

# Golden Migrants: The Rise and Impact of Illegal Chinese Small-Scale Mining in Ghana

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*This article investigates factors that attract Chinese migrants into illegal small-scale mining in Ghana, their role in the supply chain, and the impact of their involvement. This is accomplished via mixed qualitative techniques involving interviews with illegal small-scale Chinese and Ghanaian miners, and relevant Ghanaian stakeholders. Although the majority of Chinese interests in African mining is state sponsored, the Ghana case demonstrates private Chinese agency that is mostly attracted to illegal small-scale mining in Ghana due to push factors in the homeland and pull factors associated with Ghanaian state weakness. The Chinese dominate the supply chain of illegal small-scale mining with their financial, technical, managerial acumen, the sale and transfer of gold proceeds, and political patronage. This dominance accounts for the massive negative social, economic, environmental, and political impact of illegal small-scale mining in the country. Amid state weakness, Ghanaian civil society, exercising agency, remains a potent force against the phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** Sub-Saharan Africa, Resource Management, China-Africa Relations, Chinese, Ghana, Small-Scale Mining, State Weakness, Sino-Africa, Migration, Civil-Society, “Galamsey,” Resource Curse.

## **Related Articles:**

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**Migrantes dorados: el auge y el impacto de la minería ilegal china a pequeña escala en Ghana**

*Este estudio investiga los factores que atraen a los inmigrantes chinos a la minería ilegal a pequeña escala en Ghana, su papel en la cadena de suministro y el impacto general de su participación en las operaciones mineras en Ghana. Esto se logra a través de técnicas cualitativas mixtas que incluyen entrevistas con mineros ilegales chinos y ghaneses a pequeña escala y actores relevantes de Ghana. El argumento central de este estudio es que los chinos se sienten atraídos principalmente por la minería ilegal a pequeña escala en Ghana debido a factores de atracción asociados con la debilidad del estado ghanés. Por lo tanto, cualquier intento de combatir la amenaza de la minería ilegal en pequeña escala china debe abordar las causas profundas de la debilidad estatal. Los chinos dominan la cadena de suministro de la minería ilegal a pequeña escala con su perspicacia financiera, técnica, administrativa, venta y transferencia de ganancias de oro y patrocinio político. Este dominio explica el impacto social, económico, ambiental y político masivo negativo de la minería ilegal a pequeña escala en el país.*

**Palabras Clave:** Migración e inmigración, Inmigración ilegal, China, Ghana, África, Asia, Minería ilegal de China en África, Minería a pequeña escala.

**黄金移民: 中国人在加纳进行非法小规模采矿的兴起与影响**

本文研究了吸引在加纳的中国移民进行非法小规模采矿的各个因素，分析了他们在供应链中发挥的作用，以及他们对采矿工作产生的整体影响。通过混合的定性技术，包括采访进行非法小规模采矿的中国矿工和加纳矿工以及相关的加纳利益攸关方，从而完成了该研究。本研究的中心论点是，中国人基本是因为受到与加纳国力不济相关的拉力因素影响，而在加纳进行非法小规模采矿。因此，任

何试图打击中国人进行非法小规模采矿的举动，必须解决国力不济这一根源起因。中国人通过其在财力、技术、管理方面的精明才干、销售和转移金矿收益、以及政治赞助，主导了非法小规模采矿的供应链。这种主导性解释了加纳因非法小规模采矿而对社会、经济、环境和政治造成的消极影响。

**关键词:** 移民与外来移民, 非法移民, 中国, 加纳, 非洲, 亚洲, 中国人在非洲非法采矿, 小规模采矿.

At the global level, mining contributes to the socioeconomic development of many countries. This is so in the developing world, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where the mining sector is dominated by small-scale miners (Akudugu, Mahama, and Atami 2013). Across the continent, a variety of minerals are mined in this sector and in Ghana, two-thirds of all mining production involves gold (Hentschel, Hruschka, and Priester 2002, 11). In addition, in Ghana, “small-scale gold mining makes more of a direct contribution to foreign exchange and export earnings than large-scale mines” (Hilson 2003). Small-scale mining in most areas of the developing world is largely a poverty-driven activity. It is a main source of income to the poorest of the poor, the less educated, the unemployed, migrant workers, and landless populations in remote areas of the developing world (Labonne 2003). This has made small-scale mining an important tool for poverty alleviation and a generator of national income. As noted by Hentschel, Hruschka, and Priester (2002), a number of national governments across the developing world have recognized small-scale mining as a strategic pathway for alleviating rural poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods and household welfare. The activities of small-scale miners in most cases form the foundation blocks for the socioeconomic and politicocultural development of mining communities that are mostly rural and deprived. This is because the small-scale mining sector offers employment not only to people who are directly engaged in the mineral extractions but also to people involved in mining-related local businesses, among others—all of which are critical for the socioeconomic and politicocultural transformation of mining communities (Akudugu, Mahama, and Atami 2013).

In the specific case of Ghana, small-scale mining is not a new phenomenon in the country. It has been in existence for over six centuries and predates colonialism (Akudugu, Mahama, and Atami 2013). In precolonial times, Ghana produced and used gold for the manufacturing of traditional artifacts. Hilson (2001) reports that even before the era of colonialism, present-day Ghana was one of the major sources of the gold that reached Europe through the trans-Saharan trade routes with foiled attempts by most Europeans to locate and control the country’s gold fortunes. The author further reports that, in the 15th century, Portuguese sailors tried to locate and control mining from the coast but were met with stiff resistance—in failing, they turned their attention to the slave trade. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ghana is known globally for its mineral-rich land and is the second largest producer of gold in Africa—the contribution of small-scale miners to this cannot

be ignored. This assertion is supported by the report of the Minerals Commission that 34 percent of Ghana's gold output in 2013 was from artisanal and small-scale miners including unlicensed miners (Kwatia 2015).

The regularization of small-scale mining in Ghana in 1989 seems to have popularized the activity with the country experiencing a rapid and unprecedented upsurge in both legal and illegal small-scale mining activities (Akudugu, Mahama, and Atami 2013). The implementation of successive structural adjustment programs and concurrent policy reforms in the mining sector appear to have given currency to the phenomenon. The structural adjustment programs resulted in numerous layoffs in the public sector and the mining sector policy reforms made smallholder agriculture in many areas of the country unviable (Banchirigah 2008). Thus, thousands of laid-off employees of big mines who could not find jobs, marginalized farmers, and vulnerable people had to pursue their livelihoods in the small-scale mining sector (Banchirigah 2006). This marked the turning point and rise of illegal small-scale or artisanal mining popularly known as *galamsey* in local parlance. The sector is seen as a major source of employment for people in many gold-endowed communities across the country. It is estimated that there are about 1,000,000 persons—including foreign nationals—engaged in small-scale mining in Ghana with an uncountable number of people depending directly or indirectly on it as a source of livelihood (Kwatia 2015).

It is important to ensure sustainable and regulated small-scale mining in Ghana for socioeconomic development of mining communities and the country as a whole. To do this, the key drivers of illegal small-scale mining should be identified and addressed. Thus, the original contribution of this research is as follows: First, whereas most of the literature on Chinese mining interests in Africa disproportionately focuses on the role of Chinese state-owned or funded companies, this research focuses on the illegal mining activities of private Chinese citizens operating outside the purview of the Chinese state. Second, while this research highlights factors associated with state weakness as explanatory tools for the prevalence of illegal Chinese small-scale mining in Ghana, it makes the case of “African Agency” by highlighting the role of Ghanaian civil society in tackling the phenomenon. The rest of the article is organized into six sections. Following this introduction is the contextualization of the problem of small-scale mining in Ghana with special focus on illegal mining. The rest lays out the theoretical and analytical framework, the methodology, the scope of Chinese involvement in the supply chain of illegal mining, the impact of Chinese involvement in *galamsey*, and concluding remarks.

