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The "Doing" and "Undoing" of Community: Chinese Networks in Ghana

Conal Guan-Yow Ho

Abstract

Chinese have been migrating to Ghana since the late 1950s. Despite over 50 years of migration to Ghana, the Chinese do not consider Ghana their home but rather live in an extended transitory state that can last from a couple of years to several decades. Part of the nature of this extended transitory state is the invisibility of a community. This paper looks at the nature of community among the Chinese in Ghana arguing that there is a constant desire to push away from the idea of belonging to a community ("undoing" of community) while at the same time pulling towards more social intimacy ("doing" of community). In particular, this paper looks at gossip and suspicion in conjunction with economic cooperation and competition as aspects of their social encounter that illuminates the nature of this pendulum swing. (Manuscript received February 27, 2008; accepted for publication April 21, 2008)

Keywords: Ghana, overseas Chinese, community, belonging, diaspora

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Studie

Gemeinschaften im Fluss: Chinesische Netzwerke in Ghana

Conal Guan-Yow Ho

Abstract

Seit den späten 1950er Jahren sind Chinesen nach Ghana migriert. Trotz dieser über 50 Jahre Migration nach Ghana betrachten die Chinesen Ghana nicht als ihre Heimat. Vielmehr leben sie in einem zeitlich ausgedehnten Status des Übergangs, der von wenigen Jahren bis hin zu mehreren Jahrzehnten andauern kann. Ein Teil der Natur dieses ausgedehnten Übergangsstatus ist die Unsichtbarkeit einer Gemeinschaft. Der vorliegende Aufsatz betrachtet die Natur der Gemeinschaft unter den Chinesen in Ghana, wobei argumentiert wird, dass es ein ständiges Bedürfnis gibt, sich von der Idee, zu einer Gemeinschaft zu gehören, zu lösen (das „Auflösen" von Gemeinschaft), während es gleichzeitig einen Drang zu mehr sozialer Intimität gibt (das „Weben" von Gemeinschaft). Dieser Aufsatz betrachtet dabei insbesondere Klatsch und Misstrauen in Verbindung mit wirtschaftlicher Zusammenarbeit und Konkurrenz als Teile dieser sozialen Begegnung, welche die Natur dieser Wechselbewegung illustrieren. (Manuskript eingereicht am 27.02.2008; zur Veröffentlichung angenommen am 21.04.2008)

Keywords: Ghana, Auslandschinesen, Gemeinschaft, Zugehörigkeit, Diaspora

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Introduction

The global spotlight on China's activities in Africa first began in the 1950s and 1960s when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came into power. In April 1955, China had one of its first major contacts with African Liberation Movements. Though at first it was not certain the Chinese government was interested in Africa its interest eventually began to shift towards building relations with African and Asian states. In part, this was the Chinese government's desire to remove itself from the tutelage of the Soviet Union and connect its history of western semi-colonisation to the "Third World" (Larkin 1973). Political and economic connections between China and Africa increased. Premier Zhou Enlai visited East Africa during the decade of African independence declaring Africa was "ripe for revolution" and began a series of development projects to build roads and railways for Africa's infrastructure (Prah & Burnett 2007:58).

The world spotlight on China's activities in Africa soon faded as the political and economic situation of African states took a dive for the worse in the mid-1970s. In the 1980s, Africa became less important for China as it embarked on a new modernisation project, *gaige kaifang* ("Reform and Open"), which required foreign investment and technological assistance. It primarily focused its relations with Western Europe, the United States of America, and Japan seeking to expand its trade links even though it "paid rhetorical service to such issues as South-South co-operation" (Taylor 1998:443). Ian Taylor makes the point that by this time with the Cold War coming to an end, China no longer needed to support anti-Soviet elements. Furthermore, Africa's stagnant markets were not helpful to China's modernisation project. China began receiving foreign aid while its aid to Africa declined. Noticeably absent too were diplomatic visits from China to Africa from the mid-1980s until 1989, a contrast to the early 1980s when Premier Zhao Ziyang toured eleven African countries in 1982 and Vice Premier Li Peng visits in 1984 (ibid.:445).

A surprising turn in Afro-Sino relations took place with the Tian'anmen Square protests in 1989. China's response to the events drew criticism from the West but garnered support from African countries. This was the nascent period of the West's growing discourse on human rights and promotion of liberal democracy, which many African leaders saw as Western-centric, neo-colonial, and neo-imperialistic. They saw it as the West's way to impede the economic growth of developing countries, and also as a political threat to African leaders whose

status was being maintained with faint regard for popular demands (Lin 1996; Lin 1989; Taylor 1998). China took on this opportunity to renew its relationship with African countries and gain their political support as it marginalised Taiwan. Furthermore, China's internal growth as a result of *gaige kaifang* led it to turn to Africa for its oil resources and trade markets. By 1998, China had lured South African diplomatic support away from Taiwan and had begun offering technical assistance and development aid to Africa (Deutsche Presse-Agentur 1998).

From the late-1990s African and western media began noticing Chinese traders and retailers in African markets. Soon they were reporting that its cheap goods were encroaching on African markets and some Chinese were even involved in petty trading, usually an area reserved for local Africans (French & Polgreen 2007; Mbori 2005; Polgreen & French 2007). For instance, throughout 2005 and 2006, there were occasional headlines describing the poor state of the Ghanaian textile industry due in large part, it argues, from the illegal import of imitation Chinese textiles. Some headlines from such articles include: *Public Agenda*, 29 November 2006: "Textile dealers call for boycott of cheap textiles from Asia" (Orhin 2006); *Daily Graphic*, 12 April 2005: "Cheap imports killing textile industry" (*Daily Graphic* 2005a); and an editorial from *Daily Graphic*, 20 May 2005: "Textile smuggling and our industries" (Daily Graphic 2005b). There were also occasional reports that the legal, and sometimes illegal, importation of Chinese goods was hurting the economy, such as an article in *The Independent* on 20 June 2005 reporting that the illegal activities of "Mr. Zang Yong-Quin, his and others' [sic] activities have collapsed GTP [Ghana Textile Printing]" (*The Independent* 2005). Further outrage by Ghanaians over Chinese textiles happened in February as the secretariat to organise the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence was found to have imported cheap anniversary cloth from China instead of placing orders through local textile industries (*Daily Graphic* 2007; JoyFM 2007). In Namibia, there are growing rumours of the "Chinese invasion" being sponsored by Beijing (Grobler 2006).

