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From Africa to Asia: The Parenting Odyssey of African Mothers in China

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Abstract. The movement of humans from one country to another in search of greener pastures over the years has become more pronounced. In the ever-evolving landscape of global migration, of particular interest is the migration of African mothers to China. Hence, the experiences of African mothers raising their children in China stand as a compelling narrative, ripe for exploration. By employing a well-structured interview, this qualitative study explored the multifaceted realities faced by this unique demography. Participants in the study were African mothers from five different African countries, namely, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Burundi, and Zimbabwe, living in China. Traversing the intersections of race, gender, and migration, the study illuminates the nuanced strategies employed by African migrant mothers as they negotiate their identities and parenting approaches. From the daunting language barriers to the navigation of shifting societal norms, these resilient women navigate a complex web of obstacles, all while striving to provide their children with a sense of belonging and a strong cultural foundation. By unveiling the unique challenges and coping mechanisms of African migrant mothers in China, this study further brings to the limelight the intricate interplay between cultural identity, parenting practices, and the challenges of adapting to a foreign environment. Understanding the resilience, adaptation, extraordinary lives, and universal bonds of African migrant mothers in China, this study offers a window into the complexities of the migrant experience and the remarkable strength that transcends borders.

Keywords. African mothers, Migration, China, Parenting approaches, Child-raising

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of international migration has become increasingly prevalent in the modern globalized world, resulting in diverse communities and cultural coexistence in various countries (Czaika and De Haas 2014). One such example is the growing population of African migrants in China. Over the past few decades, China has witnessed a significant influx of African migrants seeking opportunities for education, employment, and business ventures (Cao et al. 2012). These individuals, upon settling in a foreign environment, face numerous challenges and experiences that shape their lives in unique ways. Of particular interest among these African immigrants are African mothers.

The experiences of African mothers who have immigrated to China are multifaceted and complex, encompassing various aspects of their lives (Liu 2019). One critical aspect that warrants exploration is their child-raising experiences. Parental practices, cultural values, and social norms significantly influence the upbringing of children, and these factors can be profoundly impacted when individuals migrate to a new country with different cultural and societal contexts (Peng 2018; Lansford 2022; Sun and Mulvaney 2022). Understanding the child-raising experiences of African migrant mothers in China is essential not only to gain insights into their lives but also to identify the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to navigate the complexities of raising their children in a foreign environment.

In addition to providing the initial setting in which children begin to mature, African mothers play critical roles in their children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development (Peng 2018). Although children inherit genetic traits from their parents, it is imperative to note that the development of children is also influenced by interactions with their parents, environment, and developmental resources (Bush et al. 2020; Frosch et al. 2021). Certain approaches to parenting seem to be universally adaptable across cultural boundaries. The physical care provided by parents, including feeding and shielding from external dangers, is essential to an infant's life. Therefore, one would anticipate that parenting practices would be culturally universal to the degree that they aid in the survival of newborns (Keijer 2021). Similarly, for emotional stability and cognitive stimulation, babies and kids rely on their parents. Parenting practices that are therefore likely to be similar across cultures include contingent responsiveness to infants' vocalizations, which is cognitively stimulating and promotes language acquisition, as well as responsiveness in other areas that allow infants to form secure attachment relationships (Bornstein 2012).

However, this is not the case with social and cultural interaction as this differs from one culture to another. Although, cultural and social factors are key players in the challenge faced by African migrant mothers in China in their child-raising duties, a thorough understanding of the existing differences could contribute significantly to the success of child-raising responsibilities by African migrant mothers in China (Spjeldnæs 2021). This study therefore seeks to understand the interplay between cultural values, beliefs, and practices of African migrant mothers in China as practiced in their home countries and that of the local Chinese community, thus identifying the complexities and nuances in their parenting practices in a foreign environment. In addition, the challenges faced by African migrant mothers in China and the strategies employed to overcome these challenges will be explored in this study. The unique experiences of this population, including language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination, can significantly impact their ability to raise children according to their desired cultural and social values. Through the exploration of the strategies employed by African migrant mothers in China to navigate these challenges, we can gain insights into their resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptive capacities.

Overall, this study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the child-raising experiences of African migrant mothers in China, shedding light on their unique perspectives, challenges, and strategies. Thus, a deeper understanding of the interplay between migration, cultural adaptation, and parenting practices would be underscored, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on transnational motherhood and migration studies. In addition, the findings of this study can inform policymakers, service providers, and communities about the specific challenges faced by African migrant mothers in China and guide the development of culturally sensitive support systems and interventions to enhance their well-being and that of their children.

2. Literature review

As a concept and lived experience, motherhood is universally shared and profoundly shaped by cultural, social, economic, and historical factors (Rich 2021). It is a complex and multifaceted role that transcends biological functions, influencing a woman's identity, relationships, and life course (Zabak et al. 2023). In many societies, motherhood is often idealized as the ultimate expression of a woman's purpose, her moral and emotional commitment to her children, and her essential contribution to the continuity of society. However, the experience of motherhood is never monolithic (Isanbor 2024). Rather, it is deeply embedded within the frameworks of power dynamics, gender expectations, and evolving socio-economic contexts, which vary across time, place, and community.

In the traditional sense, motherhood has long been associated with a naturalized, almost sacred responsibility of women to care for and nurture the next generation (Raudasoja et al. 2022). The role of the mother, however, is also profoundly political. In patriarchal societies, motherhood has historically been used as a tool to regulate women's bodies and their societal roles, reinforcing their primary identity as caregivers, nurturers, and moral guardians within the family (O'Reilly 2021). Across the globe, maternal identities are constructed and legitimized within these frameworks of power, with various ideologies and societal norms dictating the idealized image of the mother and her responsibilities (O'Reilly 2019).

