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Mapping the New African Diaspora in China: Race and the Cultural Politics of Belonging

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Contents

List of illustrations

Acknowledgments

Introduction: becoming Africans, becoming blacks in China

- 1 South China as the new Promised Land for African migrants
- 2 Chinese internet representation of African migrants in Guangzhou
- 3 Issues of credibility and trust in grassroots trade activities between Chinese and Africans
- 4 Chinese state regulation of undocumented Africans in Guangzhou
- 5 Status mobility, community networks, and trans-local belongings
- 6 Between Guangzhou and Lagos: business and family strategies of Chinese/Nigerian couples
- 7 Negotiating religious freedom in China

Conclusion: China as a key site of transnational racial knowledge production

References

Index

Introduction: becoming Africans, becoming blacks in China

A Chinese reporter stopped a heiren (a term in Mandarin Chinese, literally means black person) student on the street of Guangzhou, “May I ask which place is hotter, Guangzhou or Africa?” The heiren replied, “I don’t want to get angry, but I tell all of you for the last time that I am not an African. I got tanned in Guangzhou.”

This is a joke circulated on the Sina Weibo, one of the most popular microblogging websites in China. The joke has become so widespread on the Chinese Internet that it has developed several versions. For most Chinese netizens, this is a joke making fun of Africans’ black skin color. The underlying logic is: how can a black person get tanned in Guangzhou? Following the Chinese reporter’s inquiry, blackness is constructed as an inborn and immutable identity that is nurtured exclusively in the imagined hot weather in Africa. However, a critical examination of the multiple meanings of the joke helps flesh out some of the gaps and contradictions in the racialization of black identity in China. First and foremost, the joke betrays a general conflation of African and black identities in Chinese eyes. The *heiren*’s denial of his African identity and emphasis on his adaptation to the Guangzhou environment points to the counterintuitive idea (for many Chinese) that one can be both a black and a local Guangzhou person. Here blackness is constructed as being foreign and incompatible with local Guangzhou identity. In another version of the joke, the *heiren* actually said, “I am not an African. I am a local Guangzhou person.” This African claim of local Guangzhou identity is an explicit reference to the large concentration of migrants from Africa in Guangzhou and the prevailing stereotype of Africans as visa overstayers. Moreover, the *heiren*’s threat to get angry can be easily interpreted as an indication of the inherently “violent” nature of blacks, as illustrated by sensational media coverage of the two African protest events in Guangzhou in 2009 and 2012. In this vein, the joke reinforces negative media representation of Africans as a threat to social order in South China.

However, from a more critical perspective the joke can also be interpreted as a satirical portrayal of the Chinese public's ignorance of African society and culture. The reporter's question betrays his lack of knowledge about weather differences in African countries. According to my informants from West Africa, the weather there is generally mild and not as hot as in Guangzhou. By denying his African identity, the *heiren* tries to challenge the general Chinese association of blackness with Africa. He might come from North America or Europe rather than Sub-Saharan Africa. The *heiren*'s insistence that he got tanned in Guangzhou highlights the existence of different shades of blackness in China. It also attests to the dynamic, malleable, and shifting meanings of blackness in a transnational context. By attributing his blackness to the scorching sun in Guangzhou, he deliberately deconstructs the Chinese assumption that blackness is an inborn and immutable identity that is associated exclusively with Africa. Instead of a bold claim of local identity, his reference to the "tanning" process in Guangzhou may indicate an uneasy process of racialization of blackness in an intolerant local society. Following this logic, the *heiren*'s irritation/frustration over the Chinese reporter's query may be interpreted as well justified, since similar questions must have been posed to him many times by other equally naïve Chinese.

The polysemy of the joke points to the highly mediated and contested nature of African/black identities in contemporary Chinese society. It also reveals the gap between official rhetoric of Sino-African friendship at the state level and popular stereotypes against migrants from Africa at the personal level. Based on ethnographic research in China and Nigeria, this book explores a new wave of African migration to South China in the context of the expansion of Sino/African trade relations and the global circulation of racial knowledge. Differing from previous generation of Africans in China who were mainly students from elite backgrounds, this

recent wave represents what scholars call “globalization from below” (Mathews and Vega 2012). The majority of them are individual traders and small entrepreneurs who purchase cheap consumer goods in China and ship them back to Africa for sale. Unlike their predecessors who were dispersed to different university campuses, recent African migrants are transforming urban Chinese landscape by forming geographically visible diaspora communities in big Chinese cities. Dubbed by local media as “Chocolate City” or “Little Africa,” the African concentration in Guangzhou claims to be the largest of its kind in China (Pan, Chen and Yang 2008).

