



From Mali to China: A Typological Analysis of Malian Traders' Social Adaptation in Yiwu

Abdoul Razak Toure¹, Nidal Ahmed Moro², Abdoukarim Kalidou Issoufou³, Tang Lixia⁴

1,3,4 China Agriculture University

1,3,4 Department of Development Studies and Social Policy

2 University of International Business and Economics

2 School of Public Administration

Abstract: In 1978, China decided to gradually transition into a free-market economy that included opening up its trade with the West and inviting foreign investments. The expansion of the Chinese economy and globalization will influence the migratory scene in China as time goes by, resulting in a considerable influx of African migrants. The entry of African traders especially Malian into Yiwu, China, marks a significant international business development that stems from the city's position as an international trading hub. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand the social adaptation of 20 Malian traders on the basis of a typological analysis. The typological analysis enabled us to classify Malian traders into four groups on the basis of concepts such as social capital, language skills and involvement in social activities. The finding reveals that 1) Cultural Integrators are highly adapted to the host culture while maintaining robust community ties with the Malian community. 2) Community Anchors focused on cultural preservation and supporting their community. 3) Strategic Networkers highly adapted to the host culture but maintained limited community ties with the Malian population of Yiwu; 4) Reluctant Adapters have minimal cultural adaptation and weak relationships with the Malian community in Yiwu. This research improves academic understanding of migration practices and provides a novel framework on migrant entrepreneur adaptation, including the social aspect, while assisting policymakers. The research fills the knowledge gap on the lack of studies of Malian traders in Yiwu to develop best practices and policy frameworks that improve the integration of the migrant community into the global market.

Keywords: Malian Traders, Social Adaptation, Yiwu, China, Migrants entrepreneurs

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1 Introduction

In 1978, China decided to progressively move into a free-market economy that contained opening up its trade with the West and inviting foreign investments. This openness has enabled China to experience a wave of immigration,

mainly from Europe, North America, and Oceania. The expansion of the Chinese economy and globalisation will influence the migratory scene in China as time goes by, resulting in a considerable influx of African migrants (Cisse, 2013). This transition encountered considerable difficulties, as China was not socially prepared for this surge of migrants (Bodomo, 2015). Malian immigration aspirations have traditionally centred on nations such as France, Great Britain, Germany, the United States, or Canada. Nonetheless, strict visa regulations in the European Union and, to a lesser degree, North America, have compelled several Malians to seek alternate places regarded as more hospitable.

Consequently, China became an option for several Malians after unsuccessful endeavours in nations like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Liang & Le Billon, 2020). Emigration to China for Malian people commenced incrementally in the 1990s but reached a pivotal level with China's accession to the World Trade Organisation, which underscored Sino-African collaboration. Following China's accession to the WTO in December 2001, there was a significant surge in the number of Africans travelling to China to procure items for resale in Africa. This has resulted in a noticeable presence of Africans in Yiwu, which has often garnered negative attention in newspapers about violations of immigration law enforcement (Bodomo, 2015).

With the rise of globalisation and, at the same time, the tilting of social dynamics in certain conservative societies like China, understanding the experience of Malian traders in an environment like Yiwu is becoming increasingly important. Moreover, the city of Yiwu, in the province of Zhejiang, is increasingly becoming an important crossroads for international trade, as it continues to attract several communities from different cultures, especially from Mali. This wave of migrant traders underlines the complexity of social adaptation in a global environment. Social adaptation refers to the set of strategies used by individuals or groups to adapt to an uncertain dynamic or environment in terms of their migrant status (Rachmad, 2017).

Studying the social adaptation of Malian traders is relevant. Firstly, Yiwu is becoming a preferred destination for Malian traders aiming to set up businesses in Asia to act as a bridge between China and Africa. Second, the migrant community perceives Yiwu as China's Middle East, with a predominantly Muslim population (Said & Olivier, 2015). Thirdly, Yiwu has seen a notable influx of African inhabitants, comprising approximately 800 Malians from an estimated total of 3,000 African residents in 2018 (Bodomo, 2015).

To date, literature on Africans in China has not given much consideration to the social adaptation of Malian traders in Yiwu. Most of the research tends to focus on Africa as a whole, downplaying the fact that Africa is made up of 54 countries and therefore 54 different cultures and backgrounds. Additionally, the literature reviews most often focus on their economic interaction with the local population and the local population's perception of Africans in China. Lastly, the social adaptation experience of African traders by country, like that of Malian traders in Yiwu, has received little attention.

