Dual Interaction of Interest and Norm in Transcultural Communication: A Case Study of KH Agricultural Company's Everyday Operations in Nkoranza, Ghana

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For the past two decades, more and more Chinese companies have been investing in Africa and operating in local communities, and it is inevitable for them to interact with internal and external entities on different levels in their daily operations, which contain both business activities and everyday life. Taking a Chinese agricultural company that promotes caster-oil plant in Ghana as an example, this paper depicts and explains its interaction with Ghanaian employees, community residents and local authority from both the "interest" and "norm" interaction. However, insufficient trust, emotional incoordination and unequal power relationship in everyday life left the company in an extremely unstable state. Under the impact of some accidental events, contradiction escalated step by step, ultimately causing the company to withdraw itself from Ghana. This also provides a warning for other Chinese enterprises operating overseas, especially those deeply involved in local communities, because they need to deal with the "interest-norm" interaction in their business activities and achieve mutual understanding in everyday life at the same time.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, everyday life, "interest-norm" dual interaction, African community

INTRODUCTION

One morning in February 2020, we got up at 6:30 as usual. At 7 o'clock, we gathered in the yard, and Charles proposed we go to the small town of Dsuatre for the day, which is about 200 kilometers from the company's location and it takes two and a half hours to drive there.

Stone thought about it and agreed to the proposal. The small village was a new planting point set up by the company last year, with more farmers, more planting area (it is said that has more than 100 acres). This is a Chinese agricultural enterprise promoting castor in Ghana, being located in the central town of Nkoranza, mainly using the "company + farmer" model to promote castor planting in villages around the town. The company now has four employees, including the Chinese manager Stone, driver the "local knowledgeable" Owusu, translator Charles, laborer Sumaila. This is the fifth year of the company in Ghana, and every February is the harvesting season of the year, and at this stage, the main job for us is driving to villages which has had castor planted last year, threshing castor seeds collected by farmers, weighing and

paying money to farmers according to the price signed in contract, transporting castor seeds back to the headquarter, and eventually sending castor seeds back to China with container.

We reached Dsuatre by 10 AM. While the team waited at the village square, Charles disappeared with the pickup after claiming to fetch breakfast. Panicked, Stone and other staff returned by taxi to their Nkoranza compound, finding the Tata car also missing. Charles taunted Stone by phone: *I'm going to Accra. You can't find me.* Stone threatened retaliation but ultimately reported the theft to the police, thus beginning a futile two-week-long bureaucratic battle. Two weeks after the incident, Stone adopted another strategy, *"run if you can't win"*, leaving the dispute to two locals (Owusu and Chief assistant Simon), hastily ended the acquisition of castor, and the company left Ghana completely.

Why did Charles conflict with Stone, which made him choose a seemingly extreme way - to steal - to protect his own interest? Was it really like what he claimed on the phone, and he had to use this extreme approach because the company wanted to steal his money? After the conflict emerged, what strategies and means had the two sides adopted to safeguard and fight for the interests of their own? What was the role of other characters in the event that led to the final outcome? What were the subsequent economic-social consequences of the event?

To understand why this conflict occurred and what followed up, it is necessary to go back to the cross-cultural context and observe how Chinese companies interact with different local actors, both internally and externally. Generally speaking, the activity areas of multinational enterprises in local communities can be divided into two categories: business activities and daily life. Previous studies on multinational enterprises have revealed that most of them pay attention to the business activities related to the market or labor, while ignoring the daily interaction process with the local society (Park & Hunyh 2010). For businesses rooted in local communities, especially small private ones such as KH Agriculture, it involves both local employees within the company and continuous interaction with local community residents, traditional authorities, police, and other administrative agencies. For them, there is no clear distinction between business activities and daily life, the two sides blending together and influencing each other. On the other hand, a balanced state of daily life can affect the business activities, and when the relationship in daily life is relatively stable, the business activities can also be relatively stable; however, once the balance in daily life is broken, the business activities might be affected, and in extreme cases directly lead to a complete failure of business activities. Therefore, daily life provides a direction: a way of observation and analysis to explore the tension between scale, time, the visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, structure and local interactions (Yates 2022).

From this point of view, we start from the perspective of the daily life of the enterprise, explore its interaction process with different local actors, and analyze its impact on both sides. From the story above, we can see that the interaction between the two sides in daily life was actually dual interaction, that is, around the "interest" dimension and the "norm" dimension at the same time (Liu, Yan and Liu 2022). For example, in the car theft incident, Charles thought that he might suffer a loss of interests, so he took an extreme strategy, which was actually against the "norm" held by both sides, but also intensified the potential problems. Therefore, an operation can only be maintained relatively stable when the equilibrium state is reached in both dimensions.

However, due to an insufficient trust, emotional incoordination and unequal power relations, the balance between both sides is always in an unstable state in their "interest-norm" dual interaction. Under the impact of an incident, the incomprehension from both sides continues to unfold along and eventually breaks out, with new and hidden interactive actors joining constantly, thus affecting the process and direction of the event so much that the balance is finally completely broken. From the subsequent interaction process of the event, we can also see that the attitudes and views of Chinese and local people on the event itself and other matters extending beyond the event, all reflecting a deeper and profound relationship between Chinese and Africans. At the same time, this case provides a warning for Chinese enterprises going overseas, that a mutual understanding and adaptation of local culture needs to be considered in both business activities and daily life.

