UNRAVELLING THE ‘FONGKONG’ PHENOMENON IN BOTSWANA THROUGH ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG MASS MEDIA, GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES AND LOCAL VOICES

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Made in China goods are called fongkongs (Barrett, 2007) in Southern Africa including Botswana. With a reputation for poor quality, they are generally regarded as cheap copies or even fake goods (Park, 2013). The Botswana government has attempted to regulate and control fongkongs, but they survive and continue to thrive. This research adopts anthropologic perspective to present the views of the mass media, government and local people in Botswana, uses push-pull theory to unravel the complicated context of fongkongs in Botswana society. Through participant observation, interview and document survey the researcher aims to present a balanced view by exploring various voices and argues that despite the tightening of regulations, fongkongs seem to stay in Botswana, insofar as they fulfill popular demands from local customers. However, there is a potential risk to Chinese merchants that they will be driven out if local merchants attain control of the supply chain.

Key words: Botswana, China shops, Counterfeit, Fongkong

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to address the question that why fongkongs (usually regard poor quality and fake goods that are made in China) are prevalent despite of the quality and legal issues, as well as the governmental regulations they have encountered through unveiling the pulling power of fongkongs in Botswana society. Anthropological methods such as interview and participant observation have been adopted along with document surveying. In the first part of the paper the researcher will give a brief introduction of Botswana, followed by an overview of Chinese merchants there, the fongkongs’ arrival, and the push and pull factors on them as well as local government’s attitudes towards them. In the second part, the paper mainly argues fongkongs’ influence on local industry and retailers, the local demand for various types of fongkongs and the related tactics of governmental regulation over China shop.

Background of Botswana

Botswana is an inland country in Southern Africa with a population of 2 million; it declared its independence in 1966. Current adult unemployment is 17.8% and 30.3% of
the population live below the poverty line\textsuperscript{1} (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). The Capital city, Gaborone, contains 10\% of the population. Four decades of uninterrupted civilian leadership, progressive social policies and significant capital investment have made Botswana one of the most dynamic economies in Africa. Mineral extraction and diamond mining dominate economic activity, although tourism is also a growing sector due to the country’s conservation practices and extensive nature reserves (CIA, 2014). According to the MBendi Information Service (2014), the manufacturing sector in Botswana is relatively small, only accounting for an estimated 5\% of its GDP due to a small domestic market, as well as the fact that South Africa supplies most of the country’s needs. Aside from meat processing, Botswana had no manufacturing activity at its independence. By 1995 there were some medium to large scale manufacturing enterprises registered in Botswana; however the majority was owned by non-citizens such as South Africans and Asians.

The Chinese in Botswana

For a long time the crucial roles in Botswana’s economy were occupied by the people originally from Europe and India. Even now the most influential supermarkets are operated by these two groups. According to Best (1970, p. 601), the first Indians to settle in Botswana came from South Africa around 1892 and by 1922 Botswana had a population of approximately 120 Asians, all of whom were dependent upon trading. Botswana only established diplomatic relations with China in 1975. However since then inter-governmental cooperation in the economic and technological fields has served as the driving force of economic relations between the two countries. China has provided some financial assistance to support Botswana’s construction of a national infrastructure, including grants and preferential loans, leading to the completion of 28 projects up to the end of 2009 (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Botswana, 2008a; Liu, 2010).

In the late 1980s, Chinese state-owned construction firms came to Botswana to contribute the development of infrastructure. The Chinese government’s call to its nationals to “go abroad” has seen a significant increase in the number of Chinese enterprises and companies moving into Botswana. Currently, it is estimated that there are 10,000 Chinese\textsuperscript{2} in Botswana, with about 1,000 China shops\textsuperscript{3} distributed across the cities and rural towns, selling everything from furniture, appliances, tools, clothes, and shoes, to small accessories.