There are no available government statistics on the exact number of Africans in Guangzhou. According to some scholarly estimates, the number is probably around 20,000 (Li, Ma & Xue 2009; Haugen 2012; Yang 2012). The African population in Guangzhou is extremely diverse and almost every country in Africa is represented. According to Bodomo (2012), the top five groups are Nigerians, Senegalese, Malians, Guineans, and Ghanaians. About 80% of the migrants surveyed by Bodomo were between 24 and 40 years old, and close to 82% of them were men. Compared to other foreign populations, Africans in Guangzhou are internationally visible due to sensational media reports of several protest events. In July 2009, an undocumented African was severely injured after jumping from the second floor of a trade mall in order to evade passport check by the Chinese police. Later that day, more than one hundred Africans launched a protest outside a local police station demanding for justice (Tang and Gong 2009).ⁱ On 19 June 2012 the African community was under the spotlight again, when open clashes broke out between African traders and the Chinese police over the death of a Nigerian man in police custody (Beech 2012; Branigan 2012). While such dramatic events point to some of the hidden crises in China’s existing immigration policy, relatively little is known about the daily life experiences of African migrants in Guangzhou and how they interact with the local Chinese community.

Existing literature on African diaspora usually focuses on black experiences in Europe and North America, due to the historical legacy of the transatlantic slave trade (Gilroy 1992). However, recent scholarship begins to challenge this homogenization of the African diaspora by drawing attention to comparative studies of black diaspora experiences in different parts of the world (Patterson & Kelley 2000; Zeleza 2005). China offers a compelling case study for the African diaspora in East Asia because of its unique position as a historical ally of many African countries in their anti-colonial, anti-racist struggles, and its recent transformation into a world economic power. This book examines the multiple layers of complexity in the reception of Africans in Guangzhou and their various community building strategies. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how knowledge about Africa and blackness is constructed, contested, disseminated, and reconstructed in China's rising market economy. As an example of South-South migration, the African diaspora in China is rendered a political sensitive issue due to the resilience of the Sino-African friendship discourse (Strauss 2009). Meanwhile, the intersection of internal and international migration in global cities such as Guangzhou, and the persistent influence of western racial ideology in popular media, also contributes to the uneven racialization of black/African identities in urban China.

Debating race and racism in the Chinese context

Race is a difficult topic in China for several reasons. First of all, it is not part of the official discourse in China. The Chinese government holds that issues of race and racism only exist in Western countries and there are no racial problems in China. During the Cold War era, the Chinese government publicly condemned U.S. imperialism and colonialism in the Third World by supporting anti-racist struggles of African Americans in the United States and building coalitions with developed countries in Southeast Asia and Africa (Mullen 2004; Prashad 2001;

Snow 1988). As a consequence of this official propaganda, the general Chinese public still believes that racial discrimination is a purely Western phenomenon. The second difficulty is the lack of indigenous scholarship on the topic. Within the Chinese language, there is no single word for “race.” The closest equivalent may be *zhong zu* (*zhong* means seed, breed, species, and type; *zu* means lineage, nationality, and ethnicity). The scarcity of studies on race among Chinese scholars (both in Mainland China and Taiwan) may be attributed to the political sensitivity of the topic, problems of translation, and difficulties in the comparison of distinct historical trajectories and cultural contexts between China and Western countries.

Existing literature on race in China is generally divided into two camps. The first believes that the discourse of race and racism has a long history in Chinese culture, while the second emphasizes distinctions between traditional Chinese ways of constructing difference and the western pseudo-scientific notion of race.ⁱⁱ Dikötter (1992) argues that the emergence of a racial discourse in China at the end of the nineteenth century was not due to China’s encounter with the western world, but largely out of the “internal development” of Chinese society (34). Dikötter’s book has often been cited as evidence for the existence of racism in Chinese society (Jacques 2009; Johnson 2007; Sautman 1994), yet it has also been criticized for its reductionist approach to race and its western-centric interpretation of Chinese cultural constructs (Dirlik 1993; Stafford 1993). For example, Stafford (1993:609) calls for an understanding of Chinese concepts “on their own terms.” Dirlik (1993:70) urges critical reflections of the “hegemonic power” of Euro-American imperialism in spreading the discourse of race globally.