DUAL INTERACTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In the study of social life, daily aspect has become a special interest, that is, observing ordinary things and seemingly trivial routines and activities in daily life, as well as giving attention to different groups "ordinary people", who are regarded as creative actors rather than passive consumers or ruling objects (Löfgren 2015). The definition of "daily life" has different connotations in different social sciences but, in general, the study of daily life is often developed as an alternative to or criticism of the mainstream research tradition. Therefore, it is the study of ordinary people's life and thought, which can also be defined as routine, habit and phenomenon, that is neglected in the previous research, because the "daily" quality they possess is different from colorful ceremony, celebration and other activities with a high visibility or prestige, which is thus in a state of invisible. Like other similar concepts, the study of daily life is used not only as a research perspective or analytical tool, but also as a research ideology. From this perspective, research of daily life seems to define a kind of research direction and research style, usually focusing on the use of a qualitative and ethnographic method to explore the secret world in daily life: that is, via seemingly ordinary phenomena, to produce new and sometimes even surprising analysis for some important social problems.

From Rationality to Everyday Life

At the turn of the 20th century, positivism dominated idealized science as an objective paradigm, alienating it from humanistic concerns and triggering a crisis of meaning (Husserl 2005). Husserl argued that empirical science's dominance eroded humanity's meaning and value systems, necessitating a return to the *living world* to restore rationality. This critique spurred a philosophical shift toward everyday life analysis, yielding diverse critical theories (Yi 1994). Heidegger expanded Husserl's ideas, critiquing Western metaphysics' failure to address existence authentically. He posited that human meaning emerges through *being-in-the-world*, revealing modern life's alienation. Habermas later integrated this into his Theory of Communicative Action, framing the *life-world* as a foundation for social interaction, distinct from systemic structures (Ai 1995).

Marxist scholars like Lefebvre advanced a parallel critique. Building on Marx's alienation theory, he identified everyday life as a modern phenomenon shaped by capitalism's spatial organization. For Lefebvre, the survival of capitalism hinged on reproducing social relations through spatial control, embedding alienation into daily routines (Zheng 2011). While his later work emphasized spatial ontology, everyday life remained for Lefebvre central as both a micro-level reality and a site of dialectical tension between repetition and creativity (Liu 2003). Hence, sociology underwent its own "life-world" turn through Schutz, who fused Husserlian phenomenology with social theory. He defined the everyday as a subjective reality, a stance Berger and Luckmann extended by declaring daily practices the core of social reality (Berger & Luckmann 2019). Ethnomethodology, pioneered by Garfinkel (2002), further explored how actors construct social order through mundane interactions.

Anthropology, meanwhile, had long been engaged with everyday life implicitly through ethnography. Early works like Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer revealed culturally specific temporal experiences tied to bodily rhythms, contrasting with Western linear time. However, anthropology initially avoided explicit "everyday life" terminology, as the concept was seen as a Western construct irrelevant to non-Western societies lacking its dichotomous structure (Löfgren 2015). By the 1960s, everyday life became a focal point, particularly in European contexts, expanding to include production, consumption, and rituals. Anthropologists traditionally prioritized non-everyday events (e.g., ceremonies) for cultural analysis, but this shifted toward documenting routine practices (Jin 2001). For instance, the car theft incident mentioned earlier exemplifies how mundane acts reveal a broader social dynamics.

In the 2000s, interdisciplinary interest resurged, driven by a need to theorize tacit, embodied routines. Scholars like Ehn and Löfgren (2010) examined how habits are internalized as "tacit knowledge" and disrupted. Key questions emerged: How are routines learned? When do they surface consciously? Such inquiries have bridged anthropology and sociology, emphasizing material interactions and unconscious behaviors.

Everyday Interactions of Chinese in Africa

Early scholarship on Chinese activities in Africa predominantly focused on macro-level economic and political analyses within international relations frameworks (Large 2008). This approach homogenized China and Africa, overlooking critical nuances: (1) variations in Chinese actors across historical periods, industries, and origins, compounded by Africa's own diversity; (2) the agency of individuals/groups in shaping outcomes; and (3) reinforcement of Western stereotypes, perpetuating analytical biases (Park & Huynh 2010; Monson & Rupp 2013).

The scarcity of ethnographic studies exacerbated these issues, fostering a reliance on speculative macro-analyses and misinformation (Monson & Rupp 2013). Recent decades, however, have seen growing micro-level research, particularly in anthropology and sociology, addressing these gaps through three key lenses.

Socio-Historical Analyses

Scholars like Lee (2009) compare Chinese labor practices in Zambia and Tanzania, attributing the former's resistance to temporary labor contracts to its history of unionism, contrasting with Tanzania's entrenched casual labor norms (Lee 2009). Monson and Rupp (2013) documents how retired TAZARA railway workers in both countries reclaim agency by memorializing their contributions to China-Africa cooperation, countering those narratives of erasure (Monson & Rupp 2013). Park and Huynh (2010) highlights how South Africa's long-standing Chinese diaspora fosters familiarity, whereas Lesotho's newer migrants face marginalization due to weaker community ties.

Everyday Interactions and Power Dynamics

Studies of Chinese entrepreneurs often emphasize cultural mismatches. Giese (2013) reveals conflicts in Ghana stemming from divergent interpretations of roles (e.g., "boss" vs. "middleman") and gift-exchange practices. Conversely, Arsène (2014) shows Ugandan shopkeepers adapting themselves to local norms, fostering employer-employee rapport. Men (2014) identifies Confucian values like "face" shaping HR practices in Tanzania. Early assumptions of unilateral Chinese dominance (Lemos & Ribeiro 2007; Giese & Thiel 2012) are increasingly challenged. Driessen (2019), through Ethiopian case studies, frames power relations as dialectical processes rather than static hierarchies. Wu (2021) introduces "emotional labor" as pivotal in cross-cultural interactions, emphasizing its role in sustaining social bonds (Wu, 2021).