Malians in Yiwu face a social challenge in the process of social integration. Moreover, Malian traders face the risk of not mastering the Chinese language in a global environment where this language is dominant. In an environment far removed from their country of origin, having the social capital to create an environment conducive to moral support and social relations will facilitate the adaptation of this minority group to Yiwu. Community engagement is essential for a migrant group to understand how the group functions and how individuals within the group interact with each other. Studying a migrant group such as the Malian traders may seem homogeneous, since they come from the same country and therefore share the same culture. However, in-depth research is necessary to comprehend the heterogeneous nature of this group, enabling the development of a migration policy that specifically targets them. To support this approach, this article first explores the social adaptation of Malian traders through Rachmad's theory. Secondly, a typological analysis will identify four groups of Malian traders based on the concepts of Rachmad's theory (language skills, social capital, and engagement in social activities).

The theoretical approach to this research will be guided by social adaptation theory, which assumes that social capital helps understand how Malian traders forge ties in Yiwu. Language skills are essential to enable individuals to communicate effectively and understand the norms of the host country to facilitate their integration. Involvement in a social activity creates strategic social ties that can have a knock-on effect in terms of economic and social opportunities for Malian traders.

The social relationship between Africans and Chinese in the context of entrepreneurship is complex for several reasons. Firstly, the Chinese tend to perceive Africans negatively, but sometimes this negative perception turns into a positive outlook once these Africans demonstrate their openness to engaging socially with them (Hu, 2021).

Secondly, African and Chinese entrepreneurs are engaged in an interdependent economic and social dynamic that results in social identities and economic opportunities beyond races (Zhou et al., 2016).

This article has three aims: firstly, to examine the impact of social capital on the social adaptation process of Malian traders, while exploring its link with social integration and community engagement. Secondly, to examine the impact of Malian traders' language skills on their integration and strategic trade networks. Thirdly, to classify Malian traders into several social typologies in order to improve understanding of the relationship between their various adaptation experiences. These objectives will be analyzed through semi-structured interviews conducted between January 3, 2024 and March 28, 2024. A final one-week visit, from December 9 to 19, finalized the typological aspect of the research and confirmed the classification of participants in different groups.

The content of this article is distributed as follow. The next section focuses on the research method that allowed us to conduct this research. This is followed by an interview with the participants and a presentation of the different groups of Malian traders through a typological analysis of the concepts of social adaptation theory. Finally, the following sections discuss the limitations and conclusions of the study. The main findings is that Malian traders are divided into four distinct groups on the basis of their level of social adaptation: cultural integrators, community Anchors, strategic networkers and reluctant adapters.

2 Research method

Using qualitative research design, this study explored the social adaptations of Malians traders in Yiwu. Qualitative method is used to understand individuals beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions, generating non-numerical data (Maxwell, 2012). To analyse the social adaptation of Malian traders in Yiwu, 20 respondents were interviewed on the basis of a semi-structure interview. These 20 respondents have a company based in Yiwu with an office. This is a major clarification. Because firstly, some Malians identify themselves as traders in yiwu, but in reality, they are on a student visa, which makes it impossible under Chinese law to have a business on Chinese territory. Secondly, some traders have their businesses based in Guangzhou but spend more time in Yiwu. The 20 respondents are those who are based in Yiwu because of their business and their accommodation.

The respondents were asked to answer a questionnaire designed to obtain insight into the respondents' social adaptation level. Each concept in the social adaptation theory was studied by means of two questions. For the concept of social capital, respondents had to answer the following questions: how would you describe your social relationship in yiwu? In what ways do these connections support your integration in Yiwu community? For the concept of language skills, respondents answered questions relating to the different languages they speak and how proficient they are in Chinese. For the concept engagement in social activities, respondents were asked to share how often they participate in community or cultural events in yiwu and if they can share examples of how participation in social activities has helped them to build relationships with Malian community or local population. Some questions relating to the scale of their business were difficult to answer because some respondents were reluctant to respond. In these situations, the researcher adopted an understanding stance in order to ensure that the rest of the interview went smoothly. The rest of the questions addressed to the respondents can be found in the appendix.

It is important to note the background of the principal researcher of this study in order to understand certain points of view that could be biased. The researcher is a Malian who has been living in Beijing since 2019 as part of his studies. They frequently visit the city of Yiwu as part of their research.

The data was collected over three separate field visits to Yiwu by the researcher to interview and observe Malian traders on their business practices, challenges and first-hand experiences. The research was mainly qualitative, utilising observation techniques, semi-structured interviews, and informal discussions. This approach allows the researcher to deepen the analysis of the research question in order to obtain decisive and relevant information to enrich the article.