Echoing Stafford and Dirlik’s attention to the complexity of the Chinese cultural context, other scholars argue that in ancient Chinese society, cultural difference rather than biological difference was the primary means to distinguish between “self” and “other.” In classical Chinese

writings, aliens who did not assimilate to the Chinese way were called *yi* or *fan*, literally meaning “the barbarian.” David Y. F. Ho attributes this prejudice against non-Chinese to “culturocentrism,” that is, “a conviction as to the pliable endurance and superiority of Chinese civilization (in its spiritual, but not material, aspects), and a tendency to apply Chinese values without question in judging other races” (Ho 1985: 224). In traditional Chinese society, skin color does not indicate any immutable biological characteristics, but class status. Fair skin is generally associated with higher social status while dark skin is associated with peasants and manual laborers (Yuan 1989: 9). Fair skin is also an important standard of female beauty. This can be found in the Chinese saying “*yi bai zhe bai chou*” (white skin can hide a hundred flaws) (Hooi, 2009:8). According to Fennell (2013), traditional Chinese society does not share the absolutist notions of skin color of the European Enlightenment. It was “civilizational attainment,” together with a spatial hierarchy based on geographical distance from the Chinese empire, which determines the ranking of one’s skin color. In this traditional Chinese cosmology, “Europeans, coming from a place far from the civilizational core, were considered just as strange as Africans” (247).

In his classical work *Black Folk Here and There* St. Clair Drake (1987) exposes the limitation of the U.S. context in theorizing race and racism by examining the multifaceted nature of blackness in non-Western cultures. Besides emphasizing the different varieties of racism, Drake also makes a distinction between racism and color prejudice. He states, “...racism can exist without the reinforcement of color prejudice, just as color prejudice can exist apart from racism (and does within many black communities)” (22). Following Drake’s attention to the cultural construction of racial meanings, this research explores the specificity of the Chinese cultural context in generating a complex and ever changing matrix of hierarchical ranking of

different groups of foreigners. For example, black Africans in Guangzhou are sometimes constructed as inferior to Chinese, sometimes as occupying a higher status than Chinese due to the conflation of Africans and foreigners in some areas in the city. The differential treatment of black Americans and black Africans also gives rise to racism based not on skin color, but on nationality and economic status. In addition, the intersection of internal and international migration in Guangzhou facilitates Chinese/African business partnership and romantic relations, which have the potential of changing public perceptions of black Africans. However, the transformative power of such grassroots cross-cultural interactions is severely limited by language barrier, cultural differences, and the Chinese state's stringent immigration control policies.

In order to capture the dynamic and historically constructed nature of race in contemporary China, I adopt Michael Omi & Howard Winant's concept of racialization, "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group" (1986: 64). The uneven racialization of black Africans in China points to the fact that anti-black racism in China cannot be interpreted within the traditionally black and white binary and must be situated within the larger context of the triangular power relations between China, Africa and the West. China's increasing presence in Africa and the recent African migration to China are both highly controversial topics. Yet most of the discussions on Sino/African relations tend to ignore the persistent yet invisible influence of the West. Only a few scholars have noted the mediating effects of western media on Chinese perceptions of Africans and African perceptions of Chinese (Johnson 2007; Sautman and Yan 2009). In her study of Korean/Black relations in New York City, Claire Kim (2000) uses the term "racial triangulation" to describe the shifting racialization of Asian Americans as the model minority compared to African Americans, and as non-citizens

and outsiders in relation to whites and African Americans. This research extends Kim's theory of racial triangulation to the domain of transnational racial formation. I argue that in order to uncover the multi-layered complexity in the racialization of black Africans in China one needs to take into account racial triangulation between China, Africa and the West.