Fongkongs in Botswana

Based on researcher’s field research, Chinese wholesalers in Botswana go to China to order merchandise and entrust export agencies in China to send the merchandise by

\textsuperscript{1} Rank 156 out of 203 invested countries.
\textsuperscript{2} According to Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Botswana
\textsuperscript{3} The term is used in Botswana, both by locals and Chinese merchants themselves, to refer to shops owned by Chinese people that sell merchandise made in China. In Botswana most of such shops are owned by Chinese. According to researcher’s interview, there are two Chinese families that have been granted Botswanan citizenship.
containers. From wholesale markets in Botswana, merchandise is distributed to cities and towns across the country through retail trading activities conducted by both Chinese and local retailers. The majority of local merchants and vendors choose to buy goods from Chinese wholesalers; however, a handful of them have travelled to China themselves to purchase unique designer clothes to avoid competition with Chinese merchants.

Recently, quality issues relating to Chinese merchandise have gathered much local attention. These are frequently identified by local people and the local media (Gaotlhobogwe, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Anonymous, 2010). Chinese goods exported to Africa are usually low in price but also low in quality, especially in the 1990s when pioneer Chinese merchants arrived in Botswana, since the goods are chosen to match the consumer profile in African countries. A Chinese who has been in Botswana since 1992 says:

> When I just came here, most of local people were bare feet. A pair of shorts shoes were sold at 300 Pula (1 Pula = 0.5 USD in those days) in white people’s and Indian’s shops, and local people’s salary was around 200 Pula per month. Chinese merchants brought so called “Garbage Goods” here that are usually old fashioned or sale-remnants gathered from closed down factories in China. Local people call them “fongkongs”. But it was Chinese merchants who sell the goods in an affordable price and thus helped local people to have shoes and clothes to wear.

These days “Garbage Goods” can seldom be found in Botswana. However, local people being unaware of this background are in the habit of joking about Chinese goods, calling them “fongkongs” (Anonymous, 2010). The term originated in South Africa and Zimbabwe to describe products from Asia (especially China), which are commonly believed to be shoddy and cheap (Barrett, 2007). Some argue that “fongkongs” is a concoction of African governments and business people who are attempting to dent the reputation of Chinese traders because they cannot compete with them (McNamee et al., 2012, p. 40). However, as a result China is frequently blamed for dumping its low quality products in Africa (Park, 2008). One interviewee says: “Once you buy a pair of sandals in a China shop, you need to go back to the shop again and again, because those sandals only last a couple of weeks and you need to keep on buying new ones.” Therefore, although the quality of Chinese merchandise in Botswana has improved greatly in recent years, many local people still keep bias towards Chinese goods and the name “fongkong” is prevailing to represent almost every goods that are sold in China shops. However, not every good in China shop causes issues. Small items such as tools, accessories, and cosmetics etc. have never been a problem to China shops.

**Push and pull factors on fongkongs**

Since last decade, Chinese merchants have migrated on a global scale in conjunction with China’s rising production of consumer goods (Kuang, 2008, p. 648-649). Thus the soaring numbers of Chinese merchants pave the way for Chinese merchandise when the force of merchandise fosters strong pushing power domestically and have to seek international market.

However on the other side, local demand plays a role as pulling power that pulls
fongkongs, even problematic ones into Botswana market. Nowadays, the problematic fongkongs that stir up major issues are poor quality clothes, fake brand clothes and shoes, as well as pirate DVDs and CDs. They fulfill different demands, but also cause complaints respectively. According to Chinese merchants, low income people, including local Tswana people, Zimbabweans and Zambians, rely on cheap Chinese goods despite of their limited quality. Medium income population and college students, mostly Tswana people, are the major consumers of the fake brand. Pirate DVDs seem to obtain favor over every income level and ethnic group; even people originally from Europe have been observed buying pirate DVDs. The Botswana government seizes the opportunity of removing counterfeits to control the spread of China shops. On government initiatives like “Clean Sweep Counterfeits”, even the Chinese government has offered some help:

An underground storage facility in Gaborone used as a warehouse for fake international clothing brands was hit on Thursday in a rare raid involving the DIS\(^4\), CID\(^5\), plain clothes police and representatives of international clothing brands... Several Chinese shops in Gaborone were also swept clean during the raid as international brand representatives identified their faked brands and seized the goods worth millions of Pulas... An undercover cop, during the operation at BBS\(^6\) revealed how an underground facility used by the Chinese mafias\(^7\) as a warehouse for fake goods was discovered, and all the clothing brands found there packed in big wooden containers were set on fire at the request of the representatives of the clothing brands who accompanied the law enforcement agencies... an undercover officer on Thursday said the location is very dangerous and always guarded by huge dangerous dogs (Gaotlhobogwe, 2012).

