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A Donkey's Worth in South Africa: Domestic Laborer or Export Product; Socioeconomic impacts of China's skin trade on South African donkey owners

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Abstract
Within South Africa, rural communities use working animals instead of, or combined with mechanization for farming and chores. Development progress may have evaded these areas yet impacts them through globalization and China’s expanded market power. The burgeoning market for ejiao, a popular Traditional Chinese Medicine made from boiling donkey hides is a growing issue. Wealthier Chinese consumers, a stalled South African rural population who missed development’s benefits plus increasing economic and political engagements between the two countries allows a monopolized, and often exploitative market for donkeys. Politicians are eager to partner with Chinese ejiao retailers despite resulting decimation of donkey populations in some areas of Africa and destruction of livelihoods.

I evaluate the value of donkeys as domestic laborers within South Africa along with how China’s rapidly expanding market for ejiao and simultaneous consumption of donkeys has affected South Africa to answer in which context donkeys are more valuable. Interview responses and cost-benefit analyses are used to answer the research question and results are interpreted through Amartya Sen’s capability approach and Raul Prebisch’s dependency theory. I determined that donkeys have the greatest value as domestic laborers for South African donkey owners and communities. Rather than maintaining value as foreign export products to China, the export of hides is instead, a loss for South African donkey owners and communities.