From May 20 to June 6, 2023, the researcher spent two weeks in the city of Yiwu to meet the appointment initially obtained with the president of the Malian Traders Association. This trip was initially intended to establish contact with Malian traders in Yiwu and also to finalize the development of the half-format questionnaires that the researcher would use to collect data later. This trip enabled the researcher to observe social and commercial interactions for the first time, and how these social exchanges influence traders' experiences. The researcher made observations focused on Malian traders by spending enough time with groups of traders in an African restaurant and accompanying them to the "Futian" market. The goal was to see how they do their market activities, the way

they work with Chinese suppliers, and how they overcome the social difficulties. This first contact with the business environment in Yiwu also enabled the researcher to experience the daily interaction between Malian traders and Chinese suppliers, and the difficulties associated with this interaction. Dewalt and Dewalt (2010) assert that participant observation is an essential research tool since it allows researchers to explore in depth the behavior of groups as well as their social dynamics in their natural environment. The researcher's hands-on experience with traders provided important insights that informed the development of the interview questionnaires.

During January 2024 until March 2024 the researcher completed his second fieldwork visit to Yiwu. The three-month period focused on semi-structured interviews along with informal interviews as well as observational data collection started during the initial visit. The researcher selected semi-structured interviews as his primary data collection method since these interviews produce an in-depth understanding of predetermined interview guidelines. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews remain the ideal method for conducting exploratory research when researchers want to understand the participants' experiences and opinions in depth. The guide used during the preliminary investigation research contained open-ended questions that explored socioeconomic to social adaptation elements of Malian traders in Yiwu.

The third visit occurred in December 2024 after a discussion between the researcher and the supervisor. The researcher decided to make a final field visit for this study in order to strengthen his analysis of the typological classification that occurred during the data analysis. This visit lasted one week and consisted of doing a mini interview round with the same respondents about their future aspirations in China. This visit allowed for a validation of the typology analysis.

3 Findings

3.1 Typological Analysis - The Classification of Malian Traders

Malian traders in Yiwu reflect a significant aspect of a multi-level, practical process of social adaptation. We can broadly categorize their social adaptation level into four categories: Community Anchors, Cultural Integrators, Strategic Networkers, and Reluctant Adapters. Each typology represents a particular combination of social capital, language skills and participation in social activities: this triangulation provides insights into how these traders cope with the difficulties of living and working in a new environment. This section also examines the individual characteristics and experiences of each of the 20 Malian respondents, and groups them according to the typologies of Community Anchors, Cultural Integrators, Strategic Networkers, and Reluctant Adapters. Carefully constructed data accompany each profile to elucidate how, and why, they are classified as such, together with insights from their personal experience that has led to their typological classification.

This typological framework is essential in understanding the diverse experiences of Malian businessmen in Yiwu and their varying rates of integration with the local Chinese population and their in-group networks.

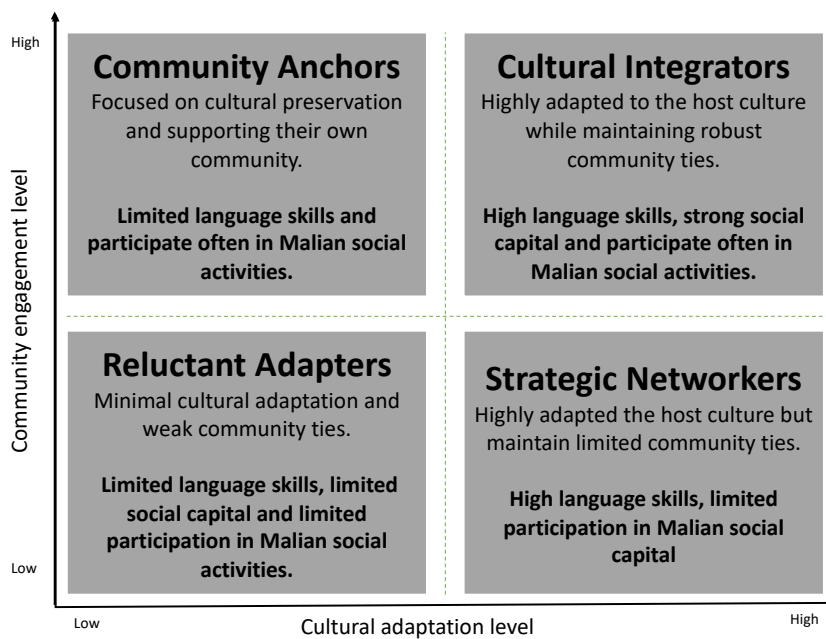


Figure 1: Social adaptation typology classification

3.1.1 Community Anchors

Community Anchors are traders who are dedicated to the preservation of Malian tradition and provide invaluable support to fellow Malians living in Yiwu. A group that is crucial to preserving a heritage and creating a sense of belonging for the Malian diaspora. This group of Malian traders has a limited knowledge of Chinese and participates actively in Malian social activities. They most often take part in activities organized by the Malian community, such as associative meetings, religious gatherings or the Malian cultural concept of "Grin". Their social capital is concentrated within the Malian community. Of the 20 participants, 7 were designated as community anchors.