A spokesperson at the (China) embassy, Vhou Vhigang said that although they are aware that the Chinese in Botswana may be involved in the rampant sales of fake DVDs, CDs and other software, their hands are tied because they cannot arrest the offenders. However, since China has experience in dealing with piracy, it can assist Botswana..."The Chinese government as you would have heard is concerned about these issues and we do not want our citizens to engage in any unlawful activity. We would lend our assistance if it is required, be it logistically or otherwise," explained Vhigang. The Chinese government has been engaged in an anti-piracy campaign that includes destroying counterfeit DVDs and putting legislative initiatives in place. (Motlogelwa, 2007)

In the news items cited above, it is evident that the sale of counterfeit merchandise has been a long-term problem for Botswana, which has yet not been extirpated despite the efforts of the government. The phenomenon of counterfeiting has caused Chinese merchants to be subjected to punitive measures and has prompted stricter regulation of

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\(^4\) Directorate of Intelligence and Security  
\(^5\) Criminal Investigation Department  
\(^6\) Name of a shopping mall in Gaborone  
\(^7\) According to researcher’s understanding, it refers to a secret society but not necessarily to be criminal.
their goods and China shops. Furthermore, as a result of this situation, all China shops now tend to be considered as hubs of counterfeiting, and all goods made in China are discredited as *fongkongs*. Despite this, in recent years Chinese goods have increased in both number and variety and even attracted customers from neighboring countries (Botswana Press Agency, 2014; Chube, 2014).

Supply chain management is often defined as fitting into “push” or “pull” categories (Harrison, Lee, & Neale, 2003). It is not difficult to discover that there are two powers taking control of the supply chain of *fongkongs*: the pushing power from China, the country of origin and the pulling power of Botswana, the country of destination. To date, research has focused on the stereotyped pushing power of *fongkongs*, such as hindering development of local industry, bringing competition to local retailers and disturbing local market (Cissé, 2013; Makungu, 2013; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2009), etc. What are missing from this research are an analysis of the pulling power as well as an exploration of who is taking balance of the two powers. This paper aims to contribute by applying the existing theory on push and pull factors and using a field work approach to explore the role of local governmental regulation on import control. The research question this paper aims to address is that why *fongkongs* prevail despite of the quality and legal issues, as well as the governmental regulations they have encountered.

**Method**

Research data was mainly gathered between November 2011 and January 2012 in retail China shops and wholesale markets in Gaborone, Botswana. 52 interviews were conducted in the 40 China shops visited. In order to achieve balance in the qualitative data, the researcher visited the randomly chosen shops twice a month. To ensure an atmosphere that was comfortable for the Chinese merchants and local people to speak freely, the researcher employed participant observation, informal interviews and conversations with Chinese merchants and their workers. Mandarin Chinese was used with the Chinese merchants and English for speaking to the local people. The primary sources of data are the informal and in-depth interviews with Chinese merchants and local customers, concerning their attitudes toward goods made in China. Participant observations were conducted in the China shops, observing interactions between Chinese merchants and local customers. Furthermore, document survey was conducted to reveal the voice of local media and governmental activities.

**Results**

*Fongkongs’ influence on local industry*

China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and consequently its market grew globally. Botswana welcomed China as a crucial investor, expecting that its financial aid and capital investment would benefit Botswana’s development (Gabotlale, 2006); on the other hand, it also considered China’s growth and momentum as potential threats, especially with regard to the increasing volume of Chinese textile imports. As Gabotlale (2005) states:
Botswana companies in the textile industry may be affected by the surge in Chinese textile imports, which have skyrocketed since the abolition of export quotas at the beginning of the year. It has long been feared that the scrapping of export quotas would expose Third World countries in particular to a battering from Chinese textile exports.

Already, the US and the EU are complaining that Chinese imports are distorting their markets and have started acting but Third World countries do not have the capacity to do the same ...

Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Trade Gaylard Kombani said Botswana might not be able to take safeguard measures against the likes of the US who are bigger markets. He said if Botswana were to retaliate they would have to be careful because China may take actions that could put them at a great disadvantage.