### **Contextualization of the Chinese Search for Gold in Ghana**

Contrary to the popular narrative concerning the Chinese presence in Africa as being “monolithic,” it is far more complicated than that. Indeed, Chinese

investments in Africa are being led by state-owned companies, private Chinese, diaspora Chinese, and African Chinese businesses (Oshodi 2015, 193). However, Haglund (2008, 557) points out that “at a time when most multinationals operating in Africa are private, large Chinese investors in strategic sectors such as energy, mining, and construction are frequently state-owned.” However, in Ghana, the overwhelming number of Chinese involvement in *galamsey* is led by private Chinese citizens exercising their own agency beyond the purview of the Chinese state. They often operate in small groups after pulling financial resources together from their homeland. The arrival and involvement of Chinese migrants in illegal small-scale mining can be categorized into two waves. The first wave of illegal Chinese miners mainly hailed from Shanglin County in the Guangxi province and started arriving in 2006. They were mostly involved in alluvial gold mining in southern Ghana and are infamously credited with the increased mechanization of small-scale mining as well as incredible profits from their activities. Illegal Chinese miners amounted to about 50,000 at the height of their involvement in illegal mining between 2012 and 2013. An Inter-Ministerial Task force established in 2013 to deal with illegal Chinese miners succeeded in deporting 4,592 Chinese nationals but failed to solve the problem.

The second wave of illegal Chinese miners exploited a legal loophole in the Mining Act 703, which permitted foreign companies to serve as “mine support service providers” to registered Ghanaian small-scale miners to literally go into large-scale mining. Even though that Act has since been repealed, it was not retroactively applicable and the damage had already been done. This led to the emergence of the Shaanxi Mining Company Ltd (Ghana), a Chinese sponsored company, which entered into an agreement in 2008 with two registered concession holders in the Talensi District of the Upper East region to engage in hard rock mining (Crawford *et al.* 2016, 3-4). Similar but smaller Chinese-sponsored mining outposts have also been reported in several parts of southern Ghana. The involvement of foreigners in the small-scale mining sector in the country is alarming given that it is prohibited by law. This raises the following fundamental questions that this article sought to answer: First, what factors fueled Chinese migration to Ghana to engage in illegal small-scale mining? Second, what is the scope of Chinese involvement in illegal small-scale mining? Third, what is the impact of Chinese involvement in illegal small-scale mining?

### **Theoretical and Analytical Framework**

The article employs a mixture of theoretical and conceptual underpinnings to answer the aforementioned questions. Push and pull factors of migration are used to explain the reasons behind Chinese migration to Ghana for the purpose of illegal mining, while the weak state theory is used to explain the inability of the state to stop the menace and negative consequences of Chinese backed illegal small-scale mining. The push factors are homeland dynamics

that normally drive people to leave their homelands for foreign countries. For most of the illegal Chinese miners in Ghana, this includes: China's African policy; Chinese entrepreneurial culture; limited economic opportunities in China; and demographic challenges in China. The pull factors explain reasons why Chinese migrants are attracted to Ghana for mining and this includes the following: ease of entry and high returns; receptivity of Chinese soft power; weak institutional capacity and corruption; willing compradors; and existing Chinese social networks in Ghana. The inability of the Ghanaian state to combat illegal Chinese mining and its negative impacts is further explained by the weak state theory.

Weak states are defined as “a broad continuum of states that are inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two” (Rotberg 2004, 4). In the case of Ghana, state weakness *vis-à-vis galamsey* is evident in “management flaws,” whereby state institutions and government officials mandated to protect the country's resources have woefully failed—thereby endangering the human security of the country. This is evident by the inability of successive governments to enforce mineral laws that forbid foreigners from engaging in small-scale mining. “Management flaws” also explain the failure of law enforcement agencies such as the immigration authorities and the police from preventing the illegal entry of would-be illegal Chinese miners as well as their prosecution for flouting Ghana's mining laws, respectively. In addition, state weakness also manifests in the form of “greed,” which appears to be the driving factor among Ghanaian collaborators of Chinese *galamsey* and corrupt state officials who facilitate their illegal activities.

The Minerals Commission established under Article 269 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana is the main promotional and regulatory body for the minerals sector in the country. It is responsible for the regulation and management of the utilization of the mineral resources of Ghana and the coordination and implementation of policies relating to mining. It ensures compliance with Ghana's Mining and Mineral Laws and Regulations through effective monitoring. Thus, the Commission has the responsibility of ensuring that the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) and associated regulations (“the mining laws”) with varying provisions that reserve small-scale mining for only the citizens of Ghana are enforced. According to Teschner (2012, 309), in the Ghanaian context of mining, the term “small-scale mines” refers to legally registered mines, while the unregistered mines are referred to as *galamsey*. However, Teschner (309) argues that “in reality, ‘small-scale’ mines and *galamsey* mines are indistinguishable, in operation.” This research agrees with Teschner's (309) use of “small-scale mine” to refer to both types of operations.

Thus, for the purpose of this article, the involvement of the Chinese in either registered or unregistered small-scale mining is deemed illegal because they are legally prohibited from involvement in any form of small-scale mining.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the enforcement of the legal requirement for the involvement of only indigenes in small-scale mining is hindered by the fact that most Chinese small-scale miners operate under licenses secured by Ghanaians. This creates a tenuous legal lacuna. The extent of involvement of foreign nationals in the small-scale mining sector has, however, brought into question the ability of the Commission to enforce Ghana's mining laws and regulations. This challenge is not only unique to Ghana. It is also faced by other African countries—such as Zambia—that have attracted Chinese mining interest. According to Haglund (2008, 549), although Zambia is a multiparty democracy with formal regulatory and monitoring institutions, they are ineffective due to poor capacity, transparency, and independence.

Although Ghana is also a multiparty democracy, the state has failed to effectively superintend and manage its mineral resources like gold. A large part of this resource is under the capture of foreigners such as the Chinese in spite of a legal framework that prohibits the involvement of foreigners in small-scale mining and this is the ultimate testament of state weakness. Indeed, “in terms of nationality of ownership, 85 percent of the industry is owned by foreigners and the rest by the state of Ghana and several small-scale Ghanaian operators largely due to the legal restriction of small-scale mining to nationals” (Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah 2011, 63). Such weakness can be attributed to the combination of governmental management flaws, greed, and external infiltration of foreigners as captured in the definition of a weak state. Oshodi (2015, 200) describes the aforementioned state weaknesses and the failure of African governments to strongly confront China over the violation of African laws by Chinese residents as the expansion of African governments’ “points of exit” (194). Under this situation, Osaghae (1999) argues that ordinary citizens fed up with governmental inaction seize the initiative under the banner of civil society to do something thereby creating “points of engagement” (Oshodi 2015, 194).

Amid state failure, signs of African agency challenging the *status quo* and demanding action against the ongoing impunity are emerging in countries such as Ghana. According to Mohan and Lampert (2013, 93, 109), “Africa cannot be seen as simply a passive space increasingly subject to intervention by China” but rather, “African actors also exercise agency outside the confines of the state, even as these actions are shaped by and in turn shape processes of state formation and function.”

In Ghana, civil society groups have been at the forefront in the fight against *galamsey* through agenda setting, public education, and putting pressure on the government to act. For example, the Media Coalition Against Galamsey was formed by a group of Ghanaian media houses to raise awareness concerning the harmful impact of the *galamsey* and call for governmental action against the menace. Similarly, Ghana's nascent film industry has made a movie dubbed “Ghana Galamsey,” the plot of which is about illegal mining. In addition, the clergy in the form of the Catholic Church in Ghana issued a statement in 2017 condemning *galamsey* and pledging to preach about the menace from the public (Leudi 2019). This sustained action by Ghana's nonstate actors was instrumental in

the government's setting up of "Operation Vanguard," a military-police Joint Task Force set up by the president of Ghana in July 2017 to tackle *galamsey* in Ghana.