Social Capital: Community Anchors have high social capital mainly focusing on the Malian community but limited social capital outside of their community. They often serve as unofficial leaders and guides, helping newcomers navigate the complexities of life in Yiwu. Their networks provide a support system for those needing counsel in personal and professional endeavors. M3 (45) stated, "Whenever someone new from Mali comes on board in Yiwu, it is my goal to help them with the settling in process. We share with them meals, stories, tips about living here." Such bonds build strength and help provide comfort to members throughout the broader Malian community.

Language skills: Community Anchors have a limited command of the Chinese language. They often focus on French and look for an intermediary to act as translator. Systematic use of translation channels risks hampering effective communication with Chinese suppliers and limiting their business opportunities. M8 (50) said, "I know a few words in Mandarin, but it's not enough to have a proper conversation. I find myself having to lean on friends or rely on apps for assistance." The lack of language proficiency constitutes not only a social but also an economic obstacle for this group of Malian traders due to their dependence on other means to communicate with Chinese suppliers.

Engagement in social Activities: Participation in social activities is mostly limited to Malian community gatherings such as cultural celebrations or "Grin", religious functions, and family-oriented events. Community Anchors are the organizers of these community and religious events to bring together as many Malians as possible in a space. Their goal is to create a union around the values of their country within the Malian community of Yiwu. M12 (38) said, "We hold an annual festival which is to celebrate our culture. It unites everyone and lets us share our

traditions with the younger generation.” These events help to build migrant community cohesiveness but provide limited opportunities for cultural exchange.

Field observations showed that Community Anchors tend to have communal meals that are traditional in nature and therefore reinforce their cultural patterns. They most often participate in “Grin”¹ gatherings. Sharing culture stories and news of the country creates a sense of solidarity and connection at these events.

Table 1: Cases classification of Community Anchors

No	Respondents	Profile	Reason for classification
1	M3 (45 years old)	M3 is a long-term resident in Yiwu and is active in volunteering for community events. He prides himself on the preservation of Malian culture, hosting traditional dinners and cultural events.	His interest in community support and cultural preservation, combined with limited Chinese language skills, places him in the Community Anchor category. M1 is a community leader through his work, particularly in helping newcomers resettle. <i>"I have difficulty communicating in Chinese, but that doesn't necessarily prevent me from communicating with the Chinese, as I'm always surrounded by my Malian compatriots or my Chinese secretary, who most often accompanies me to the Futian Market to meet my suppliers."</i>
2	M8 (50 years old)	M2 runs a small import export business focussed on household products. He interacts with other Malians frequently, though this office also helps serve as a space for them to gather and be together.	His limited command of the Chinese language highlights his reliance on the Malian community for social interaction. <i>"I know a few words in Chinese, but it's not enough to have a proper conversation. I find myself having to lean on friends or rely on apps for assistance."</i>
3	M12 (38 years old)	M12 is known for storytelling at community events, sharing stories about Mali that resonate with the youth. He emphasizes a theory of culture and the process of information transmission.	His effort to advocate for support of the continuity of culture and serving as a mentor to younger Malians designates him as a Community Anchor. <i>"At the moment my level of Chinese does not allow me to communicate with Chinese people. I have to call on my Malian friends when they are available to help me. I also have a Chinese associate who speaks English and helps me interact with my Chinese partners."</i>
4	M4 (37 years old)	M4 is an active member of the Malian community, whose duty it is to arrange religious circles and celebrations. His commitment to fostering a sense of belonging is remarkable.	He places more value on communal harmony than economic pursuits. <i>"My level of Chinese is mediocre, but I don't feel obliged to learn it. I'm not even interested, because I have people</i>

¹ The grin is part of everyday Malian life. The "grin" finds its "origin" in associations of young people (mainly boys) of roughly the same age who have undergone the same initiation ordeals together.

