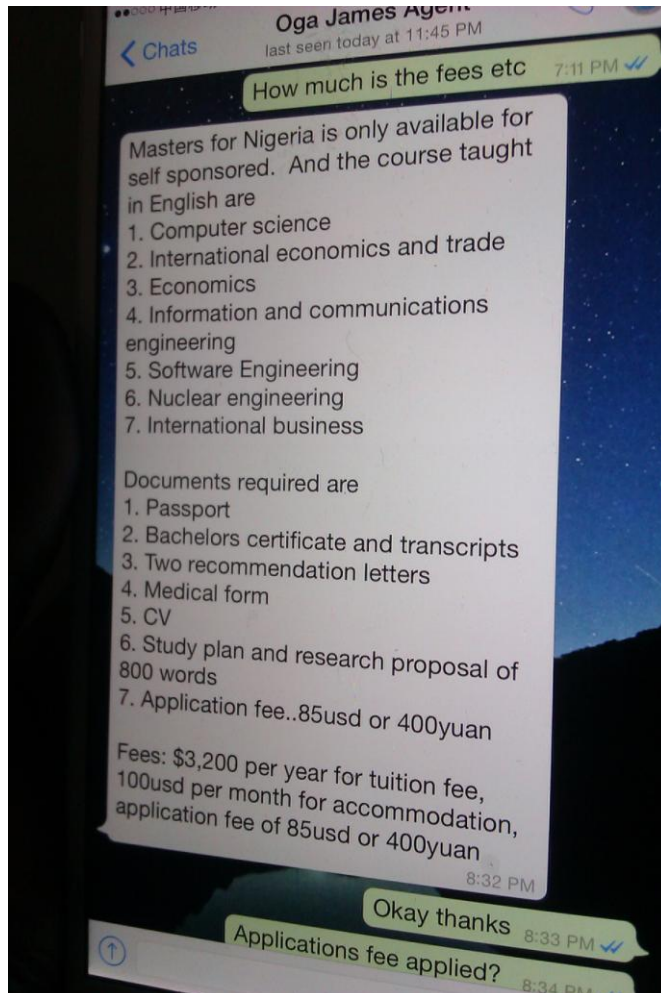
For me, one of the most intriguing questions was to issue of finding Malaysia as an attractive country to study abroad. There could be three common answers:

- Through the recommendation of a friend who already had been in Malaysia and graduated or is still studying over there and is willing to organize all the needed logistic aspects at the place for the incoming individual,
- Following family members (adults usually join spouse when young students follow fathers or uncles)
- Or, because of the particular specialization of a study which is not available in Nigeria, and if this happens to be case, the Internet is used as the main search platform methodology.

### **6.2. Who helped those Nigerians in their decision to look for higher education particularly in China?**

Also very alluring questions for me was how students identified China as an attractive country to study abroad. There could be the following answers:

- Through recommendation of a friend or family member who had already been to China and graduated or is still studying over there and is willing to organize all logistical aspects of the travel while still residing in China,
- Based on exchange agreements between Nigerian and Chinese universities or on a regional level between Nigerian state and Chinese province
- Individual research on the Internet as well as through adverts in the newspaper;
- Through commercial agents (not always reliable and provide false information as shown on illustration 8)



#### **Illustration 8**

The snapshot of the Smartphone screen of chat between a Nigerian Educational Agent and Nigerian Student who wants to study in China

Photograph: Malwina Bakalarska, Changsha, China 2015.



### 6.3. Why did Nigerians choose Asia to study abroad?

The research outcome also identified a number of patterns related to the choosing of Asia as a study destination, and its consequences for Nigerians on both personal and professional levels.

Among the main reasons why Nigerians choose **Malaysia** for continuing education are mostly based on the perceptions that:

- It is easy to obtain a Malaysian visa;
- Costs of living in Malaysia are relatively low;
- Living standards are high
- Universities provide access to high-quality facilities
- It is a predominantly Muslim country (which happens to be important for students from Northern Nigeria).