Enterprise-Level Operational Logic

Lee (2017) examines Zambian copper mines, critiquing Chinese firms via Marxist lenses: their accumulation strategies (profit-driven resource extraction), organizational hierarchies (centralized decision-making), and "spiritual temperament" (pragmatic adaptability) reflect broader traits of global Chinese capital. Yan et al. (2020) analyze Chinese enterprises' "developmentalist" ethos, shaped by state-entrepreneur synergies during China's economic rise, which informs their adaptive behaviors abroad. Micro-ethnographic approaches have enriched understanding of China-Africa engagements, yet interdisciplinary rigor and multi-scalar analyses remain critical to transcending reductionist binaries and advancing nuanced theories.

Interest-Norm of Chinese Enterprises in Africa

Early economic research adopted a "marginal approach", framing agents as "rational economic men" optimizing utility within budget constraints (Marshall 2019). This model excluded social structures, reducing decisions to utility maximization within predefined sets (Granovetter 2019).

Early studies in anthropology refute the assumption in economics. Malinowski (1921) challenged this universality through Trobriand gift exchanges, demonstrating how social and spiritual ties transcend the transactional logic. Mauss expanded this, arguing that human systems balance individualism and collectivism, and rejecting utopian free markets or pure altruism (Chris & Keith 2022).

In sociology, one of the main lines of social interaction is the symbolic interaction theory based on the research of George Herbert Mead. Mead (2005) theorized self-development through social interaction, dividing it into imitation, play, and game stages. Individuals internalize roles, forming a "generalized other"

that harmonizes personal and societal expectations. His work inspired derivative theories: Moreno and Linton's role theory, Hyman's reference group theory and Goffman's dramaturgy (Le & Wang 2011).

Researchers from economic perspective are certainly aware of a neglect of social factors in previous studies. Becker extended utility functions to include discrimination and social interactions, while Akerlof integrated psychological/sociological variables (e.g., norms, reciprocity) into economic models. However, these efforts faced criticism for oversimplifying social dynamics into typified roles and neglecting historical and structural contexts (Swedeberg 2003; Granovetter 2019).

On the basis of previous studies (Liu 2017; Yan & Meng 2018; Yan, Zhang & Liu 2019), Liu et al. proposed that it is necessary to investigate the formation and change of their interest pattern and normative pattern in the dual interaction of people's interest and norm (Liu, Yan & Liu 2022). That is, it concerns both an interest interaction between people and normative interaction between people who carrying different norms. This study attempts to borrow the basic assumption of human action in this framework. That is, the interactive participants are people who both possess interests and norms. It is also assumed that there may be differences in norms they each carry in their interaction. We also need to make a clear definition of *interest* and *norm* first. In this framework, *interest* refers to *the benefit of material resources to people*, which is distinguished from the concept of utility in contemporary economics. At the same time, unlike previous studies, where *norm* is usually regarded as an indirect variable that affects utility, "norm" here has a direct effect on utility, which is rooted in the state of social norms internalized in people's mental preference, and from a consideration of how norms influence resource access.

PROMOTE CASTOR IN NKORANZA, GHANA

How a Chinese Company Went to Ghana

KH Agriculture, a Chinese agribusiness, entered Ghana in 2015 to establish a castor bean production base amid declining Indian exports due to crop competition and Sino-Indian trade tensions. Led by investor Wu, a veteran dubbed China's *Castor Oil King,* the company aimed to secure industrial supply chains for China's aviation sector. Ghana's stable economy and safe environment attracted Wu, who partnered with local chiefs to launch KH under a "company + farmer" contract model, which provided farmers with seeds, tools, and training while circumventing land tenure disputes common in sub-Saharan Africa (Tang et al. 2017).

KH's hybrid management combined Chinese technical expertise with local labor. Chinese managers oversaw operations, agronomy, and training, while Ghanaian staff included translators (often China-educated) facilitating communication and laborers assisting fieldwork. Translators doubled as logistical coordinators, fostering close ties with Chinese colleagues through shared living arrangements.

Initial trials near Accra faltered due to coastal climate instability. A pivotal meeting with Nkoranza's chief ("Nana") redirected KH inland in 2017. Nana endorsed castor as a sustainable livelihood, offering local support. Pilot plots with 36 farmers yielded unexpectedly high harvests, prompting a rapid expansion to 3,000 acres in 2018. However, the 2018 scale-up failed catastrophically: poor managerial oversight and erratic weather led to crop losses, eroding farmer trust, which triggered internal strife, including staff turnover. In 2019, Stone, the sole remaining Chinese manager, took charge to salvage KH's reputation. Despite efforts to rebuild community relations, cultural friction and operational hurdles persisted, compounded by Stone's isolation in Nkoranza.

Everyday Life in Nkoranza

From a review of simple historical development processes of KH Company, we can find out that, on the one hand, many twists and turns occurred in the process of enterprise operation and management, and the contradiction between investor and actual responsible person led to some irreparable negative consequences, which is certainly one of the reasons for the final failure of the company. On the other hand, because of the particularity of agricultural companies, Chinese and local people lived under the same roof, and their business activities and everyday life were inevitably mixed together. And because the everyday life was stranded in a small city, it was inevitably necessary for them to interact with local community,

government agencies and local authorities. It is therefore necessary for us to understand the background and basic picture of Ghana and Nkoranza.

Nkoranza lies in Ghana's Bono-Ahafo Region, bordering Kintampo South, Techiman, Ejura-Sekyedumase and Offinso North. Its transitional climate between southern tropical forests and northern savannahs features two rainy seasons (April–June and September–November), an annual rainfall of ~1300mm and average temperatures of 21.2–30.9°C—ideal for castor cultivation (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). However, deforestation since the 1980s, driven by logging, agriculture, and wildfires, has degraded ecosystems, altering rainfall patterns and destabilizing KH's operations.