In their study of racialization in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), Kubota and Lin (2006) draw attention to epistemological racism, which attends to the unequal power relations between the West and the Rest in terms of racial knowledge production. Stam and Shohat also note that in comparative studies of racism in different cultural contexts, the "which is worse?" question is the wrong question (2012: 281). They argue, "the globalized era of asymmetrical interdependencies requires a heightened sense of the (partially regulated) flow of ideas, of crisscrossing messages and multidirectional but still power-inflected channels of exchange, where nations and states are not necessarily coterminous" (295). Echoing the two authors' emphasis on the transnational circulation of racial ideas and ideologies, this book investigates how the Chinese knowledge about Africans and blacks are developed, contested, and mediated by China's encounters with Africa and the West in different historical periods. From the "yellow race" discourse in late 19th century to the "Sino-African friendship" discourse in the Mao and post-Mao regimes, to the current "African threat" discourse in Guangzhou, the Chinese knowledge of blacks and Africans has been molded and remolded in larger contexts such as China's anti-colonial struggles, rise of nationalism and pro-democracy movement, changing political and trade relations with African countries, and its recent integration into the global economic system.

Guangzhou as a contact zone

There exists an abundance of literature on the African presence in Guangzhou. Instead of conducting an exhaustive literature review, I identify two groups of literature based on their different publication periods and varying conceptualizations of the African diaspora communities in Guangzhou. Scholarly articles published before 2012 usually focus on the general profile of the African population and their geographical concentration in two major areas in the city: Xiaobei and Sanyuanli. Bertonecelo and Bredeloup (2007) treat the African diaspora in Xiaobei area as emerging new trading posts for customers back in Africa. Li and his colleagues argue that the Xiaobei and Sanyuanli areas represent a transnational ethnic enclave that has gone through different stages of transformation, such as emergence, prosperity and collapse (Li, Ma & Xue 2009; Li et al 2012; Lyons et al 2008; Lyons et al 2012). Challenging the enclave thesis, Bodo (2010) regards the African migrant community in Guangzhou as a social cultural bridge between China and Africa. Compared to earlier researches which are largely exploratory in nature, scholarly articles published after 2012 tend to focus on more complex issues such as the transnational social networks of African migrants and the organizational structures of the diaspora communities (Marfaing and Thiel 2015; Muller and Wehrhahn 2013; Mathews 2015). Castillo identifies multiple mobility trajectories among Africans and describes their place-making strategies in Guangzhou as “dwelling on the move” (2014: 243). Gilles (2015) treats Guangzhou as a translocal trading place that is linked to African social networks in multiple scales and localities. Bork- Hüffer et al (2016) examine how African social networks and migrant organizations facilitate the emergence of transient social spaces between China, West Africa, South Africa, and Dubai.

The shift of attention from geographical space to social space, from ethnic enclave to translocal communities reflects an increasing scholarly sensitivity to the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of the African diaspora in Guangzhou. However, there still exist important gaps in current literature, for example, the experiences of undocumented Africans, daily interactions between African and various groups of Chinese, and the cross-cultural implications of African social and business networks. To address these gaps, this book proposes to treat Guangzhou as a “contact zone” where China’s internal migrants meets with international migrants. Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991: 34). While inspired by Pratt’s ideas, my usage of the notion of contact zone also differs from hers in several aspects. First, contact zone in this book incorporates both the social and spatial dimensions. The concentration of transnational trade activities in several wholesale markets in Guangzhou has enabled the development of more sustained cross-cultural interactions in such areas. Second, I am using culture in its adjective form by treating contact zones as intercultural spaces where migrant or diaspora populations from different ethnic or national backgrounds contest, negotiate, and appropriate their differences in order to achieve the common goal of economic prosperity. Finally, while interactions between Chinese and African migrants also involve asymmetrical power relations, they are not reducible to the dichotomy of domination and subordination.

As one of the first cities to benefit from China’s open-door policy, Guangzhou is not only a popular destination for international migrants such as African traders, but for internal migrants from rural and inland China. Taking advantage of the city’s thriving export-oriented market

economy, Chinese migrant workers and petty entrepreneurs tend to congregate in Guangzhou's several big wholesale markets, providing various trade or trade-related services to international traders. To a certain extent, the Chinese and African migrant populations in Xiaobei and Sanyuanli have formed a mutually beneficial economic relationship. Despite language barrier and cultural differences, the two groups share similar structural marginalization in urban China due to their non-*hukou* or non-citizenship status and their categorization as the "floating population" by the Chinese state.ⁱⁱⁱ Not only are the two migrant populations cut off from the state support system due to their outsiders' status, they are also subjected to various state rules and regulations due to their concentration in the informal economy for job or business opportunities. The notion of contact zone attends to the dynamic and fluid nature of the Chinese and African communities and highlights the production of new geographical and social spaces for cross-cultural and interethnic business interactions at the grassroots level.