Discourse that emerged through these media articles portrays a mixed sense of China's influence, at once acknowledging the benefits of commerce and aid and also questioning whether or not its practices are exploitative (cf. Sautman & Yan 2007). Both western and African media have reported on China's increasing aid to Africa coupled with its importation of African oil (Brown 2006). In the volume *African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Manji & Marks 2007), activists and intellectuals express similarly cautious views that combine semi-optimism over

China's re-entry to African politics and economics with a range from uncertainty to caution about how African institutions and civil society should respond. For instance, Africa environmental activists Anabel Lemos and Daniel Ribeiro (2007) question whether Mozambique is at risk of being colonised by China through its newly formed economic partnership. Stephen Marks concludes that "China's growing imperialist role abroad" (Marks 2007:12) is a call for African activists to ally with Chinese New Left groups who are uneasy with China's model of economic development. Ndubisi Obiorah however cautions that "it is immensely difficult to attempt to describe popular perceptions in Africa of Chinese business or of China itself" (Obiorah 2007:39) because of the lack of research done on the African populace, though it is also clear that African politicians overwhelmingly favour China's presence.

Despite reports and figures of China's trades and investments in Africa, it is still uncertain how much of these investments are from private sector companies and how much are from Chinese state-owned enterprises. Even though there are some links between the Chinese government's foreign policy objectives and private Chinese enterprises in Africa, the depth of the relationship varies and are nonexistent for some of these companies. The current nascent scholarship of China in Africa takes primarily a political science perspective focusing on the relations and activities of the Chinese government with those of African governments and national economies. In these macro-level policy analysis, it is easy to gloss over differences despite the heterogeneity of the Chinese in Africa or to account for these differences as varied by nation since most of these studies take nation-states as actors (e.g. Broadman 2007; Carey et al. 2007; Taylor 2006). In their analysis of China's political and economic strategies in Africa, Eisenman and Kurlantzick have even gone as far as saying:

> [a]s Chinese investment in the continent has grown, some 80,000 migrant workers from China have moved to Africa, creating a new Chinese diaspora that is unlikely to return home. (Eisenman & Kurlantzick 2006:221)

The media similarly conflate activities of Chinese people and the actions of the Chinese government. For instance, on 26 November 2007, the BBC reported that "thousands [of Chinese] have moved to Africa with Beijing's approval" and that "[t]hey are part of China's bid to secure raw materials and markets for its manufactured goods" (Bristow 2007). More recently, *The Sunday Times* reporter, Jon Swain (2008) wrote a sensational article beginning with the subtitle "Chinese

entrepreneurs are invading Africa". Despite noting an earlier history of Chinese people in Africa in the 15th century "before the arrival of the first Europeans", he inadvertently portrays this history as setting into motion the later stages of "invasion" in the 20th and 21st century. Furthermore, he lumps together Chinese government activities of development projects – roads, railways, sports complexes, and parliament buildings – with clearly private business activities such as petty trading and restaurants. Citing Serge Michel, journalist for *Le Monde*, he notes that Chinese people are "advancing throughout Africa [... and] as their projects balloon they are penetrating the imagination of an entire continent". He follows with a statement noting that "China's growing economic presence in Africa" is a reality that the West has to face. Few reports attempt to distinguish Chinese people's activities on the ground from the political and economic activities of the Chinese government in Africa. Mauro De Lorenzo makes the keen observation that in Rwanda:

> most Chinese investments in Africa are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – and thus only indirectly motivated by the high-level Chinese "go abroad" policy and its attendant incentives. (De Lorenzo 2007)

He also makes the point that many Chinese construction companies are not willing to make long-term investments due to their perceptions of Rwanda being economically unstable and that it has been difficult to encourage Chinese entrepreneurs to set up business there. He builds a more complex picture of Chinese activities on the ground as being less than parallel with that of the ideologies of the Chinese government.

In my ethnographic research[1], I find it important to distinguish Chinese networks and communities on the ground in Africa versus the representations of what the Chinese government is doing in Africa. Conjoining these two ideas erase the specificities of Chinese in Africa and any particular understandings of them. How Chinese people live and work in different African countries is not what the Chinese government imagines or desires. There may be few direct relations between the Chinese government and Chinese people living abroad. For much

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of the history of the Chinese in Ghana, the Chinese government has not had much direct influence on their everyday lived experience. Indeed, the Chinese government has not paid much attention to Africa between the mid-1970s to the late 1990s. In South Africa where the Chinese first arrived in the mid-1600s as convicts and indentured labourers, the Chinese government has not had strong influence on the Chinese there for much of its four hundred years (Yap & Man 1996). This is not to argue that the Chinese government had no effect on Chinese abroad because they clearly did. For example, Chinese in South Africa were mobilised to send money to China during the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937 to 1945 contributing one of the highest amount per capita (Yap & Man 1996:256). However, to lump together Chinese people and the Chinese government or to understand the Chinese presence in Africa as primarily related to China's political economic policies is to privilege government politics which does not necessarily have efficacy in understanding the ways Chinese abroad live. It obfuscates our understanding of what actually matters to Chinese living in Africa. And finally, it is an a priori assumption that puts Chinese living abroad into a coherent unit exaggerating their commonalities and identities while understating their differences that are part of how they define, limit, and reproduce community and selfhood. A more nuanced approach is needed.

My paper focuses on the nature of community among the Chinese in Ghana, a fluctuating network that has been in existence since the 1960s.[2] Research on overseas Chinese, or the more recent term "Chinese diaspora" coined by Lynn Pan (1994) and Tu Wei-ming (1994a), focused mainly in the regions of Southeast Asia and North America where Chinese have migrated to in large numbers and for longer periods. The research on Southeast Asia has often characterised northern China, the heartland of various Chinese dynasties, as being the central pull that kept the sojourner mentality among Chinese living abroad. This mentality grew out of Confucian philosophy adopted in government discourse that it was disloyal to both family and the empire to live permanently abroad. In this model, China occupied the centre and people who assimilated into other cultures were on the peripheries. Since the mid-1900s this idea has been challenged as more Chinese migrants saw themselves as settled "foreign nationals" and "descendants of Chinese" (huayi) (Cushman & Wang 1988; Wang 1991; Wang

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[2] I grew up in Ghana from the 1970s to the early 1990s and later moved to the United States.

2000). *Sons of the Yellow Emperor* by Lynn Pan (1994), one of the first books to proclaim a history of the Chinese diaspora, was a search for an alternative model by toppling the political hegemony of China as centre and by focusing on the semi-periphery which are Hong Kong, Taiwan, overseas students and aspiring migrants. He is concerned with the idea of a "Cultural China" and the loss of Chinese characteristics. This scholarship continues to put forth that "the idea of a cultural core area [...] has remained potent and continuous in the Chinese consciousness" (Tu 1994b). For the Chinese in Ghana, the idea of China as the centre does not hold as prominent a role in understanding their experience in the diaspora. For several decades, the Chinese in Ghana viewed China as nation and a place to detach oneself from. Progress for these Chinese was seen as moving from tradition to modernity. Certain contemporary cultural practices and ideas in China were seen as anachronistic. Moving abroad then provided the possibility to become modern as one became geographically removed from China.