However, successive anti-*galamsey* task forces such as the 2013 Inter-Ministerial Task Force and the ongoing 2017 "Operation Vanguard" are bound to fail without dealing with the root causes of state weakness. The laws of Ghana are explicit that no small-scale mining can take place without the relevant license. It is explicitly stated that in order for a small-scale mining license to be authorized, citizens of Ghana must be aged at least 18 years and be registered members of the District Office of the Minerals Commission. The license is granted for an initial period of not more than five years (renewable) and once granted, it is not transferable to noncitizens. This means that the laws reserve small-scale mining for only citizens of Ghana. Also, the laws require that each mining area has a committee consisting of the District/Municipal/Metropolitan Chief Executive (local Mayor), nominated representatives of the mining community, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Minerals Commission.

The role of the Committee is to effectively monitor, promote, and develop mining operations in its catchment area. Besides the above, the mining laws require the use of effective and efficient mining methods, adhering to good practices, health, safety, and environmental compliance. In fact, the Minerals Commission is required to grant written permissions on the quantities of chemicals such as mercury for small-scale mining. These laws are seemingly not being enforced because of weak state institutions. This article further argues that illegal Chinese are motivated by and exploit systemic institutional failures in the implementation—or lack thereof—of small-scale mining laws and regulations with devastating social, environmental, and economic consequences in mining communities and the country at large.

### Methodology

Data for the present research was gathered from the 60 relevant stakeholders in the Talensi, Nabdam, and Bawku West districts of the Upper East region of Ghana between November and December 2017. The choice of these districts is because of the high concentration of small-scale miners there as well as the presence of a major Chinese Mining outpost in the form of Shaanxi Mining Company. The research utilized mixed qualitative techniques in the form of semistructured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Case Studies (CSs). The KIIs involved 20 relevant institutional and community stakeholders such as representatives of law enforcement and immigration officers, officials from the EPA, local NGO representatives, traditional Chiefs, and local politicians, as well as illegal Ghanaian and Chinese miners. Three FGDs involving an average of ten participants, which included both Ghanaian small-scale miners and nonminers, were conducted in Talensi, Nabdam, and Bawku West districts, while ten CSs were used to gather in-depth life stories of Chinese miners



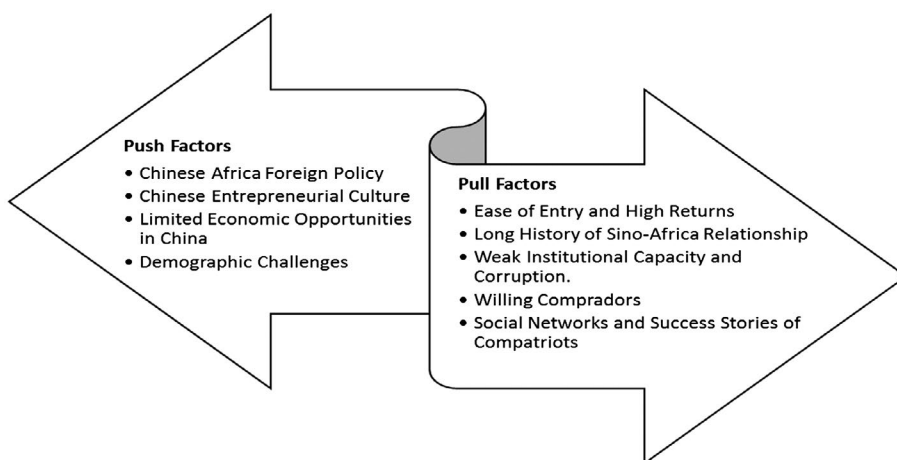
regarding the impact of Chinese involvement in illegal mining. These techniques were supplemented by primary documents and publications from governmental agencies and think-tanks, respectively, as well as secondary sources such as media reports on the activities of illegal Chinese mining in Ghana.

### Push Factors

#### Chinese-African Foreign Policy

Over the years, the Chinese Government has introduced a series of foreign policy initiatives aimed at accelerating rapid economic development in China as well as seeking global influence. These outward-looking policies have opened the floodgates for ordinary Chinese citizens to follow the lead of their government by migrating to countries and regions of the world where the Chinese government’s influence is welcomed or even courted. The flagship policy of China’s outward engagement is its “getting out strategy” introduced in 1999. Under this policy, Chinese enterprises were encouraged to pursue foreign investments overseas and, in the case of Africa, China sought natural resources in return for heavy infrastructural investments. For example, “In 2000, China-Africa trade was a mere \$10bn. By 2014, that had risen more than 20-fold to \$220bn according to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington” (Pilling 2017) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**  
**Push and Pull Factors Fueling Chinese Migration into Illegal Mining in Ghana**



*Source:* Authors’ construct, 2018.

*Notes:* The above is a graphic depiction of the push and pull factors that fuel Chinese migration to Ghana to engage in illegal mining. The push factors capture domestic factors in China that motivate migration to Ghana for illegal mining, while the pull factors capture incentives in Ghana that attract Chinese migration for illegal mining.

A by-product of China's "going out strategy" is that thousands of Chinese laborers were often brought in by Chinese firms to execute infrastructural projects. This further opened the doors for other Chinese migrants, such as illegal Chinese miners in Ghana, to consider privately migrating to resource-rich countries like Ghana to try their luck. However, the embrace of Beijing as an exemplary influence through complementary gains—like the infrastructure and loan concessions—the competitiveness that is currently associated with the presence of the Chinese in some sectors of the Ghanaian economy, such as the textile industry, has contributed to a gradual upwelling of anti-Chinese sentiments in Ghana (Aidoo 2016, 64).

### **Chinese Entrepreneurial Culture**

China has a long history of its citizens migrating all over the world and currently has an overseas-based Chinese population of over 50 million (Hutton 2018). Fueled by what Wang (2012, 78) attributes as "extraordinary Chinese entrepreneurship," the spirit of the Chinese diaspora has often excelled economically in their new-found countries. In addition, it is this Chinese entrepreneurial spirit that has propelled China to become one of the largest economies in the world in recent times (Poutziouris, Wang, and Chan 2002; Zapalska and Edwards 2001). For example, although ethnic Chinese constitute only 1 percent of the population of the Philippines, they control 40 percent of the country's economy. In Malaysia, the Chinese constitute about a third of the population but control two-thirds of the economy. Similarly, although the Chinese population in Indonesia is only 4 percent of the population, they control 50 percent of the local economy (Poutziouris, Wang, and Chan 2002). Hence, many illegal Chinese miners in Ghana are driven by a long history of Chinese-diaspora entrepreneurial success in faraway lands and thus motivated to come to relatively obscure places—such as Ghana—to fulfill their entrepreneurial dreams.

### **Limited Economic Opportunities in China**

With a population of over a billion people, the average Chinese is bound to find difficulties in finding economic opportunities that will guarantee a decent lifestyle. Buttressing this challenge, Le Yucheng—an Assistant Foreign Minister of China—once stated that "every year, China needs to create 25 million jobs, roughly five times the population of Denmark" (Yucheng 2012) a daunting task for any populous state. In addition, although China has achieved unprecedented economic growth over the past three decades, the benefits have eluded millions of rural Chinese eager for economic and social mobility. Among this group, international migration to uncharted places in Africa remains a viable option. Reinforcing this point, Sullivan and Cheng (2018, 1176) argue, "that the decision to seek work in Africa is the result of anxiety about being left behind by China's competitive economy." According to Xiang (2016, 17)

although migration trends in China have traditionally been dominated by the wealthy and highly skilled, many unskilled Chinese workers are being pushed overseas due to layoffs resulting from the privatization of state companies and the marginalization of small-scale enterprises in favor of larger enterprises by the Chinese Government. Most of the illegal small-scale miners in Ghana fall into the category of low skilled and those interviewed cited the limited economic opportunities in China as a reason for their migration to Ghana. They all plan to return to China after making enough money that will sustain a good lifestyle for themselves and families back home.