Post-1990s decentralization split Nkoranza into the North (capital: Busunya) and South (capital: Nkoranza) districts. Despite this, Nkoranza remains a commercial hub, hosting weekly markets attracting regional farmers. Nearby Techiman (100km west) handles banking and tax needs. Agriculture employs 65.7% of locals, though services now dominate Ghana's GDP (Diao et al. 2019). The informal sector—55% of sub-Saharan Africa's economy (Ncube & Jones 2014)—thrives in towns like Nkoranza, where residents like KH driver Owusu balance farming with side jobs. Street-level enterprises (tailors, braid shops, stalls) epitomize this hybrid livelihood model.

Ghana's post-1992 market reforms and raw material exports (cocoa, timber, minerals) fueled three decades of growth, lifting half its population from poverty by 2015 (Diao et al. 2019). Offshore oil discoveries in 2011 further boosted GDP, though structural reliance on commodities persists. Industrialization remains concentrated in Accra and Kumasi, leaving inland towns like Nkoranza dependent on agriculture and informal services.

The 2020 elections highlighted a public ambivalence: while Nkoranza traditionally supports the ruling NPP, skepticism about political elites' self-interest dampened voter enthusiasm. Conversely, religious engagement is fervent. Christianity—splitting into Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist sects—dominates, with weekend services drawing crowds. Minority Muslim and traditional beliefs coexist, occasionally sparking regional tensions. Locals often express surprise at Chinese colleagues' secularism.

Chinese in the Eyes of Ghanaian

Despite historical ties dating to 1950s anti-colonial solidarity, rural Ghanaians in Nkoranza often perceive Chinese through a binary racial lens—labeling them "white" and associating them with wealth and obligation to provide aid. This reflects a legacy of colonial-era hierarchies where power equates financial responsibility.

Local understandings of China derive from contrasting media portrayals. Positive coverage highlights infrastructure projects (roads, power plants) fostering economic growth and job creation (Bempong Nyantakyi et al. 2022). Conversely, there are reports condemning illegal gold mining by Chinese prospectors from Guangxi province, whose environmentally destructive methods since 2006 have fueled resentment (Liu 2014). Both narratives reinforce a perception of Chinese affluence, positioning China as a "developed" nation in African eyes (Li & Zhang 2022). This wealth stereotype permeates daily interactions. A 2020 incident exemplifies this: Driver Owusu insisted on carrying shopping baskets for Chinese staff, framing it as his "duty" to serve "bosses". Such encounters reveal how chiefs, elites, and locals alike engage Chinese through strategies blending deference and opportunism.

Chinese entrepreneurs, shaped by China's economic rise, often view Africa as a "40-years-ago China"—underdeveloped yet ripe with opportunity. They adopt a "savior" mentality, blending Western linear developmentalism with egalitarian pragmatism. Unlike colonial condescension, they prioritize mutual profit in sectors overlooked by Westerners. Investor Wu and manager Stone embody this ethos, yet face cognitive dissonance: despite intentions to "lift Ghanaians out of poverty", they encounter persistent resistance.

Story of Stone

Stone, the Chinese manager of KH Agriculture in Nkoranza, Ghana, embodies overlapping identities: corporate leader, economic migrant, cultural outsider, and family provider. His journey from agricultural technician in China to sole KH representative in Ghana reveals tensions between personal interests and

organizational norms. Stone joined KH in 2018 after connecting with investor Wu via a WeChat agricultural group. Initially recruited for safflower breeding in India, he was redirected to Ghana due to project cancellations. Tasked with assisting castor expert Professor Xu, Stone's role shifted when poor 2018 harvests led to Xu and colleague Feiyun's departure, leaving him as KH's sole Chinese representative by 2019.

As a lone Chinese in Nkoranza, Stone faced linguistic and cultural barriers. His limited English ("*I only know a few simple greetings*") hindered communication, breeding mistrust: "*I don't know what [locals] are talking about… whether they have small actions behind my back.*" Repeated failed attempts to learn English deepened his isolation, culminating in resignation. Stone's initial focus was financial survival. With a mounting mortgage and family costs after marrying a colleague met during domestic seed promotions, he sought a higher income abroad. At KH, he prioritized economic interests—salary and career advancement—over cultural adaptation. Promotion to manager expanded Stone's responsibilities: daily operations, farmer negotiations, and liaising with law enforcement. This transition forced him to balance Wu's expectations with on-ground realities. Remote decision-making clashed with local unpredictability. Such frustrations reinforced his biases, leading to a "self-enclave" lifestyle minimizing local contact—a coping mechanism that paradoxically heightened anxiety and limited KH's community integration.

Through the above review, we can make a preliminary portrait of the individual "interest-norm" dual demand of Stone. He entered KH as an ordinary employee but, after acting as a manager, he has experienced marked changes. Stone's dual role as Wu's agent and field decision-maker created tension: at the interest side, he continued to focus on economic returns (salary, project success) to support his family. On the other hand, he is obligated to uphold KH's operational standards and navigate through local norms (e.g., farmer relations, bureaucratic protocols). This duality clashed with divergent stakeholder expectations. Farmers prioritized immediate yields over sustainable practices. Wu demanded profitability despite ecological and social complexities. Stone's prejudices and language barriers exacerbated his misunderstandings with the locals, trapping him in a cycle of distrust.

Stone's isolationist approach conflicted with KH's community-dependent model. By reducing interactions, he missed partnership opportunities and alienated himself against potential collaborators. His enclosed lifestyle, while psychologically protective, hindered KH's outreach and amplified his alienation— a paradox underscoring the fragility of expatriate-led ventures in unfamiliar cultural terrains.