Recent scholarship in migration studies has been paying increasing attention to the issue of scale. Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2011) emphasize the relative positioning of a city within hierarchical fields of power in studies of migrant agency. Others challenge the division between internal and international migration as two separate fields of study (Ellis 2012; Hickey and Yeoh 2015; King and Skeldon 2010). By treating Guangzhou as a contact zone, this book emphasizes the overlapping and interconnected aspects of different scales, which facilitate a wide range of interactions between various groups of Chinese and Africans. Earlier research on Africans in Guangzhou tend to note the negative aspects of Chinese/African encounters, such as Africans' reluctance to adapt to Chinese culture, and resentment of African practices by Chinese traders (Lyon et al 2008, 2012). These scholars attribute the formation of the African enclave in Guangzhou to racism and state immigration control policy. This research privileges the temporal

scale by analyzing the changing perceptions of Chinese towards Africans over time. As intercultural business activities flourish, some Chinese migrants' attitudes towards Africans also changed from negative to accommodating or even friendly. Tightening state immigration policies also led to the reconfiguration of the African communities. While Xiaobei and Sanyuanli remain the center of African business and social life, more and more Africans are moving to smaller cities such as Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, and Shenzhen, where immigration control is less rigorously implemented (Bork- Hüffer et al 2014). This book argues that it is precisely the contested and negotiated nature of interethnic relations that contributes to the multiple meanings of blackness and the uneven racialization of black identity in China.

Scholars have been using a variety of terms to describe Africans, such as global entrepreneurs, transnational business men, nomadic traders, migrant traders and so on. Castillo (2014) problematizes the migration paradigm in accounting for the African experiences in China by favoring a transnational mobility paradigm. He argues that Africans' multiple mobility trajectories challenge the assimilation (permanent settlement) model perpetuated by the nation-state system. However, echoing Faist's (2013) critique of the mobility paradigm for its neglect of power relations, an overemphasis on the "transient," "mobile" and "unstable" journeys of Africans runs the risk of obscuring their structural marginalization in China. Rejecting the notion of Africans as migrants may also perpetuate China's official rhetoric as a non-immigrant country. Inspired by Xiang's (2015) argument that migration is always embedded in social processes such as state making, this book critically examines how state immigration policies mediate the community building and place making strategies of African migrants in South China. I argue that the transnational mobility strategies envisioned and practiced by African migrants reflect both the structural constraints they encountered in Chinese society, and their active quest

for economic prosperity in the global economy. By identifying the various contradictions in the formulation and implementation of state immigration policies at different administrative levels, this book emphasizes the distinctiveness of the Chinese context in fostering a fragmented notion of anti-black racism that simultaneously resembles and differs from racisms in some western countries.

Blackness as translocal subjectivity

In his study of the construction of Afro-Jamaican blackness in Japan, Sterling (2010) notes Asia's "disconnection from discussions about blackness in the modern world" due to the absence of large numbers of people of African descent within its borders and "its location outside the primary circuits of the Atlantic and Arab slave trades" (37, 41). However, the situation has changed dramatically now with the phenomenal increase in China/Africa trade relations and the extensive media reports of recent African migration to South China. Guangzhou not only hosts the largest African diaspora communities in China, but functions as a nodal point in connecting multiple and overlapping personal and business networks between people of African descent in Asia, Africa, Euro-America, and other parts of the world (Giles 2015). To a certain extent, the new African diaspora in China, together with China's expanding influence in Africa, has repositioned Asia as an emerging key player in the global debate about blackness. The Chinese case promises to contribute to existing literature on blackness in three aspects. First, the concentration of grassroots trade activities among African migrants in Guangzhou has facilitated the development of interpersonal social spaces between ordinary Chinese and Africans in daily life settings, which provides an alternative source of racial learning beyond the broad, hegemonic discourse of race from the West (c.f. Sterling 2010). Second, the triangular power relations between China, Africa and the West complicates the black and white binary and points to

alternative racial formation processes that move beyond the superior/inferior, domination/subordination modes of differentiation. Finally, since the African experience in China is embedded in a global context of overlapping diasporas (Lewis 1995), it facilitates the cross fertilization of racial knowledge through the multi-directional and asymmetrical flows of people, capital, commodities, and ideas between China, Africa, and other parts of the world.