In addition, a major push factor driving Chinese miners into Ghana is the fact that these Shanglin-based Chinese are traditionally artisanal people that used to be engaged in mining in their home region of China. However, this source of livelihood has been threatened by the Chinese authorities, which have often intervened to stop their mining operations because of clashes with other ethnic Chinese groups. According to Botchwey and others (2019, 313-4), over the years, many of the Shanglin residents became expert miners and even developed their own sophisticated mining techniques and equipment—such as trommels, water platforms, crushing machines, pumps, and suction equipment—required for river mining. However, in the 1990s, Shanglin’s residents got into conflict with the locals of Xinjiang and Heilongjiang when they migrated there to mine. This prompted the Chinese authorities to clamp down on their mining activities throughout China. As a result of the official clampdown of their mining activities, most of the Shanglin miners began looking for more conducive mining opportunities and thus ended up in gold-rich places such as Ghana (313-4).

### **Demographic Challenges**

One of the major push factors driving Chinese migration is the massive demographic shift fueled by China’s rapid economic growth and expansion. However, China’s rapid economic growth has not corresponded with even job growth across the country, triggering a rural-urban migration crisis involving some 200 million people in search of nonexistent jobs in major cities across China. Indeed, the percentage of people living in urban areas from 1990 to 2015 increased from 26 percent to 56 percent. This has created much social disorder and adversely impacted wage levels (Farrar 2016; Kwong 2017).

A major contributor to this social disorder is the household registration system known as the *hukou*, which links the receipt of government social welfare services to a person’s original place of birth. Thus, rural migrants to the city risk losing these benefits when they move to cities unless they overcome the bureaucratic huddle of transferring their *hukou* to their new urban places of abode or pay a premium to continue accessing these benefits (Farrar 2016). Consequentially, some of those unable to cope with these demographic challenges and capable of raising the necessary funds, view migration overseas as a viable alternative to make a legal or illegal living (Kwong 2017).

Thus, demographic challenges are motivating factors for the over 50,000 irregular Chinese migrants who entered Ghana in 2000-13 to engage in illegal gold mining. They are tagged as the “Shanglin gang” because they mostly hailed from the poverty stricken Shanglin County in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. They sought to flee the poverty and governmental threats against their traditional alluvial mining livelihood (Botchwey *et al.* 2018, 1) and thus viewed Ghana as a viable alternative.

According to Xiang (2016, 8-9), out of the 527,000 Chinese unskilled workers who migrated in 2013, 271,000 were project tied, while 256,000 were individual migrants exercising their own agency. In addition, while highly skilled Chinese workers tend to migrate to the West, the unskilled tend to migrate to non-Western countries with about 70 percent of unskilled and semiskilled Chinese workers migrating to East and South East Asian countries and 20 percent migrating to Africa since the 1990s. Thus, illegal Chinese miners in Ghana fall in the latter category.

## **Pull Factors**

### **Ease of Entry and High Returns**

Systemic institutional corruption in the regulation of mining in Ghana remains a major source of attraction for Chinese involvement in *galamsey* as it facilitates easy entry into a lucrative sector from which they are legally prohibited. For example, “whereas Ghanaian law prohibits foreigners from mining plots smaller than twenty-five acres, many Chinese *galamsey* miners reach informal deals with local landowners with the former mining the plot and sharing the proceeds with the latter” (Leudi 2019).

In addition, institutional corruption enables the Chinese to illegally come into Ghana after often bribing immigration officials to extend their stay without declaring their intentions. Entry to the *galamsey* business is further made easier by the availability of willing Ghanaians who are eager to assist the Chinese to get land for mining as well as labor for a fee. Supporting this point, the Chinese Ambassador to Ghana has posited as follows:

How can we be able to do *galamsey* in your country... it is because of your own people... why are Chinese not doing illegal mining in South Africa where there is also a lot of gold... it is not possible... because the local people don't support us but in Ghana some locals help the small number of Chinese people doing *galamsey*. (Welsing 2019)

Another major attraction is the relatively low capital outlay required for a *galamsey* start-up, coupled with the advanced technical skills of the Shanglin Chinese miners. Indeed, several Ghanaian miners interviewed lamented the fact that it is easier for Chinese miners to set up *galamsey* operations than Ghanaians

even though the law outright prohibits foreigners from engaging in small-scale mining. This is because the relevant regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies prefer to “deal” with the Chinese miners who are generally viewed by corrupt Ghanaian officials as the highest bidders compared to their Ghanaian counterparts.

At the height of Chinese *galamsey*, He (2013) captured the ease of entry and high returns for Chinese *galamseyers* (illegal small-scale miners) in Ghana with the observation that, “Three years ago Chinese miners operated about ten small gold mines in Ghana, but that number has now grown to about 2,000. Some produce up to a kilogram a day, some only 30 to 50 grams.” He (2013) further adds that, while three million Yuan could not purchase a three-bedroom apartment in Beijing, it could easily set up a lucrative mining operation in Ghana capable of generating a daily profit of USD \$2,900. In addition, profit-making remains the single most important motivating factor fueling *galamsey* in Ghana among all the stakeholders in this illegality and the Chinese are no exception. A major driver of the high profits in the gold business is international gold prices, which have held steady for over a decade. According to Leudi (2019), “in April 2001, gold stood at \$349 per ounce, yet by August 2011 gold had reached an all-time high of \$1,911 per ounce.” It is, therefore, not a coincidence that the influx of Chinese miners into Ghana started in around the year 2000 when the gold price began to rise. By the time international gold prices peaked in 2008, thousands of Chinese had arrived in Ghana. By 2013, various Chinese media sources estimated that about 50,000 Chinese miners had been attracted to and arrived in Ghana in a gold rush (Kane 2013; Lu 2016).

### **Receptivity of Chinese Soft Power Influence**

Over the past decade, China has accumulated substantial soft power influence in Ghana via increasing Chinese investments, trade, and donor support. For example, Chinese-Ghanaian bilateral trade has grown exponentially rising from modest levels of about USD \$100 million in 2000 to USD \$6.7 billion in 2017. In addition, Ghana is the number one supplier of foreign students to China with about 6,500 students (Pilling 2018). China has also given Ghana billions of U.S. dollars in loans and funded projects such as roads, stadiums, and even constructed a brand-new Ministry of Foreign Affairs building after the original one got burnt in an inferno. The Ghanaian example is part of Chinese soft power influence in Africa and there is evidence that it is paying off positively in terms of Chinese image on the continent. A 2016 Afrobarometer survey of 36 African countries, including Ghana, found that 63 percent of Africans found China’s influence “somewhat” or “very” positive. When asked which countries provided the best development model for Africa, 30 percent said the United States and 24 percent China, placing them number one and two (Pilling 2017). Such a positive image of China in Africa cannot be lost on prospective Chinese immigrants interested in both legal and illegal business ventures in Ghana and

the continent at large. This sentiment is exacerbated by the official Chinese media portrayal of Ghana as a place where the Chinese are welcome because China has propelled “Ghana’s economic and social growth and brought tangible benefits to the people of both countries,” thereby earning a “high reputation from the Ghanaian government and people” (Pilling 2018).