"INTEREST-NORM" DUAL INTERACTION OF CHINESE MANAGER AND GHANAIAN EMPLOYEE

Different Definitions of Relationship

On the first night we arrived at Nkoranza, we went out to a street barbecue to have a night snack. When asked about his relationship with Charles, Stone blurt out: *we are not only friends, but also brothers, because he can help me do anything, both at work and in life, the two of us rely on each other.* Whereas Charles was a little indifferent about this view, saying: *Stone is my boss, the most I admire about Chinese is 'Business is Business' (BiB), I will execute any instructions he give to me, but sometimes he makes a decision before he thinks it through, this is very bad.*

Why do they have completely different descriptions of their relationship? Does this statement represent what they really think, and why do they choose different depiction? In fact, in Stone's explanation, the essence of this "brotherhood" relationship contains a bit of emotional dependency accumulated by living together for a long time, but it is also a strategy he uses to try to build trust. But for Charles, trust building does not come from individual interaction and mutual understanding, but from an idealized work rules and business logic, such as "BiB" that he often stresses to different people. In his understanding, this is an advantage of Chinese companies and even general businesses, but do KH company, Chinese companies and even all Chinese really follow "BiB"? It is not the case with a little observation and reflection.

From this perspective, the interaction between them goes beyond unilateral business level, but diffuse in every aspect of everyday life, and the interaction process affects the increase or decrease of trust, which

has different intensity in different period. When external factors come in, it also affects the trust, finally determining the final choice of both sides.

Cultural Division in Localization of KH Company

KH Agriculture's structure, typical of Chinese overseas enterprises, restricts Ghanaian employees to non-leadership roles with capped advancement opportunities. Locals, initially unaware of this ceiling, gradually recognize it, leading to attrition. This "one-way loyalty" model—prioritizing Chinese managerial control with limited Ghanaian benefit—clashes with local expectations, often triggering drastic self-interest defenses when trust erodes. Such dynamics blur the boundaries between everyday life and abstract economic-political structures (Scott 2009).

Charles, a graduate from University of Ghana and former Chinese government scholarship recipient, studied business in Xiamen University, mastering Mandarin and starting an English tutoring venture. Post-graduation, he faced setbacks in China's competitive education sector, including legal troubles, prompting his return to Ghana. Fluent Chinese secured him roles in a plastic factory and later an Obuasi gold mine, where he leveraged local networks to launch his own mining operation and fuel supply business. Government crackdowns on illegal mining made him to divest, reinvesting in shops in Kumasi and Sunyani while starting a family.

Charles joined KH as a translator, citing stable income and castor project potential. His deeper aim was mastering cultivation techniques to independently promote castor, leveraging his Ghanaian identity. He described his strength as follows:

> As a Ghanaian, I know very well what Ghanaians think, what these farmers think and act, how to push them to grow, how to arrange their work. It is easy for me. You've heard that this company experienced a lot of failures before, but if it were me to handle the company, all could have been avoided. The company also has a lot of problems now that I can easily solve, but I am just a translator. I don't say much, even if I tell Stone, he won't listen.

As a "*wounded idealist*", Charles balanced pragmatic economic goals with aspirations for career impact. His elite background and cross-cultural experience bred frustration with KH's hierarchical constraints. While his interest demanded financial security, his norm drive sought trust and respect from Chinese colleagues. Denied of influence, he rationalized disengagement, prioritizing tangible gains over unreciprocated loyalty. This tension epitomizes the clash between a Ghanaian agency and Chinese managerial distrust in cross-cultural enterprises.

FROM BROTHER, BUSINESS TO CONFLICT

Unstable State of Trust

Stone and Charles maintained a functional yet precarious working relationship, rooted in mutual dependence. Stone, reliant on Charles's language skills and local knowledge, delegated to him significant authority, even entrusting him with 11,000 cedis during a leave. This transactional trust stabilized operations temporarily, masking underlying tensions.

Stone admitted their bond was pragmatic:

> Everyone is using each other. Do you think I can really treat him as a brother? My purpose is to be able to let him follow my order, although he seems a good person, and has an honest personality. In a whole, I trust him within a certain extent. After all, he is local, so I can't trust him completely. When I returned to China for vacation, I gave so much money to him. Fortunately, there was no problem in the end, so he was still trustworthy.

Charles, while competent, harbored disdain for Stone's leadership:

Stone does not want to solve problems except getting angry. You know his way of expression is useless. As you have seen recently, he sometimes gets angry with farmers in the field and scolds them for not being good. Do you think this method works? Communicating with the farmers like his way, will they plant it well? Impossible, that's not an effective way to deal with problems. You need to keep calm.

Beyond work, their interactions were minimal. They cooked and ate separately—Charles in his room, Stone alone in the living room. Cultural divides widened the gap: Charles frequented bars and socialized, while Stone remained isolated at home. Educational disparities exacerbated the divide—Charles, a University of Ghana graduate with Chinese postgraduate experience, viewed Stone (a technician with no international background) as unqualified. The author's arrival disrupted their fragile equilibrium. Stone shifted reliance to the researcher for translation, further sidelining Charles and reducing their already sparse communication.

From the perspective of personal psychological origin, both Stone and Charles lack the willingness to understand each other. Stone has a stereotypical picture of locals, and has no intention to understand them. Based on his education and individual experience, Charles also shows no intention to understand his superior, who he thinks is unqualified. Therefore, the initial state of trust, affecting everyday life events, gradually became an unstable state, and eventually broke up.

Analysis of "Interest-Norm" Dual Interaction

Charles initially joined KH Agriculture with dual aims: altruistically improving farmer livelihoods and personally mastering castor cultivation. He stated: *I wanted to help farmers… Castor could uplift them. That's why I joined.* Yet he later admitted pragmatic goals: *Salary isn't why I'm here. My shops earn more. I came to learn planting techniques—even if KH fails, I'll try myself.* While critical of KH's operational flaws, he maintained a transactional "interest-norm" balance: earning wages while gaining expertise for future ventures.