Echoing scholars who note the fluid and malleable representations of blackness in different geographical, historical and social contexts (Rhodes 2007; Sterling 2010; Frazier 2014), this research finds that the construction of blackness in contemporary China is a transnational and interactive process, which involves the intersections of multiple perspectives. Authors like Du Bois (1965) and Fanon (1967) have noted the importance of the white gaze in creating a double consciousness among blacks in the historical context of slavery, colonialism, and white domination. In the Chinese context, it is the co-existence of the Chinese and white gazes, and the triangular power relations between China, Africa and the West, that helps define blackness as a translocal subjectivity. On the one hand, the majority of my African informants experienced a heightened awareness of being black in China. They reported that Chinese has displayed a wide range of attitudes towards blacks, such as curiosity, fear, fascination, resentment, avoidance, and disdain. Some Africans attributed their negative experiences in China to racism, while others cited ignorance and lack of contact with blacks as major reasons for Chinese prejudice. On the other hand, most Africans also demonstrated a heightened awareness of the differential status of blacks in China and in the West. A middle-aged Nigerien engineer who was on a business trip in Guangzhou told me, “I like China because here you are treated like a human being. People talk to you. In France, when they see you as a black person, they avoid talking to you. They try to keep a distance from you. You can tell the horror on their faces.”^{iv} Despite the various challenges

and obstacles they encountered, many Africans still considered China a promised land, where they can find business and life opportunities that are not available in the West.

It is important to note that Africans' comparison between China and the West can work both ways. While China may function as a strategic site for Africans to criticize Western colonialism and white supremacy, the country's conservative immigration policies and neglect of human rights also render it a less desirable place for permanent settlement. It is the tension between constraints and opportunities, mobilities and immobilities that characterizes the adventurous yet precarious nature of black African experiences in China. The fact that blackness in China is constructed in relation to both whiteness and Chineseness points to the shifting and contested meanings of race in a nonwestern context. One important distinction between China and the West in their relations to Africa is the resilience of the Sino/African friendship discourse from the 1950s to the present (Strauss 2009). Existing literature on Afro-Asian connections mainly focuses on elite exchanges in the political/ideological realm and fusions in popular culture (Frazier 2014; Mullen 2004; Prashad 2001; Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 2006; Sterling 2010). This book examines daily life interactions between Africans and Chinese from non-elite backgrounds in various informal trade spaces in Guangzhou. I argue that Afro-Chinese encounters at the grassroots level not only help reveal the negotiated process of mutual racial learning, but promises to subvert hegemonic discourses such as Sino/African friendship and white supremacy in subtle ways.

In my previous book *Diaspora and Class Consciousness: Chinese Immigrant Workers in Multiracial Chicago*, I define racial learning as “the development and accumulation of knowledge about racial differences and racial hierarchies through daily life experiences in various transnational, local, institutional, and community settings” (Lan 2012:5-6). In this book I

want to emphasize that racial learning between non-elite Chinese and Africans is a bi-directional process, which oftentimes involves mutual stereotypes and racialization. In their study of racialization of labor in the Chinese/African interface, Sautman and Yan (2016) note the racialization of Africans by various Chinese actors, and the racialization of Chinese by various African actors. The two authors propose a model of South-South racialization that is markedly different from the North-South exemplar. I want to further unpack this concept of South-South racialization by noting the heterogeneity in both the Chinese and African communities. The distinction between elite and non-elite Chinese indicates that there are different types of Chinese gazes on black Africans, which may or may not involve racialization in the western sense. For example, Chinese migrant workers' fear or fascination with blackness may be attributed to curiosity and lack of contact with blacks, rather than internalization of western racial ideology (c.f. Sterling 2010). Moreover, since the Chinese gaze does not command similar hegemonic power as the white gaze, Africans in China can sometimes resist, negotiate and return the gaze by constructing their own stereotypes about different groups of Chinese. It must be noted that this mutual racial learning process can be at times highly idiosyncratic and fraught with tensions. However, the cross fertilization of racial knowledge through the global African diaspora network may facilitate the formation of a translocal black subjectivity that is critical towards both China and the West.

