

SENEGAL Chinese migrants



The rivalry between Senegalese and Chinese traders could intensify unless Senegal's government finds solutions to the country's chronic unemployment and economic problems. Photo: Peter Garmusch

For Mami, a young Senegalese woman from Dakar, the question of where to buy her shoes is simple. She could go to Sandega, the bustling African market in the centre of the town, but she prefers to head a few blocks north to Centenaire, an area of the city rapidly becoming known as Chinatown.

"I like the Chinese shoes better," she said, as she inspected a pair of sparkly flip flops from a crate. "They are cheaper."

Half a world away from China, on the westernmost point of Africa, Senegal is a country best known for football and music.

It is also home to the newest outpost of the Chinese diaspora, with thousands coming in the past five years to conduct business, raise families and make a better life.

An entire city boulevard, a stretch of about a kilometre, is now lined with Chinese shops selling imported women's shoes, consumer durables such as glassware, and electronic goods at rock-bottom prices.

The cheap imports have proved a hit with Senegalese consumers like Mami – but the Chinese success in business is bringing them into direct conflict with Senegalese traders who are suffering from the competition.

Meanwhile, the Senegalese government is squeezing the local traders from another direction, with attempts to restrict the street trade in Dakar.

Two months ago the government tried to evict the petty traders whose wooden trestle tables line the potholed streets and ban the roving vendors who have a small selection of goods to sell, such as football shirts or mobile phone cards.

Senegal is a multiparty democracy and President Abdoulaye Wade won a second term last February after promising to tackle youth unemployment.

Yet for thousands of people, particularly young men, the street trade remains the only way they can make a living.

About 97 per cent of new jobs created in Senegal between 1995 and 2004 were in the informal sector, according to the World Bank – meaning even university graduates struggle to find salaried work.

The recent attempt to force out the street traders sparked citywide riots, described by residents as the worst in a generation.

The unrest started with the street traders but soon spread to become a wider protest over unemployment, rising food prices and the perception that the government was ignoring

the poor while it builds luxury hotels and highways.

For a few days hundreds of people rampaged through the city throwing stones and blocking main roads with burning tyres and rubbish.

Police in riot gear eventually used tear gas to disperse the protesters and the government promised to delay its plan to shut down the street trade to give the traders more time to find other work.

Even if the government backs down, the competition from the Chinese newcomers means Senegalese street traders, and also shopkeepers, are facing a long-term decline in business.

Many Senegalese traders deeply resent the Chinese, who they accuse of flooding the market with "cheap, plastic rubbish" and destroying their livelihood.

Ass Sene, who runs a shop selling African textiles and crafts in the Centre Commercial Ass Khalifa near Sandega, described the damage to his business.

"The market is broken," Mr Sene said. "There are many, many Chinese people. It's no good. Chinese people are no good. We buy our material from Senegal but the Chinese bring it from China. It's a cheaper price but it's not good material. Many, many Senegalese buy from

the Chinese. Business was better before the Chinese."

Senegalese traders, led by business organisation Unacois, went on strike in 2004 to demand caps on Chinese immigration.

Yet not everyone wants the Chinese to go and there is little racial hostility towards the Chinese within Senegalese society in general.

The Senegalese pride themselves on their cultural tradition of *teranga* – or hospitality and openness to outsiders – and Dakar is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the region.

With many basic goods within reach of ordinary Senegalese for the first time, consumers are determined to keep prices low.

The Chinese also bring employment – most shops employ two or three Senegalese people – and reportedly pay up to a third more than the minimum wage.

Momar Ndao, the president of the Senegalese consumers' association Ascosen, said his organisation made a counter-protest in 2004 to argue that the Chinese should stay.

He said the Senegalese traders were cheating their customers with grossly inflated prices, charging up to 10 times more than the Chinese for the same products.

"If it was different goods it would

be acceptable but it was the same goods – they go to China, buy the same goods and sell 10 times higher," Mr Ndao said.

"We say it's xenophobia sending back people of another skin complexion – if we are a *teranga* state we have to be open with other countries."

The Chinese immigrants started coming in significant numbers about five years ago, pulled by economic factors and encouraged by their government. Some have come to work in the construction industry or road building, but most go into commerce in the emerging Chinatown.

Many shopkeepers in Centenaire came from Hunan province (湖南) and say they received funding from the Chinese authorities to move to Senegal.

Official numbers reveal there are 150 Chinese families – 200-300 people in Dakar – but unofficial estimates are higher.

Hu Yan, 42, a businessman based in Centenaire who moved from China 14 years ago, believes there are now 1,000 Chinese living in Dakar, with 100 shops between them.

Senegal might seem an unlikely destination for the great Chinese dream of emigration, but for many it's better than what they left behind.

Many, many Senegalese buy from the Chinese. Business was better before the Chinese

Ass Sene, Dakar shopkeeper

As well as business opportunities, immigration is also a way to escape China's one-child policy and many Chinese migrants in Dakar have two or three children.

"In China you can only have one but you can make another child here with dual nationality," Mr Hu said. "It's a route to go to Europe or America. You make money here, have another child and the children can go to an American or French school."

The problem between the Chinese and the Senegalese is economic rather than social but there is little interaction between the two communities outside of work.

The Chinese cluster in areas, living near their businesses and socialising mostly with other Chinese.

Mei Young-hung, 42, said she works so hard there is little time left for making friends. She moved to

Senegal five years ago with her husband, leaving her two grown-up children behind in China.

"I came only for business," she said. "When I don't have another job, I sleep or watch TV."

Some people, even supporters of the Chinese, believe there is a risk of social unrest if Chinatown grows too much bigger without greater integration with the Senegalese.

