

---

# Definitely maybe: Assessing the resilience of Chinese wholesaler - retailers in Johannesburg

Tanya Zack\*<sup>1</sup> and Philip Harrison<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Independent urban planner – South Africa

<sup>2</sup>University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) – Private Bag 3 2050 WITS Johannesburg, South Africa,  
South Africa

## Abstract (in French and English)

Up until 2012, opportunities in retail and wholesale of affordable goods in Johannesburg were vast, attracting Chinese migrants in significant numbers and leading to the rapid proliferation of Chinese malls. In recent years, this favourable situation seems to have changed, due to intensifying levels of competition and concerns about an increasingly saturated market, challenges related to a weak currency as well as shifts in the domestic market with a growing share of (more selective) end-consumers. In the face of these various pressures, adaptation strategies employed by Chinese wholesalers embrace different geographical scales, ranging from local to transnational, and include adjustments in the supply chains, as well as an increasing focus on marketing, design and branding, and strengthening of personal relationships along the supply chain. If the vast majority of clothing and daily consumer goods sold in South Africa are made in China, perceptions change depending on the point of sale. Whilst South African franchises are seen as sources for fashionable goods, Chinese malls are often associated with poor quality. Owing to these double standards, there is a tendency to modernise (both at the level of the malls as well as of the shops), in some cases through diluting, in others by highlighting visible Chinese characteristics. By focusing on the appearance of the malls as well as on the commercial strategies adopted by a select number of Chinese wholesalers, this paper seeks to provide insight into the nature of shifts in the market for affordable products.

**Keywords:** Chine, Afrique, China, Africa

---

\*Speaker