Many studies of overseas Chinese in North America portray early Chinese migrants as labourers who faced racial discrimination from the white majority leading them to band together in solidarity both geographically and emotionally (e.g. Ling 2008; Takaki 1994). The rise of the practice of forming cultural communities was understood as a response to the need to fight for survival in a discriminatory larger society. By the 1940s, most Chinese in the United States of America had settled in major urban areas such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York forming what scholars have termed ethnic enclaves or Chinatowns (Lee 1960). Most studies of Chinese in North America have focused around these Chinatowns taking the geographic boundedness of these enclaves as evidence for socio-cultural coherency (Fong 1994; Nee & de Bary 1972; Wong 1982). According to Wang Ling-chi (1999), the political and scholarly discourse on the question of Chinese assimilation dominated in the United States of America. In her recent study, Ling Huping (2008) continues to take on the model of cultural and social cohesion among Chinese of St. Louis. Prior to 1966, there was a geographically discernible area in St. Louis that could be identified as an ethnic enclave. With subsequent urban renewal, the Chinese are now geographically invisible but cultural and social cohesion of these Chinese continue. Ling upgrades the model from a community that is bounded geographically to one that is now bounded culturally. The ethnic identity of Chinese and Chineseness continues to dominate the analysis of these models as

the force that binds Chinese people together.

In his recent survey work on community, Gerard Delanty theorises that contemporary community is less bounded than those of the recent past and is based more on a sense of belonging "expressed in unstable, fluid, very open and highly individualised groups" (Delanty 2003:187). He approaches community as a communicative process and experience of belonging in contrast to older literature on community that emphasised institutional structures, spaces, symbolic forms of meanings that undergirded a sense of groupness and morality.

My ethnographic work is closer in line with Delanty. I argue that the Chinese in Ghana are continually engaged in producing and disengaging from community, an indication that their social bonds are loose and uneasy and that their idea of belonging to a place and group is fluid. Consociation of Chinese in Ghana is ephemeral and specific to particular contexts and activities. These consociations are not marked with strong categorical identity, such as ethnicity, and personal commonalities are not always used to imagine or evoke a sense of ongoing collectivities (cf. Amit & Rapport 2002). The Chinese living in Ghana do not imagine themselves as a population in exile, a diaspora looking back to Asia (China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia) for a cultural core, or immigrants to Ghana with expectations of assimilating or settling down as foreign workers. In relation to the Chinese in Ghana, they see themselves as transitioning through with a fluctuating sense that home in the future could be in the West. In recent years, China has become a growing possibility for them to return as they see China begin to rise economically, an indication to them that China's anachronistic patterns are beginning to fade into the past.

Viewed as a social phenomenon, the Chinese community is in constant flux with the lack of a clear core. Examining people's relationships with each other along with their desires for and rejection of larger sociality brings to the fore this nature of the continual push away from and pull towards various communities. How does one understand this continual "doing" and "undoing" of community by individuals who clearly express that there is no Chinese community in Ghana? Their personal networks both produce senses of community but also greater suspicion and the active severing of ties leading to also a lesser sense of ethnic bonds. Part of this process of "doing" and "undoing" of community allows them to live in an extended state of transition with hopes of being somewhere else later, either to the West or back to Asia with hopefully more accumulated wealth and in a better socio-economic situation. To be Chinese in Ghana does not mean

one has to be part of a Chinese community or a Ghanaian community.

Primer to the Early History of Chinese Presence in Ghana

The Chinese are primarily clustered today in the industrial city of Tema and the capital Accra, two coastal cities 20-minutes drive from each other linked by the high speed Kwame Nkrumah Motorway. Within these two cities, there is no geographically discernible ethnic enclave. The Chinese live in various parts of the city, a geographic expression of their "doing" and "undoing" of community. It also renders them invisible as a group to most Ghanaians and especially the national government.

Early settlements were in Takoradi 200 kilometres (about 125 miles) west of Accra. Takoradi was the only deep-sea harbour for Ghana and so industrial development first began in Takoradi until Tema's harbour was developed in 1961. After that, most Chinese factories developed in Tema and Accra.

Chinese industrialists first came to establish factories and then brought over managers and workers from Hong Kong who then took over the daily operations of the factories. By then, most of these industrialists left Ghana returning to Hong Kong. In asking more about this early history, I was repeatedly advised to talk to the managing directors of some of the older Chinese factories. Their origin stories were sometimes mystically recounted but were often told with awareness to Ghanaian national politics, global order of political economy and transnational networks of relations that enabled their survival.

One of the narrators of this early history was Mr. Kong (all names are fictitious), who held major shares in one of the more successful Chinese steel-making factories in Ghana. Mr. Kong originally from Shanghai, China, had migrated first to Hong Kong and then subsequently migrated to Ghana in the 1970s where he established a successful steel-making factory. Mr. Kong recounted a version of the Chinese origin story that, despite its having sometimes a mythical overtones, highlighted the importance of Ghana's colonial past that facilitated the movement of Chinese to Ghana. Although most of my interviews and fieldwork activities were conducted in Cantonese, Mr. Kong spoke to me in English perhaps as a way to mark himself as worldly and knowledgeable:

> The first Chinese in Ghana who discovered Ghana were seafarers who sailed around southern Africa and then across the Gulf of Guinea in the 1950s. They landed somewhere west of [Tema] around Takoradi but I don't think they stayed for long. They found the place amicable. Ghana is

a beautiful place – good weather and the natives are very tame. You know, Ghanaians are very friendly and not racist. No tribal wars. No ethnic conflicts. Not like Togo or Ivory Coast. And they are very tame, easy to work with, and welcomed foreigners. We had the knowledge for factories and they had the labour. These Chinese reported back home and news was heard how favourable Ghana was for business so the Chinese came. Ghana was just becoming independent and there was business opportunity. The government was looking for foreign investment but I don't think they were that keen on aid from Europeans. Development here was also easier for the Chinese from Hong Kong because of the British connection – and business was in English.

Mr. Kong was aware that two converging trends, namely Ghana's political and economic approach to dealing with its colonial legacy and China's vying for world power in the 1950s facilitated the possibility for Chinese entrepreneurs to establish industries in Ghana. At the height of Chinese industries in Ghana, textile factories dominated, followed by metalwork. Other smaller industries include ones that produced glass lamps, hair care products and paper.

The First Trend

Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana who played a major role in leading Ghana to independence in 1957, saw himself as champion of Africans' right to self-determination and liberation. Nkrumah was not just satisfied with an independent Ghana, but envisioned that the whole of Africa would follow suit. He believed that the ultimate goal was not national unity but political unity across the African continent – the creation of a suprastate (Nkrumah 1971:290). Nkrumah was aware that Ghana held the unique position of being the first sub-Saharan colony to gain independence and that it played a leading role in pan-African politics in its first nine years of independence. He was conscious of forming foreign policies that "shielded Ghana from ideological conflicts" between the West and the Eastern bloc (Armah 2004:3). Furthermore, to move Ghana's economy away from dependence on colonial trade and on foreign capital and goods, Nkrumah moved towards an industrial model. This created the possibility for Chinese entrepreneurs to develop industries in Ghana.

