

Ghana's Living Nightmarish Experience with Chinese Soft Power

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From official sources, an estimated population ranging from 10,000 to 30,000 Chinese nationals live in Ghana today. Unofficial sources put it higher. Although on the high side, an unbelievable report says about 700,000 Chinese live in Ghana.

It took the trial of **En Huang aka Aisha Huang**, arrested in Kumasi on September 2, 2022, to officially confirm that Chinese nationals could enter and exit Ghana illegally too. Kumasi is Ghana's second largest city after Accra, the capital of Ghana. Kumasi is in the Ashanti Region. En Huang, a Chinese national described by the media in Ghana as kingpin of illegal mining in Ghana, was convicted on December 4, 2023 for mining offences. Also called Galamsey Queen, En Huang was sentenced to four and a half years with hard labour in prison. In addition, she was to pay a fine of GH 48,000 with consequences of custodial sentences in default. Galamsey is the local name for illegal mining.

Image [source](#)



En Huang was earlier arrested for illegal mining offences committed from 2015 to 2017 in Ghana. However, on December 19, 2018, the Attorney General of Ghana entered a nolle prosequi and terminated the trial. Her permit to remain in Ghana indefinitely, was revoked by the Comptroller General of Ghana Immigration Service, leading to her immediate repatriation to China aboard Ethiopian Airlines.

Contrary to the order of the Comptroller General, En Huang re-entered Ghana. On September 2, 2022, she was arrested again, but in Kumasi. The Attorney General directed her prosecution of past and present committed offences.

Officially, migration of Chinese to Africa started in the 1960s, although the record on the Gold Coast, now Ghana, puts its first visitors in the 1940s. Originally, these migrants came from Hong Kong, a British colony just as was the Gold Coast, the former name of Ghana. Mainland Chinese started coming to Ghana in the 1980s. The Gold Coast became independent on March 6, 1957, taking the new name Ghana.

To appreciate the figures, let's look at the size of others from the region to compare. For instance, 272 Japanese have been recorded in Ghana, whilst a total of 614 Koreans are known to reside in Ghana. As of 2021, 11,313 from the rest of Asia were recorded as residents in Ghana.

The earliest ethnic Chinese migrants to the Gold Coast, in what is now called Ghana, who came from Hong Kong, began arriving in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when both territories [Ghana and Hong Kong] were still part of the British Empire. These migrants stayed in the Gold Coast for periods ranging from a few years to several decades. They never came to consider the Gold Coast as their home.

These migrants consisted largely of men who came to the Gold Coast alone and worked as employees in Chinese-owned factories, while their families remained back at home in Hong Kong. They were concentrated in the western part of the Gold Coast. But after the Gold Coast became independent, the **Kwame Nkrumah** government began implementing plans to promote development in the eastern part of the country.

As a result, these Chinese migrants began moving towards Accra and Tema. Aside these mentioned individual migrants, an official contingent also came from the People's Republic of China [PRC] for a brief period in the 1960s. At the time, the PRC provided a variety of military assistance to Ghana in the 1960s, including a loan meant for an arms factory in 1962, which in any way was never constructed. It included a dispatch of military advisors in 1964. After the February 24, 1966 putsch, which overthrew Nkrumah's government, the National Liberation Council military government expelled the 430 PRC nationals, including three intelligence officers and thirteen guerrilla warfare specialists.

However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, some of the migrants from Hong Kong returned accompanied by their families to Ghana. Migrants from Shanghai also joined, around the time. Following further political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, including two coups d'état by **Fit Lt Jerry Rawlings**, many Chinese migrants returned home.

Backed by the sudden leap of economic reforms and opening up the country, migrants from mainland China began arriving just at the time Hong Kong migrants, in the reverse, were flowing out of Ghana. Thus, migration from mainland China intensified in the 1990s - some came as employees. Most came as traders, who started and ran import-export businesses or restaurants.

Origins of migration also diversified. Whereas earlier migrants came mostly from Hong Kong or Shanghai, latter Chinese migrants came from Guangdong, Henan as well as the Republic of China in Taiwan. The early wave on migrants from Hong Kong worked as employees in a variety of industries in both the Gold Coast and in Ghana, including a failed tobacco-growing venture, a factory in Takoradi producing cooking implements, and an imitation wax print clothing company.

The true owners of these businesses hardly visited Ghana themselves. In the 1990s and 2000s, large Chinese companies trooped in to actively participate in Ghana's construction industry as large contractors. Individual Chinese traders engaged in the retail of textiles, electrical appliances, and in daily consumables.

