

# FILM REVIEW

**Christiane Badgley, director.** *Guangzhou Dream Factory*. 2017. 66 minutes. English, with English, French, and Mandarin Subtitles. Guangzhou, China. Raymar Educational Films. \$250.00.

The documentary film *Guangzhou Dream Factory* features the stories of Africans who make a living in Guangzhou, a traditional commercial city in South China. It adopts observational, participatory, and expository approaches and techniques to tell the story. The filmmaker observes the lives of Africans who have come to Guangzhou with shared aspirations of “going out for a better life.” They buy goods and sell them back in Africa. Like migrant communities across the world, within the African community in Guangzhou there are many restaurants, stores for African food, hair salons, and international logistics hubs, among other commercial establishments and activities. Some Africans are lucky to find opportunities within the city, while others are not so fortunate. Nevertheless, this film does not undermine the distinctiveness of African immigration stories in China, nor does it fall into the typical discourse of Africa-China or China-Africa. Guangzhou appears as the locus, while the “dream” is about Africa’s development. This dream is manifested in the exposition of the filmmaker’s experience in Ghana, interviews about Africans’ common concerns about visas, and some archival footage of Ghana’s postcolonial development. Thus, it moves beyond the controversial neocolonialism discourse and turns to the subjectivity of Africa. “We face neither East nor West. We face forward.” The words of Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah, cited in the film, exactly capture this subjectivity.

Although it is not explicitly stated, this film attaches importance to endogenous development in Africa. This concern is reflected through the prism of the common concerns of Africans about visas. Chrisna, an international law student at the University of Wuhan, comes to buy goods in Guangzhou in order to resell them in Africa at a higher price. According to him, it is difficult to obtain a work visa after graduation. Therefore, trade is the best way to make money. Favour Prosper, a Nigerian mom whose daughter was born in China and now behaves like a Chinese person, wishes that her daughter could continue her study in China; they face the prospect of going back to Nigeria without a successful visa extension. Kingsley Azieh Che opens

factories in China and claims to have captured 80 percent of the market for men's suits in Cameroon. However, even a successful factory owner like Che worries about his visa. Once his visa is terminated, his factories will have to close. The African community in Guangzhou is claimed to have declined since the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Africans in Guangzhou may next go to India, Thailand, or Vietnam to seek their fortune. These stories lead to a common question: why do they not go back to their own countries? One Nigerian businessman answers in this manner: "Sometimes I imagine if the African leaders can put what they have together, put the resources together, we shouldn't be here."

The above question leads to another, larger question: what is the best way to develop Africa? Chukwuemeka "Emmy" MacAnthony, a Nigerian, gives his answer. Emmy believes that encouraging the Chinese to invest and open factories in Africa would be better than trading. As early as the 1960s, Kwame Nkrumah emphasized the significance of industrialization. "There is no freedom without economic independence." However, there is still a long way to go. Che, the successful businessman who opens factories in China, would rather not open his factories in Cameroon, in spite of his very successful business selling men's suits, and he must worry about his visa in China. According to him, high taxes, bribery, lack of infrastructure (particularly roads and electricity), and the lack of materials are major obstacles to setting up production in Africa. Emmy thinks that, compared to China, Africa has more resources, while the government is the real problem which is hindering Africa's development. The film also mentions the contrast between Ghana and China regarding their divergent course to industrialization. Ghana established a wide range of industries to serve its national needs after independence, but then shifted from one to another without proper management. In contrast, China has achieved consistent economic development. In this sense, Guangzhou implies a different possibility of development.


Another point that needs to be mentioned is that the film transcends the macro narratives that always consider China a stronger power in the Africa-China relationship. Beyond the state-centric narratives, the power structure of Africa-China relations is multilayered. As mentioned by Emmy, a lot of Africans open factories in China and hire Chinese workers. The presence of Africans in Guangzhou contributing to the local economy is also recognized by Michael, the Chinese manager of the hotel where the film director stayed. Lily, a woman from another province in China who came to Guangzhou to get a better life, married a Nigerian man after they met in a Catholic church. Her accent and diet featured in the interview are African rather than Chinese. Shared culture does not connect her to a local man in Guangzhou but rather to an African.

This film inspires a dream about Africa and Africans. Guangzhou is not the focus of the dream but rather a trigger to think about the dream of endogenous development in Africa. With the supposed decline of the African community in Guangzhou, the next dream hotbed can be Yiwu or any city in Thailand or Vietnam. Other documentary films such as *Africans in Yiwu* and

*Bobby's Factory* feature new hotbeds. Whatever the case and wherever the next wave of migration is, the dream is always going to be about Africa and Africans in search of a better future.

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