However, critics fault successive Ghanaian governments’ lethargic approach in enforcing Ghana’s Minerals laws, which bar foreigners from small-scale mining due to over cautiousness and sensitivity about offending a major economic benefactor. This sentiment was given credence by the Senior Minister of Ghana, Yaw Osafo Marfo, while explaining the rationale for the halt in the prosecution and subsequent deportation of a notorious illegal Chinese miner as follows:

We have a very good relationship with China. Today, the main company that is helping develop the infrastructure system in Ghana is Sinohydro, it is a Chinese Company. It is the one that is going to help process our bauxite and provide about two billion dollars to us... Putting that lady (Aisha) in jail in Ghana is not going to solve your economic problems. It is not going to make you happy or me happy. (Graphic Online 2019)

The calculating attitude of Ghanaian officialdom above does not serve as a deterrent by would-be illegal Chinese miners who may feel that they could be dealt with leniently as well, if caught. Nevertheless, Ghanaian civil society and the public are increasingly becoming vocal against such official inertial as evidenced by the media backlash that the Senior Minister faced in the aftermath of his justification for the nonprosecution and deportation of the illegal Chinese miner.

### **Weak Institutional Capacity and Corruption**

One of the hallmarks of a weak state is institutional weakness and corruption. Both the Failed States Index and Transparency International rank Ghana as a weak state and one of the most corrupt in the world, respectively (Transparency International 2018). In the case of Ghana, the country does not lack institutions, but rather these institutions have been compromised by corrupt and rent-seeking elites who abuse these institutions for selfish gains. Officially, Ghana has a robust legal and institutional framework capable of regulating its mining sector, but these laws and institutions have been rendered ineffective through official corruption. This reality serves as a major attraction to fortune-seeking Chinese who are willing to exploit the institutional weaknesses and pervasive corruption of the system to their advantage. Official culpability in institutional weakness and corruption is captured by a local *galamsey* man in Talensi as follows:

They are attracted into the country because our laws are not being enforced by our leaders. Past authorities have not been able to deal with this issue because of corruption. They take bribes from these Chinese and allow them to operate. (Galamsey Operator 2017)

The Chinese *galamseyers* hold similar views regarding the weakness of state institutions in enforcing the relevant mining laws and relations. Many of these Chinese miners, who are in Ghana illegally, break local laws and disrespect the norms, beliefs, and culture of local people with impunity. They feel the laws of Ghana do not work and they are at liberty to do anything and get away with it as long as they are ready to pay corrupt public officials. Indeed, there have been instances where “Chinese miners in one area would visit the police station to turn themselves in monthly for breaking the law, and then pay the fine for their transgression” (Botchwey *et al.* 2018, 11) as part of a recurring corrupt deal between the lawbreakers and law enforcement. The “fines” serve as protection money rather than as a form of punishment for breaking the law. This lends credence to the level of weakness of state institutions in enforcing the laws and punishing wrongdoing.

### **Willing Compradors**

Ghana’s mining laws clearly forbid the involvement of foreigners in small-scale mining. Even a loophole in the Mining Act that permitted the engagement of foreigners in the provision of technical support to Ghanaian miners has since been repealed. Nevertheless, there are several Ghanaians who are eager to serve as so-called “compradors” for Chinese miners for selfish-financial reasons. There is a mutual desire for illegal Ghanaian-Chinese mining partnerships because of mutual financial gains and the realization by both parties that they need each other. These compradors aggressively court their equally aggressive Chinese pursuers knowing very well that the latter is handicapped by the law in their pursuance of their mining goals. This army of compradors readily provides a variety of consulting services to facilitate illegal Chinese mining. This includes the following: securing immigration papers; mining concessions; mobilizing labor; and connecting their clients to top government officials to procure their acquiescence or protection. In short, these compradors serve as fixers who make the dreams of Chinese miners come true.

### **Social Networks and Success Stories of Compatriots**

Although the exact number of Chinese migrants in Ghana is not officially known, estimates range between 7,000 and 20,000 (Mohan *et al.* 2014, 20-1) to as high as 50,000 (Botchwey *et al.* 2018, 1). However, this could be higher considering the fact that 4,592 illegal Chinese miners were deported between June and July 2013 alone (Hirsch 2013a). A large number of Chinese immigrants in Ghana serves as a major pull factor in attracting prospective Chinese miners to Ghana. Chinese migrants operating in the mining sector serve as a strong

social network for prospective Chinese migrants by providing them with the necessary information needed to migrate and to immediately settle down and get to business. This is corroborated by existing studies such as Dobler (2005), Mohan and Kale (2007), and Ong (1993) who established the importance of Chinese transnational networks in Ghana as drivers of Chinese migration as well as success. In addition, Chinese migrants upon arrival in Ghana can count on their “networks—known as *guanxi* in Chinese—to do business. These networks can take the form of kinship relations (*xueyuan guanxi*), regional affinities (*diyuan guanxi*), friendships or work colleagues” (Cook *et al.* 2016, 67).

Furthermore, many would-be Chinese migrants to Ghana are attracted by tales of quick-and-easy riches from their counterparts in Ghana. Indeed, the Chinese media was awash in the 2000s concerning tales of Shanglin miners in Ghana striking it rich—thus, fueling the exodus of thousands of Shanglin miners into Ghana who went ahead to establish over 2,000 mining operations across Ghana (He 2013).

### **Areas of Chinese Participation in Small-Scale Mining in Ghana**

The involvement of the Chinese in illegal small-scale mining in Ghana is mainly in five areas. These are in the area of finance, transfers and sales, management, technical mechanization, and institutional protection (see Figure 2).

#### ***Finance***

The scope of illegal small-scale mining operated by the Chinese requires significant capital outlay to yield significant returns and the Chinese have a financial advantage over their Ghanaian counterparts. Crawford and others (2016, 4) posit that,

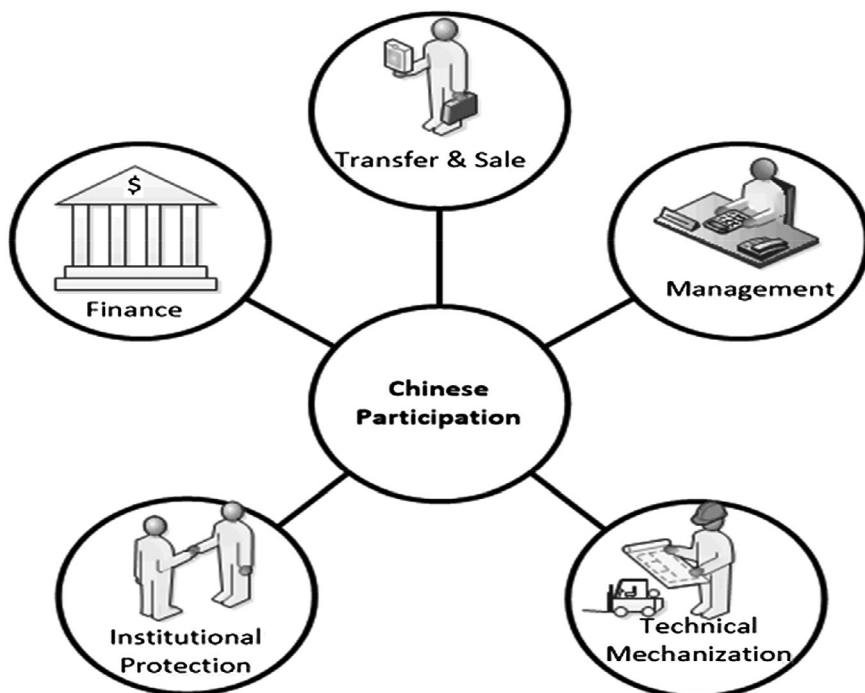
Chinese miners also brought in considerable amounts of capital—and the combination of new technology as well as capital has led to a huge intensification of production on both small-scale concessions and unlicensed land. Areas of land are now mined in weeks that previously would have taken years using traditional methods.

