

Assembling Campaigning Identity Online: The Virtual Space of the Transnational Chinese Entrepreneurs in Ghana

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For the past year, I've been doing follow-up research on the Chinese business community located in Accra, Ghana. This time I focused on the virtual space in which Chinese businessmen and businesswomen assemble elements of a transnational identity, construct a cyber public domain, and establish business networks.

The Chinese business community in Accra has grown quickly. Up to the second quarter of 2009, 387 Chinese enterprises are registered with the Ghana Investment Promotion Center, with a total investment of \$235,180,000. The number of Chinese companies has almost doubled since my 2008 study. The development of the virtual community of Chinese represents this trend well with the number of online discussion groups quadrupling. The website of the Ghana central-China Chamber of Commerce has drawn members not only from within Ghana, but people in bordering West African countries as well.

With the contemporary inflow of Chinese capital and labor force, the Chinese entrepreneurs I interviewed have created a transnational space where they are both outside of the Chinese nation-state and bounded by a shared citizenship. For instance, following the earthquake in southwest China in July 2009, people from different corners of Accra gathered together and donated money through the Chamber of Commerce website and discussion group.

Last summer I reported that some Ghanaian entrepreneurs called for regulations on Chinese retailing activities. Despite the sweeping inspection of Chinese businesses soon after the December 2008 elections in Ghana, retail/wholesale shops still managed to operate near Rawlings Square, which was referred to as China town inside the Chinese business community. Frequent trips to China by Ghanaian government officials to promote investment in Ghana combined with the sporadic efforts of the state to protect the national economy highlight



conflicts between state efforts to benefit from the global market forces and to regulate global capital and labor. The transnational Chinese entrepreneurs are very savvy about the situation and have utilized the virtual space as a public domain to strive for their legitimate existence and rights. Recently, the chamber of commerce has started a campaign to collect questions and concerns for a dialogue with the vice president of Ghana.

Aside from the political awareness of the Chinese business community, they have developed the website and online discussion group into a space where prospective investors in China and veteran entrepreneurs in

Ghana connect and communicate. This is reflected in the specialization of discussion groups, such as the one devoted to the construction sector business.

Yang Jiao is a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology. His research was made possible in part through a Center for African Studies pre-dissertation summer research grant.