There are exceptions – such as Hadina, who sells shoes in Centenaire and has lived in Senegal for five years.

She speaks Wolof, the local language spoken by the Senegalese, as well as Chinese and has a Senegalese husband and two young children.

The Chinese arrive in Senegal without any language skills but they learn both Wolof and French, the colonial language, from their employees and in turn teach them Putonghua.

There has been very little trouble between the Chinese and Senegalese so far, despite the tensions over trade, but there has been some conflict within the Chinese community.

One Chinese trader, who wished to remain anonymous, said some of his fellow countrymen had even resorted to guns to resolve their

differences. "Between the Chinese there are a lot of problems because they compete and no one wants to be under another," he said. "If you say you are the top here, another one says no."

The Chinese immigration comes against the backdrop of growing intergovernmental friendship between Senegal and China.

Senegal, which previously aligned itself to Taiwan, resumed diplomatic ties with China in 2006 and declared that there was only one China in the world and Taiwan was an integral part of its territory.

Taiwan cut ties in protest, accusing China of "buying" Senegal with the pledge of US\$600 million in aid.

China is also interested in Africa for its natural resources and a number of Chinese companies are setting up in Senegal to export minerals such as phosphates.

Without a radical change in policy in both China and Senegal, the numbers of Chinese will only increase, opening more shops and bringing more trade.

Unless the government finds solutions to the country's chronic unemployment and economic problems, the rivalry between the Senegalese and Chinese traders could test *teranga* to its limits.

Universities may shut as ageing population leaves classes empty

Jessica Shepherd

Almost every day, scores of desperate teenagers tune in to Nippon Housou Kyokai – Japan's equivalent of the BBC – not for some light relief from schoolwork, but for a show that helps them to cram for tough university entrance exams.

But for how much longer? Japan has one of the oldest and most well-respected higher education systems in Asia. These days, however, it is in crisis.

Up to 40 per cent of Japan's 744 universities could go bust, merge or close in the next 10 years, according to research by a British professor at Oxford University, out later this year.

Decades of falling birth rates have shrunk the number of 18-year-olds, who provide 90 per cent of all university entrants, down to 1.3 million last year from 2.05 million in 1992. With no baby boom or influx of migrants anticipated, the figure is expected to fall further, to 1.18 million, by 2012 – an overall decrease of 42.3 per cent over 20 years.

Japan Education

Roger Goodman, professor of modern Japanese studies at Britain's Oxford University, said Japan's universities were increasingly struggling to fill their government-authorised number of places. His study on Japanese education will be published in a chapter of a book, *The Demographic Challenge: A Handbook About Japan*.

"The Japanese higher education system is facing a contraction, possibly better described as an implosion, of a type never seen before," he said.

Nearly 75 per cent of Japan's universities are private and run four- or two-year courses. They are considered second class to the country's 87 national universities, which makes them most vulnerable to student recruitment problems.

Professor Goodman said that 30

per cent of four-year private universities failed to fill their student quota in 2004. The figure was 40 per cent for two-year universities. And this was when the real demographic drop had not yet kicked in.

The Japanese government was quite happy to let the market decide how the system was "hollowed out", said Professor Goodman. "It has no intention of bailing these universities out. The result is that many institutions – estimates suggest between 15 per cent and 40 per cent – will go bankrupt, merge or be taken over by larger universities within the next decade."

"Universities in Japan are on the brink," said Ian Reader, professor of Japanese studies at Britain's Manchester University. "There is increasing stress across the higher education sector there."

No one is saying how many mergers, closures or takeovers have already taken place or are on the cards. But a particularly high-profile case is Hagi International University, which sought court protection for

bankruptcy in 2005. Hagi was bought by a construction firm and reopened last year as an institution specialising in the health sciences.

It is unclear what the implications are for the quality of degrees in the east Asian giant, which is home to three universities ranked in the world's top 60 – Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.

"The pinch is coming at the lower end of the prestige scale," said Professor Reader. "As numbers of potential students fall, the universities higher up the pecking order are drawing more of their intake from groups that would have gone to lower-ranked universities. The less prestigious universities are especially having a hard time."

Professor Goodman predicted that entry to the lower-level private universities would become a "free pass". Half of the applicants no longer needed to sit an exam to get in, he said. "Institutions will end up admitting lower-ability students with little or no motivation to study simply because they need their fees,



Up to 40 per cent of universities in Japan could merge or close because of the continuing decline in student numbers. Photo: Bloomberg

which make up about 80 per cent of the university's income," he said.

Japan's leading national universities will continue to be protected by state support. The leading private universities will continue to be protected by their reputation and alumni networks. But rural, public and local universities and lower-level private universities face a bleak future, if indeed they have a future at all."

It was bad planning that let this happen, said Andrew Gerstle,

professor of Japanese studies at London's School of African and Oriental Studies.

The Japanese government had let the number of universities rise since the 1990s, despite warnings that there was a demographic disaster looming.

There was a 30 per cent increase in the number of universities in the 1990s because of a liberalisation of the sector. Colleges thought it was their last chance to obtain university status. Between 2000 and 2006, the

number of universities grew further, from 649 to 744.

A Japanese government spokesman said there was going to be an oversupply of universities. But according to the spokesman the authorities were creating a "safety net", which included mergers and planning for transferrals of students between institutions.

"To survive the global competition among universities, each institution in Japan is trying to create a unique selling point for itself," he said. "For example, there are universities that focus on attracting office workers to study part time and those that are trying to recruit as many foreign students as they can."

Japanese universities are also starting to teach classes in English in a last-ditch attempt to recruit students from outside of Japan. Waseda University is one example: its international studies faculty runs most of its lectures in English.

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