The way motherhood is experienced and understood varies significantly across cultures. For instance, in many Western countries, the rise of individualism has shaped a more autonomous model of motherhood, one that emphasizes the psychological well-being of the mother alongside the development of a child (Rossi 2017). This is evident in the growing emphasis on "attachment parenting," a model that stresses the importance of emotional bonds and child-centered approaches to caregiving (Cummings and Warmuth 2019). In contrast, societies with more collectivist orientations, such as many parts of Asia, place a greater emphasis on the family unit as a whole, where motherhood is considered integral to maintaining social harmony and fulfilling familial duties (Das and Bardis 2023). This distinction underscores how different cultures structure their understanding of motherhood, often elevating the mother's role as central not only to child-rearing but to the broader cohesion of society.

The globalization of ideas and practices has introduced additional layers of complexity to the concept of motherhood, particularly in the context of migrant women. As families become increasingly transnational, motherhood is often marked by the tensions between the desire to maintain cultural traditions and the pressures of adapting to new environments (Bryceson and Vuorela 2020). For migrant mothers, their role as caregivers is compounded by the challenges of language barriers, economic survival, and cultural adaptation, making their experience distinct from that of native mothers in the host country (Richards 2024). These mothers may find themselves negotiating between the traditional values they brought with them and the expectations of the society in which they now reside (Sookhoo 2024). As such, their understanding of motherhood becomes a negotiation of cultural identity, self-empowerment, and the desire to provide the best for their children in a foreign land (Lerma 2018).

The social and economic conditions under which a mother lives also significantly affect her experiences of motherhood. In societies undergoing rapid economic change or marked by high levels of inequality, mothers may face distinct challenges related to their ability to provide for their children (Walsh 2017). The rise of dual-income households in many urban areas has led to changes in maternal roles, with mothers juggling professional and caregiving responsibilities. This often leads to a reevaluation of what it means to be a "good" mother, particularly in cultures where intensive mothering practices are increasingly valued. The

pressures placed on mothers to balance career aspirations with parenting responsibilities can lead to feelings of guilt, stress, and identity conflict (Meeussen and Van Laar 2018).

Moreover, the intersectionality of race, class, and gender plays a crucial role in shaping the experience of motherhood. For women of color and particularly migrant mothers, their experiences can be shaped by the additional burden of racialization and marginalization (Manzanera-Ruiz et al. 2024). They may face societal expectations that differ from those placed on native mothers, as well as economic and legal barriers that complicate their ability to fulfill their maternal duties. For example, migrant mothers often find themselves in precarious employment situations, which may limit their ability to provide their children with the same material advantages as more established families (O’Keefe and Courtois 2019). The experience of being a mother in this context can thus involve navigating systemic inequities and overcoming the intersection of social, economic, and cultural obstacles that are often overlooked in mainstream discussions of motherhood.

Motherhood, therefore, is not a static or universal experience, but a dynamic and evolving identity that is continuously shaped by larger societal forces. These include cultural ideals, economic imperatives, gendered expectations, and individual life choices (Isaac 2021). For African migrant mothers in China, their journey of motherhood reflects this intricate intersection of culture, migration, and adaptation, as they negotiate their roles as caregivers in an unfamiliar environment while navigating the challenges and opportunities that come with their transnational status. In this context, motherhood becomes a multifaceted experience that is informed not only by personal beliefs and practices but also by the larger social, cultural, and economic forces at play in their host country.

Ultimately, the study of motherhood requires a holistic approach that takes into account the varying contexts of women as mothers. Understanding motherhood through a transnational lens, especially for migrant mothers, allows for a deeper insight into the challenges they face and the strategies they employ in their everyday lives. By broadening the scope of motherhood beyond biological and normative definitions, we can better appreciate the complexities of maternal identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

This research, therefore, aims to illuminate the lived experiences of African migrant mothers in China, exploring how their understanding and practice of motherhood are influenced by both their heritage and the new societal norms they encounter. By doing so, it contributes to the growing field of transnational motherhood studies, offering valuable insights into the intersection of migration, culture, and parenting in a globalized world.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study included African migrant mothers residing in various parts of China. These African migrant mothers residing in various parts of China were from five different African countries, namely, Burundi (3.3%), Ghana (16.7%), Kenya (10%), Nigeria (56.7), and Zimbabwe (13.3). This study employs the use of qualitative data from one-on-one interviews with African mothers currently raising kids in China, with a total of 30 participants. These range from working mothers to student mothers to stay-at-home mothers, all within the ages of 18 – 45 years.

3.2 Methods

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to gather rich and nuanced data from African migrant mothers residing in

various parts of China. The interview questions consisted of 3 sections. The first section (section A) with 7 questions addresses the demography of the respondents. Information on personal attributes such as age, education level (bachelor, master, or doctorate), country of origin, number of children, career history, number of years of residency in China, and Chinese language proficiency. The second section (section B) with 14 questions addresses issues of cultural and social factors that could impact child raising experiences of African migrant mothers following variables available in existing literature while the last section (section C) addresses challenges experienced by African migrant mothers in China and how they overcome these challenges (Yim 2022).

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The data obtained from the interview was unstructured data, which was coded for easy analysis. Coding and analysis were done using IBM SPSS statistics data editor version 29.0.2.0. Through the thematic analysis, we identified key themes and patterns that emerged from the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the child-raising experiences of African migrant mothers in China.

4. Result and discussion

4.1 Demography of Respondents

The following section presents an analysis of the data collected from migrant African mothers living in China using the interview guide. Total number of respondents is 30. Of the total respondents, the country of origin of more than half (56.7%) was Nigeria while those with other nationality included Ghana (16.7%), Zimbabwe (13.3%), Kenya (10%), and Burundi (3.3%) (Table 1). Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, which may explain a higher record of migration of Nigerians when compared to other African countries.