In January 2020, poor harvests prompted Stone to secretly plan KH's exit from Ghana. Charles grew suspicious that the company was about to leave. He perceived betrayal—a breach of both economic interest and normative trust. Stone's covert departure strategy ("minimize bargaining trouble") reignited Charles's past grievances with Chinese employers, prompting his drastic car theft retaliation. This extreme response stemmed from a violation of norms: deception compounded by cultural disrespect.

KH's case reveals how everyday micro-interactions (room assignments, bar conversations) shape organizational trust in cross-cultural settings. Both parties entered with dual "interest-norm" expectations. Yet cultural disconnects destabilized fragile trust. Charles's elite status and prior Chinese experiences heightened sensitivity to slights, while Stone's isolationist habits bred alienation. When business pressures mounted, latent tensions erupted into a lose-lose conflict.

THE EMOTIONAL PLIGHT OF "SELF-ENCLAVE"

Everyday Life in Isolation

Stone's daily life followed a rigid, insular pattern: rising at 6 AM, preparing meals (often reheating leftovers), and departing by 7 AM for fieldwork (castor promotion, farm visits). Post-lunch, he retreated to his room due to afternoon heat, resuming work correspondence with investor Wu in the evening. His isolation extended to meals—cooking alone while attempting unstable video calls with his family in China—and evenings spent watching downloaded TV shows before bed at midnight.

Stone's routine minimized external contact, driven by anxiety and cultural alienation. Fear of local unpredictability ("negative emotions… contributed to his decision to flee") reinforced his isolation, mirroring predecessors' practices at KH. This withdrawal severed potential community ties, including with the local chief—a traditional authority figure who could have offered security but was neglected after initial interactions.

KH's enclave approach ignored locals' dual role as collaborators and safeguards. Residents, curious about the foreign presence, faced barriers: language gaps, cultural differences, and Stone's inaccessibility. Mutual suspicion bred misunderstandings, exemplified by Stone's avoidance of public spaces and distrust of unannounced visitors. Stone's isolation mirrored KH's broader failure to engage Nkoranza's social fabric. While intended to reduce stress, his seclusion exacerbated anxiety and operational fragility. The absence of everyday interactions—market chats, communal meals—deprived him of cultural insights and crisis buffers, ultimately heightening tensions that culminated in conflict.

Impact of "Self-enclave"

The term "enclave" describes socioeconomically isolated zones, often applied to Chinese state enterprises operating abroad with minimal local integration (Blandy 2006; Wissink et al. 2012). While typically associated with large firms, private ventures like KH Agriculture adopted similar isolationist tactics despite lacking the structural prerequisites: capital dominance, cost gaps, and economic independence (Yao & Liu 2019). KH's agricultural model inherently required community engagement, yet its enclave mindset led to counterproductive outcomes. Unfortunately, due to their fixed attitude and ready to withdraw investment mindset, it is difficult to break through this situation that continues. Therefore, lack of interaction with local community has caused some negative effects for "self-enclave" KH company, which is reflected in different levels of everyday life and business activities.

First of all, from the operational perspective, choosing "enclave" is not conducive to the promotion work of KH company. It would abandon valuable local human resources, which has repeatedly proved important in the promotion process, local employees such as driver Owusu, who plays the role of road signs and communication bridge in the process of promotion to interact with local farmers, and company also has to rely on local workers to work daily to save expenses. Furthermore, early success relied on positive word-of-mouth, but Professor Xu's later failures spread distrust, forcing unsustainable expansion. Secondly, from everyday life perspective of Chinese in KH, "enclave" is not a good choice for their own security. Stone's self-enclosure bred paranoia and neurasthenia, manifested in erratic decisions and distrust toward employees. Objectively, isolation alienated locals, fostering suspicion that escalated security risks, as evidenced by the car theft crisis. Finally, the state of "enclave" is not conducive to making other accurate judgments. Limited local understanding left Stone reliant on fear-driven decisions. Emotional reactions exacerbated misunderstandings, culminating in the theft incident's mishandling.

DUAL INTERACTION UNDER UNEQUAL POWER

Confusion of Local Law Enforcers

During KH Agriculture's 2020 threshing season, a routine police checkpoint stop escalated into a tense negotiation, revealing asymmetrical power dynamics between Chinese managers and Ghanaian authorities. At a barrier outside Nkoranza, police flagged KH's pickup truck, citing missing safety equipment (fire extinguisher, first-aid kit). Driver Owusu and translator Charles attempted to resolve the issue informally, but manager Stone refused bribes, insisting on court proceedings: *I'll pay 1,000 cedis legally, not a penny here! I won't spoil their bad habits!* The police officers insisted to demand 200 cedis ($35) to avoid impounding the vehicle. Stone's defiance clashed with Owusu's pragmatism: *Court wastes time and money. Compromise is better.* After hours of stalled negotiations, police confiscated Owusu's license, delaying KH's operations by detaining the pickup.

Contrary to studies framing Chinese actors as dominant (Lemos & Ribeiro 2007; Giese & Thiel, 2012), this incident shows their vulnerability within Ghana's administrative systems. Stone, despite economic leverage, faced institutional intransigence. As Driessen (2019) notes, local actors often invoke external power structures (e.g., legal systems) to counterbalance Chinese influence. Stone echoed common grievances among Ghana-based Chinese, labeling police as "greedy", "corrupt", and a "rogue government". These views stem from clashes between Chinese informal negotiation tactics and Ghana's bureaucratic rigidity. For Stone, the encounter reinforced a paradox: while Ghana's institutions appeared malleable, they resisted the guanxi (relationship)-based solutions prevalent in China.

