Investigating Peaceful Integration and Diversification in Cairo’s Chinese Restaurants

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BACKGROUND

Setting: Post-Revolution Cairo, Egypt
- Egyptian society, post 2011’s Arab Spring revolution, has been largely recognized by the West as politically volatile and ripe with sectarian conflict.
- Where the West sees a failed revolution, China sees new opportunities for partnership via the Chinese government’s One Belt One Road initiative.

Sino-Egyptian Relations
- By strengthening both economic and diplomatic ties with Egypt, China is sending an increasing amount of Chinese nationals to Egypt. These nationals have a variety of professions.
- Chinese professionals, laborers, and students are settling into communities concentrated in Cairo’s Ma’adi and Abbasia neighborhoods. Many are establishing businesses and increasing the Chinese community’s visibility to and interactions with local Egyptians.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Restaurants: A Place of Peaceful Exchange
- Participant responses revealed that Chinese nationals, who dine in or own Chinese restaurants believe that restaurants provide an important setting for cultural exchange between Chinese and Egyptians in Cairo.
- Young Egyptians who have traveled to China or who study Chinese frequent Chinese-owned restaurants with their Egyptian friends and family, encouraging exposure to Chinese food and culture.
- Egyptian participants enjoy having Chinese-owned restaurants as part of their city as it makes them feel “international.”
- Through employing Egyptian wait staff, Chinese and Egyptians exchange cultural norms and help one another adapt to new cultural contexts.
- Young Egyptians are hungry for cultural diversity and despite Egypt’s current political climate, peaceful cultural exchange and integration is occurring.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Education within and for communities that takes place outside of formal educational institutions in which a shared active and political space where wider solidarities that encompass a multiplicity of perspectives can be developed (Tett, 2010)

INTEGRATION

The first-hand exchange of cultural experience in order to cultivate cultural competency, or the ability in a cross-cultural context to acquire knowledge and skills that afford the motivation to problem solve and reduce cross-cultural misunderstandings (Breslin, 2000, Delong et al., 2011; Juwah, 2006)

DIVERSIFICATION

The Future of Sino-Egyptian Relations
- Recognizing the potential of Chinese-owned restaurants can help foster better relations and good will between Egyptians and Chinese through locally based, immigrant-owned restaurants that service the entire community.
- Sino-Egyptian relations on a macro and local level are reciprocal in nature.