Table 1. Different parameters considered for the respondents

Country of respondents				
Country	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Burundi	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Ghana	5	16.7	16.7	20.0
Kenya	3	10.0	10.0	30.0
Nigeria	17	56.7	56.7	86.7
Zimbabwe	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Age of respondents				
Age group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
18-25	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
26-35	23	76.7	76.7	80.0
36-45	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Education level of respondents				
Education History	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent

Bachelors	4	13.3	3.3	13.3
Masters	18	60.0	60.0	73.3
PhD	8	26.7	26.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Respondents Career type				
Career History	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
None	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
Part-time	7	23.3	23.3	56.7
Full-time	13	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Respondents number of children				
No of Children	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
1	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
2	15	50.0	50.0	83.3
3	3	10.0	10.0	93.3
4	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Respondent's residence duration in China				
Residency Duration (years)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
1 - 5	9	30.0	30.0	30.0
6-10	17	56.7	56.7	86.7
11-15	3	10.0	10.0	96.7
16-20	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	
Respondents' Chinese language proficiency				
Chinese Proficiency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Poor	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
Basic	7	23.3	23.3	50.0
Fair	9	30.0	30.0	80.0
Good	3	10.0	10.0	90.0
Fluent	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

In addition, the respondents consist of different age groups, with the younger being 18 years and the oldest being 45 years. Most of the respondents aged between 26-35 years (76.7%); other age groups include 18-25 years (3.3%) and 36-45 years (20.0%) (**Table 1**).

The result further revealed that all the respondents were educated, with 60% of them attaining a master's degree level of education where most of them were aged between 26-35 years. The other respondents possessed a bachelor's degree (13.3%) and a doctorate (26.7). The result also highlighted a varied distribution of employment statuses among the respondents, with

significant representation across none (no employment or stay-at-home mothers), those with part-time employment, and those with full-time employment. This provides a concise overview that emphasizes the diversity in work patterns of the respondents. The data showed that the majority of the respondents have full-time employment (43%) while a significant number (33.3%) were unemployed or full-time mothers and 23.3% have part-time employment. The distribution of the number of children among respondents as presented in **Table 1** showed most of the respondents (50%) have two children; while 33.3% of the respondents have only one child, 10% of them have three children and only 6.7% have four children. **Fig. 1a** shows the age distribution of the children of the respondents. More than three-quarters (85%) of the children were aged between 1-5 years; other age groups of the children of the respondents included 6-10 years (13%) and 11-15 years (4%). Religion has been deeply enshrined into the African culture as a result common religious practices among Africans are Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion (Aderibigbe 2015; Gez et al. 2022). When respondents were asked what religious education was given to their children, 67% claimed Christian religion, 23% Islam, and 10% fell in the category of those who either practice traditional African religion or have no religious affiliation at all (**Fig. 1b**). When respondents were asked what growth rituals they observe for their children, all (100%) the respondents chose birthday. The majority of African migrant mothers (56.7%) have lived in China for 6-10 years while a significant portion (30.0%) has been there for a shorter duration of 1-5 years. A smaller number have been in China for 11-15 years (10.0%) and 16-20 years (3.3%) (**Table 1**).

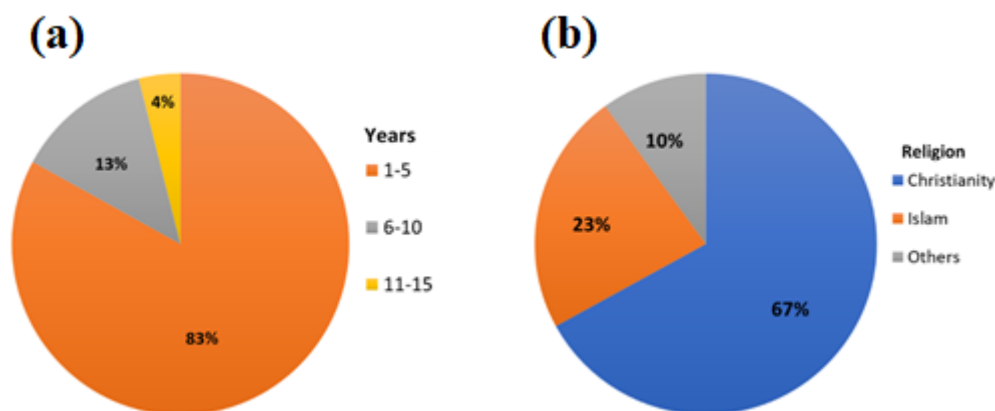


Fig. 1. (a) Percentages of children's age group of migrant African mothers living in China (b) Percentage of respondents in line with religious education given to children

The majority of African migrant mothers have either Fair (30.0%) or Poor (26.7%) Chinese proficiency while a significant portion has basic proficiency (23.3%), a smaller number however have Good (10.0%) or Fluent (10.0%) proficiency (**Table 1**). This shows on average that the majority of the African migrant mothers are fair speakers of the Chinese language.

4.2 Parenting practices

By asking the respondents if they were stay-at-home moms, a significant portion of them (43%) did not identify as stay-at-home moms. This indicates that these mothers are likely engaged in activities outside of the home, such as employment or other commitments, 30% of the respondents identify as stay-at-home moms, indicating that they primarily take care of their household and children without engaging in external employment and the remaining 27% of respondents partly identify as stay-at-home moms (**Fig. 2a**), suggesting that they might be

involved in part-time work, freelance activities, or other flexible engagements that allow them to spend substantial time at home. When respondents were asked if they have a nanny, a majority of the respondents (67%) do not have a nanny while 33% of the respondents did have a nanny (**Fig. 2b**). This suggests that most of these mothers either take care of their children themselves or rely on other forms of childcare support such as family members, friends, or community resources. Others may prefer or require additional help in taking care of their children, possibly due to work commitments or other responsibilities. This distribution reflects the varying childcare strategies and resources among African migrant mothers in China, with a majority managing childcare without the aid of a nanny.