In his review of literature on African American history, Lewis (1995) identifies a tension between racial formation and identity formation. He remarks, "... race is but one part of the self, and race is always relational. Equally important, black Americans have lived in variegated communities, where class, color, religious, and other differences mattered" (783). Echoing Lewis' intersectional approach, this book seeks to understand the black diaspora experiences in

China by taking into consideration intersections between race and other denominators of difference such as class, gender, nationality, language, legal status, religion, and cultural differences. For example, some Africans' English language skills may enable them to occupy a higher social status than Chinese due to the power of English as a global language. Since most African migrants are either Muslim or Christian, they often display a sense of moral superiority over Chinese, who are generally considered as non-religious and thus lacking good moral standard and discipline. Through interactions with different groups of Chinese population and forging transnational ties with African diaspora in other parts of the world, black Africans in Guangzhou become active agents and participants in the production of a new version of blackness that is marked by flexible accumulation of economic and social capital, translocal networks, provisional mobility and immobility strategies (i.e. visa oversayers), political consciousness, and cross-cultural savvy. This new black subjectivity is not permanently attached to any specific location, yet it has the potential to temporarily penetrate or subvert some of the existing mobility regimes in China and the West by its capacity to develop connections and sense of belonging to multiple communities (Glick Schiller & Salazar 2013).

A note on methodology

The data for this research was gathered between March 2012 and June 2014 through archival research (government legal documents, Chinese language newspapers and journals) and participant observation in the African markets in the Xiaobei and Sanyuanli areas in Guangzhou. Due to institutional constraints, I could not live in Guangzhou for a sustained period of time. However, I managed to rent an apartment in a neighborhood near Xiaobei and commuted regularly between Hong Kong and Guangzhou for eight months. Each visit to Guangzhou lasted about two to three weeks. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I tried various strategies in order to

get to know African informants, but with little success. Most of them were either too busy with their businesses or suspicious of my motivations for talking to them. Since it was rather difficult to build trusting relations with African migrants, I decided to start with Chinese who maintain contacts with Africans. The first person I approached was Mr. Chen, the realtor who helped me find my apartment in Xiaobei.^v Since Mr. Chen's office is located in a busy street, he sometimes has foreign (mostly African) clients looking for housing nearby. Unable to speak English, Mr. Chen had some hard time trying to communicate with foreign clients. I explained my research project to Mr. Chen and offered to help him with English interpretation. For several months, Mr. Chen would call me on the phone whenever he had a foreign customer and I would either do the translation over the phone or stop by his office if I happened to be around. Through my volunteer work with Mr. Chen, I gathered valuable information about the apartment hunting experiences of African migrants in the city and local state's policy on the regulation of foreign populations in Guangzhou.

Meanwhile, I also found over the Internet an English interpreter's job in a Chinese Muslim man Youssef's shop in Xiaobei. I explained my research project to him and offered to do volunteer work in his shop. I stayed for three weeks in Youssef's shop working full time from 10 am to 10 pm almost every day. This job provided me great opportunities to observe daily interactions between Youssef and his African customers. When business was slow, I chatted with Youssef and his wife about their migration history, previous business experiences in Guangzhou, and life back in their hometown in Ningxia, a province in the northwestern part of China. Although participant observation in Youssef's shop yielded a lot of interesting data, I was still searching for opportunities to get initiated into the African diaspora communities in Guangzhou. My research took a new turn when I met Lisa, a middle-aged Chinese woman who owns a

logistics business in an African market in Sanyuanli. Lisa introduced me to Kevin, one of her part-time employees. Polite and soft-spoken, Kevin is a 28-year-old Nigerian who overstayed his visa in China. Due to Lisa's reputation as a warm-hearted person who is ready to help undocumented Nigerians in the market, I immediately won the trust of Kevin, who affectionately addressed Lisa as "Auntie". I told Kevin my previous migration experiences from China to the United States, and then to Hong Kong. I then explained my previous research on Chinese migrant workers in Chicago. Finally, I expressed my wish to learn more about the struggles, challenges, and dreams of African migrants in Guangzhou. Kevin's face started to shine and he said eagerly, "Yes, many of us live in pain. We are living in a different world. We want our voices heard, but the Chinese government is not interested in our stories." Since then, Kevin became my key informant, gatekeeper, and major interlocutor in the field.

