

Xiaoqian Wan, 2021
Brown, Sociology

Patterns of Distribution between Ghana and China: Race, Culture, and the Formation of the Transnational Market

This dissertation explores the question of how social orders of the market are created and maintained and how these orders are challenged or persistent in the digital era. What are the material and social conditions that enable the calculative, strategic, or affective behaviours to be established between the buyers and the sellers? Empirically, this dissertation will explore the social conditions that create stable linkages between consumers and producers located in culturally and geographically distant societies, i.e., Chinese consumers and African consumers.

The dissertation composes three main sections: The first section describes how the market has evolved from informal marketplaces composed of street selling and mobile vendors to an iconic wholesale trading mall where all kinds of commodity transactions congregate. The second section describes the social structure underlying the global commodity chain coordinated by micro and small enterprises. It shows the structure of the coordination, the logic of coordination, as well as the evolvement of individuals on the chain of coordination. The third section focuses on the micro-level process of how these mutual relationships are signalled and formed, especially against the pre-existing categorical differences and inequality among the strangers in the face-to-face and digital interactions. I will show the importance of migration/sojourn and cross-ethnic communications that take place in the actual physical marketplace in linking the consumers and suppliers.

Exploring the social order underlying this “global” market” speaks to the field of economic sociology by addressing several challenges: 1) It will add to the limited attention to social constructivism of the market 2) it will bridge the dialogue between economic sociology with the global political economy 3) It will also add to literature regarding the technological impact on market coordination.