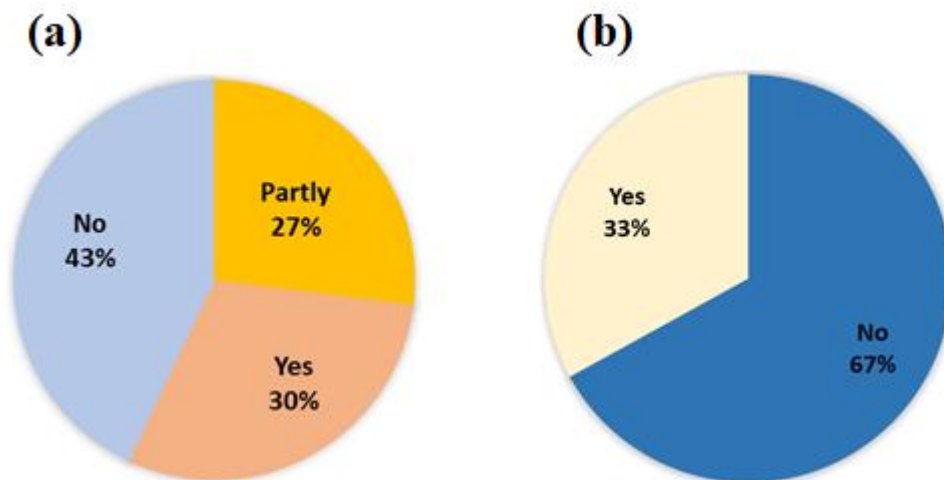


Fig. 2. Plots showing (a) Percentages of respondents and occupational status (b) Percentages of respondents with and without a nanny

When respondents were asked who mostly look after the children, the majority of respondents (60%) reported that the mothers are mostly responsible for looking after the kids (**Fig. 3**). This indicates that in a significant number of African migrant families, mothers are the primary caregivers while 23.3% of respondents stated that a nanny is mostly responsible for child care. This suggests that a substantial portion of these families might be employing external help for child care while fewer respondents (16.7%) employ the help of extended family members for child caregiving. The data shows that mothers are predominantly responsible for child care among African migrant families, followed by nannies and grandmothers. This distribution highlights both the reliance on the immediate family (mothers) and the use of external (nannies) and extended family support (grandmothers) in child-rearing practices.

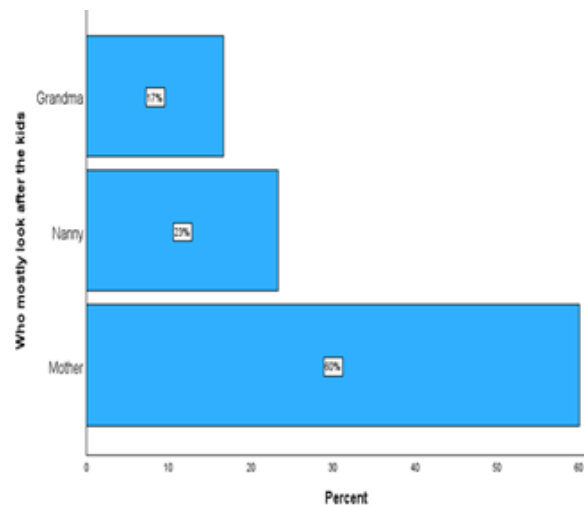


Fig. 3. Percentages of those looking after respondent's kids

Further inquiry regarding who they consult over their children's diet and eating habits shows that the respondents majorly consult the internet (37%) and community (30%) as the top sources, however, the internet is slightly more popular (**Fig. 4a**). Personal experience (13%) and relatives (13%) are moderately used sources, indicating that personal and familial knowledge is still important but not as important as community advice and internet resources. Hospitals are the least consulted source, which may suggest either a preference for non-medical advice or confidence in other sources.

When respondents were asked who they consult over appropriate clothing for their children (**Fig. 4b**), the majority of the respondents (45%) chose personal instinct. The data suggests that personal instinct plays a dominant role in deciding appropriate clothing for kids, indicating a high level of confidence in individual judgment. The community is the second most consulted source, with around 25% of people consulting their community for advice showing that African migrant mothers' value collective wisdom in decision-making.

Responding to who they consult when their children are sick (**Fig. 4c**), 55% take their children to a hospital which from the data is the most consulted source followed by relatives (18%). The internet is often consulted by approximately 10% of mothers, while about 7% engage in self-medication and 5% rely on advice from the community. The least source is personal experience with approximately 5% of mothers relying on their past experiences to decide what to do when their children are sick. The data indicates a strong preference for professional medical advice, with most mothers taking their children to a hospital when sick. This suggests a high level of trust in medical professionals and the healthcare system in China.

Additionally, concerning how they found schools for their children, most (67%) selected schools based on proximity (**Fig. 4d**). This suggests that convenience and ease of access are the primary factors for most parents when choosing a school. About 27% of respondents relied on recommendations from neighbors. This shows that personal recommendations and community input are also significant factors in the decision-making process. A small proportion of respondents (7%) used an app to find schools.