Unlike their Ghanaian counterparts, the Chinese can afford the cost of the heavy mining machinery that can cost as much as USD \$150,000 and an additional \$3,000 for shipment to Ghana. The Chinese miners also come prepared with enough money to cover operating costs such as living expenses and bribing public officials (Botchwey *et al.* 2018, 3).

The financial advantage of the Chinese is derived from the fact that, prior to coming to Ghana, they often pool resources to acquire the best concessions to maximize profits. They often enter into very advantageous partnerships with Ghanaians who transform their ownership of mining concessions or lands into equities. In many of these partnerships, Ghanaian partners are eager to take



**Figure 2.**  
**Scope of Chinese Participation and Involvement in the Supply Chain of Illegal Small-Scale Mining in Ghana**



*Source:* Authors' construct, 2018.

*Notes:* The above is a graphic depiction of the participation chain of Chinese involvement in illegal small-scale mining in Ghana. It shows that Chinese participation is highly sophisticated as they remain at the apex of the participation chain, while their Ghanaian counterparts have been relegated to the periphery.

less percentage from the proceeds so long as they receive regular returns, which they would have not been able to generate on their own. This is evidenced by a Ghanaian concession holder in partnership with Shaanxi who acknowledged a 93 percent to 7 percent split to the advantage of his Chinese partners for all the value of gold produced (Crawford *et al.* 2016, 5).

### ***Technical Mechanization***

Although illegal or small-scale mining is not new or introduced by the Chinese, the latter revolutionized it through the introduction of modern and sophisticated machinery. Over the years, the operations of *galamsey* have evolved from the use of crude implements such as pickaxes and pans to more sophisticated machines introduced by the Chinese. Some of these machines were actually designed and manufactured in China and cannot be afforded by

Ghanaian miners. According to Crawford and others (2016, 4) “in particular, the Chinese introduced the now widespread use of excavators, wash plants (trommel), and crushing machines (*changfa*), as well as water platforms and suction equipment for dredging in rivers.”

The operations of the Shaanxi Mining Company in the Talensi District is a formidable testament to the successful mechanization of small-scale mining in Ghana. The Shaanxi Mining Company, like many other Chinese-backed mining entities, has successfully exploited a loophole in Ghana’s Mining Act, which initially permitted foreigners to provide technical support to their Ghanaian counterparts to transition into mechanized and—in some cases—large-scale mining. This was the case of Shaanxi. Thus, “Shaanxi has made a huge financial investment in the construction of a sophisticated underground mine since late 2008, and clearly they anticipate large profits” (Crawford *et al.* 2016, 5). This has been compounded by the fact that, although the section of the Mining Act that permitted technical support from foreigners has been repealed, it did not call for a retrospective ban.

### ***Management***

Because the Chinese are normally the biggest investors in many of these illegal gold mining partnerships with Ghanaians, the former ensures managerial control over all operations of mining, especially management. In many instances, the official Ghanaian owners of the concessions are usually absentee investors or owners who are only interested in the regular and timely receipt of whatever percentage of profits that are guaranteed monthly. To complement the activities of the Chinese managers, local partners are responsible for the constant supply of workers for the mines since there tends to be a high turnover rate among the mine workers in general due to poor wages and abuse from the—mostly Chinese—management. This scenario was evident from respondents working at Shaanxi Mining Company. The dominance of the Chinese in management is also strategic as it guarantees that there would be no corruption on the part of their Ghanaian counterparts and also ensures that the latter would not know how profitable a concession truly is in order not to demand more than what had been originally agreed upon.

### ***Institutional Protection***

A major operational cost for the illicit mining activities of the Chinese in Ghana, is seeking institutional protection from traditional authorities, local/national politicians, regulatory authorities, local and national law enforcement bodies, and even national anti-*galamsey* task forces. The cost of institutional protection includes: the acquisition of immigration documents; procurement of operating licenses; payment of bribes to acquire concessions; the requirement of police protection; and avoiding the closure of illegal mining sites by anti-*galamsey* task forces. In some cases, it involves bribing local law enforcement to release mining equipment impounded by national task forces as well as bribing

law enforcement authorities to free illegal Chinese miners arrested by either local law enforcement or national task forces. In an archetypal case of such naked institutional protection, Crawford and others (2016, 9) discovered that about 20 uniformed police personnel were continuously guarding the mining compound and plant of Shaanxi Mining Company in the Talensi District. The magnitude of the protection could only have been possible after financial inducement at the top levels of government by the Chinese owners (Crawford *et al.* 2016, 9). A recent case of official complicity in the facilitation of illegal mining was revealed on February 27, 2019, in a documentary by a Ghanaian investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw, who secretly filmed several security operatives and mining regulators taking bribes from undercover journalists posing to facilitate illegal mining. Charles Cromwell Bissiw—who serves as the Secretary to the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining—was filmed taking the equivalent of about USD \$7,000 to circumvent the process of renewing the mining license of a mining company (Graphic Online 2019).

### ***Transfers and Sales***

The Chinese are also responsible for the sale and subsequent transfer of all the proceeds from the sale of the gold mined. How this happens is subject to debate, but what is not debatable is that most of the gold mined by the Chinese does not pass through official channels. Crawford and others (2016, 8)—citing official Ghanaian Government sources—acknowledge that it is common knowledge that most of the gold mined by the Chinese eventually ends up in China. In addition, the Chinese sometimes sell the gold to middlemen from India as well as the Middle East and manage to transfer the proceeds abroad through unofficial channels. This largely explains the president of Ghana’s revelation that “although the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recorded \$7 billion worth of gold imports from Ghana, official records (in Ghana) reports only \$2 billion in exports of the precious metal to the Gulf country” (Myjoyonline 2018).

## **The Impact of Chinese Involvement in *Galamsey***

### **Increased Environmental Degradation due to Increased Mechanization**

Although the negative impact of Ghanaian-led *galamsey* on the environment has long been felt before the influx of the Chinese, their involvement has deepened the negative environmental impact on Ghana. Unlike Ghanaian small-scale miners who use rudimentary implements, the Chinese utilize highly sophisticated and mechanized equipment with a far more devastating impact on the environment than their Ghanaian competitors in terms of scope and impact. For example, the Chinese have introduced heavy machinery such as heavy-duty excavators, Nelson Gold concentrators, heavy-duty generators, etc. In addition, the Chinese use prohibited dangerous chemicals for mining that have long-term damage to the environment. This was highlighted by a local *galamsey* operator in

Talensi who pointed out that the Shaanxi Mining Company was using cyanate, which, “is not allowed in small-scale mining because it is poisonous to the environment and its management requires technical expertise but the foreigners are using the chemicals that are not allowed in the small-scale mining sector without proper management” (Galamsey Operator 2017).

In addition, the Shaanxi Mining Company uses very powerful explosives for their operations that cause severe noise pollution as well as structural damage to nearby building facilities. One such building that has suffered structural damage is a nearby primary school in Gbane, where teachers often run outside for their lives whenever blasting occurs. Furthermore, the company has encroached upon nearby farms thereby threatening the livelihoods of poor local farmers (Crawford *et al.* 2015, 40).

### **Corruption of State Institutions**

Typical of most weak states, Ghana’s mining laws are rarely enforced and, in most cases, can be circumscribed via bribery of government officials. As a result, the Chinese have taken advantage of institutional lapses in Ghana’s immigration and mining sectors to falsely acquire immigration documents and to engage in small-scale mining, which is forbidden for foreigners. *Galamsey* operators in the Talensi mining community lamented the impunity with which the Chinese operate in the area and expressed a feeling of helplessness concerning the situation. According to a Galamsey Operator (2017), “They bribe immigration officials. Additionally, Ghanaian leaders accept bribes from these Chinese miners, which only benefits just a few of the population while the rest of the country suffers the consequences for life.”