The Second Trend

In 1954, China experienced its first war-free year in almost three decades and the CCP's control was finally consolidated. With the Bandung Conference in April of 1955, the CCP had one of its first major contacts with African liberation movements (Larkin 1973). Just as Nkrumah had been conscious of not aligning with either the West or Eastern bloc, the CCP was coming to a period when it desired to remove itself from the tutelage of the Soviet Union and began making alliances with African States. Political Scientist, Bruce Larkin writes that although from the 1950s to the 1970s, China did not view its relations with African states as important as her affairs with other Asian countries and the U.S., the Bandung Conference demonstrated that Afro-Asia was a viable political concept. Even though the Bandung Conference marked the beginning of significant Chinese initiatives in Africa the CCP was not able to see this. These two trends – Ghana eager to develop non-aligned movements and China developing relations with African states – helped Chinese entrepreneurial interests set up business in Ghana.

The Third Trend

The desire of Chinese industrialists to escape from communist influence became a deciding factor in why they moved away from China. Sociologist Wong Siu-Lun writes about Shanghai industrialists who began emigrating to Hong Kong in the mid-1940s and eventually helped to develop Hong Kong's vibrant industrial economy, particularly around the cotton textile industry (Wong 1988). With the intensification of civil war in China after World War II in the 1940s, emigration of Shanghainese industrialist to Hong Kong grew. Hong Kong became a refuge for these industrialists who re-established their factories here.

For some of these industrialists, there was a second subsequent move out of Hong Kong to Southeast Asia and to Africa to escape economic competition in Hong Kong. Because Hong Kong's market for textiles was small, new export markets had to be opened, especially after the United Kingdom and the United States of America imposed quotas on Hong Kong's textile products. Some of these markets for textiles included Nigeria and Ghana. However, these second migratory moves for the entrepreneurs were temporary. Once the factories were established, managers and workers from Hong Kong were sent over to take over the day-to-day operation of the companies, allowing these industrialists the freedom to move away from Ghana. Notably, less wealthy industrialists who did

not have factories outside of Ghana continued to manage company operations while wealthier industrialists who also had a larger global reach did not. Mr. Young, one of my informants, illustrates this second migratory trend. Mr. Young is a middle-aged manager of a household enamelware factory, one of the oldest surviving Chinese-operated factories in Ghana. He worked for the company in the 1970s as a chartered accountant, later left for the U.K. and then came back in the 2000s working as the managing director. The major shareholder of his company resides in Hong Kong and has multiple companies in Southeast Asia. In our interview, spoken in English because he was more comfortable in it after having living in the U.K. for so many years, he recounted to me the following:

The factory was started in 1959 and production began in 1960. At that time, the company was half the size of today. Over the years, it gradually expanded. Initially, we had about 30 plus Chinese workers working here because none of the locals knows how to operate the machinery. Gradually the expat staff reduced on a yearly basis [as local staff gained technical knowledge]. Today we have only nine Chinese technical staff. Most of the work is done by the Ghanaians. It is owned majority share by the Chinese from Hong Kong. Minority share is owned by Ghanaians, 25 percent. In the early days, it was compulsory that you have Ghanaian shareholders though often they were sleeping partners – just a name to satisfy government requirements. Enamelware moved from mainland China to Hong Kong when the communists took over. Their main market is export because Hong Kong is a small market. Whether you like it or not, enamelware is the poor man's cooking utensils. It is cheap to produce and so cheaper to buy than other kinds of cooking utensils such as aluminium. So, it is primarily to poorer countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Nigeria, and Ghana that we export enamelware to. When the practice in Hong Kong became expensive to operate, the only thing to do is try to establish businesses in those countries. Even before this factory moved here, a trading company was established. I believe the first Hong Kong trading company was called Africa Trading Company Limited and they not only sold enamelware but also cigarettes and other items. That was established in the early 1950s.

Mr. Young had illustrated that Chinese entrepreneurs were keenly aware of global trends and national politics that affected their decision on where and how

to move their enterprises. Because these entrepreneurs often did not stay in Ghana but became mobile citizens of the world, they employed foremen, middle and upper management from Hong Kong to take over the daily operations of the plants. Moving the factories to Ghana became a way to gain financial capital for the entrepreneurs. Furthermore, using the mobility of Chinese managers and workers, they were able to guarantee their continual mobility. However, the Chinese workers also risked immobility, in part due to the company's operational policies, in part to national politics at the time, and in part to global economy.

I became aware of this in conversation with Mr. Pok, an owner and managing director of a glass lamp factory in Tema. He is in his 50s. His father established the factory in the 1980s and Mr. Pok was subsequently asked by his father to take over in the 1990s. Mr. Pok recounted to me that many Chinese factories in Ghana had no intention of staying in the country for long. Although they had viewed the political situation as fairly stable when they first migrated in the 1960s, they did not believe the country had any sustainable long-term plan for economic development. Furthermore, this sense of instability was created by government plans that industries would eventually become solely government or Ghanaian-owned leaving no room for long term stable establishment for the Chinese.

What these industrialists saw, Mr. Pok said, was a way to manoeuvre national policies to their benefit. Up until 1990s, Ghana had a policy of foreign exchange control allowing only certain companies such as manufacturing industries to have access to foreign exchange to buy necessary equipment or resources to further develop or maintain their factories and production. What many of these companies would do was misstate the amount of foreign exchange needed, by either: (1) over-invoicing whereby they reported a higher buying price for a certain good than what they actually paid for; or (2) bringing in fewer goods than what they had reported. The foreign exchange not used could then be exchanged at a higher rate for Cedis (GHC) in the local black market. With Cedis in hand, these companies could then turn to the Bank of Ghana where the official exchange rate is lower and exchange it again for more foreign currency, thus, using foreign exchange to buy more foreign exchange. Another informant who worked in the textile industry corroborated Mr. Pok's story and illustrated this. He told me that around the 1960s and 1970s the foreign exchange rate was officially 1 USD for every 3 GHC, and the black market rate was 1 USD for every 10 GHC, so about 3 times the value. In the black market, Chinese

industrialists could buy Cedis which were then exchanged at government banks for US-Dollars at a higher rate. They had the privilege of exchanging for foreign currency because as manufacturing industries, they had permission to use US-Dollars for factory equipment. Mr. Pok reported to me that in many cases, new machinery was brought in just for the purpose of earning foreign exchange but this machinery was never installed and in fact not needed. He also stated as a matter of fact that over-invoicing was the norm of doing business in developing countries: "Who doesn't do it!"