			<i>in the Malian community who can help me”</i>
5	M5 (42 years old)	M5 runs a logistics business and most of the time provides transporting services to other Malians. He emphasizes Malian values and advocate for the defense of cultural identity.	His focus on cultural preservation and community support, as well as minimal language skills and interaction with local Chinese population, further solidifies his classification as a Community Anchor. <i>“I’ve been in Yiwu for 7 years but I’ve never been interested in the Chinese language. Although it seems important to understand, I don’t feel threatened by the lack of level in Chinese either”</i>
6	M6 (53 years old)	M6 runs an export-import company for household products but struggles to understand the intricacies of the local market. He only hangs out with Malian friends and doesn’t socialize with the local people.	His few friends, and great attention friendship only with Malian group status, puts him on the community Anchor classification. M6 values communal cohesion more than assimilation to host culture. <i>“I think I’m a little old to be venturing out to learn Chinese. Sometimes it can seem complicated to communicate with Chinese when I have no one to help me translate. But I feel comfortable with my Malian relatives who help me a lot in this respect”</i>
7	M11 (50 years old)	M11 has lived in Yiwu since 2008 and says he is unhappy with his ineffectual communication with local residents. He often relies on support from the Malian community.	He describes himself as a key player in social events, and his reliance on the Malian community for socialization ranks him among the pillars of the community. <i>"I'm someone who learns very quickly, but the Chinese language doesn't allow me to do that because it's very difficult. So, I've always had difficulty communicating in Chinese."</i>

3.1.2 Cultural Integrators

Cultural integrators are exemplified by a cohort of traders who have been able to assimilate into Chinese culture, while maintaining strong ties with the Malian community in Yiwu. They demonstrate that it is possible to establish good relationships with both cultural contexts and adapt successfully. They possess excellent language skills, strong social capital, and regularly participate in Malian social activities.

Social Capital: Cultural Integrators have balanced social capital allowing them to form relationships in both their community and host culture. This dual engagement enhances their potential to create communication and cooperativeness within different cultural segments. M14 (32) stated, *“I made friends with both Malians and Chinese people. My Chinese friends invite sometimes to travel with them to their home town. It increases my understanding of the Chinese culture and makes it easier to share our culture to others.”* Having a network composed of both Malian and Chinese friends is what strengthens this group of Malian traders. They tend to use this asset most often in their everyday business life.

Language Skills: Language skills is a trademark of Cultural Integrators. For many of them, this has enabled them to reach an intermediate to even fluent level of the Chinese language and thus successfully interact with Chinese suppliers and authorities. M15 (29) said, *“Speaking in Mandarin has opened up many doors for me. I had the chance to learn the language at Hangzhou training center (Shanghai) before coming to Yiwu. Understanding the language allows me to do very good business deals especially when the supplier trusts me”* This group of Malian traders sees the Chinese language as an indispensable condition for establishing a business in Yiwu. They preferred to enroll in Chinese language centers before actively starting business in Yiwu.

Engagement in social activities: Cultural integrators often undertake cultural and economic activities. They participate in traditional "grin" gatherings organized by Malians, they also participate in sports activities and attend trade fairs, taking advantage of these opportunities to build relationships and expand their networks. M14 (32) reported, *“I enjoy taking part in the local dragon boat festival. During this holiday my Chinese friend invites me to his hometown every year. It’s a nice opportunity to see different areas of China, make new friends and learn about Chinese traditions.”* This group of traders is involved in the major events in Yiwu due to their role as a bridge between the local community and the Malian community.

Observations suggest that Cultural Integrators often play a bridging role between the Malian community and the local Chinese community. They participate in regular events celebrating both cultures, in joint food gatherings that feature Malian and Chinese dishes. Cultural Integrators allows civilizations to learn from one another, embrace differences and foster mutual understanding.

Table 2: Cases Classification of Cultural integrator

No	Respondents	Profile	Reason for classification
1	M1 (27 years old)	M1 is trader who has cautiously established relationships with Malian community and Chinese suppliers. He participates in frequent cultural exchange activities.	His ability to navigate multiple systems and his advanced Language Skills are a perfect example of him serving as cultural Integrators. He often participate in the daily “grin” initiative of the Malian community. <i>“I am studying in a language training center now. I have class three times a week as I realize that learning Chinese will lead to more opportunities for me. I want to maintain good relationships with my suppliers. My program lasts one year but after 9 months I have progressed a lot and I can communicate effectively with my Chinese suppliers”</i>
2	M7 (29 years old)	In Mali, M7 owns several boutiques that highlight a distinctive mix of Malian and Made in China products.	M7's bicultural participation and robust social networking abilities designate him as a Cultural Integrator. His initiatives are to combine Chinese cultural and Malian culture. Additionally, he did not miss any activity of the Malian community while I was conducting fieldwork. <i>“As soon as I arrived in Yiwu, I immediately enrolled in a language school. This allowed me to quickly grasp the language and make Chinese friends wherever I went in China.”</i>

