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## China group eschews protocol

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In a sign of the growing interest in establishing business alliances in China, a second trade association is forming in Honolulu aimed specifically at deal-making through Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong-Hawai'i Chamber of Commerce is the creation of financial consultant and entrepreneur Johnson W.K. Choi, who had been president of the established Hong Kong Business Association of Hawai'i before forming the new group. He said 43 members have enlisted, mostly locally based businesses.

Choi has ruffled a few feathers by breaking away from his former group. He said he did so to adopt an approach that eschews protocol and social activities often associated with business associations in favor of the pure pursuit of new alliances.

"We want to focus only on business without focusing on any political agenda," he said.

This is the time, he said, to get busy negotiating deals with Chinese business operators who are hungry to build ties to adapt to the huge economic changes occurring in their country. "If you can't respond, they just bypass you," he said.

Choi plans to sponsor a half-day seminar Sept. 25 at the East-West Center to discuss Hong Kong connections. He also wants to lead a trade mission to Hong Kong in early December.

Choi's high-profile, self-propelled strategy, departs from the Hong Kong Business Association's history of working with the state Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism through trade missions and group contacts to promote trade partnerships.

Isoo "Dick" Oshima, president of the Hong Kong Business Association, said the 5-year-old group has sought to clear a path for local businesses by working with the state, as well as individually, to build ties with China.

"We try to facilitate trade," he said, "but also with a social conscience."

Oshima noted that the association sponsors a well-received Friday night radio program on KNDI-AM in Cantonese and financially supports the Sui Wah language school.

Both groups share in the goal of promoting business through Hong Kong channels. For local businesses without considerable leverage inside China, Choi said, Hong Kong firms help to reduce risk. Additionally, Hong Kong's tradition of civil law offers foreign companies a means of recourse unavailable in other Chinese cities.

On a broader scale, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of Hawai'i has promoted business relations, whether at individual or state levels, with enterprises in various parts of Mainland China as well as in Taiwan and Singapore.

Mike Murphy, director of the U.S. Commerce Department's Honolulu Export Assistance Center, said many of the trade groups in Hawai'i enjoy the advantages of cultural affinity, proximity and a history of people-to-people networking with Asian countries including China.

"I don't think there is another place in the U.S.," he said, "where you can make this kind of connectivity."



A new group is seeking to promote business through Hong Kong channels, but its founder has ruffled feathers.

Associated Press photo

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