In reference to the concerns expressed by Botswana and its partners, the related statistics showed no convincing evidence to prove a significant relationship between the import of Chinese goods and any changes to Botswana’s trade figures. According to the statistics for Principal Imports of Textiles & Footwear, it is clear that Botswana’s textile imports came mainly from South Africa, and that even after Chinese goods became available, Botswana’s imports from South Africa increased significantly. Conversely, imports from the UK and US remained at a comparatively low level. Imports from China, although showing growth over the years, have not surpassed one fifth of the quantities imported from South Africa (Fig. 1). Furthermore, the volume of textiles exported to South Africa has grown through the years. By contrast, the export of textiles to both the UK and the US reached a peak in 2007 and declined thereafter, and has remained at a low level since 2009. Meanwhile exports to China have remained at a low level since the beginning (Fig. 2). In fact, as can be seen from the statistics of Principal Import Items from China,
the import of Machinery & Electrical Equipment has been escalating since 2007 and has become the most important item in the China-Botswana trade relationship (Fig. 3).

According to Mogapi (2006, p. 26) the fastest growing export commodities to SADC are fabrics and textiles. The Botswana government has invested substantially in the development of an export-oriented textile hub, which explains the continually increasing volume of exports to South Africa. The tiny boom in textile exports to the US, however, is mainly due to AGOA, which was in place from 2000 to 2008, and provided duty-free

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8 Southern African Development Community: it has 14 members with an estimated population of about 208-million people (2001 estimate). One of SADC’s principal aims is to co-ordinate and harmonize the socioeconomic policies and plans of its member states to ensure sustainable economic development and growth in the southern African region.

9 The African Growth and Opportunity Act: the main purpose is to improve trade and economic co-operation between the US and eligible sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries.
access for over 6,500 products from sub-Saharan Africa to enter the American market (Mogape, 2005, p. 21). After the arrival of Chinese goods in Africa, some small local mills did manage to supply the local market and survive the competition, benefiting from their large volume and low value. However, Botswana is basically too small to host significant textile mills (Tang, 2014). If it were not for agreements such as AGOA and the SADC Trade Protocol, it would be difficult for Botswana to export textiles. The import and export statistics show no solid evidence that Chinese textiles directly influence the import or export of Botswana textiles; however, the reliance of the country on Chinese machinery and electrical equipment has evidently grown over the years. Due to Botswana’s initially weak industry, the role played by Chinese imports can be seen as helping to meet the needs of local people, rather than as hindering the development of local industry.

Fongkongs’ influence on local retailers

Aside from the worries over the extent to which fongkongs harm the local textile industry, their influence on local markets, especially with regard to competition with local retailers is also a source of tensions. Surprisingly, the results show that along with the arrival of fongkongs, competition among Chinese merchants has grown fiercer, while local merchants and street vendors have benefited from rich resources instead of being squeezed out of business. To explain this, let us start by looking at how fongkongs are supplied to retailers and consumers in Botswana and who exactly are the competitors to China shops in Botswana.

As stated above, the problematic fongkongs flooding to Botswana mainly consist of counterfeits and low-price goods. Counterfeit goods find their way out of China and into foreign cities via sea, air and internet (Lin, 2011). Every year large amounts of counterfeit goods are confiscated by airport authorities. To avoid investigations, counterfeiting operations are increasingly conducted over the internet, with use being made of online auction sites or spam mails, which are designed to complicate the detection of trademark violations and the enforcement of intellectual property rights. According to Chinese informant, that is how some fake brand T-shirts, sneakers and pirate DVDs and CDs come to Botswana. On the other side, in order to obtain lower priced clothing some Chinese entrepreneurs, in days of old would go to closing factories and seek out rummage sale goods. Currently they order clothing from Chinese factories which have similar looking with fashion clothing, however inferior material and sewing skills. The China shops in Botswana target the low-income population, thus ensuring that only a relatively few South Africa brand chain shops can be their direct competitors, since locally-owned shops tend to target customers with stronger purchasing power (Table 1). According to researcher’s observation of several low-income Botswana families, they only visit local shops before Christmas or after receiving bonus, whilst most of the time comparing prices between China shops to hunt for the most economical choices they desire. Hence, competition between Chinese merchants themselves and that with South African capital shops are far fiercer than their competition with local retailers.