After conducting interviews I concluded there are a number of main reasons why Nigerians, who wanted to study abroad, chose **Mainland China** as their destination. Common

- Wide range of scholarship opportunities;
- Easy access to visa (comparing to applying for a US or UK visa);
- Low living costs and low tuition fees, when compared to European destinations;
- Higher living standards, when compared to Africa;
- Personal development reasons, mostly perception of possession of the Chinese language and contacts in China as an asset for future career;
- Access to research on advanced technologies / medicine

For those students who choose **Hong Kong**, some additional reasons that motivated and played vital role in their selection are:

- No language barrier (possession of English is common and English is a language of instruction in education);
- Religious freedom and unrestricted access to churches;
- The perception that racism does not exist in such highly internationalized environment.



#### **6.4 Institutional background of Nigerian-Asian academic cooperation**

To be able to justify this, I conducted the third part of the field research in Nigeria. Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2015, I have visited Nigeria's leading regional universities in the South-West, South-South and South-Eastern part of the country.

Initially the third part of the research project was aimed at investigating the consequences of Nigerian education migrations to Asia in a biographic context. I intended to track the careers of students who I met in Malaysia in 2014 and in China in 2015. I was interested in learning how did their experiences from different culture influence their private and especially professional lives.

Later on, when I collected data from students in Malaysia and China I realized that it is equally important to collect first-hand stories and opinions from students who came back from the Asian universities and also from those who study Chinese language and culture while residing in Nigeria. For this purpose I visited all the Confucius Institutes in Nigeria, at the University of Lagos and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Both are located in important trading hubs of the Yoruba-land (Lagos State) and of the Igbo-land (Anambra State).

Before going to Nigeria, which will be my third visit, I tried to cover the map of main universities, which are sending their students to Asia. With the help of the interviews I already had with Nigerian students in China and especially in Malaysia, I was able to obtain a clear image of the collaboration between those Asian academic centers and universities from the northern part of Nigeria, a region historically known as Muslim-dominated, which I also experienced during my visit to Kano and Sokoto in 2011 where I developed good academic network with universities from these cities.

During data collection at the Utara University Malaysia (UUM), I was invited to participate at the very important meeting of the representatives of Bayero University Kano (BUK) Nigeria who were on an academic visit to Malaysia to sign a Memorandum of Understanding to open a new bilateral relations of student and academic staff on Islamic Banking



School as a part of UUM structure.<sup>17</sup>

So in 2015 I chose southern part of Nigeria to conduct interviews with authorities and lecturers of the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport), University of Calabar (Unical), University of Lagos (Unilag), Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (Unizik), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), which develop international exchange programs with Asian countries, particularly with Malaysia and China.



**Map of Nigeria:**

Source:

<http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/nigeria.html>

<sup>17</sup> Some of the pictures from the official ceremony are available here:  
<http://www.africansinasia.com/gallery-malaysia/>





I conducted interview at the University of Lagos (Unilag), an institution where I have maintained academic relations since 2008 with the following staff members: Prof. Duro Oni, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who also happens to be the first Director of the Confucius Institute at the University of Lagos and pioneer of the academic cooperation between Nigeria and China; Prof. Muyiwa Falaye, Dean of Faculty of Arts and former the Director of the Confucius Institute, University of Lagos; Prof. Iyiola Oni, Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, who facilitated the contact and link with the above-mentioned professors; Prof. Lirong Jiang, Co-Director of the Confucius Institute (affiliated at the Beijing Institute of Technology), together with her Administration Secretary Dr. O.N. Ejehu and her driver who also studies Chinese language; Dr. Partick Oloko, Associate Professor, Department of English, Dr. Fatai Adesina Badru, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology and Dr. Omon Merry Osiki, Department of History, as well as with two Chinese language teachers.

