



Building roads between China and Ghana

It took Su Yuehua a while to figure it out, but he learned the secret to business success in West Africa

By **XIAO LIXIN**

Two decades ago, Su Yuehua landed in the West African nation of Ghana to build from scratch a branch office of the contracting company China Gansu International Corp for Economic and Technical Cooperation. Su, now 50, has remained in Ghana, and has been recognized by Chinese and local authorities for turning that branch into a large, thriving and diversified company that is expanding into other parts of West Africa. Along the way, he says, he has had to abandon some ways of thinking and absorb local customs, ways of doing business and even learn an African language. In the process, he has improved ties between China and Ghana and made many friends, too.

AFRICAN OPERATIONS

CHINA STATE HUALONG (GHANA) CORP
Industry: Construction
Established: 1987
Headquarters: Accra, Ghana
Employees: Near 2,000
Address: Plot 26 South Legon, Accra, Ghana
Phone: 233 302 503388
 233 024 4323898

PARENT COMPANY IN CHINA

CHINA GANSU INTERNATIONAL CORP FOR ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION
Industry: International project contracting
Founded: 1970s
Headquarters: Lanzhou, Gansu province
Overseas operations: Ghana, Zimbabwe, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Singapore, India, Ethiopia, Guinea and Ivory Coast
Employees: Near 3,000
Ranking: 204th, the ENR Top International Contractors 2014
Address: Jiangong Building, No 575 East Section of Xijin Road, Qilihe District, Lanzhou, Gansu province,
Phone: 86 931 2659950
 86 931 2216431
Website: www.cgicop.com

SU YUEHUA



Chairman, China State Hualong (Ghana) Corp
Born: 1964
Education
 Bachelor in Industrial and Civil Architecture, Lanzhou University of Technology (1987)
Career
 •Chairman, China State Hualong (Ghana) Corp (present)
 •General Manager, China State Hualong Construction (Ghana) Ltd (2001)
 •Project Manager, China State Hualong Construction (Ghana) Ltd (1994-2001)
 •Works at Gansu Institute of Building Sciences (1987-94)

Su, chairman of the subsidiary, the China State Hualong (Ghana) Corp, has led the transformation of the Ghanaian branch of the company, which has grown beyond its main businesses of industrial and civil architecture, urban road and bridge construction and international project contracting, into an enterprise with annual revenues of more than \$100 million.

Su at first met many challenges, such as extremely harsh living and working conditions at the time, as well as consecutive setbacks in failing to win project bids.

But instead of feeling intimidated, Su made a big effort to gain experience by working with employees on construction sites. He would rack his brains to decipher what went wrong when there was a problem with the company's operation.

Su noticed that the fundamental reason that Hualong didn't win project bids was the failure to understand local culture and background information about the bid project, and, more importantly, to build mutual trust with the local people.

From then on, Su started to learn and practice not only English, but also the local Twi dialect because, he says, he believed that only through barrier-free communication could he learn what the local people truly wanted.

Before too long, Su could communicate freely with local people. That not only brought him many friends, but also bridged the distance between him and Ghanaians, as well as helping the company better integrate into the local community.

Over the decades, Su's company has established seven of its own subsidiary corporations, stretching its business into real estate, import and export trade, pharmaceutical production and the hospitality business, making Hualong a comprehensive group corporation.

Hualong's newest enterprise, pharmaceutical production, is a business removed from the company's established strengths and advantages, but still is considered a highlight in the company's operations, given the considerable market prospects for pharmaceuticals in Africa.

The company put a new pharmaceutical factory into production in 2014 after equipment testing was finished. The production and sales of pharmaceuticals will be given priority as a key sector in Hualong's diversified business operations, the company says.

After gaining a firm foothold in Ghana, Su set about planning Hualong's journey in Africa. One slight deviation from this planned

path is the prospect of expanding Hualong into the entire West African region.

There are good reasons for that. The past few years have not been so good for Ghana's economy. With the economy's problems and its limited market capacity in the construction industry, the board of directors of Hualong decided on an "out of Ghana" strategy and started exploring opportunities in neighboring African countries. Benin, for its stable political and economic situation and healthier market, was chosen as the first step in Hualong's business expansion in the region.

On Dec 29, Hualong made its latest expansionary move by signing a contract for a road and harbor construction project in Benin worth 530 million euros (\$623 million). The project, estimated to take three years, is expected to create a transit center for crude oil and supplies, connecting Cotonou, the country's biggest city, to northern Benin and the neighboring countries of Nigeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

The project will cover 61 hectares, including 300 large parking lots for platform trailers, 9,600 storage areas for containerized freight, five oil tanks each with a volume of 18,500 cubic meters, four large warehouses as well as other infrastructure like office buildings, banks and fire stations.

Hualong also is involved in the construction of a hospital in Guinea and a deepwater port in Benin.

While Hualong strives for development and prosperity, Su says it always keeps its social responsibilities in mind. Apart from often providing help and assistance to local Chinese who find themselves in a tight spot, it has donated money and materials to local groups in need. It donated \$20,000 and built a canteen for a girls' middle school in the Upper West Region in 2006, and helped with the maintenance and renovation of a 3-kilometer road in Accra in 2011.

"We will continue our participation in building local infrastructure and devotion to public welfare establishments in Ghana, for the sake of Ghana's social, economic and cultural development and China-Ghana friendship," says Su.

Twenty years of devotion to his career and the enterprise's operation in Ghana has also won Su accolades. Not only was he nominated by the China Enterprises International Development Association as a "China excellent entrepreneur", he also was selected as vice-chairman of the China-Africa Business Council. Ghana's president also made Su an honorary citizen.