While the Chinese Government via its embassy in Ghana has repeatedly denounced the involvement of its citizens in *galamsey*, it has rejected some of the local media hysteria scapegoating the Chinese for the problem and alludes to symptoms of Ghanaian state weakness for the problem. According to the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Chinese Embassy in Ghana, Mr. Zhu Jing, “Chinese illegal miners could not have come all the way from China to Ghana without the facilitation, support, and shelter from local people—so Ghana is the root cause of the problem” (Ngnenbe 2019).

### **Agricultural Impact**

The Chinese involvement in mining has expanded the scope and scale of *galamsey* activities in Ghana thereby threatening agriculture as a source of livelihood in mining communities. This is because the Chinese—via their aggressive prospecting—have ventured into virgin lands, thereby destroying and rendering them unproductive for agriculture. Chinese miners are also using dangerous chemicals in mining communities that pollute local water bodies, which ultimately harm aquatic life and livestock, as well as humans who depend on these water bodies for their drinking water. The negative agricultural impact

of Chinese mining activities in Gbani in the Talensi District can be summed up by the lamentations of John Yaro, a local opinion leader as follows:

Gbani is dying. Gbani and its environs are under threat. We the citizens, having been aggrieved by their actions, are asking for the immediate deportation of all Chinese nationals resident in Gbani because they are irresponsible and have no respect for authorities. Possible violence is looming because of the operations of the Shaanxi Chinese [workers]. Their activities are affecting us. Our people cannot get water to drink. Our animals cannot survive. The shea trees are going. (Starrfmonline 2017)

A major consequence of mining-related destruction of farmlands is that it is nearly irreversible long after the mining has stopped. According to respondents from the Association of Church-based Development NGOs (ACDEP) in the Talensi District—an NGO whose main focus has been on agriculture in the district for several years—Chinese-backed mining activities in the Talensi District are destroying arable lands and farming activities cannot be conducted on these lands even after the mining pits have been covered. ACDEP has also observed that crops in mining communities do not do well as compared to crops in nonmining communities in the same districts even though they have the same type of soil. In addition, ACDEP respondents lamented the loss of able-bodied people who have abandoned farming and gone into mining because of the lure of quick money. Citing the collapse of a cotton farm project that the NGO was sponsoring in Loho in the Upper West region as an example, the NGO argued that all was going well until mining activities began in the community. The project was abandoned as the youth left the cotton farming to engage in mining. Furthermore, the diversion of farmlands toward *galamsey* is negatively affecting crop yields per acreage in the Talensi District. According to ACDEP respondents,

Farming activities in the Talensi and Nangode areas could have been improved in terms of acreage and yield but looking at the past in the area performance in figures, one would realize a decline with regards to acreage and yield instead of an improvement from the various agricultural interventions in the area and this can be attributed to mining activities in the area. (ACDEP Representative 2017)

### **Foreign Dominance in the Mining Sector**

As stated earlier, small-scale mining is the preserve of Ghanaians, but the poor enforcement and weak regulatory regime of Ghana's mining sector have led to the influx of foreigners into the sector. Prominent among these foreigners are the Chinese who partner with Ghanaians to undertake mining activities or get Ghanaians to the front for them to acquire mining concessions. Most

of the Chinese originally capitalized on a now-repealed legal loophole that allowed foreigners to provide technical support for Ghanaian miners to mine themselves. According to Crawford and others (2015, 36), the current practice is that Ghanaians legally acquire a mining concession and then cede 85 percent of the value of the gold derived to a Chinese partner who is responsible for all the financing and mining, while the Ghanaian retains only 15 percent of the accruals. This is clearly a violation of Ghana's Minerals Act that is unfortunately pervasive.

Although job creation and increased revenues from gold production were among the reasons why Ghana's government legalized small-scale mining and limited it to Ghanaians, the involvement and dominance of the Chinese in the sector defeats the aforementioned objectives in several ways. Chinese involvement in small-scale mining is illegal and displaces Ghanaians from potential well-paid mining jobs—leaving Ghanaians at the margins of the gold production supply chain. This was evident in the Talensi District where respondents lamented that their small-scale mining activities have been adversely affected because of the presence of the Chinese mining company (Shaanxi Mining Company LTD), which has mined all the gold within their reach. This was after Shaanxi had promised the locals to only engage in deep mining, while allowing local *galamsey* operators to engage in shallow and surface mining. However, in the words of a frustrated local miner, “Shaanxi has started mining upwards toward the surface and picking up all the gold within our reach rendering us unemployed” (Talensi Miner 2017).

### **Militarization of Mining**

One of the most enduring definitions of a state is that given by Max Weber, who defines a state as a “human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory” (Weber 1946, 78). This definition of statehood has become the benchmark for the evaluation of statehood in recent years. Thus, countries, where other entities compete with or challenge the state in the exercise of force, are often classified as weak states. Therefore, the reported use of force by Chinese miners to secure their mining concessions and equipment without consequences from legitimate Ghanaian authorities is an affront to the Ghanaian statehood and exposes Ghana as a weak state. According to Hirsch (2013b), there is rising tension between the Chinese miners and their hired Ghanaian counterparts that has seen the Chinese illegally acquire guns from the police to defend themselves against disgruntled Ghanaian employees. Buttressing this point, Hirsch cites a Chinese miner's admission that, “We have the guns to defend ourselves from the locals” and a senior policeman admitted that, “The Chinese are armed [and] most of the time the guns are sold by policemen.”

### **Negative Social Impact**

The involvement of the Chinese in *galamsey* has created a myriad of social problems. First, the involvement of the Chinese has widened the intensity and

scope of *galamsey*, which requires more labor. This has attracted many people as young as primary school pupils. These pupils are increasingly missing classes or outright dropping out of school to engage in *galamsey*. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Upper East Region of Ghana—where the Talensi District is located—has one of the highest school dropout rates in the country according to government figures. Strengthening this point, Hilson and Potter (2010, 456) cites views of local government officials in the Talensi-Nabdam district who have observed that,

The engaging of children in *galamsey* and quarrying deprives them of the opportunity to attend school and unduly exposes them to health hazards. Among others the engagement of children in *galamsey* and quarrying exposes them to: low number of children attending school... low enrolment and retention rates... high school dropout rates... [and] poor performance in school.

In addition, because many of the Chinese miners are either single or married men who migrate to Ghana without their partners, they often use their resources to hire Ghanaian prostitutes from the mining communities or other parts of Ghana. There have also been media reports of organized human trafficking by some of the Chinese who traffic Chinese women into Ghana and prostitute them to Chinese miners. While Ghanaian *galamsey* respondents largely acknowledged the prevalence of Ghanaian prostitutes in the Talensi District compared to Chinese prostitutes the latter has been widely reported in the media in other mining communities in southern towns in Ghana. For example, in Wassa Akropong Chinese prostitutes mainly between the ages of 18 and 25 “charge between GH¢500 and GH¢ 1,000 from their clients who are mostly foreigners and *galamsey* operators” (Emmanuel 2017). However, as a result of high-level corruption, which further exacerbates state weakness, there are hardly any arrests and prosecutions of those behind the human trafficking and the illicit sex trade fueled by *galamsey*. Indeed, media reports suggest that some law enforcement agents and prominent state officials may have been compromised by some of the Chinese miners who supplied the former with some Chinese prostitutes and recorded them on tape for blackmail (Adomonline 2017).

