
Change and continuity: Evolving dynamics in Johannesburg's Chinatowns

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Abstract (in French and English)

The significant and continuous arrival of Chinese migrants in Johannesburg has led to a strengthening of the commercial and residential footprints, adding new features to the city's urban landscape. Apart from numerous Chinese malls, mainly concentrated along the southern edges of the agglomeration, as well as the shining banners of a few big multinationals in the financial district in the North, it is the presence of Chinatowns that contribute most to the Chinese visibility in town.

In comparison to most other cities, the originality of Johannesburg comes primarily from the duplication of these ethnic landmarks, reflecting the plurality and complexity of Chinese migration waves. Between the arrival of the first Chinese in the late nineteenth century and the new migrations since the mid-1990s, the differences are pronounced and also translate into space (from urban decay in first Chinatown in downtown Johannesburg to urban renewal and development in the second one located in the eastern suburbs). While both areas follow singular trajectories, each of them displays Chinese characteristics within the broader Johannesburg landscape. Apart from analysing the shifting nature of these spaces, it is also worth studying how domestic authorities (both at municipal and national level) engage with these areas, and – by extension – with the Chinese minority groups.

Keywords: Chine, Afrique, China, Africa

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