At this University a key person responsible for cooperation with Chinese academics is Prof. Duro Oni (who visited the Peoples Republic of China in 1991 and since then visits China every year sometimes up to 3 or 4 times a year). He turned to Hanban in 2006 to with the idea of establishing Confucius Institute in Lagos and in 2007 based on the Bilateral Agreement with Beijing Institute of Technology, an official cooperation granted and the Confucius Institute was opened in 2009. Prof. Duro Oni popularly called “Mr. China” at the University of Lagos proposed the emergence of a new Department of Chinese Language which was established in 2013 within the Faculty of Arts.

During my field research in China in June 2015 I some of the first set of students that emerged as a result of this department from the University of Lagos. Upon completion of their studies in this new field of studies in Nigeria, the young students were sent to the University of Suzhou for four additional semesters to learn the Chinese language from native speakers.

I left Lagos State (Yoruba-land) heading to Anambra State (Igbo-land). At the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, I visited another Confucius Institute which was established in 2008, one year earlier than the one Lagos. While there, I interviewed Prof. Ji Nengwen, Director of the Confucius Institute (2008-2015), an affiliate of the Xiamen University; Dr. Sunny Ifeanyi



Odinye, Head of Department of Chinese Studies and Coordinator at the Confucius Institute, Editor of Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies with his wife Mrs. Ifeoma Odinye from the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and I conducted Focus Group Discussion with 10 students from the Department of Chinese Studies.

Dr. Sunny Ifeanyi Odinye is deeply involved in the full activities relates to the department as well as to the Confucius Institute. He studied in Beijing for two years, 2005-2007, and did his doctoral degree at Xiamen University from 2010 – 2013, with that effect he became the first Nigerian who wrote his Ph.D thesis in the Chinese language. Thanks to his experience he encourages his students in passing the language Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK)<sup>18</sup>, with the opinion that “language is a strategic point” in any international relation. Moreover he admitted that “both the Chinese and the Igbo people are good traders”, which happens to be an important factor in the process of building business relationships for future alumni of Department of Chinese Studies at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka.

At the University of Port Harcourt (Uniport) which is the most important university in the South-South region of Nigeria due to its location in the heart of the Niger-Delta region known its richness in vast oil reserves, I held meetings with Mr. Kingsley O. Wogwu, Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor; Prof. Acho Akakuru, Director of Exchange and Linkage Programmes Unit and with the staff of this Unit. During our meeting, Prof. Acho Akakuru and his devoted team presented a full list of the academic exchange between the University of Port Harcourt and other foreign universities. At my time of visit in October of 2015, the University of Port Harcourt does not have any Memorandum of Understanding (official agreement) with any Asian universities. They mainly send their academic staff to countries like Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Netherlands, Czech Republic and USA. But in 2010 one of the University of Port Harcourt academic staff was sent to Malaysia on TWAS Fellowship (The World Academy of Sciences). Also Prof. Akakuru and Mr. Wogwu expressed the will of University of Port Harcourt to establish new exchange programmes with Asian universities.

At the University of Nigeria in Nsukka (UNN), located in Enugu State, I interviewed Prof. Edwin M. Igbokwe, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Administration and Prof. Charles A. Igwe,

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/hsk/105146.htm>



Director of Advancement Centre. Prof. Igwe mentioned about academic exchanges with other Asian universities especially with Japanese academic centres. He pointed out the scholarship opportunities for Nigerian students from technical departments sponsored by Japanese Society for the Promotion of Sciences. Prof. Igbokwe admitted that the UNN is gradually picking up contacts with Malaysian and Indonesian universities to establish long-term cooperation.

In Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, I had a meeting with Dr. Emi Joel Efiong, lecturer at the University of Calabar together with her assistant, Mr. Mark Daniel. This time the University was on strike.



## 7. Adaptation process of Nigerian students in Malaysia and China<sup>19</sup>

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The process of adaptation is much easier in a group of peers. In Malaysia there is no official structure of communication between Nigerian students in different region of this Asian country, which could be used as a medium to exchange experience among newcomers and other African residence. We can talk about this situation only at the universities where a big amount of students from the same Nigerian university lives on a same campus. In Malaysia, I visited two well-established Nigerian Communities with its President and organizational body in both at the Utara University Malaysia in Sintok and at the University Sains Malaysia on the Penang Island. Both places were located within a distance from the city center on a complex campus. This space factor is influenced on the level of integration.