3	M14 (32 years old)	M14's been in Yiwu over five years, and made good relationships with local suppliers.	His fluency in Chinese and active participation in Chinese and Malian activities classified him as a cultural integrator. He uses his linguistic abilities to promote cultural exchange. <i>"I made friends with both Malians and Chinese people. My Chinese friends invite sometimes to travel with them to their home town. It increases my understanding of the Chinese"</i>
4	M15 (32 years old)	M15 also attends Trade exhibitions and leverage Chinese enterprises, thereby increasing his market footprint. He values intercultural dialogue.	M15s actively networking and sustained fluency in Chinese. He becomes more versatile by participating in several cultural activities. <i>"Speaking in Chinese has opened up many doors for me. I had the chance to learn the language at Hangzhou training center (Shanghai) before coming to Yiwu. Understanding the language allows me to do very good business deals especially when the supplier trusts me"</i>
5	M19 (35 years old)	M19 is recognized for his active participation in "Grin" gatherings and Chinese festivals, promoting both Malian and Chinese culture.	His active participation in bicultural events and fluency in Chinese demonstrate his role as a Cultural Integrator. He has a major advantage in language skills. <i>"I have an HSK 4, which allowed me to acquire the necessary communication skills in Chinese. I use this advantage to learn and better utilize certain details of the Yiwu market. It's already not easy to do good business in Yiwu when you don't speak Chinese."</i>

3.1.3 Strategic Networkers

Strategic Networkers typically concentrate on exploiting links with the host culture for economic advantage, frequently to the cost of their own community ties. This group possesses high language skills and limited participation in Malian social activities. They highly adapted to the host culture but maintained limited community ties with the Malian community. Of the 20 participants, 4 were identified as strategic networkers. Additionally, this group possesses strong business skills and a comprehensive awareness of local market dynamics.

Social Capital: Strategic Networkers maintain broad networks inside the host culture, enabling them to establish formidable professional partnerships. Nevertheless, their affiliations with the Malian community are frequently negligible, since they emphasize relationships that yield immediate economic advantages. M16 (40) stated, *"I spend most of my time meeting potential suppliers or attending trade fairs. It's all about building a strong network that can lead to profit."* The focus on social ties that lead to economic gains drives this group of traders to orient their circle of friends solely towards the Chinese. They think that being close to the Malian diaspora has less economic value for their daily activities.

Language skills: Advanced mastery of Chinese is a key characteristic of Strategic Networkers. This proficiency allows them to manoeuvre complex business transactions and interact with local suppliers efficiently. M2 (34)

emphasized, *"Understanding Chinese language has enabled me to navigate misunderstandings and prevent expensive mistakes in transactions."* What they have in common with community anchors is their command of the Chinese language. Members of strategic networks use their Chinese friends to improve their level of Chinese. Mastering the Chinese language is very important to them because they want to make Chinese friends to increase their economic opportunities.

Engagement in Social Activities: Participation in social activities primarily focusses on events of the host culture, including business forums and trade fairs. Strategic Networkers frequently emphasize these efforts to enhance their visibility and broaden their professional connections. M17 (36) stated, *"I rarely attend Malian community events because I find more value in business networking events. It's where I can make connections that lead to real opportunities."* They have no animosity towards their Malian compatriots, but prefer not to take part in activities organised by Malians in Yiwu. They are more interested in Chinese events, especially those that can lead to trade.

Field observations during business exhibitions shows that Strategic Networkers frequently emerge as the most engaged attendees, actively conversing with vendors and prospective partners. They engage in interactions with a distinct emphasis on results, highlighting the significance of developing professional relationships that may yield business opportunities. This group of Malian traders avoids being associated with anything related to the motherland.

Table 3: Cases Classification of Strategic networkers

No	Respondent	Profile	Reason for clarification
1	M2 (34 years old)	M2 operates a prominent import-export business.	His orientation towards commercial opportunities with Chinese partners and his HSH 4 certificate mark him as a Strategic Networker. He would rather form profit-oriented partnerships than community ties. <i>"Understanding Chinese language has enabled me to navigate misunderstandings and prevent expensive mistakes in transactions."</i>
2	M16 (32 years old)	According to M16, he participates in forums and trade shows to enhance his professional network. His business acumen is evident when you talk to him.	This trader's fluency in Chinese allows him to better communicate with Chinese suppliers. I spent a whole day with him to understand his daily activities. <i>"The Chinese language not only allows me to communicate better, but it also strengthens the trust between me and my Chinese partners."</i>
3	M13 (27)	M13 is known for signing favorable contracts with Chinese suppliers. His networking is key to his thriving.	His excellent command of Chinese and his background in business networking place him among the specialists in strategic networking. This classification reflects his weak connection to the Malian community.
4	M17 (36 years old)	M17 frequently collaborates with Chinese entrepreneurs to create joint ventures in Africa. He holds a fantastic sense of the local market.	His focus on the economic partnerships and his fluent language skills reflect the qualities of a Strategic Networker. He favours professional associations over community ties. <i>"I rarely attend Malian community events because I find more value in business networking events. They're</i>

			where I can make connections that lead to real opportunities."
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3.1.4 Reluctant Adapters