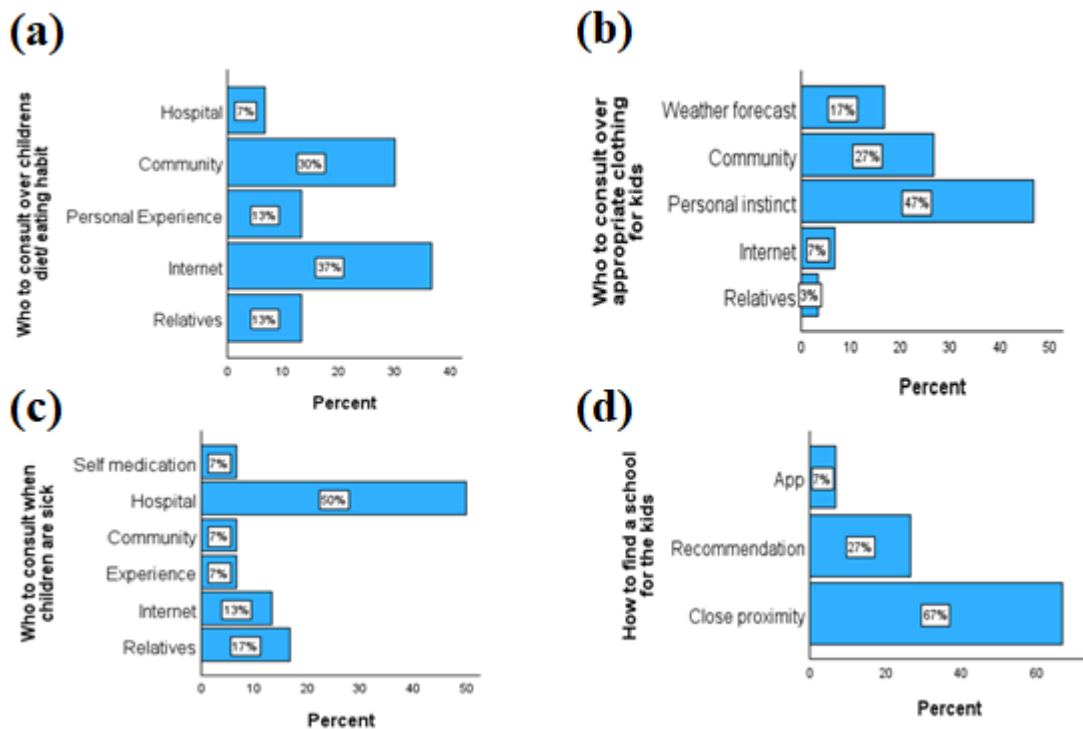


Fig. 4. Supports African migrant mothers consult in raising kids (a) for diet/eating habits (b) for clothing (c) for health (d) for finding a school

4.3 Language barriers

The majority of mothers fall into the fair proficiency category (30%), with significant portions in poor (27%) and basic (23%) categories (**Fig. 5**). Only 20% of mothers have good or fluent proficiency. Fathers have a more balanced distribution but stand out in the fluent category (30%), which is their highest. Children show a high level of fair proficiency (33%) and a notable percentage in both basic (27%) and fluent (27%) categories. They have the lowest percentage in poor and good proficiency levels. Fair proficiency is the most common across all groups. Mothers tend to have lower proficiency levels compared to fathers and children, who show higher levels of fluency. There is a general trend of increasing proficiency from mothers to children, suggesting that younger generations (children) have better proficiency levels, possibly due to better access to education or more integration into environments requiring this skill.

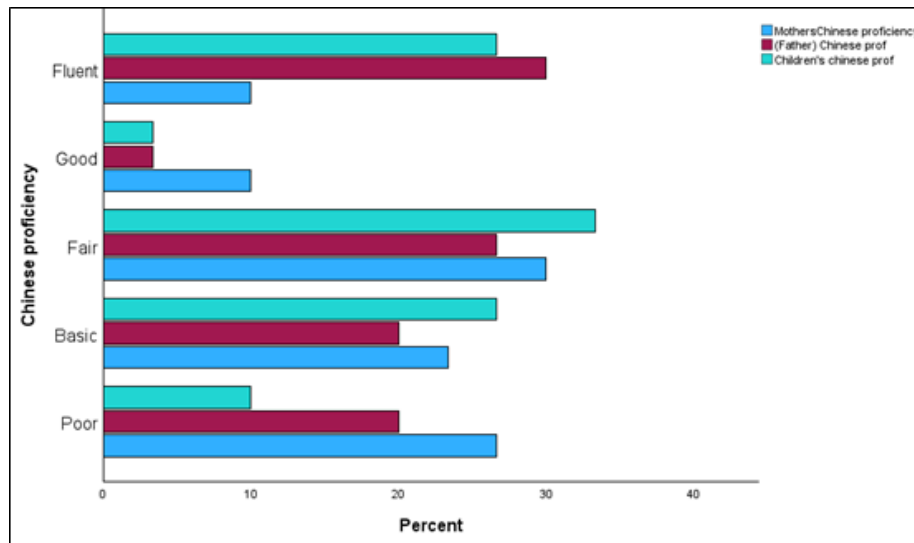


Fig. 5. Chinese speaking proficiency of father, mother, and children

4.4 Social Integration Challenges

When respondents were asked if they experienced any difficulties in socializing, schooling, healthcare, children’s nutrition, and obtaining/processing passport or visa in China, 93% had difficulties socializing (**Fig. 6**). A significant number of respondents (67%) have difficulties with schooling while the distribution around healthcare is some close with 53% having no difficulty accessing or adapting to the healthcare facilities, however, 47% of respondents have some challenges with regards to healthcare accessibility. The majority of the respondents (67%) said their children easily adapt to the foods in China while 32% have difficulties with Chinese food. The majority of the respondents (93 %) did not experience any difficulty obtaining or processing a passport or visa while an insignificant number of respondents (7%) claimed there were some difficulties experienced with processing a passport or visa.

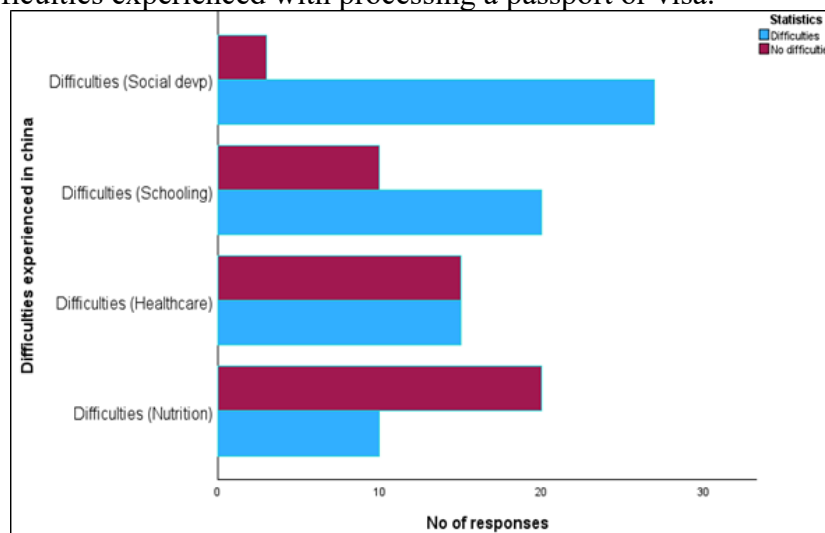


Fig. 6. Difficulties experienced by African migrant mothers in China

When respondents were asked which of the child-raising practices, they preferred between their home country and China, the majority of the women (47%) preferred child-raising practices from their home countries indicating a strong attachment to their cultural and traditional

methods while 33% of mothers find Chinese child-raising practices more ideal, 20% of mothers however prefer a combination of both Chinese and home country practices (**Fig. 7a**). While there is a preference for home practices, there is also a notable openness to integrating or adopting practices from China either fully or partially. This suggests a flexible approach to child-raising among African migrant mothers, balancing tradition with adaptation to their new environment. When respondents were asked about the Chinese practice of having grandmothers in charge of taking care of children, 67% were unfamiliar with the cultural practice while 33% were familiar with it from their home country (**Fig. 7b**).