In Hong Kong there are two general organizational structures integrating Nigerian students. The first is called the “Yoruba Association in Hong Kong” connects and gathers its members who are residents from the Yoruba ethnic group, one of the three main Nigerian ethnicities virtually by the popular “WhatsApp” messenger. The second one is “Association of Nigerian Scholars in Hong Kong”<sup>20</sup> uniting only Nigerians from the academia.

It is therefore difficult to speak about integration between Nigerian traders, students and scholars. The only places where I could meet members from all of these groups were churches.

In the mainland China, situation is totally different. There is a strong cooperation between the Nigerian Embassy in Beijing and the Association of Nigerian Students in China (ANSIC)<sup>21</sup>. Thanks to it, almost every newly arriving student is informed about the possibility to join the Association, which gives him/her contacts to local leaders and new friends from the same country. ANSIC members are well structured and active. They publish bulletin, organize yearly meetings and elections on a country and regional levels. They are referred to in an on-line TV report about daily life of Nigerian students in China.

Nevertheless, 96% of interviewed students confess its problems with living in Asian environment.

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<sup>19</sup> Developed analysis on this topic will be available in a separate article.

<sup>20</sup> <https://web.facebook.com/Association-of-Nigerian-Scholars-in-Hong-Kong-572699112893753/?fref=ts>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ansiconline.org/>