As stipulated and required in the Ghana Investment Promotion Act of 1994, a foreigner needed an investment of not less than US \$300,000 in retail business, provided 10 locals

would be engaged as employees.

More recently, late arrival Chinese nationals introduced engagement in small-scale mining, particularly in gold. Some are also engaged in providing funds for mining operation purposes, in the lease of heavy duty equipment and machinery to miners, and in the strategic setting up of shops that deal in the supply and distribution of mining-related chemical substances, equipment and machinery, and spares.

Chinese nationals in Ghana live together in close units but within local communities. They haven't built larger single Chinese communities in the strict sense of it as in Chinatown yet. But names like China Mall, Chinese Restaurant, etc. have emerged.

Most migrants visited with the aim of exploring better opportunities to make money, as against an intention to acquire citizenship and settle down in Ghana as a national. To obtain Ghanaian citizenship, an applicant could do so by marriage to a citizen of Ghana; or show proficiency in a spoken indigenous language or understand it.

Some early Chinese nationals, who have proven record to have lived in Ghana for most of their lives, have acquired Ghanaian citizenship, often granted without difficulties.

In recent times, a section of local environmentalists and traders have risen in protests against chiefs and the government for the influx of Chinese nationals engaged in illegal mining and petty trading as retailers selling imported goods. The chiefs and the government are accused for the relaxation of investment laws.

In late 2007, local traders organised protests in Accra which accused Chinese nationals of unfair competition and trading in specified areas of engagement preserved for natives, which Chinese nationals were disqualified. In reaction, these Chinese migrants reported of arbitrary treatment by the police.

For example, one day in February 2009, officers of the Ghana Immigration Service arrested over 100 Chinese nationals, the highest in a single day. They were arrested for their engagement in illegal gold mining. Forty-one of these Chinese nationals signed an open letter of protest to the Ghana Immigration Service, requesting for a review of their cases.

The sudden crackdown was explained as necessitated by the government's desire to protect local businesses arising from worsening economic disparities, despite the fact that this is not allowed under Ghanaian law.

Chinese investments, of course, play a critical role in spurring and stimulating diversity of portfolios in the economy of Ghana, resulting in increases in trade volumes as it shapes an emerging pattern of migration of Ghanaian traders to the Guangzhou and Yiwu regions of China, addressing older forms of challenges which impaired relationship.

Virtually, every home in Ghana today is inundated with imported Chinese consumables – from basic needs such as toothbrushes and toothpaste to toilet rolls and toiletries. In the area of building and construction, supplies of imported inexpensive building materials have improved conditions in meeting previous high cost challenges in housing deficit.

Significantly, in the areas of rural development for example, imported Chinese motorcycles and tricycles have contributed immensely in reducing the deficit in haulage and transport services delivery, and reducing the cost and time of doing business drastically, although this

came with heavy losses in human lives with high figures in rates of maimed cases such as amputees.

Also, thanks to Chinese low cost mobile phones and accessories and computers, Ghanaians have seamlessly joined the ICT revolution by default. Even mobile telephony service providers and tech companies import Chinese equipment and complementary accessories to keep the industry alive.

In all, weak institutions and regulatory bodies and regimes have contributed in several ways to allow excesses of Chinese business operations in Ghana to overwhelm law enforcement and made mockery of the government through a compromised criminal justice system.

As it stands today in Ghana, illegal mining and its attendant threats of environmental disaster has created a tense political climate with civil society organisations and organised labour confrontations with the government, leading to a bitter standoff.

Reported cases of unregulated use of chemical substances and heavy metals such as cyanide, lead and mercury in illegal mining activities, are found in water bodies, the food chain and wildlife. Manifestations of the effects of these on humans, such as deformities in childbirth and in the reproductive system, have been recorded by scientists in laboratories.

Mining in Ghana has been known for several millennia before the most recent clash of cultures with Europeans. At no time has it been this devastating as it did with the recent influx of Chinese into the country, especially with the sophistication of imported Chinese equipment and machinery, which have quickened the pace of environmental degradation and destruction.

Whereas the onus lies on the Government of Ghana to assert its authority as a sovereign in the exercise of law enforcement in respect of strict adherence to a regulatory regime that comes with the issuance of mining licences, it behoves on the integrity and good relationships with the Chinese government through its embassy and diplomatic staff in Ghana to make collaborative interventions to curb the looming menace already taking a heavy toll on the host country as adequately enumerated above.

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