The traffic stop exemplifies the complexity of cross-cultural power dynamics. KH's struggle highlights how Chinese firms, despite financial resources, often lack situational control when local norms and institutions intervene. Understanding these interactions requires analyzing both structural hierarchies and the "interest-norm" calculus of individual actors.

How Local Law Enforcers View "Foreigners"

Ghana's colonial history fostered a Western-educated middle class in coastal towns, promoting values like welfare, respect, and equality alongside economic growth. While some elites accept "development must pay a price", this remains marginal and ineffective in resolving social tensions (Yan, Zhang, & Li 2020). McDonnell (2017) notes that colonial legacies left Ghana with an interstitial bureaucracy—a mismatch between formal systems and local society, creating fragmented governance. Bureaucrats here often exercise self-sovereign authority, motivated by pride in enforcing "advanced" rules rather than mere economic incentives (McDonnell 2017).

This institutional gap is manifested in coexisting Westernized formal systems and informal local practices. Technocrats in finance, environment, and law—often educated abroad—uphold universal standards, resisting Chinese models despite acknowledging their developmental role. Conversely, grassroots bureaucrats (e.g., police, tax officers) navigate informal rules, seeking gray profits from Chinese firms while recognizing their economic contributions.

Chinese companies face confusions when interacting with these dual systems: strict Eurocentric regulations in one part clash with opaque local norms in another. Law enforcers in Nkoranza exhibit dual "interest-norm" preferences. On the interest side, low salaries and colonial-era hierarchies drive demands for gray income, especially from affluent foreigners. However, Chinese actors underestimate the norm dimension: law enforcers adhere to hybrid rules shaped by history. Informal practices like bribery coexist with rigid adherence to formal legitimacy, even when counterproductive.

For instance, police may insist on fines for minor violations not solely for profit but to assert institutional authority. This complexity requires discerning which departments prioritize formal norms versus informal interests—a skill that translator Charles possessed but enclave-minded Chinese like Stone lacked. KH's isolation prevented an understanding of these nuances, leading to a perception of Chinese as "predators". Cooperation with local rules could satisfy dual demands, but resistance reinforced distrust. Without adapting, Chinese companies risk being trapped between bureaucratic rigidity and communal skepticism, unable to navigate Ghana's layered governance.

FROM "LAW-ABIDING" TO "TAKING DETOUR"

The Strategy Choice of "Taking Detour"

Faced with law enforcers like this, most Chinese businessmen have gone through a "taking-detour" process, such as a visa renewal incident of Stone. In July 2019, his one-year work visa was about to expire. According to relevant regulations of Ghanaian government, visa renewal requires a tax payment certificate from the tax bureau, which demanded an 11,000-cedi fine for alleged underpayment, though the clerk couldn't cite specific legal grounds. Stone challenged this, prompting a meeting with the director, who dismissed his declared 1,000-cedi monthly salary as implausible: *You came from China to earn just 1,000 cedis?* Stone claimed the company was unprofitable, offering future dividends. Unconvinced, the director recalculated taxes using inflated salary (1,500 cedis) and assets (rented house, company car), demanding 1,800 cedis in back payments.

Stone refused, later bypassing the requirement via a Chinese agent who secured the visa for 200 cedis without the tax certificate. He justified this circumvention by citing Ghana's "rogue government" – low official wages and systemic corruption incentivizing arbitrary fines. However, Chinese firms like KH often split salaries (part paid in China, part locally) to minimize taxes. Similarly, they categorize local wages as "base salary + subsidies" to reduce liabilities.

Stone viewed these tactics as necessary against a system where officials "prioritize their wallets over investors' needs". While tolerating minor, sporadic bribes, he drew the line at repetitive extortion (e.g., the

tax director's demands). His experience reinforced a broader Chinese perception of Ghana's bureaucracy as predatory toward foreigners, legitimizing evasion strategies despite their illegitimacy under formal norms.

Cultural Cause of Action for Chinese in KH

China's rapid development over 40 years has hinged on a "development-oriented government" model, marked by state-led globalization strategies leveraging foreign investment and cheap labor to fuel export-driven growth (Gao 2006). This model fostered a symbiotic relationship between government, market, and society, as seen in Yiwu's small commodity market, where harmonious interaction among these actors underpinned economic success (Zhen 2020). Chinese enterprises thus expect governments to streamline processes and mediate conflicting interests, thus ensuring stable outcomes (Yan, Zhang, & Li 2020).

In Africa, however, this expectation clashes with reality. Governments, instead of facilitating business, often become sources of friction, leveraging power for self-interest. KH Company's Chinese staff, accustomed to developmental state support, face dissonance. They interpret local demands (e.g., bribes) as transactional "interest exchanges" for operational stability, yet feel disillusioned when outcomes remain unpredictable. This propels strategies to minimize losses, like Stone's visa renewal detour via agents.

Their struggles stem from misaligned norms. While familiar with informal practices (common in China), they reject complexities like Ghana's colonial-era "foreigner tax" mindset or inconsistent enforcement (e.g., arbitrary police checks). Unable to reconcile formal-informal contradictions or navigate situational nuances, they default to bypassing authorities. For instance, splitting salaries (part paid in China) reduces tax burdens, reflecting distrust in local systems deemed corrupt or exploitative. Thus, KH's approach—avoiding engagement with Ghana's interstitial bureaucracy—emerges as a pragmatic, albeit reductive, solution. It sidesteps the cognitive effort of deciphering hybrid norms, and prioritizing cost efficiency over understanding contextual intricacies. This mirrors broader Chinese business tactics in Africa, where perceived institutional unpredictability justifies circumvention, even as it perpetuates cycles of mutual misunderstanding.