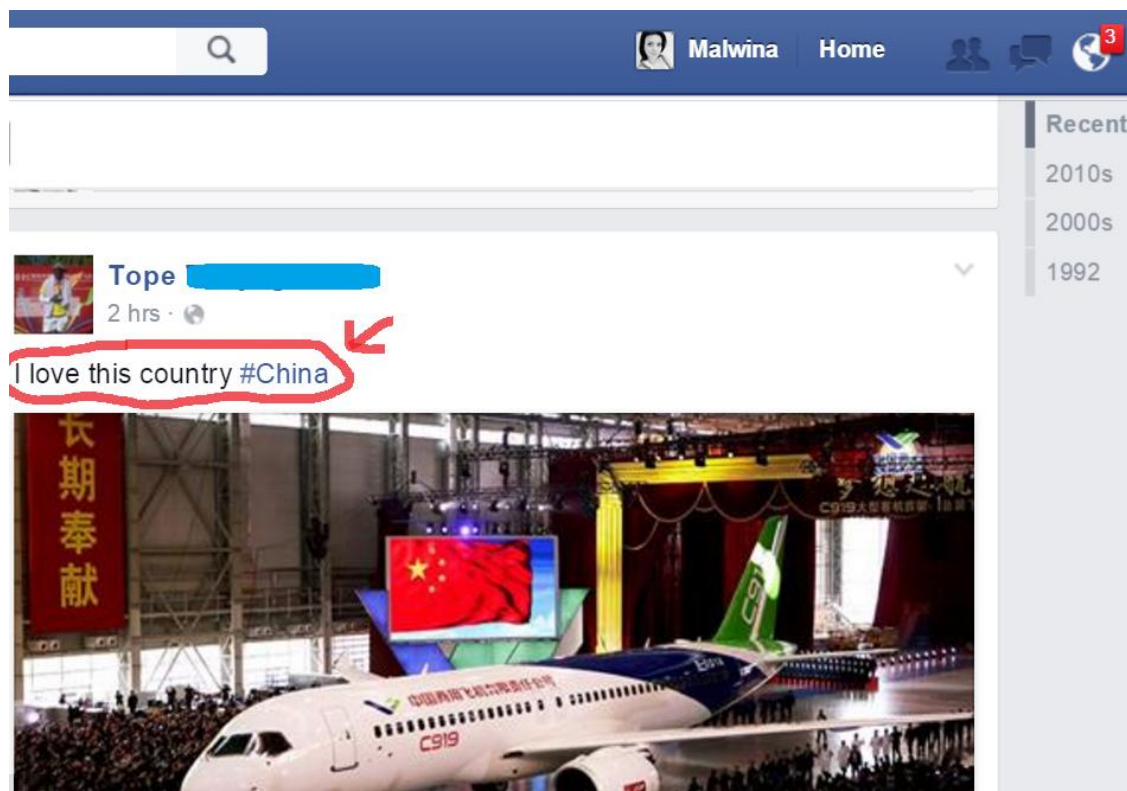


Among the main challenges and problems related to adaptation in Malaysia for the Nigerian respondents are as listed below:

- Difficulties in getting used to Malay food;
- Introvert and shy nature of the Malays;
- Racism;
- Lack of entertainment / boredom at the campus
- Organization of the studies

Grand majority of the Nigerians interviewed perceived their stay in China as uncomfortable. Among the main challenges and problems related to adaptation in China (and Hong Kong), for the Nigerian respondents are as listed below:

- Language barrier (for mainland China);
- Xenophobic / racist behaviour (for mainland China mainly)
- Food and geographical distance
- High costs of living (for Hong Kong)



**Illustration 9:**

Printscreen from the Facebook page of one of the Nigerian interviewed students who appreciated his stay in China.



## **8. Individual achievements and further aspirations of Nigerian graduates after coming back from Asia**

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Few Nigerians expect to continue their career in Malaysia after graduation. As student visa does not translate into a work permit (which the government is reluctant to provide), the perspective to find employment is limited for administrative reasons, with some exceptions for the academic lecturers. Others come back due to the terms of their scholarship that (many PhD students are obliged to work at their home universities) or for personal reasons. Young students see more opportunities in Nigeria to open their own business. Some of informants planned to continue their education in UK, USA or Australia doing Ph.D. degree or postdoctoral fellowship. I have met only two people who wanted to stay in Malaysia because they got married local women. But they were randomly met Nigerians in Kuala Lumpur not on student visa.

After graduation, Nigerian students based in Hong Kong do not expect to continue their career in this city-state because of strict visa regulations. There is a special visa, which falls under the “Immigration Agreement for Non-Local Graduated” law. Those foreign alumni of local university who apply for this visa after their graduation can work or do business in Hong Kong for a period of one year. After this time a foreigner needs to be employed for another year. After this time, the person can extend his/her work visa for another two and then three years. So it is necessary to live in Hong Kong constantly for seven years to become a permanent resident. But generally it is difficult to find a job in a relatively small Hong Kong as there are limited opportunities for people from outside of the international corporate structures. Experience of previous graduates reduces the expectation of chances to find employment for people from outside the corporate environment, especially Africans.

Students based in Mainland China often perceive their current position as an intermediate step before enrolling in Western countries for a Ph.D. Those who do not expect to continue their academic career are more willing to apply their newly acquired skills in Nigeria or to be involved in business or diplomatic relation with China.





## 9. Summary

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Referring to the research questions I have already presented the motives that makes Nigerians chose to study in Malaysia and China, which is mainly the easy access to visa and cheaper costs of living. The same reasons can be applied to the topic - what Nigerians consider to be attractive in Asian universities offer? But in this case scholarships from Chinese and Hong Kong Government are crucial in the process of decision making. We also know the answer whether Nigerian students wish to stay in Southeast Asia or rather to return to Nigeria, the answer is “most often they do not want stay in Asia”. Another research question referring to African students experience symptoms of hostility or racism towards them was also undertaken briefly in this report giving rather negative picture of the case.