As mentioned earlier, Chinese merchants originally operated a shuttle trade which involved selling goods brought from China in a market or on the street and then returning
to China for the next consignment. This arrangement rapidly developed into a network of larger or smaller “Chinese markets” (Nyíri, 2011, p. 146). Since “Chinese markets” were founded in Botswana, many traders from Botswana and even neighboring countries have taken to buying imported Chinese merchandise from China shops and “Oriental Plaza10” outlets and then distributing it in rural towns and neighboring countries11. According to a Chinese retailer, “Local shops sell the same Chinese goods as ours. However, local people trust their own people, considering their goods are not fongkongs but in a good quality (Interview 2013 September).” A street vendor reveals, “I usually get these shoes (fake brand shoes, such as adidas, Puma, etc.) from China shops, but they cannot sell them now. So I go to South Africa every month to restock (Interview 2013 September).” Therefore, many fongkongs are distributed by local merchants who effectively behave as parasites on Chinese merchants. And even when Chinese merchants are forbidden to sell counterfeits, they still continue the business. Furthermore, in recent years many African traders have even copied the example of earlier Chinese merchants by going to China as “suitcase traders”. They represent “globalization from below”, which can be defined as the informal transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital (Mathews, 2011). Interviews carried out by this researcher have revealed that there are a number of Botswana local traders who travel to China several times every year to restock their shops with Chinese goods. Moreover, the latest tightening of regulations affecting Chinese merchants (Gaotlhobogwe, 2009a) and government financial support for local entrepreneurs has made it easier for locals to start in business by themselves. Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA; 10 Wholesale markets in Gaborone and Francistown selling merchandise imported from China or Chinatowns in South Africa.

11 Zambian and Zimbabwe traders come to Botswana to ship Chinese goods back to their country, due to the fact that in their country goods in retail China shop are more expensive (interview 2011 November).

### Table 1. Prices of textiles and footwear in retail shops in Gaborone (Pula)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item/Type</th>
<th>China shop</th>
<th>South Africa Brand chain shop</th>
<th>Local shop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General feature</td>
<td>ordinary, low price</td>
<td>ordinary, stand price, ex. Jet &amp; PEP*</td>
<td>gorgeous, fashionable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>90~100</td>
<td>40~ 60</td>
<td>200~250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s T-shirt</td>
<td>30~100</td>
<td>70~120</td>
<td>120~205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s socks</td>
<td>5~ 15</td>
<td>10~ 30</td>
<td>20~ 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Jeans</td>
<td>40~100</td>
<td>110~150</td>
<td>100~300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ladies’ pumps</td>
<td>20~ 60</td>
<td>60~120</td>
<td>120~300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunglasses</td>
<td>20~ 35</td>
<td>40~ 60</td>
<td>100~500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: based on researcher’s field work in 2013 and estimation.

* Jet and PEP are South African clothes shops. Their chain shops can be found in almost every shopping mall in the big cities of Botswana. http://www.jetonline.co.za/ and http://www.pepstores.com/
Website of Government of Botswana, n.d.) provides a holistic approach to the development and promotion of viable and sustainable citizen-owned enterprises, which is done through the provision of financial assistance in the form of loans at subsidized interest rates, back-up business training and mentoring services to enhance the sustainability of these enterprises. This situation has led to a widespread belief amongst Chinese merchants that the government is trying to ban retail China shops altogether. As one interviewee puts it, “Local government tells local merchants that once Chinese are driven out, everything belongs to them.” One Chinese pioneer merchant reveals:

According to local law, foreigners are forbidden to operate retail businesses selling clothes and shoes. However, local government did not ban China shops when Chinese were selling clothes and shoes in their retail shops due to the market need at that time and the job opportunities that came along with China shops. Whilst once local people obtain the ability and capital to run retail shops by themselves, retail China shops will be swept out without doubt (Interview 2013 November).

This explains why local government strains the regulation towards retail China shops in recent years, through the opportunities of sweeping counterfeits. In practice however, local merchants are encouraged to start businesses by themselves, whilst enjoying the benefits and convenience brought by the Chinese.