As entrepreneurs manoeuvre foreign exchange, factories were often left operating at a basic minimal level without updates to equipment or further training of workers in newer methods of production. From the perspective of the entrepreneurs, any kind of long-term investment was risky. In fact, as China's influence in Africa begins to increase in the 2000s, it has been noted that Western companies are less willing to take the risk in making initial investment while the Chinese are willing to take that risk (*East African Standard* 2006; Hilsum 2005; *New Vision* 2006; Sautman & Yan 2007:60-61; Swain 2008). As the global economy of production changes leaving behind older and less effective ways of production, workers find their skills only useable in Ghana and increasingly less needed outside of developing countries. For many of these workers, they gradually begin to experience a sense of immobility as they feel they have been "left behind by the rest of the world". Furthermore, immobilising these Chinese workers was an informal government practice that said large industries could not close operations. Often, the reasons were politically motivated. The government was afraid that shutting down factories would lead to worker unrest. Several managing directors told me that sometimes the government would share the financial burden of operating factories that were no longer profitable. The point here is that wealthy enough Chinese entrepreneurs were able to negotiate these kinds of possibly immobilising situations by using Chinese workers to run the factories. Yet, many of these Hong Kong Chinese workers with fewer economic and social resources still viewed their stay in Ghana as temporary.

Deng Xiaoping's reform program *gaige kaifang* set in motion subsequent emigration of mainland Chinese. A small and sporadic trickle of migrants from China began in the 1980s but the trend was not noticeable until the mid-1990s when a large number of Mandarin Chinese speakers came primarily to sell inexpensive Chinese manufactured goods. An increasingly large number of Chinese in Ghana are made up of these Chinese traders. By my rough estimates

in speaking to other Chinese, there are possibly about 2,000 Chinese in Ghana although other estimates have gone as high as 6,000 (Sautman & Yan 2007). It is worth noting that the Chinese embassy also is unable to keep records on the local Chinese population. Their reply to me was that many do not register with the embassy and many are illegally staying in Ghana.

My ethnographic research focuses primarily on the Cantonese-speaking population that came in the 1960s through to the 1980s. The primary reason for not focusing on the newer population is difficulty in locating and accessing individuals who make up this group. Individuals from the older population often remark at the speed of entry, exit, and re-entry of individuals from the newer group. Importantly, many of these individuals are suspicious of other Chinese whom they fear would be competing in the same market and for the same resources. Other possible reason for the heightened sense of suspicion is because some are illegal residents or may business practices that are somewhat underhanded. My informants noted that these were some of the reasons newer Chinese were more reluctant to associate and bond with other Chinese.

Chinese in Ghana: A Community?

Considered as a group, the Chinese in Ghana are fragmented and in flux. Typical indicators that some form of group-ness or community exist such as a community newspaper, organised events that bring large numbers of Chinese together, social institutions that make claims to encompassing all or different categories of Chinese, and Chinatowns, were mostly non-existent. The Chinese embassy in Ghana does organise certain large events such as the Chinese national holiday. Most of my informants do not attend stating that they do not know anyone would attend and that those who do are "businessmen who find it advantageous to make relations with the embassy because China's economy is developing". One time, a few Chinese delegates flew in from China and the embassy appealed for Chinese to welcome the delegates by waving Chinese national flags at the airport. This appeal was taken as a disingenuous request for community by many of my informants, one who said:

> They're asking us to be like monkeys to wave flags. Do you want to be a monkey? They only contact us when they need help but otherwise we're left to our own devices.

The monkey metaphor in Cantonese suggests someone who is comical and absurd, a buffoon. Thus, even though the Chinese embassy creates the occasional event

to produce community, the resistance met by many Chinese for this appeal for sociality points to the disjuncture of "community."

The only two institutional structures that suggest the possibility of community are the two Ghana-Chinese chambers of commerce. One of these is reputed to be the front for an organised ring for Chinese female prostitutes and for Chinese transients who are finding ways to pass through to the West. The other one was founded by a Chinese entrepreneur formerly in the textile business and supposed to unite the different small and medium-sized Chinese industries together. The organisation's own secretary described the organisation as "superfluous, useless, a puppet for the founder to manipulate his own personal networks and for him to claim some fame". Other divisions within this categorical identification, Chinese, also exist such as divisions between mainland Chinese, Hong Kongers, and Chinese from other parts of Asia. Class also is a dividing line between certain networks: restaurant owners do not necessarily have the same network associations as those in the trading business, nor do restaurant owners themselves necessarily form a network.

Two characteristics of an enduring social group is that its basis for mobilisation is institutional or communal and its reproduction depends on individual willingness to operate in certain social roles (Amit & Rapport 2002:23). Among the Chinese in Ghana, there has rarely, if ever, been a social/communal organisation through which such sociality has been imagined. Furthermore, we cannot suppose a community exists because of common ethnicity. Several of my informants would say, "What Chinese society is there in Ghana?" and would quickly resort to using the metaphor, "Chinese in Ghana is like a wok of loose sand" by that meaning that there were people identifiably Chinese but there was neither unity nor desire for it. Mr. Kwok who runs a well-known Chinese restaurant for over a decade in Accra said to me during an interview:

> You know, I have a lot of family problems, but Chinese are not interested in helping out. When you have problems, they disappear. We can only be "ha-ha" friends.

"Ha-ha", the sound of laughter indicates friends who are only superficially interested in you.

Suspicion and gossip characterise their social encounter of fragmentation. When I first arrived, two pieces of advice I received from different informants were, "To *zuoren* (be a person), one needs to learn to have a circumlocutory approach in speech and behaviour. Don't be so straightforward". The implication

was that being direct and straightforward was too revealing about one's own positions and interests and also shows too much interest in someone else's. To be indirect is skillful because you can maintain, on the surface, the status quo of your social relationship while finding out more information, potentially sensitive, about something. The understanding that one achieves is often not directly received but rather through inferences – putting a puzzle together through various sources to achieve clarity. Complementing this advice was the admonition that cautioned how much I revealed and what I revealed. Various informants warned me: "Be careful of what you say to others, even if it's something you believe to be innocuous. Anything you say can come back to haunt you. Chinese are very capable".

An example illustrates some of this guardedness and suspicion. One of my close informants, Helen, runs a Chinese restaurant in Accra and one day introduced me to Chan Hong, a Chinese businessman that could give me contacts within the Ghana Immigration Services who might be able to extend my visa. He was someone I knew of over a decade ago but was never close with. He greeted our re-introduction in this way:

> So you're writing a dissertation eh? Well, I can't give you much information because you're not the only one writing a book. I'm writing my book too and I need the information.

When Helen and I sat back down at our table, she quietly commented on Chan Hong's remark:

> Chinese are very guarded. They aren't that open because they fear how widely information about them spreads. They want to keep to themselves. The best scenario in their eyes is that you mind your own business and I'll mind my own business.

It turns out that despite these high levels of suspicion of each other, a pull for sociality exists just as much as a push away from intimacy.

