

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

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Choi: China business opportunity is now in rural areas

The Chinese government's current focus on improving economic conditions in rural provinces may provide an opportunity for U.S. business, according to Johnson Choi, president of the China-Hawaii Chamber of Commerce.

"The Chinese government is looking for products to improve the lives of the people, especially the Chinese citizen who lives outside of the major metropolitan centers," Choi says.

It has been reported in U.S. media that a key goal of the Beijing government this year is to find ways to leverage the newfound wealth of China's industrial provinces to benefit residents of outlying lands. But Choi says there is a political dimension to the situation that is not so widely known.

"China is slowly moving toward democratic elections in the rural areas," Choi says. "Rural villages elect their representatives, these representatives elect the next level of representatives, and so on. In order for the representatives to have a chance to move to a higher level, they must do things benefiting and improving the lives of the people he or she represents. Therefore any company that has products at a reasonable price that benefit the Chinese outside the metropolitan centers is welcomed by the Chinese government at all levels."

The same theme was sounded by Tom Conlon, president of International Windmill Supply Co., in an address Friday to an audience that included Chinese Chamber of Commerce President Winfred Pong, University of Hawaii Professor Chian Leng Chia, Michael Zhang of China Club, Anthony Chang of Pacific Resources LLC and others with an interest in fostering China trade.

Conlon said there are business opportunities in rural provinces provided U.S. companies are akamai enough to know that they can't do it without a local office or a local representative, and that they need to choose a local partner carefully.

"Any business that wants to enter the China market by taking a few trips to China each year without trusted local private sector representatives or an office in China will find that this doesn't work," he said. He also advised against hiring a representative who acts like he knows it all or who says yes to everything the company wants.

Some of the best employees are good people retired from state-owned enterprises at the mandatory retirement age of 50-55, he said. Many of these people have the technical skills and are eager to work as their retirement income is small.

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