The responses obtained regarding their thoughts on kindergarten in China, the majority of respondents (83%) expressed satisfaction with kindergartens in China (**Fig. 7c**). This indicates a high level of approval and positive perception of the kindergarten education system. Only 7% of the respondents are unsatisfied with the kindergarten system of education in China, despite this perception, the overall feedback is positive on kindergarten education in China. When respondents were asked about their thoughts about primary schools in China, only 6 respondents (20%) expressed satisfaction with primary schools in China. A significant majority of 24 respondents (80%) found primary schools to be unsatisfactory (**Fig. 7d**). It can be inferred that there are significant concerns or issues with the primary school education system in China among the respondents. This high dissatisfaction rate suggests that the primary schools are not meeting the expectations or needs of the majority of migrant families.

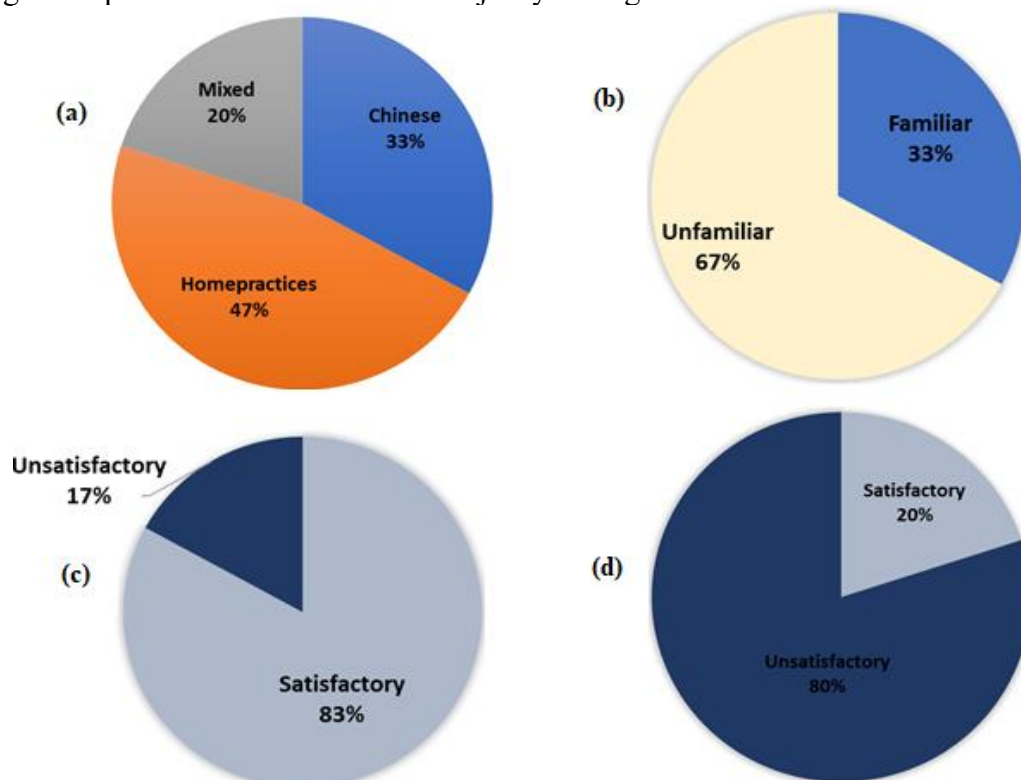


Fig. 7. Plots showing (a) Preferred Child raising practices between China and home country (b) Grannies in charge of kids (c) Respondent's thoughts about kindergarten in China (d) Responses on thoughts about primary school in China

More also, when asked about childcare policies in their home country and China, 84% of respondents said the childcare policies in their home countries are inefficient, however, 87% of the respondents claimed the childcare policies in China are strongly efficient (**Fig. 8**).