Misplaced "Interest-Norm" Dual Interaction and Its Consequences

After the car being stolen, Stone reported the case to the Nkoranza police, expecting a swift resolution. The police chief criticized KH's lack of engagement: *You've been here years but never visited us. The Chinese lady in Sunyani with gambling machines brings gifts—that's how business works.* Stone agreed to future visits, but negotiations stalled when officer Adjei demanded "chopmoney" for investigative efforts.

KH's interactions with police grew fraught. Simon, the chief's assistant, mediated, while Charles returned the cars claiming a contract granting him ownership after a year's service. Stone disputed the contract's authenticity, citing mismatched signatures and seals. Xu, the former manager, also denied signing it. The police chief proposed forensic analysis in Accra, requiring KH and Charles to split 1,500 cedis. Stone paid 750 cedis upfront; but Charles never contributed. Weeks passed with no progress. Wu emailed the local chief, who ruled cars be returned but demanded severance if KH exited—a decision Stone rejected as legitimizing theft. Exhausted, Stone transferred the car ownership to Simon and Owusu, then left Ghana on February 27, 2020. The process for dealing with car theft finally accelerated KH company to leave Ghana. In the frequent interaction with local police, Stone nearly collapsed, and Wu also changed his attitude, from angrily repeating that Charles must be put into prison, to a final compromise, namely agreeing to the retreat of Stone, and then the case was left to locals. From the description and analysis of occurrence and process of this case, we can see the following two points.

At first, in some extreme cases, companies will have to abandon local operation especially in the exploration phase of an investment, to reduce more possible cost inputs and losses of later stages, i.e., the final choice for KH Company. Both the owner and manager of the company did not understand the norms adopted by local police department during the case. In their opinion, those law enforcers should adopt a relatively fair perspective to handle the incident. Moreover, in this process, they also gave certain financial interest to the police, including the chief police, who did not bring out a good handling of the case. In fact, in the process of handling this case, the norms of local police were more similar to local protectors,

regarding Chinese companies and Chinese as belonging to "outsiders", who violated the rights of local people; hence Charles had to take this approach to defend his rights. This is why when Simon helped us in the chief's office, the chief asked him why he would help Chinese, rather not the Ghanaian.

Secondly, even if KH company continued to operate in the local area, it would be likely for it to never find a way to deal with this situation and therefore be stuck in a similar dilemma again. In a cross-cultural situation, if there is no understanding of local culture and if one refuses to interact with local society deeply, with time continues, the consequence of interaction will always be at a low level of equilibrium which regards this kind of "blackmail" as a fixed cost, never leading to the possibility of optimization. Therefore, whatever situation like the above happens, negative judgments about each other would appear between Chinese companies and local law enforcers, resulting in a failure and causing a final breakdown of the equilibrium. In the long run, this situation will also affect initial situation of other newcomers, creating negative effects when they interact with local society, thus causing mutual misunderstanding and resulting in a vicious circle.

CONCLUSION: DISPLACED "INTEREST-NORM" INTERACTION AND REFLECTION

Stone and KH Company's experience in Ghana underscores the risks of enclave management in cross-cultural contexts. Isolating themselves in Nkoranza provided temporary psychological comfort but amplified long-term operational risks. Stone's anxiety stemmed from both environmental unfamiliarity and reinforcing misunderstandings through everyday interactions. His withdrawal from local engagement deepened biases, culminating in KH's collapse. This illustrates how enclave strategies, while seemingly protective, often exacerbate vulnerabilities by preventing meaningful community integration. Charles's extreme response—stealing company cars—emerged from dual frustrations: KH's impending exit without employee compensation and the breached expectations of mutual benefit. As a local elite, he initially believed KH would uplift farmers (a normative aspiration), but perceived exploitation (economic interest violation) drove retaliation. This reflects a broader local narrative of Chinese as "predators" extracting resources without reciprocity. Crucially, superficial cross-cultural interactions failed to build trust, deepening misunderstandings rather than fostering mutual understanding.

That is why attention should be paid to everyday life. Sarah Pink (2012) emphasizes everyday life's analytical value, arguing that mundane interactions reveal deeper socio-cultural dynamics. In KH's case, routine encounters—market visits, police bribes, employee negotiations—shaped outcomes as critically as formal business operations. Structured analysis of "interest-norm" dual demands clarifies these dynamics: actors prioritize economic gains (interest) while navigating cultural expectations (norms). For instance, police demanded bribes (interest) but also asserted procedural legitimacy (norm), a duality misread by KH as mere corruption.

For Chinese companies operating in foreign countries, especially those deeply embedded with local community. there are three points reflected from this case. First of all, enterprise managers should not only pay attention to the interaction between production and business activities, but also to interaction in everyday life. They are interrelated and influence each other, and the insignificant micro interaction in everyday life will also have an impact on the operation of enterprises. Secondly, operation of "enclave" is conditional. Chinese investors and managers need to consider their specific conditions of certain industry where they are located. The characteristics of different industries show different interactive levels and strengths, and there will be different interactive objects which requires managers to have a strong cross-cultural communicative ability. Finally, managers need to consider from both sides of "interest-norm", understand demands of different actors in local society, and understand the logic behind other party's actions, so as to adopt appropriate coping strategies, and achieve good operation and long-term success.

In cross-cultural settings, misunderstandings arise not from isolated interest clashes or cultural stereotypes but their interplay. KH's failure to decode Ghana's hybrid formal-informal systems (McDonnell 2017) led to misjudging police norms and employee grievances. Proactive engagement, rather than enclave withdrawal, could have aligned KH's operations with local expectations, thus mitigating conflicton. In this

sense, successful transnational enterprises must dissect everyday interactions through dual interest-norm lenses, fostering adaptability over rigid isolation.

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