Local demand for fongkongs

Due to Botswana’s economic status, a large number of local people depend on inexpensive fongkongs to fulfill their daily needs. And there are a considerable number of medium income level populations who expect fongkongs, especially counterfeit clothes and pirate DVDs to fulfill their desires that their economic situation cannot allow in a normal context. There are also rich people who count on Chinese merchants to bring what they cannot find in Botswana or what they know will be much cheaper in China (like furniture and construction materials).

According to Benza (2012), almost half of Botswana’s population lives on under US$2 per day. People receive financial support from the government, but their income still does not meet their needs. Despite the limited quality of fongkongs, they are the goods that meet the economical consuming needs of the local population. As one local family release: “We go shopping in the China shop only because we cannot afford those in other shops. Those clothes sold in China shops are sewed poorly and once you wash them the color fades.” However, despite of the complaints towards the low quality of fongkongs, as long as local merchants cannot manage the supply chain or sell merchandise as cheaply as the Chinese do, Chinese merchants seem to continue to occupy their dominant position in trading activity. In 2009, when the government tried to drive out China shops, some local people raised their voices in protest, arguing that China shops were a benefit to ordinary people. As the following news item states:

Chinese shops cater for the masses. In these cold winter days, people with measly wages can afford to keep their whole families warm, courtesy of the Chinese. Prices
of clothing items range from as low as P10 ... Batswana women are able to watch their favorite South African soapie Generations, thanks to the Chinese who provide the Philibao decoders which ‘unblock’ SABC channels. One man was overheard boasting to his friends how he looks good in suits bought from Chinese ‘Ten Thebe’ stores. “Even these people working in government offices wear them,” the man said. “All you have to do is take it to the dry cleaners to remove the starch (Anonymous, 2010).

In spite of tightened local regulations, counterfeit goods still play a crucial role in Botswana society. In recent years because of the growing domestic economy and the increasing influence of television, considerable numbers of locals possess more disposable income than ever before. They have developed a taste for elite culture as well as aspirations toward a higher social status. However many people are unable to discriminate between counterfeit and genuine merchandise unless media and local government educate them. In fact many low-income and medium-income locals do not care that much whether they are wearing a genuine brand or a fake one, so long as that brand confers the social status they desire. This may provide a strong clue as to why people remain regular customers of China shops and become addicted to inexpensive and fashionable counterfeit goods.

Additionally, when there is a need for special goods in Botswana, people have become used to asking Chinese merchants for help. The researcher observed that one middle age lady came into a China shop to ask if they sold a plastic foldable table: “Don’t you have the plastic table? You shall bring it for me next time”. The Chinese shop assistant, who has been in Botswana for four years responded: “We don’t have it now, I will ask my boss to ship one for you when she goes to China”. The demand for goods in Botswana has risen along with its economic development. The huge and varied market of China has become increasingly attractive to locals. “I want to go to China myself to buy furniture and clothes. I know the quality of goods in China is much better. China shops do not bring us good qualities”, a middle age man said when met the researcher in a China shop. Notwithstanding the pushing power of fongkongs, the pulling power of local needs cannot be ignored, since it is prompting Chinese merchants to bring in increasing quantities of fongkongs and even “novel fongkongs” in order to meet consumer demand.

To sum up, fongkongs’ arrival provided more choice to local customers and in some extent brought down the price level in Botswana (Bolaane, 2007, p. 164), which contributes to the life improvement of the poor. Although the supplement of counterfeit goods could also inspire the unhealthy desire of consumers or determine the consumption style of people, fongkongs can be seen as a transit while local textile industry and entrepreneurs are growing. However, in recent years, despite of the shrinkage of counterfeit goods and the quality improvement of fongkongs, many local people continue to criticize Chinese with a negative perspective. “They call our goods fongkongs because we are Chinese. The goods sold in South African shops are also made in China, but local people consider them gorgeous. There is no standard for quality, our goods’ price is reasonable to the quality. How can you expect a 50 Pula T-shirt to have the same quality with a 500 Pula one?” stated

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12 100 thebe = 1 Pula = 0.12 USD
an interviewee whose voice speaks out the common feeling of the Chinese merchant. To
get a further understanding of local customer’s attitude to low quality of fongkongs, we
need to link the story of fongkongs to the control of China shops, which is outlined in the
next section.