Reluctant adapters are those who are neither connected to the Malian community in Yiwu nor to the local community. This group is constantly faced with adaptation difficulties that have led them to weak support networks and limited engagement in community activities. This is the most isolated group because of their lack of trust in human relationships. They have Limited language skills, limited social capital and avoid participating in Malian social activities. They are characterized by Minimal cultural adaptation and weak community ties. Reluctant adapters were found among 4 of the 20 Malian traders.

Social Capital: Their social capital is low with limited friends in their entourage. They often feel isolated from the Malian community and the local Chinese population. M9 (45) *“Personally, I find it difficult to communicate with people, be it Malians or Chinese. I have met too many people who have disappointed me in the past.”*

Language skills: French and Bambara are language that this group can speak fluently. Reluctant Adapters have no proficiency in the Chinese language. Lack of language proficiency could create substantial barriers to communication, limiting their ability to work with local suppliers efficiently. *“I know some Chinese phrases but it's not enough to make a conversation,”* said M20 (52).

Engagement in social activities: Reluctant Adapters avoid social activities. They seldom participate in cultural and social events, which contributes to their sense of isolation. M10 (48) said, *“I don't go to many events because I feel out of place. All of my friends are back home, and it's hard to find ways to interact with people here.”*

Reluctant Adapters are more often on the fringes of social gatherings, choosing to forgo events altogether. Several factors contribute to their reluctance to join, including age and personal circumstances. Traders who belong to an older generation may feel alienated from younger people's social networks and therefor decide to avoid activities in groups.

Table 4: Cases classification of reluctant adapters

No	Respondent	Profile	Reason for classification
1	M9 (45 years old)	M9 operate a shipping company in Yiwu.	During my interview with M9, he mentioned his difficulty adapting to life to Yiwu, often feeling alone and disconnected from the Malian community as well as local culture. His level of limited social activity and weak language skills makes him a Reluctant Adapter. <i>“Personally, I find it difficult to communicate with people, be they Malians or Chinese. I have met too many people who have disappointed me in the past.”</i>
2	M10 (48 years old)	Socially, M10 lives a fairly lonely life; most of his conversations are with family members according to him.	His reticence to engage with either culture and his precarious networks mark him as a Reluctant Adapter. The M10 dilemma highlights the difficulties some Malian traders face in their adaptation efforts. <i>"I rarely frequent the Malians because I think that some Malian here in Yiwu</i>

			<i>thinks that when you approach them, it is to study their business and recover their customers. Which makes me stay quietly in my corner."</i>
3	M18 (52 years of age)	M18 has been in Yiwu for 10 years yet is still not engaged with the local community.	<p>His limited involvement in social contexts and his reliance on his mother tongue (Bambara) confirm this designation as a reluctant adaptor. In social situations, he often feels left out. His Chinese language skills are minimal.</p> <p><i>"I've always thought that learning the language isn't important since I'm only here for a short time. Another aspect is that I don't understand the Western languages through which Chinese is taught. These aspects have kept me in a sometimes uncomfortable situation since I always need translators."</i></p>
4	M20 (55 years old)	M20 has difficulty following the speed of Yiwu life and regularly expresses feelings of homesickness. He has relatively few ties in either group.	<p>His isolation and lack of engagement in cultural exchanges make him a Reluctant Adapter. M20's experiences underscore the challenges of adjusting to a new environment.</p> <p><i>"I know some Chinese phrases but it's not enough to make a conversation,"</i></p>

The profiles of the 20 respondents are a testament to the diverse experiences and adaptation strategies among Malian traders in Yiwu. Their social dynamics are further revealed in the four trader typologies—Community Anchors, Cultural Integrators, Strategic Networkers and Reluctant Adapters. By having these different characteristics as well as diverse experiences, the understanding of their roles within the Malian community, and more in the Chinese context is greatly understood.