At the initial stage of the report I was wondering if the Nigerian students feel less alienated in Malaysia or in China? Do they feel more affiliate in dealing with Asians than in dealing with the Europeans? Also I asked myself what are the similarities and cultural differences for Nigerian students during their stay in the Malaysian and Chinese universities? Are there any, and if so what kind of difficulties do Nigerian university graduates face in the context of the Nigerian labor market? Do they keep contact with their Asian colleagues or professors and if so, for what purpose they use such contacts? What cultural elements are familiar to them, and what is alien in dealing with Asian culture? How did the Asian experience influence the careers of these Nigerian graduates? Because these questions relates to the common topic of cross-cultural relation, I decided to dedicate to them to more space in a devoted article which was prepared for publication in the international academic peer-review journal.



## 10. Conclusions

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Do any changes occur within the framework of the African migration to Europe in the face of closer African – Asian cooperation? I expected that the answer to this question will be positive. But the results were not so clear.

During the field research in Nigeria numerous factors that contributed to the increasing interest in Asian countries as destinations for education and vocational trainings were examined. The perception that China and Malaysia are attractive and available as partners strongly correlates with the visibility of their educational offers, as well as their cultural and business-related presence in general.

To cover the full picture of the Nigerian affection towards Asian culture, I went on further into additional research of the market of educational agencies that facilitates the movement of Nigerian students to China and Malaysia. I also collected information on the reception of Chinese culture in Nigerian cities using participant observation. For this purpose, I visited Chinese-run companies, restaurants and the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Lagos.

Lastly, the impact of exposure to Asian aesthetics, brands, products, and cultural presence in daily life was studied. I interviewed managers of the Asian companies working in Nigeria, documented performance of Asian restaurants, shops, as well as presence of Asian-related gadgets for daily use<sup>22</sup>, which represent part of the process of familiarization with, and the acceptance of Asian presence and values in Nigeria. All of these contribute indirectly to the perception of China or Malaysia as success stories and potential destinations for building a career.

One must list activities of the Confucius Institutes in this regard as among the major sources of information, agents offering admission and university entry facilitation and formalities in order to enrol in foreign universities, exposure to Asian studies and information available at the Nigerian universities, and finally presence of (mostly) China in the public sphere, pop culture, advertisements etc.

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<sup>22</sup> Visual illustrations are available on-line in the photo gallery  
<http://www.africansinasia.com/nigeria-2015/>



From the institutional point of view the Confucius Institutes form a major tool of Chinese soft power<sup>23</sup> aimed at spreading Chinese language, obtaining access to local manpower that would maintain ties to China, and securing the presence of Chinese staff in key locations for trade and scientific research. The task of the Confucius Institutes in Africa is therefore to work towards changing the reception of China and the Chinese people, as well as in the symbolic realm. It is noted that in the early years of dynamic development of the Chinese presence in Africa, the middle entrenched association was portrayed with the image of an "aggressive looking dragon", but nowadays the Confucius Institutes is attempting to change this perception, by promoting the image of the "Chinese pandas" as a harmless animal that is easily identified with the characteristics of positive friendship.

Like I mentioned at the beginning I visited both Confucius Institutes in Nigeria; at the University of Lagos and at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The establishment of each of the Confucius Institutes was as a result of a long process of building ties between the universities in Nigeria and China, particularly by setting up departments of Chinese studies, receiving Chinese language teachers, building partnerships with Chinese universities, developing bilateral student exchange programmes and programmes for PhD students. Examination results and performance of the Confucius Institutes proved that they play an important role in attracting students to study in China through the extended language courses and annual competitions where students are awarded with visits to China, known as the Chinese Bridge Programme. They play a role in breaking stereotypes about the Chinese people and in building a positive image of the Chinese approach towards success.