**Local government’s practical control of fongkongs**

On a practical level “fongkongs” is a word often used by the medias to attract local
 attentions and mentioned by local government as a public condemnation to threaten China
shops, as McNamee et al. (2012) argues that it is a concoction of African governments and
business people who are attempting to dent the reputation of Chinese traders. Fongkongs,
although they have received much criticism, are products that answer to lower-income
customers’ needs and desires. Therefore, the government tries to balance their activities by
being strict on some of the fongkongs on the one hand but also turning a blind eye to the
majority of them. As mentioned before, according to the law although foreigners are
forbidden to operate retail clothes business, local government did not ban China shops in
the beginning, but only regulate them when necessity comes, such as negotiate more job
opportunities or salary for locals, encourage industrial investment, etc.. This tendency
became obvious since 2008 when Botswana was influenced by the global economic crisis.
Many Chinese merchants emphasize: “poor people here need our goods, government here
needs us”, and “my business provides many job opportunities to the locals”. So far, the
government’s “Clean Sweep” activities have been concentrated on counterfeits. Further-
more their actions are usually taken as a result of pressure from “outsiders”, such as the US
and South Africa, as the following news item shows:

*The Chinese Embassy in Gaborone has offered to help Botswana to curb software
piracy ... The US had threatened to go to court over rampant Chinese piracy. China
has the biggest market for US movie companies and IT corporations such as Microsoft.
Reports in Botswana indicate that among the biggest traders of counterfeit movies
and software are people of Asian origin, especially Chinese* (Motlogelwa, 2007).

In September 2013, a Chinese shop owner who was interviewed stated: “These days
people from South Africa clothes factory (international brand representatives) are
accompanying with Batswana officers to check China shops. Once counterfeit brand
clothes are found, people will be fined and the goods will be confiscated.” Due to the fact
that most of the counterfeit clothes and DVDs are copies of US and South African brands,
it is not surprising that these two governments would devote considerable energy and
attention to the problem. Although the Botswana government’s attitude towards counterfeit
merchandise is clear, it seems its activity is closely related by outer pressures.

Faced with strict regulations and frequent checks carried out by the government,
many strategies are adopted by Chinese merchants to avoid legal penalties. Firstly, the
Chinese community tends to close ranks when the government conducts “Clean Sweep”
operations. When officials come to check retail shops in one shopping mall, the information
will be spread to other malls through family and other contacts, which tends to invalidate
the inspection. Also it has been observed that some Chinese merchants do not put
counterfeits in their shop windows. Furthermore, some merchants only show photos of pirate DVDs in albums before the customers decide what they want. In a word, various ways have been adopted to keep the counterfeits from the eyes of local officials. Generally speaking however, the Botswana government tends to turn a blind eye to attempts to find loopholes, in order to avoid social turbulence; provided that Chinese merchants pay their taxes and help solve local unemployment.

**DISCUSSION**

“Globalization and lower trade barriers” (Chaudhry & Zimmerman, 2009) can be counted as the most influential factor in triggering the phenomenon of fongkongs in Botswana. Due to the frequent media interest in the issue of fongkongs in Botswana, and related governmental regulation, it is easy to concentrate our attention on the pushing power of China, and to ignore the pulling factors in Botswana society. It has been a puzzle to observer that, despite tightening of regulations and “Clean Sweep” activities in Botswana, fongkongs have continued over the years to hold their share of the market. Field research has shown that fongkongs do not bring a negative influence to bear on the local textile industry or local retailers, as had been assumed. Surprisingly enough, their contribution is not limited to feeding demands of local customers of different income levels, but also creates benefits for local merchants and street vendors. Although they are widely criticized, and have damaged China’s reputation, fongkongs, are still useful to Botswana society. Due to their ambiguous function, the government faces a dilemma when dealing the challenge of striking a balance between, on the one side, the complaints of the public and pressures from outsiders, and on the other, the advantages gained by local vendors and low-income consumers. Ultimately the government employs delaying tactics, putting China shops under stricter regulatory control when necessity calls whilst training its own entrepreneurs to compete more effectively in the future with Chinese businesses. This tactic helps the government to control the number and scale of Chinese businesses, whilst balancing the pushing and pulling powers macroscopically.