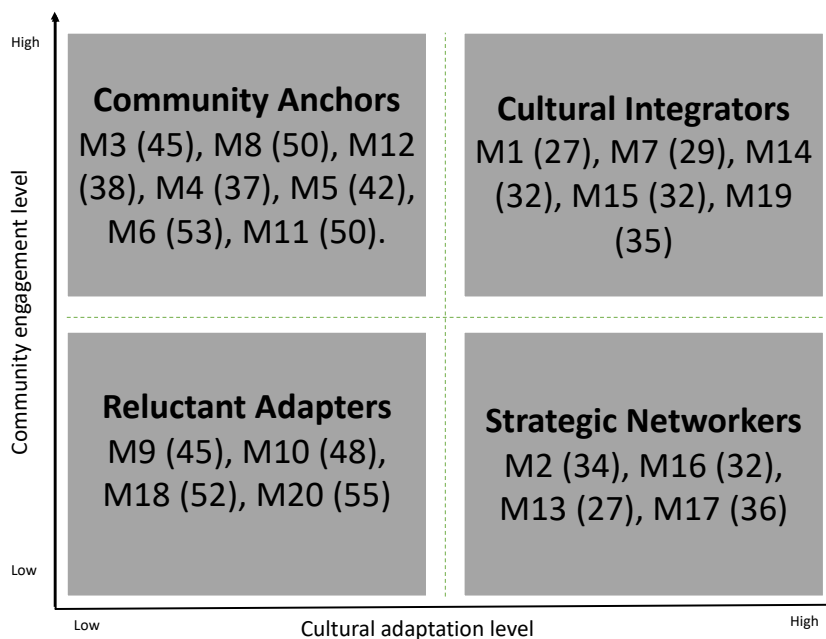


Figure 2: Classification of the cases

The importance of identifying these different typologies allows us to understand the complexity of the experience of migrants at different levels of integration within the host community as well as within their own community. The challenges faced by these traders are discussed as well as the importance of social capital, language knowledge and engagement in social activities in their process of social adaptation. Understanding these dynamics is key to formulating effective integration policies and meeting the diverse needs of immigrant communities in the context of global trade. Building social capital, improving language skills, and promoting involvement in social activities, Malian traders can facilitate their strategic networks and enrich Yiwu's cultural landscape. Tackling these challenges can enhance their social adaptation experience and enrich the multicultural nature of the city.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The typology analysis made it possible to classify Malian traders into four groups (community anchors, cultural integrators, strategic networkers and reluctant adapters) to precisely elucidate the social adaptation process and the difficulties encountered. This innovative approach goes beyond a simple classification and offers empirical data on the role played by social elements, in particular: social capital, language skills and engagement in social activities, in the process of social adaptation of Malian traders. Community anchors members are those who attach major importance to the preservation and promotion of Malian culture in Yiwu through the "Grin" meetings. These traditional Malian encounters reinforce mental well-being to some extent but do not ensure their cultural integration. This assertion may be supported by Putnam (2002) who stipulates in his research that social network strengthens the mental health of migrants but also has limits.

Cultural integrators and strategic networkers better understand the importance of having Chinese language skills to better understand Chinese standards and expand their strategic network. These two groups have a more or less complete command of the Chinese language. Cultural integrators use their language skills to make strategic partners at the local level, whether in the business context or in the social context, which promote intercultural communication and mutual understanding (Thomas 2004). However, strategic networkers use their language skills only for commercial business thus limiting their opportunities to better understand the codes of Chinese living together (Li, 2020). These differences in terms of language skills, social capital and engagement in social activities between groups show that the path towards cultural integration and community engagement is not a matter of one size fits all approach, but complex phenomena that require an analysis of each individual.

The situation of Reluctant adapters demonstrates the case of individuals who are in difficulty in cultural integration since their language skills are at a minimal or non-existent level. Their case shows the weakness of community engagement and cultural integration when migrants lack social capital and adequate language skills (2002, derwing). The importance of this typological classification will make it possible to develop measured policies that target migrant groups specifically according to their social obstacles. This innovative classification is an approach that allows a better understanding of the backbone of Yiwu's Malian traders and helps to enrich the academic debate on the social adaptation of migrants. It will also make it possible to treat the social adaptation of migrants not as a group with identical characteristics but a group with different specificities from each other.

Although it is difficult to generalize about the social adaptation of Malian migrants on the basis of 20 responses, it is clear that the findings from the respondents give an initial idea of the situation of African migrants in China. Moreover, some of the questions used to identify the business scales of Malian traders were challenged by the fact that some participants were reluctant to answer certain questions relating to their wealth. To overcome this obstacle, the questions were maintained while giving participants the freedom to choose whether or not to answer in order to maintain a healthy interview environment.

The main findings are that among the 20 respondents, 5 were classified as cultural integrators. This group of traders have high Chinese language skills, strong social capital and participate often in Malian social activities. 7 traders were classified as community anchor, this group is composed of Malian traders with limited Chinese language skills and participate and initiate Malian social activities. The third group is made up of strategic networkers who are traders with a good knowledge of Chinese and who have limited community links. The fourth and final group is made up of reluctant adapters who have limited language skills, limited social capital and limited participation in Malian social activities.

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