Partnerships and occasional working cooperation with Asian counterparts play a role in attracting students to study in China also in those locations where no Confucius Institute is established (e.g. University of Port Harcourt, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

The Agencies offering arrangement of logistical formalities and enrolment often involve Nigerians who worked with Asian institutions or who studied in China or other foreign countries. Public advertisements available in the form of posters are often placed and could be found mostly in the vicinity of universities, and they list countries where students could be assisted

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<sup>23</sup> Soft-power term in this context is used in the meaning of Joseph Nye's concept: J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power. The Means To Success In World Politics*, New York 2004, s. 34.



with their application to study. Those advertisements often omit Western destinations like the United Kingdom and the USA, and offer help in enrolment to those countries, where they are sure it is easier to obtain visas. These include China and Malaysia but also extend to countries like Northern Cyprus, Belarus, and Georgia amongst others. Although the visa-clue does not necessarily correspond with the quality of teaching, it contributes to perception of certain countries being more available for studying than the others, and also to increase of interest in the opportunities they offer.



#### **Illustration 10**

Street advert of Nigerian education agency based in Abuja (the capital of Nigeria). Among American and European destinations to study abroad we can see Malaysia as an Asian opportunity.

Photograph: Malwina Bakalarska, Calabar, Nigeria 2015.



Referring to the academic exchange, I noticed that the Malaysian universities and colleges promote their offer through educational agencies while China prefers to establish direct relations with African universities. Both the African and Asian sides strive for such academic cooperation and relations with each other.

Because of my research, this year I was asked by one of the Chinese college representative to initiate contact with Kenyan universities. This happens to be a very long connection process and procedure in linking the Asian college with the East African ones, but Chinese side were seriously engaged in establishing this new academic exchange.

In conclusion these are the major differences seen between Malaysian and Chinese educational offer for African/Nigerian students:

MALAYSIA	CHINA
In Malaysia education is treated more as a business with large amount of private schools with American or English names	Chinese scholarships are the example of soft power tactic <sup>24</sup>
Malaysia advertises itself as Asian educational hub offering 2 main scholarships: the "Malaysian International Scholarship (MIS)" and the "Commonwealth Scholarship And Fellowship Plan (CSFP)"	China offers scholarship programs for Nigerian students under the China Scholarship Council
Scholarships are funded by Nigerian universities for their students based on bilateral contracts with Malaysian universities (sponsored by Nigerian government TET Fund Program)	There is developing relation between universities exchange programs between Nigerian states/cities and Chinese provinces/cities
There are some scholarship opportunities for Nigerian alumni who graduated in Malaysia	There are some scholarship opportunities for Nigerian alumni who graduated in China
Other self sponsored students are into get higher education diploma in a fast mode	If Nigerian students are not willing to study the Chinese language they choose Hong Kong which offers government scholarships for foreign students <sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Soft-power term in this context is used in the meaning of Joseph Nye's concept.

<sup>25</sup> For example Hong Kong University in 2015 offered a scholarship for master student from abroad which is 14.350 HK\$ (while a yearly university tuition fee costs 42.000 HK\$ and it is paid from the scholarship). City University of Hong Kong provides for its foreign students monthly scholarship 20.000 HK\$.



This research was not designed to generalize its findings to a large population. It is obvious from the nature of the sampling which was used and which is commonly acceptable in the field of qualitative research.<sup>26</sup> All results can be applied to the situation from the period of 2014-2016 and relates to these particular students and other actors who were involved in the project.

Although, the conclusion of my research may overlap with the conclusions of other researchers who are doing<sup>27</sup> or have done<sup>28</sup> similar academic investigation.

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<sup>26</sup> „Qualitative Field Research and Data Analysis”, in: Rochelle Brocka and Richard G. Johnson (eds.), *Research Methods in Africana Studies*, Peter Lang, New York 2014, p. 271.

<sup>27</sup> Chak-Pong Gordon Tsui, *African University Students in China's Hong Kong: Motivations and Aspiration*, „The Journal of Pan African Studies”, vol.7, no.10, May 2015; Tope Tony Igbekele, Master thesis on Nigerian students in China, Beijing 2015 (not published yet)

<sup>28</sup> Sandra Gillespie, *South-South Transfer. A Study of Sino-African Exchange*, Routledge, New York 2001; Adams Bodomo, *Africans in China: The Experiences from Education and Training*, <http://www.cmi.no/file/2911-.pdf>



