The Role of Religion in the Adaptation Process of Africans in China

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In Southern China, A Thriving African Neighborhood

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NINA PORZUCKI

In the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, thousands of African immigrants, many of them small-scale clothing traders from Nigeria, have come seeking business opportunities. One of the Nigerian traders, who goes by his "designer name" of Niiayoyi,

Letter from China

February 9, 2009 Issue

THE PROMISED LAND

Guangzhou's Canaan market and the rise of an African merchant class.

By Evan Osnos

The neighborhood around Canaan draws thousands of aspiring immigrant entrepreneurs. Taxi-drivers call it "Chocolate City."

Illustration by John Ritter

Joseph Nwaosu, a Nigerian exporter, has yet to acclimate to the winter damp of Guangzhou, on China's southern coast. Over a button-down shirt he

黑色乡愁：非洲人在广州调查报告

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广州 调查报告 • 中文 • 黑色乡愁

11月19日，在环市西路与小北路交界处，一名外籍男子穿过马路。

在接非洲人，这是一个比“中国农民工”走得更远的群体。

中国广州已成为非洲人历史进程中无法抹去的记忆。1996年亚洲金融危机爆发以来，原来在东南亚曼谷、雅加达等城市经商的非洲人转战广州，至今已17载。他们与我们的历史、经济、文化，乃至肤色都如此不同，却让我们生活在同一片天空下。
China: from a country of sending emigrants to a country of receiving immigrants

- The rise of China and rise of immigration to China.
- China has transformed from a country of emigrant-sending country to immigrant-receiving country.
- The 2010 China Population Census collects information on foreigners who live in China.
Outline of the project

1. The Emergence of African community in Guangzhou
2. The role of religion in the adaptation of African merchants in Guangzhou
Why study Africa to China migration?

- China Africa economic connection: China is Africa’s biggest trade partner for the last 9 years. Africans in China contributed to this trade volume.
- Rise of African immigrants in China, (Guangzhou).
- China-Africa Forum in Sept. 2018
Figure 1. China-Africa trade (中非贸易)
北京大学国家发展研究院名誉院长、前世界银行首席经济学家林毅夫日前表达了对非洲经济
We found 112 countries where China has financed projects. While most fall under its infrastructure plan known as the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has pushed beyond those boundaries.
Dots show ports China helped build.

Light red lines show ocean shipping activity.

Source: Shipping data from University College London Energy Institute.
Previous studies

- Zhigang Li and his team research in Guangzhou, identifying spatial characteristics of African neighborhoods (小北)："chocolate city", ethnic economy, transnational urban space
- Niu Dong (anthropology): Africans’ Hometown Associations in China.
- Bombdo: Africans as bridges of China-Africa
Globalization and African migration to China

- China as the world’s factory, Guangdong as the center of the world factory: electronics, garment, shoes, fabrics, toys, wigs, furniture etc.
- Guangzhou history as trade center. Demand for goods, African market serves 1.2 billion population and 54 countries
- Chinese entrepreneurs are reluctant to do businesses in Africa
DONGGUAN, China

This is a city you’ve probably never heard of, yet it has a population of 10 million people who fill your dressers and closets. By one count, 40 percent of the sports shoes sold in the U.S. come from Dongguan.

Just one neighborhood within Dongguan, Dalang, has become the Sweater Capital of the World. Dalang makes more than 300 million sweaters a year, of which 200 million are exported to the U.S.

Keep towns like this in mind when American protectionists demand sanctions, after the latest round of talks ending yesterday made little progress. Some irresponsible Democrats in Congress would have you believe that China’s economic success is simply the result of currency manipulation, unfair regulations and pirating American movies.
Xiaobei neighborhood in Guangzhou: “the chocolate city”

- From Chungking mansion in Hong Kong to Xiaobei
- Proximity to locations of factories
- Proximity to transportation networks (railroad, buses, subway)
- Proximity to locations of religious worship
- Shared faith with Chinese Muslims
IN AN EMERGENCY REQUIRING POLICE, PLEASE DIAL 110.

FOREIGNERS SUSPECTED OF ILLEGAL ENTRY, ILLEGAL RESIDENCE AND ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT WILL BE DETAINED FOR INVESTIGATION AND FINED AND DEPORTED. THOSE DEPORTED WILL NOT BE PERMITTED TO ENTER CHINA FOR ONE TO FIVE YEARS.

FOREIGNERS WHO WORK IN CHINA ILLEGALLY SHALL BE FINED NOT LESS THAN RMB 5,000 BUT NOT MORE THAN RMB 20,000 YUAN; WHERE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SERIOUS, THEY SHALL BE DETAINED FOR NOT LESS THAN FIVE DAYS BUT NOT MORE THAN FIFTEEN DAYS AND SHALL ALSO BE FINED NOT LESS THAN RMB 5,000 YUAN BUT NOT MORE THAN RMB 20,000 YUAN.

FOREIGNERS STAY AT A PLACE OTHER THAN A HOTEL, THE HOST OR THE FOREIGNERS THEMSELVES SHALL, WITHIN 24 HOURS OF THE LODGER'S ARRIVAL, GO THROUGH TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION REGISTRATION PROCEEDURES WITH THE LOCAL POLICE STATION, OTHERWISE COULD BE FINED UP TO 2000 YUAN.

IT IS ILLEGAL TO EXCHANGE MONEY WITH UNAUTHORIZED UNITS AND PERSONS, AND PLEASE GO TO THE BANK TO EXCHANGE MONEY.

ANYONE WHO RESIDE OR STAY IN GUANGZHOU SHALL CARRY WITH THEM THEIR PASSPORTS FOR POSSIBLE EXAMINATION BY THE POLICE.
Why focus on religion?

- Africans in China are very religious (Christian and Muslim)
- Church is an important home to facilitate immigrant adaptation.
- Experiences of immigrants in the U.S.: Catholics, Jewish. Chinese immigrants in the U.S.
- Refugee settlement in the US: Vietnamese, Muslim immigrants.
Religious services for foreigners in China

- In U.S., immigrants can attend ethnic based church/masque/ temples where immigrant native language is used in service.
- Chinese immigrants in NYC
- But in China, this is not possible. Pastors, Imams need to be Chinese citizens.
- Unintended consequences of helping Africans adaptation in China.
From shared neighborhoods to shared places of worship

One of the measures of immigrant assimilation: spatial assimilation (Massey, 1985).

Spatial assimilation: (1) more interaction with neighbors of different race/ethnic backgrounds, social networks—better jobs? (2) school resources for kids, (3) access to other benefits (health care, recreation...
Shared places of worship and social integration

- Religious participation and Chinese language proficiency
- Religious participation and making new friends (from same country, Africa, shared faith, including local Chinese—new opportunities). More likely to rely on these church/mosque based friends when encountering difficulties in life.
- Religious participation and community activities (volunteering, Chinese language training, and cultural events)
Sacred heart cathedral (Guangzhou)
Summary and discussion

(1) Guangzhou as a center of the world factory, history, African market, role of Chinese entrepreneurs.

(2) Xiaobei as immigrant neighborhood: proximity to factories, transportation, shared faith with Chinese Muslims.

(3) Religion facilitates social integration: (1) Chinese language learning, (2) community participation, and (3) coping with challenges of life in Guangzhou for Africans.
Thank you (谢谢)!