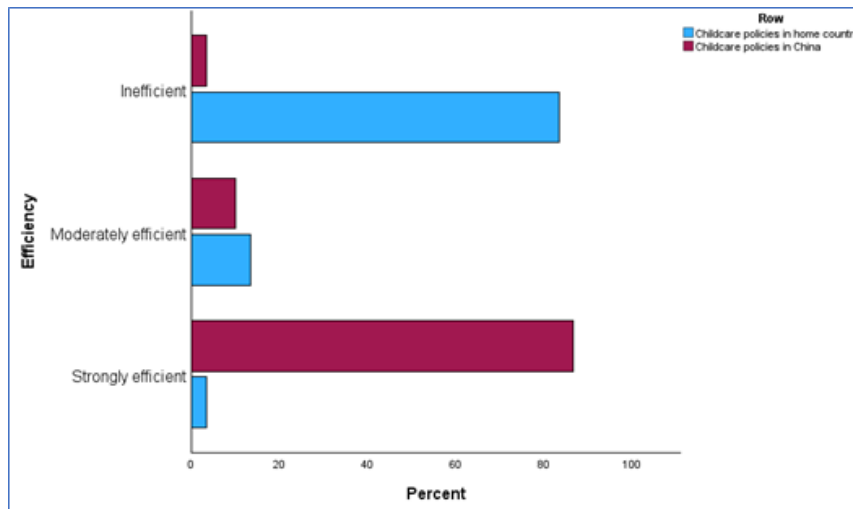


Fig. 8. Child care policy in China and African migrants home country

5. Discussion

5.1 Cultural values, beliefs, and parenting practices African mothers brought from their home countries

Cultural education refers to the process of teaching children about their local customs, traditions, beliefs, and general life patterns. Its key objectives are character, morality, and physical development of the children as well as instilling in them the proper values they need to recognize, comprehend, and respect the cultures, norms, and values of their community (Nonyelum 2023). Every culture has a common tendency geared towards stability and this does not exclude Africans. Every African believes that African culture must always be preserved and treasured. This study reveals that African parents in China are actively preserving their culture and beliefs by teaching their children their native languages, participating in cultural celebrations such as Christmas, and birthdays, and forming community groups. They also engage in the use of educational resources such as books, documentaries, music, and art from their home countries to enlighten their children about African history, traditions, and values. They also continue to practice their faith, attending religious gatherings and teaching their children the religious practices and values of their culture (Fig. 2). Culinary traditions are also passed down through cooking traditional dishes at home, which not only preserves culinary traditions but also provides a tangible connection to their cultural heritage. Oral traditions, such as stories, proverbs, and folklore, are shared with their children to help them understand their cultural values and history. Travel and home visits are also important for maintaining a strong cultural identity. African parents in China also often seek to integrate their children into Chinese society by encouraging them to learn Mandarin and understand Chinese customs. This dual identity allows children to sustainably grow into multi-culturally dynamic individuals. These methods help create a balanced environment for their children to thrive in a multicultural setting while staying connected to their African roots.

5.2 Parenting practices

African migrant moms' experiences in China are affected by the difficulty of raising children in a culturally and linguistically diverse setting. These moms frequently use a variety of parenting strategies that combine their cultural background with the reality of living in a new

nation. This section focuses on the techniques used by these women such as using nannies, food choices, clothes, education, and healthcare in raising their children in China.

African migrant moms in China mostly do not rely on nannies to help with childcare (**Fig. 4**). According to the data obtained, most of the moms have Chinese proficiencies ranging from fair to poor which may be the reason for their choice of not usually taking a nanny. Some moms however due to the challenges of juggling work and family life opt where possible for the service of a nanny. When choosing a nanny, African migrant mothers prefer nannies from their cultural background to ensure their children are exposed to their native language and cultural traditions at home (Salami et al. 2017). However, because of the scarcity of such nannies, many people go for local Chinese caretakers. This option involves moms handling cultural variations, including dietary preferences and discipline tactics, and may include educating the nanny on crucial components of their cultural norms to maintain continuity in their children's development. Language is also often an issue; therefore, African moms may teach their nannies rudimentary English language or words in their home languages to improve communication. In contrast, some moms may take the initiative to acquire basic Chinese languages to converse with the nanny and better integrate into the local society (Kioko et al. 2014).

Maintaining traditional dietary practices is a significant aspect of cultural preservation for African migrant mothers in China. Food is a critical component of cultural identity, and many African mothers make concerted efforts to prepare traditional dishes for their families (Monterrosa et al. 2020; Reddy and van Dam 2020). This often involves teaching the nanny to cook African meals or taking on the responsibility of cooking themselves. When it comes to children's diets, African mothers may consult a combination of community elders, and local healthcare providers. This is partly in agreement with the data obtained in **Fig 7a** where the mostly relied sources consulted for children's diet are community (such as older relatives or local community elders) with a significant number of respondents using internet sources (such as parenting groups, parenting apps or web search). This approach allows them to blend their traditional dietary practices with Information they receive from other mums online, articles, or elders in their community, ensuring their children receive balanced nutrition while staying connected to their cultural roots. However, the availability of traditional African ingredients in China can be limited, prompting mothers to seek out specific markets or adapt recipes using Chinese recipe alternatives.

The low rate of consultation from local health providers may be due to a lack of health insurance or for some, language barriers. Migrant African mums look out for alternatives such as contacting relatives in their home countries for possible home-made remedies for mild sicknesses, however, when the sickness is severe, they prefer going to the hospital to see a health practitioner to care for the child.

5.3 Challenges faced by African migrant mothers

African migrant mothers in China face several challenges in raising their children. Some of these challenges stem from cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers that can hinder their ability to socialize, handle children's nutrition, access schools, and provide adequate health services for their families. This tends to impact their children's education, health, and social life. One of the major challenges that have been identified is the language barrier. Despite that African migrant mothers have some fair level of proficiency in the Chinese language, the inability to speak or understand it properly limits the migrant African mothers' ability to communicate effectively which reflects on some choices they make in the healthcare or

educational institution of their children. For instance, when mothers are given medical advice in the form of prescription labels or medical forms, they find it difficult to follow it accurately which is why sometimes it may be discouraging for the mothers to access Chinese healthcare. Some of the other reasons migrant African mothers encounter challenges with accessing Chinese healthcare include cultural differences in healthcare practices and lack of health insurance. Many of the migrant Africans in China work either work in the informal sectors or in jobs that do not provide health insurance benefits. Without health insurance, the cost of healthcare services can be very expensive and this prevents migrant mothers from seeking medical care for their children (Chen et al. 2022). Even when health insurance is available, the application procedure can be complicated and bureaucratic, discouraging its usage by migrant African women who are unfamiliar with the system. Because of these restrictions, many African migrant women look for healthcare information and assistance through other means such as the elderly in their community, social media, and internet searches (**Fig. 7c**). While these networks offer some support, they are not a substitute for expert medical advice and treatment. The dependence on informal networks may result in misinformation and potentially dangerous health problems (Bork-Hüffer 2015). More also, the majority of the respondents find it challenging to socialize which the majority attributed to communication barriers. This is the reason many African migrant mothers experience social isolation in China.

5.4 Strategies employed by migrant African mothers to maintain the cultural heritage and values of children while adapting to Chinese society and culture

African migrant mothers employ various means to connect their children to their African roots while also adapting to the Chinese way of life. Some of these means are discussed below;

Language preservation is one of the primary strategies African migrant mothers use to maintain cultural heritage. Many African mothers ensure they teach their children their native languages at home, despite living in a predominantly Chinese-speaking environment. Some African parents make a rule of speaking their native languages at home and switch to the Chinese language when outside the house and also ensure their children communicate with relatives back in their home countries. This goes a long way to help preserve cultural identity (Mohan and Tan-Mullins 2009). This practice not only fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride but also serves as a foundation for transmitting other cultural values and traditions. In addition, children and their parents also learn to speak Mandarin with the majority being able to communicate in the Chinese language hence, children raised in China or any other foreign country by migrant African mothers are usually duo-linguists and this helps them to preserve their language while adapting to the environment of their resident country.