Another area of state failure can be seen in the inability of the state to reign in the illegal gambling operations of the Chinese in mining communities they operate in. The latter has introduced gambling slot machines in mining communities such as the Talensi District and raking in thousands of dollars in illicit-gambling proceeds. These slot machines are made and imported from China as well as cleared from Ghanaian ports by officials who ought to know their illegal purpose. Illegal-gambling slot machines have been positioned in strategic locations throughout mining communities by Chinese miners to attract unsuspecting locals seeking to strike it rich. These machines attract diverse people ranging from school children to adults with devastating socioeconomic

consequences for the community and the country as a whole. The net effects of these slot machines are dire. First, it exploits a community that is already impoverished thereby worsening their welfare. Second, the introduction of slot machines for gambling purposes is illegal under the National Lotteries Act of 1958, which prohibits foreigners from operating gambling businesses and stipulates that gambling proceeds be “directed towards research, agriculture, education, sports, the provision of water resources countrywide, and the improvement of the environment,” something the Chinese are definitely not doing (World Investment News 1999). The negative impacts of illegal gambling on mining communities such as that of the Talensi District have been noticed by local Chiefs and opinion leaders—which has led to a wave of public backlash against operators of slot machines. This is evidenced by a 2018 order given by local Chiefs in Talensi for the seizure of all gambling slot machines in the community (MyNewsGH 2018).

### **Loss of Revenue**

The illegal involvement of the Chinese in small-scale mining in Ghana defeats one of the cardinal goals of the government’s legalization of the activity, which is increased revenue mobilization. Millions of dollars are annually lost by the government of Ghana from the proceeds of small-scale mining, largely because of institutional weaknesses in tracking the proceeds of illegal Chinese miners. They evade paying taxes by managing to sell their gold outside the country at the blind side of the Ghanaian authorities. Peter John Amewu, the Ghanaian Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, is on record to have said that “In the year 2016, USD \$2.3 billion worth of gold left this country through illicit mining” (Enstie 2017). The Chinese also engage in illegal gambling operations, which deprive the state of much-needed revenues as it minimizes patronage of state-sanctioned lottery. They dupe the state of tax revenues by pocketing all the proceeds from their gambling slot machines at the blind side of the state.

### **Increased Underdevelopment**

Chinese involvement in *galamsey* in Ghana defies the neoliberal argument for developing countries to seek foreign investment to accelerate economic development. This is because Chinese involvement in *galamsey* is akin to organized crime whereby participants are engaged in a black-market venture because they are engaged in a prohibited activity *circa* small-scale mining, a legal preserve of Ghanaians. In addition, because the Chinese are engaged in an illegal activity, they find themselves operating in the shadows of the law and as such are unable to engage in any developmental projects for the communities where they operate. Indeed, apart from the cottage industries such as food vending or basic retailing—that *galamsey* generates—there are very limited positive long-term economic impacts in mining communities. Thus, unlike other legal-foreign mining entities, these disparate Chinese *galamsey* sponsors are unable to engage in any developmental projects in communities that they mine as part of



a desirable corporate social responsibility effort. This point is buttressed by the sentiment of a Talensi community leader:

Shaanxi mining limited has not brought any development to this community ever since they started operation. Even when community members had pleaded to tap electricity from their power plant, they refused vehemently. The Chinese have not been good to Ghanaians at all, they have only come to pick our gold and return to their country while leaving us with unemployment and destructed environment. Government should eliminate them from the country before they create more harm. (Talensi Community Leader 2017)

Many of the stakeholders against Chinese illegal gold activities in the Talensi District lamented about the poor state of development and widespread poverty in the mining communities in the District. This phenomenon is not only limited to the Talensi District of Ghana—it is a nationwide problem since there is not a single mining town in Ghana that can be described as having been developed through mining. This view is corroborated by the CEO of the state-owned Precious Minerals Marketing Company, George Abradu-Otu, who observed that “Ghana is the second-largest gold producer in Africa after South Africa. We’re the 8th in the world, [but] what do we have to show for it? If you ask me whether gold has benefitted Ghana, I’ll say no” (Enstie 2017).

### **Conflict with Local Communities**

Chinese involvement in *galamsey* has often led to conflict with local inhabitants of mining communities within which they operate. Some of these conflicts have even led to death and other forms of brutalities against locals often protesting against the presence and activities of the Chinese on their land. The sources of such conflicts are varied and include cultural differences between the Chinese and their Ghanaian hosts, Chinese mistreatment of Ghanaian workers, dispute over land, local hostility against Chinese environmental degradation, and use of security agents against locals. In the Talensi District where the Chinese backed Shaanxi Mining Company Ltd. operates, there have been several protests against the company by the locals. For example, in May 2017, Ghana’s Minister of Lands and Natural Resources directed the company to cease operations following the deaths of six miners at a separate mining. Angry locals attributed the deaths to the aftershocks of unannounced explosions by the Shaanxi Mining Company. The deaths prompted protests from the Concerned Citizens of Talensi against the company (Myjoyonline 2017). There have also been tensions between the people of the Talensi District and the Shaanxi Mining Company over what the locals perceive as unfair employment practices by the company and disrespectful treatment of workers by the company’s Chinese management. This sentiment is captured by the Secretary to the Gbani Traditional Area, John Yaro Ti-roug as follows:

They are very corrupt. Their mode of employment is very corrupt. You need to pay something and do a lot of things. If you whistle, you are dismissed. A group was sacked for asking for salary increase. Someone picked a camp bed just to sleep on, not to take it home and was sacked... We have protected them for a while thinking these people were going to help the community to develop. These people are dangerous. They are treating us like animals. The way they talk to [Ghanaian] workers. I have seen it. They are talking to workers and all workers must sit on the floor. They will sit in stuffing chairs. Meanwhile there are chairs there. (Bediako 2016)

### **Physical Danger and Low Wages**

One of the economic rationales behind the legalization of small-scale mining was its potential to generate millions of jobs to address the high unemployment rate in the country. While small-scale mining, both legal and illegal, has attracted millions of Ghanaians, they are often at the periphery of the *galamsey* supply chain. Ghanaian laborers mainly provide back-breaking labor and often work in dangerous and unsafe environments. Symptomatic of weak states, enforcement of existing labor laws and safety regulations are almost nonexistent, which emboldens those at the top of the supply chain of illegal small-scale miners, such as the Chinese, to exploit their Ghanaian workers economically. For example, although there is a legal daily minimum wage requirement for Ghanaian workers, Chinese mining operatives at the Shaanxi Mining Company continue to woefully underpay their Ghanaian employees, further exasperating their standards of living. Ghanaian respondents working for Shaanxi Mining Ghana Ltd. complained of being underpaid and earning GH¢150 (USD \$34) per month, which is way below the national minimum wage.

### **Conclusions**

This article presents a holistic view on the role of Chinese migrants in illegal small-scale mining in Ghana by tracing the motivational factors behind their migration to Ghana, the scope of their involvement in the supply chain of illegal mining, and the impact of their illegality. Such a comprehensive approach is needed in order for policy makers to effectively combat the menace of illegal small-scale mining in Ghana, which continues to be a challenge. Any effective policy against illegal Chinese small-scale mining should address the pull factors that attracted Chinese miners to come to Ghana for illegal mining. Many of these pull factors—such as weak institutional capacity and corruption, availability of willing Ghanaian compradors, ease of entry into illegal mining, and the existence of a strong Chinese miners' social network in Ghana to facilitate illegal mining—are all symptomatic of the reality of Ghana as a weak state. Contrary to the rather hysterical media portrayal of Chinese migrants as the primary culprits

of illegal small-scale mining, they are only opportunistic migrants exploiting state weakness created by the ruling elites and state officials mandated with the responsibility of enforcing Ghana's mineral laws. The best hope in the fight against *galamsey* remains the exercise of agency by civil society groups expanding their "points of engagement" at a time that the government of Ghana is expanding its "points of exit" due to increasing economic dependency on China.

### About the Authors

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