It is easy to accuse Chinese merchants of using Africa as a place in which to dump unsold stock, taking advantage of the complementarities of the seasons between the two hemispheres and making use of kinship and native-place connections (Nyiri, 2011, p. 146). However, it is also undeniable that they are significant initiators of China-Africa trade, pioneers who paved the way for Chinese merchandise’s pushing power, and helpers to many needy Africans. Although Chinese merchants are criticized as exploiters of Africans, in that they remit their incomes back to China whilst making little contribution to local society (Makungu, 2013), in recent years many Chinese have engaged in donating activities in order to fulfill their social responsibility, and to rebuild their reputation. For instance, according to Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Botswana (2008b), Chinese community raised and collected donation worth 125,000 Pula from Chinese business people based in Gaborone Oriental Plaza to support the SOS Children’s Village. Chinese Ambassador encouraged Chinese people to do more to return their love
and care to Botswana as it has created a favorable environment for their living and doing business in Botswana. Therefore, from a comprehensive perspective, Chinese merchants work as a positive factor to stimulate and boost Botswana.

Botswana government politically use Chinese merchants to satisfy the local demands for goods and job opportunities; and regulate Chinese business step by step, according to the time and timing. One thing is certain however, no matter how the situation develops, local people on low-incomes are the greatest beneficiaries, in that their quality of life has been significantly improved since the arrival of fongkongs in Botswana. The definition of fongkongs in Botswana has been renewed over the years, for it has departed from the quality of goods to the image that it presents. Now “fongkongs” equals any goods sold by Chinese merchants regardless its quality or source. However, fongkongs, despite their bad reputation, will not disappear from Botswana as long as they continue to meet local needs even if Chinese merchants are eventually replaced by local traders. The fongkongs will still be sold by Batswana merchants and vendors, but they may not be named “fongkongs” at that time.

In this research, a field work approach has been adopted in order to arrive at the truth behind stereotyped hypotheses and to increase the volume of the unheard voice. To date, a vast body of literature has debated the increasing number of Chinese merchants in African countries and the challenges this raises (Dobler, 2009; Haugen & Carling, 2005; Kalusopa, 2009; Sautman & Yan, 2009); however, few have provided an insight into Chinese people’s daily interaction with locals or the voices of local people concerning Chinese in their societies (Codrin, 2014; Giese, 2013). Most of the relating researches are based on governmental document and media reports whilst lacking a comprehensive understanding of the area through fieldwork (Cissé, 2014; Giese, 2013). As a result, although the evidences of the increasing Chinese population and merchandise, as well as the social problems caused are clearly reported, the triggers and reasons of the phenomenon usually remain underground. However, this research contributes to understanding the nature and history of fongkong phenomenon in Botswana, which at one hand furthers our understanding on “globalization from below (Mathews, 2011)” and its interaction and social influence on both sides. On the other hand, it challenges the stereotype that concentrates on pushing power, by analyzing the pulling power through researching interests of different stakeholders and gathering information from country’s policy to practical level. Furthermore, this research contributes to push-pull theory by offering an example of balance controller role played by governmental policy to advance theory. The theory of push and pull factors explains some of the roots of fongkong phenomenon. With this theory both countries of origin and destination can detect which are their weaknesses and try to find solutions for those problems, build long time policies for counterfeit suppression, and improve law enforcements and other organizations work with prosecution.

In any society, the mass media, government and the voices of ordinary people all contribute in their different ways to construct the reality in the given society. However, people have a tendency to pay attention only to what they think the loudest and most wide spread voices and to ignore the rest, which gives birth to bias and conflicts. Furthermore, any voice has its own motivation behind, and whilst hearing the voice it is also crucial to
discern its hidden attitude and interest. Through this field research an attempt has been made to unravel the various strands affecting attitudes towards fongkongs: the pressing needs of local society, the relationship between local vendors and China shops and the dilemmas faced by government. It is hoped that this approach has enabled a comprehensive and well-balanced understanding of a complex situation, by listening to a variety of voices and discerning the interests hidden respectively.

REFERENCES


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