Ethnography: Grace and Her Changing Networks

Throughout my fieldwork, I had to contend with suspicion not only about my own project but I also observed interactions between Chinese being particularly suspicious of each other, even sometimes among those who declared they were friends of each other. Gossip and suspicion, and economic cooperation and competition are characteristics that illustrate this pendulum swing of "community" among Chinese. My interactions and relationship with Grace illustrate these.

I began learning about Grace at the end of April. I had arrived in the field just about three weeks earlier but it would be another eight months before we would engage in each other's company. Nevertheless, in those eight months I overheard gossip about her and sometimes was directly told information about her such as her personality, who she likes to socialise with, and what they think are her motives for associating with certain people. Most of this came from people whom I later learnt were her friends and close acquaintances. Their gossip about her piqued my interest and I used those situations of revelation to probe deeper about what other things people had to say about her. Gossip was one route I received information about others. With Grace, there did not seem to be anything worthy to gossip about. It did not seem there was anything striking about her background, behaviour, or interpersonal connections that seemed to make her a candidate for gossip. Things I heard about her originally consisted of the rather mundane, ranging from commentary about her parenting skills to her abilities as housewife and cook, to her skills as a mahjong player. Why gossip about her and, especially, to me? Although these acts were mundane and seemed unimportant, they were acts of inscribing Grace within particular personal networks. Although there was nothing special about her background or character that one perhaps would imagine would make her a good candidate for gossip, learning about people indirectly typically through hearsay is common to forming impressions about others. Sometimes information one hears are unguarded opinions perhaps to release interpersonal relationship tensions. Other times, one might test the information one knows about a certain person and attempt to confirm or uncover other pieces of information about them.

Later, it became clearer to me there was something different about Grace that perhaps made her the subject of gossip. Her status as Chinese was questionable. Born and raised in mainland China, she married her husband in her 20s, a Hong Konger who was frequently based in Guangzhou where the Hong Kong company he worked for manufactured clothes. Although never having lived extensively in Hong Kong, Grace liked to identify herself as a Hong Kong Chinese, an act that other Hong Kong Chinese in Ghana saw as her trying to rewrite her own background and claim a higher social status, a putting on of airs which at some level her friends and acquaintances made fun of. All of this, I learnt before I had met her. It seemed then gossiping about Grace and evaluating her personhood was a way to inscribe her social boundaries and also a way to question her own acts of social identification.

I finally met Grace eight months later, when I visited one of her neighbours, a mutual friend. Grace introduced herself and in the process of our conversation said she was also from Hong Kong. Later that day, our mutual friend pulled me aside and said, she likes to tell people she's from Hong Kong just because she holds a Hong Kong temporary resident permit. But she's really from China. She wants to think she's from Hong Kong because she thinks it gives her status.

As my relationship with Grace developed, I began to notice her shifting back and forth between her social identity as a Hong Konger and as a mainland Chinese. During the early period of our acquaintance, her intimate network of friends consisted mostly of families from Hong Kong. During an interview with her, she said that her parents have always encouraged her siblings to go abroad due to distrust of the Communist Party in China. Being the youngest of three, her parents wanted her to stay at home while her brother immigrated to New Zealand and her sister married and immigrated to the U.S. At one point during the interview, she said when she went to Hong Kong for the first time in 1988, her knowledge of the world broadened. She marvelled at Hong Kong's efficiency and glamour compared to Guangzhou. She applied for a Hong Kong Resident Permit after she was married but she has not yet received permanent resident status. She said she wanted the permit because it allowed her to move around the world with fewer hindrances, especially regarding visas. Although she did not have plans to travel to many places, she said she wanted to give her two young children that option. This seems to suggest that for Grace, having a Hong Kong identity enabled her not only mobility but also a kind of social status among her network of friends who also moved between the west, Ghana, and Asia.

Several months later, her husband who was working for a textile company was transferred to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to help start up a new factory. At that time, it was uncertain if his relocation was permanent but because the transfer happened in the middle of the school year when her children were in school, the company allowed Grace and the two children to remain in Ghana while her husband moved to DRC. When I visited her a month later after her husband had left, she told me she no longer wanted to sit at home and take care of the children like her friends who were housewives. "I feel bored and useless", she said. She decided she wanted to do more than just be a housewife and began to pay more interest to how Chinese businesses ran.

It was also right at this time when a friend and mahjong partner of hers, Heather, accused Grace of spreading rumours about her making advances towards

married men. This not only affected the relationship between Heather and Grace but also between Grace and her other Hong Kong Chinese friends. Although the analysis of the circulation of that gossip is too lengthy for this article, it suffices to say that Grace decided her "Chinese circle of friends was too complex". She called me up one day and grieved, "How can just one rumour destroy our friendship of over ten years?" She steadily began pulling away from personal networks that Heather belonged to and began associating with mainland Chinese businesspeople. In the larger social scheme, Hong Kong Chinese and mainland Chinese often do not socialise in part due to language barriers and in part due to, as my informants told me, cultural barriers. However, suspicion between the two groups is also high. With Grace's desire to venture beyond her network of Hong Kong Chinese housewives, she began developing friendship with three mainland Chinese businesswomen: one who runs a tyre business with her husband, another who runs a restaurant and is married to a Ghanaian with prominent political connections, and another who also runs a restaurant business.

Ethnography: Status and Economic Cooperation and Competition

The "doing" and "undoing" of community not only can be seen through gossip and acts of suspicion, but also in the role status plays in networks and in the tension between economic cooperation and competition.

For the first two months I was in Accra, Helen was my host. I had given her a cursory introduction to my research project and she insisted on guiding me through some of her networks in the Chinese community. Perhaps as an old family friend, she had decided it was her duty as an elder to give advice and "show the way". She had hoped her introductions to her old-time contacts would expedite my research project and direct me to the appropriate resources. To her eyes, the appropriate people for my research were those who had lived in Ghana for a long duration, had an understanding of the history of Chinese in Ghana, and had broad and successful economic connections. Importantly, they were often viewed by many Chinese as being successful in business, resourceful, and having wide networks that enabled them to branch out to different networks to actualise a more luxurious livelihood. These were primarily businessmen who had various economic connections within the Chinese networks, especially to people who had economic resources and networking abilities, and who had important bridges to the larger Ghanaian communities.

As a restaurateur, Helen had many connections to powerful businessmen but the primacy of her relationship with them has faltered over the years, due to the decreasing role her restaurant plays within Chinese networks. Importantly, her restaurant no longer competes as strongly against many other Chinese restaurants. Perhaps in part because of this, her efficacy in being able to manipulate her networks to aid my research was limited. Sometimes when her connection to other Chinese did not result in my access to a particular network, I had to turn to other Chinese who had other inroads to those same networks.