The celebration of cultural festivals is another strategy migrant African mother use to integrate their children into their cultural heritage. They do this by planning or taking part in religious rituals, community events, and festivals. Children get the chance to directly experience and interact with their cultural heritage via these events. The children benefit from these festival celebrations because it helps them to be connected to their African identity despite living in a foreign environment. Community networks are essential in helping African immigrant moms preserve and share their culture. Mothers also engage in social and religious functions such as cultural learning platforms, religious exercises, and community centers where their children may engage with other kids from similar backgrounds to learn about African traditions, languages, and values (Liu et al. 2012).

Finally, African migrant moms use modern communication tools like video calls and other social media platforms like family WhatsApp groups to help the children maintain contact

with friends and family back home. Children may communicate with family members through these platforms and take part in cultural events virtually (Chen et al. 2019).

5.5 Social networks and supports available to migrant African mothers and how they influence their child-raising experiences

According to the data in **Fig. 7**, migrant African mothers in China utilize a combination of personal experiences from their home country, community support (which may be in the form of a social network group, social community, older people from the Chinese community, other expat moms groups), formal institutions (such as health workers in hospitals, school teachers, etc.), and digital resources (such as internet searches) to navigate child-raising in a new cultural environment. This convergence of sources is further evidence of flexibility and strategic parenting in a foreign environment. Relying on community networks as well as the Internet underscores their need for accessible, culturally relevant information; these sources offer reassurance and practical guidance. The fact that migrant African mothers can trust the hospitals and other formal health care systems suggests that, as far as health is concerned, they are not void of professional knowledge either. Altogether, such support systems lessen the hurdles and hardship involved in child raising in a foreign country as it give African mothers various options and resources so they may ensure their children are well. The use of personal, community, and institutional support networks makes for a hybrid parenting style that combines traditional values with the practicalities of being in China.

5.6 How African migrant mothers in China navigate and negotiate differences in educational systems, parenting styles, and child discipline practices between their home countries and China

African migrant mothers in China use a range of navigation and negotiation strategies to negotiate differences in educational systems, parenting styles, and child discipline practices between their home countries and China. These mothers preserved their identities through a process of cultural hybridity, selective integration, and community support while bringing up their children to make them adaptive to Chinese society. The challenge for African migrant moms residing in China is striking a balance between the educational systems, parenting philosophies, and child-discipline methods of their native countries and those of China. Chinese educators have raised the bar for student achievement, included role learning, and established strict academic requirements in their system (Wu 2019). These could be compared with a larger outlook in most African educational systems which focus more on the training of the children holistically; there is a balance between what is taught and social or moral education. In addition, Odé and Hatfield (Odé and Hatfield 2020) argued that African migrant mothers find themselves negotiating between what has been perceived as different educational philosophies. For instance, some mothers may supplement their children's education with tutorials or activities that represent the values and skills of their home country. They may even encourage children to participate in activities like language classes or traditional dance that reinforces the cultural roots to give an assurance that while in the Chinese school system, children will not lose touch with the mother culture. For instance, African parenting styles often involve the community in raising children and are based on collective responsibility and respect for elders. This may be different from what is observed in China, which is more individualistic and competitive (Chen and Zhou 2020). In so doing, these African mothers must employ various adaptive strategies in parenting, to cope with the exigencies of the Chinese society, which differ in the expected behavior and practices of discipline. Research by Cheng and Li (Cheng and Li 2021) further proves that these mothers practice a kind of 'cultural hybridity' where they assume their

traditional ways of parenting and integrate them with those of China. In most of African setups, discipline is considered a collective responsibility. It was the norm for even other relatives and community elders to take part in counseling or correcting a child's behavior. In contrast, Chinese disciplinary practices may be more hierarchical, with parents strictly exerting control over their children's behavior, particularly in academic matters. African mothers in China, according to Kim (Kim 2020), negotiate these differences by selectively adopting practices that suit both cultures; some continue to involve extended family members in the disciplining of children even from afar through regular communication and consultation. Others may resort to the harsh and fast forms of punishment present in Chinese society, specifically in academics, and still ground these practices in the overarching scheme of their cultural values, consciously selecting which elements from both cultures are best incorporated into parenting practices. This helps them socialize their children with the consciousness of their African heritage while at the same time preparing them with skills and behaviors to fit into Chinese society. In other cases, African mothers' resort to various other mechanisms, such as community support groups, religious institutions, and online networks for the sake of making their cultural values and parenting practices stronger. These networks provide a platform to share lived experiences and coping strategies that help mothers navigate the difficulties of bicultural parenting.

6. Conclusion

Although individual differences exist, even among African migrant mothers in China, however, an interplay between both cultures is important especially for African migrant mothers to successfully raise their children in a foreign environment. Many of these mothers' battle between instilling their culture and the Chinese culture in their kids. Some of these mothers have been living in China for more than ten years, hence, they have a good understanding of the Chinese culture and many of them have been well integrated into the system. However, African migrant mothers who are new or have just immigrated to China are faced with myriads of challenges including language barriers and food culture among others. These mothers due to their maturity may develop some level of adaptability, thereby coping with the new environment. The kids of these African migrant mothers on the other do not find this easy, hence they rely on their mothers; by extension, the challenges of these kids further contribute to that of their mothers. One relevant approach to help such mothers overcome these challenges is the establishment of an interactive platform where African migrant mothers who have been well indoctrinated about the culture, food, language, etc., could provide the necessary guide to those who are new in the system. Through this system, African migrant mothers would have the privilege of interacting with one another, thereby keeping in touch with their culture (through communication in their local language where possible, receiving information on where to purchase items especially food items of their ethnicity) while simultaneously learning and imbibing the culture of the Chinese people. This would facilitate growth and development within their community as they would be well integrated into the system in a short time without losing touch with their culture as Africans.

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