How did Helen and her husband George build their status? Today, they own and operate the second oldest Chinese restaurant in Ghana. Both had been pivotal figures in Chinese networks. Their restaurant opened in May 1985 during one of the most difficult periods in Ghana's economic and national development. The economy of that time was described as a "crisis of poverty" in which the Ghanaian state had become weak to almost the point of non-existence (Chazan 1983). Partly due to state mismanagement and waste, economic resources had steadily diminished. The political foci of the 1980s were stark in comparison to the earlier decades. When Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, it had 481 million USD in foreign reserves or about ten times more foreign reserves than foreign debt. Nkrumah's desire to build an industrial base for the country resulted in extraordinary spending and within ten years, Ghana had accumulated a foreign debt of 1 billion USD (Salm & Falola 2002:24; Vallely 2007). The coincidental falling of world market prices of cocoa also reduced Ghana's external flow. Subsequent administrations were unable to achieve political legitimacy resulting in numerous overthrows and coups. There was a movement from focusing on development to attaining basic survival. Political scientist, Naomi Chazan wrote:

> [T]he substance of political economy considerations moved from industrial-ization to rural development, from growth to averting total collapse, from production of surplus to maintaining minimum food supplies. (Chazan 1983:2)

The downward spiralling of the economy to stagnation highlighted the prevalence of social inequalities which became a major point of focus in political activities, giving rise to conflicts. Virtually all segments of the Ghanaian population were politicised, including Chinese expatriates, who were often lumped in with professional groups and demonised as exploitative of workers and the economy.

Many Chinese had serious doubts about being able to sustain themselves. The same factories that had brought them to Ghana a decade or two ago had difficulty supporting a large staff of Chinese workers in the volatile political and economic situation. Some Chinese feared that measures like Alien Compliance Order of 1969 that led to the deportation of Lebanese, Asians, and Nigerians in the retail sector during Busia's administration from 1969 to 1972 would return. Popular opinion in opposition to foreigners at that time came primarily from Ghanaian businessmen and traders who felt foreigners had an unfair economic advantage (Peil 1974). Although most of the opposition centred around the presence of foreign traders in rural areas and other foreigners of African descent, some unrest was directed towards the Asian and European foreign staff of larger factories co-owned by Asian and European nationals (ibid.). Fearing that history would repeat itself and fear of economic instability, many Chinese employees, such as George, did not see their contracts renewed. Many of those unemployed, and those facing imminent unemployment left Ghana. Some returned to Hong Kong and others found ways to live in the United States of America and Canada.

Some, like George, felt returning to Hong Kong or moving forward to the Western World were not options and that they had to stay put and find a way to make do. Some found niches in the market and opened up new manufacturing businesses. Others made repeated attempts in the Chinese restaurant business which was a difficult business to compete in: Chinese groceries were not available on the market and restaurateurs had to ship basic ingredients such as soy sauce and sesame oil from Hong Kong. Also, the unstable economy made people less inclined to spend on dining out.

Helen and her husband George decided to stay in Ghana. Prior to his unemployment, George was the sole breadwinner but once they made decision to stay, Helen played a pivotal role in the start-up and management of the restaurant. Her children by then were in elementary school and for their sake, Helen told me, they decided to stay in Ghana. Hong Kong was no longer an option because her children could not read or write Chinese. "They would not be able to catch up", she said, "and we cannot afford to send them to international schools!"

Despite the odds against the success of their business, and especially faced with the competition of an already existing Chinese restaurant, Helen and George were able to succeed and see their restaurant thrive. They were able to provide a separate Chinese menu for their Chinese clientele thus attracting an increasing number of Chinese social events (birthday parties, dinner parties) to

their restaurant. They imported their own Chinese groceries, and offered to bring additional goods for the Chinese when they had spaces in their containers. All of these services resulted in a rise in their status among other Chinese and hence their influence within those networks.

In recent years, they have put less energy into keeping the restaurant competitive with newer restaurants and their status among their personal networks began to fall. They started the immigration process to Canada over a decade ago and several years ago received permanent residency status in Canada. Several times a year, they would alternately travel to Canada to fulfill their residency requirements to receive citizenship. Putting less focus on the restaurant meant they were catering less to their social networks and over time, many of their patrons shifted over to other restaurants where their needs could be met.

Another ethnographic example illustrates how status "does" and "undoes" community. It was Wuying's 80th birthday and his wife, Wumo invited Helen and me for dinner at their house in Tema, a town about 30-minutes drive from Accra where we stayed. Helen was hosting my stay in Ghana until she left for Canada two months after I arrived. Some of the dinner participants later told me that Wuying's 80th birthday celebration was noticeably subdued compared to those of several years ago. In the past, he celebrated his birthdays at Helen's restaurant, inviting at least 30 people and more to her restaurant, where everyone paid their respects to this once wealthy tycoon. A few years ago, he lost most of his money to a bad business partnership and was in litigation with his former business partner. Today, there were only eleven invited guests attending. Meichin, one of my friends also at the dinner party, pulled me aside when she saw me, shook her head and said to me, "Look at Wuying. Who pays attention to him now? When he had money everyone was being obsequious towards him".

During dinner, one of Helen's friends teased her about the food in her restaurant and said she needed to taste other people's food to improve her restaurant's offerings.

"Eh Helen, why don't you try some of this? You run a restaurant you must taste a bit of everything!" said Mr. Cheung.

"Yes, I run a restaurant but it doesn't mean I have to like to eat everything!" said Helen.

"Eh! How can you say that as a professional restaurateur? You need to taste everything to learn new recipes. Tasting new dishes is part of improvement", said Mr. Cheung.

Mr. Cheung's remark was indirectly a scathing critique of Helen's restaurant. For the past several years, Helen and her husband had neglected their restaurant and so its quality has diminished. Compared to other Chinese restaurants, it was noticeable that it had fewer Chinese patrons and few of them held personal celebrations at her restaurant, a strong indication that her restaurant and her family no longer serve as an important nexus for Chinese sociality in Accra and Tema.

Upon hearing Mr. Cheung's caustic remark, Helen picked up her plate and gestured a throw but never let the plate loose. She was furious.

"Eh! Don't throw that! It's an antique! It's 30 years old!" Mr. Cheung said. "I know! I have a set too!" Helen said. She immediately went into a chuckle, I assume to regain composure and it helped to return the mood of the party to something more light-hearted.

"Many people have those plates, actually," said Wumo.

"Why?" someone asked.

Wumo paused, sighed, and then said, "Ay, it's complicated". She then directed her speech to Helen and said, "We also tried to start a restaurant, remember? All of us (referring to Chinese in general) tried to start in this business, but only you were successful". Helen chuckled. Perhaps she was savouring the moment of being recognised for the successful business she had built rather than the reduction of status her restaurant now faced.

In a matter of a few seconds, Wumo had deflected from answering why so many Chinese had her types of plates to saving Helen from Mr. Cheung's scathing remarks. She never answered the question about the history of her plates and further probing by some others at the table was met with the same emphasis: she sighed and a remarked that the story was complicated.

On the return ride back to Accra with the restaurant driver driving the VW Vanagon and Helen and me sitting in the back, I asked her thoughts about those plates. She told me that a couple of decades ago, several Chinese had tried to open Chinese restaurants and most failed. Wumo was one of them and those plates came from the failed business. I asked why she chose to work in the restaurant business and she said the business was not as competitive back then so they were willing to try. I wondered out loud why Wumo was guarded about the histories of the plate. Helen snapped at me, "Look at her status now and you'll understand?" She said no more. Over time, I understood. To probe too deeply about Wumo's past was to conjure up memories about their more glorious past

adding salt to the wound: a reminder for Wumo that she and her husband were once part of a central nexus of Chinese social relationships but now they are at the peripheral, forgotten and ignored by most people.

I would like to return to Grace in the period when she changed her personal networks and started associating with mainland Chinese entrepreneurs to look at an example of economic cooperation and economic competition at work in "doing" and "undoing" communities. In the shifting of her networks, Grace began paying attention to Chinese who ran businesses and she started befriending Selina, a mainland Chinese restaurateur. This was during off-season for fishing and restaurants were finding it difficult to buy fish. Ghana's fishing season is dictated by a cool water upwelling which usually occurs from July to October and lasts for about 18 weeks. As an inexperienced restaurateur, Selina was having difficulty procuring a steady supply of fish and often had to resort to fish unsuitable for Chinese cooking, or she simply did not offer the dishes. Grace started spending more time at the restaurant that I had close networks with and tried, through coaxing my relations with the owner, to get information about how he was getting a steady supply of fish. It was not surprising when he replied to her that this was information he could not divulge to her. One day, when George's fishmonger came to drop off his supply, he made his fishmonger promise that he would only supply fish to his restaurant and nowhere else. George expressed to me:

> It's because of situations like this that I like to stick to my own business and not mingle with other Chinese. They use too many deceitful tactics to get information. We all have our secrets.

A surprising turn soon took place. One day Grace came with a box of fresh squid and presented it as a gift for George. She told him that at Selina's restaurant, fried spicy calamari was a hot sell among Ghanaians and he should offer that at his restaurant. This was something George had considered before but he did not offer it because neither he nor his wife knew how to process the squid effectively without bursting the ink bladder and making a mess. Grace was able to find out the processing technique from Selina and demonstrated it to George. Over the next couple of months, she continued to maintain a steady presence at the restaurant developing a relationship with George, visiting daily and telling him about other Chinese restaurants she knew well. On various occasions, Grace offered him ideas of how to improve his restaurant business (e.g., more contemporary table settings, how to cook more creative dishes) and

offered him samples of good other restaurants had procured. It also just so happened that during the later part of this period, George developed ulcers in his mouth that would not heal. Thinking that it was cancer, he wanted to leave for Canada, where he was a new citizen, for a check up. I offered to manage his restaurant for as long as he needed and he took me up on the offer. When Grace also offered to help, he surprisingly obliged. Over the months of developing friendship with George, he let down his guard and finally developed enough trust to let Grace help manage his restaurant.

At first it was surprising to me that George had given enough trust to Grace to co-manage the restaurant. He had a strong distrust of other Chinese and had a tendency to keep his distance from them. Expressing to me at numerous times that he was aware that the Chinese restaurant business was increasingly difficult to survive in due to the growth of many new Chinese restaurants, he was caught in a bind between his distrust of other Chinese and curiosity to know what other Chinese restaurant businesses were doing. His business was not performing as well as many other Chinese restaurants, and unlike other business owners I knew in the field, George lacked the social expertise in maintaining relationships with other restaurant owners or friends of restaurant owners. In his occasional frustrations with Chinese customers, he would vent to me that he found Chinese customers too demanding, often wanting Chinese restaurants to cook dishes off the menu but would also often complain about the quality of his food relative to other Chinese restaurants. It was these same customers that if he had a good relationship with he could cajole into getting information about other restaurants. In fact, Grace often was a conduit for two restaurants owners who were able to get news of other restaurants from her. The watershed for George was when he developed health problems and he had to leave Ghana to seek more advanced medical help. At that point, it was probably less favourable for him to maintain distance with Grace and so choose to allow her to help manage the restaurant. Although George had turned to me for assistance, I had never managed a restaurant before and it possibly eased his mind that there would be two people to run the restaurant. For George even though he had continued to push away from social intimacy ("undoing" of community) he also had a breaking point when he had to kindle social relations in order to manage his own affairs. These personal acts of pushing away from belonging to a community and sometimes re-create social intimacy is characteristic of the "doing" and "undoing" of community among Chinese in Ghana.

Conclusion

With the growing attention towards China's activities in Africa, there has been some conflation about the activities of Chinese people in Africa and the policies and desires of Beijing in Africa. Some Chinese networks in Africa have closer relations to Beijing while others operate on a different set of agendas. Closer attention to Chinese people's activities in Africa is needed.

In my ethnographic study of the Chinese in Ghana, there is continual wariness of being associated as a community but at the same time a pull for community. Chinese in Ghana sometimes have an asymptotic approach to community formation but also often a clear intentional avoidance of one. Part of this pulling towards and pushing away from a sense of community is developed through the high level of suspicion and gossip that is part of the nature of their networking strategies. In another vein, being Chinese in Ghana does not mean one has to be part of a solid fixed Chinese community or a Ghanaian community, a reality of disjuncture that works with their desires to eventually leave Ghana and move to the West or return to Asia. Community can be understood as ways of belonging and as Delanty writes "the persistence of community consists in its ability to communicate ways of belonging, especially in the context of an increasingly insecure world" (Delanty 2003:187).

My study of Chinese in Ghana begins to demonstrate that unlike earlier migrations of Chinese to North America and Southeast Asia, community for Chinese in Ghana is fluid, open and organised more like networks and they lack a kind of visibility and structure more common in earlier migrations of Chinese to other parts of the world. We see Chinese in Ghana actively working with and working against this categorical identification as Chinese. Through their personal networks, Chinese operate in ways that are not about a unified or abstract imagined community. Personal commonalities sometimes do and sometime do not bring Chinese together as a group. To simply analyse and understand Chinese in Africa under the rubric of "ethnic community" is an a priori assumption that does not interrogate the nature of this performance of community. Especially since the desires of many of these Chinese is to leave Ghana after living in this state of extended transition, it is efficacious to understand their personal networks and how they navigate through and with them. Unlike Benedict Anderson who makes a claim for "imagined community" in which individuals are able to imagine themselves as part of a larger community

through print media or other emotionally charged category, personal networks take direct face-to-face contact to maintain and requires reciprocity, opportunity, and effort. For Chinese in Ghana, there is no need to have a sense of an "imagined community" when they desire to eventually leave Ghana behind.

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