Although Kevin opened the door to the undocumented Nigerian community to me, I still need to present myself strategically to my black African informants in order to win their trust. Initially, I gave Kevin some of my name cards and a hard copy of my book on Chinese migrants in Chicago. He would help me recruit interviewees by advocating my research project within his social network. Following Kevin's advice, I rewarded each interviewee with a bottle of red wine. The interview usually took place in Lisa's shop, or in the interviewee's shop. To my surprise, my Chinese identity did not hinder my informants from opening sharing their negative experiences with the Chinese authorities and with other Chinese migrant traders. Due to my previous higher educational experiences in the United States and current status as a fulltime researcher in a prestigious university in Hong Kong, my African informants considered me to be more "open-minded" and "educated" than the Chinese they interacted on a daily basis in the market place. They also wish that their experiences in China (as recorded in my book) can be known by more

people in the world so that the Chinese state can change its policy towards migrants from Africa. Kevin remained my major interlocutor throughout my fieldwork in Guangzhou. Whenever I had questions or doubts about the contents of some interviews, I would talk to him seeking verification or confirmation. We discussed a wide range of topics emerged from my field notes. I also followed Kevin and his friends to different markets, warehouses, sports and social events.

As I visited Lisa's shop more frequently, I started getting to know more people in the market, both Chinese and Africans. After I started following the snowball sampling method, I became less dependent on Kevin's social network and attempted to reach out to Africans from other countries. Later I was initiated into the Ugandan community in Guangzhou through connections with a female Ugandan trader. My research with Ugandans yielded important data on short-term visitors to China and females from East and Central Africa working as prostitutes in Guangzhou. In order to further capture the diversity within the African community, I recruited two African students: one from Zambia, one from Gambia, to be my research assistants. I also hired two Chinese research assistants. One of them tried to interact with French-speaking Africans, while the other focusing on Chinese migrant traders' perception of different groups of Africans. Altogether the research team conducted over one hundred open-ended and semi-structured interviews with African traders from Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Togo, Gambia, Tanzania, Niger, Senegal, Cameroon, and other countries. In addition, the Zambian research assistant and I also interviewed twenty African students who were pursuing higher educations in universities in Guangzhou. In order to obtain a balanced view of the African experiences in Guangzhou, the team also interviewed forty Chinese who had various levels of interaction with Africans. Their backgrounds include real estate agents, small business owners, government officials, migrant workers, and wives of African men.

In addition to open-ended interviews, I also conducted participant observation fieldwork in Stone Chamber Catholic Church, which has a large African congregation for its Sunday afternoon service, and an underground Pentecostal church attended mainly by Africans. Between May 2012 and June 2013, I served as the pastor's Chinese interpreter during sermon time in the underground church since I am a Christian myself. The pastor knew my status as a researcher, yet I remained a participant observer most of the time and made no efforts to recruit African informants for interviews. The church got me into good contact with several Chinese wives of Nigerian men, who provided me with valuable insiders' information on interracial marriage. Due to translocal nature of the African communities in Guangzhou, multi-sited fieldwork became a necessity. Following Kevin's social network, I made a three-week research trip to Lagos, Nigeria from July to August 2013. In Lagos, with the help of two research assistants, I conducted informal interviews with Nigerian traders and deportees on their business experiences in China and encounters with the police in Guangzhou. I also interviewed several Chinese wives who were running business with their Nigerian husbands in Lagos. In order to compare the African experiences in Guangzhou and in other Chinese cities, my research assistant Allen Xiao and I made two short research trips to Yiwu (in May and November 2014) to conduct informal interviews with African traders there. In addition, with the help of a Nigerian graduate student in Hong Kong, I attended an African church there and gathered some useful information on African traders in the city.

While I was in the field, I sometimes heard stories of how young female graduate students (both Chinese and Caucasian) being embarrassed by some over-enthusiastic male African informants. This seldom happened to me because my initial group of Nigerian interviewees was pre-screened by Kevin, who already informed them of my research project and my status as a

professor from a university in Hong Kong. In addition, my age (early forties) and my personal identity as a Christian woman also helped build trust and mutual respect between me and my informants. In order to overcome the limitations of my gender and ethnicity as a researcher, I provided Kevin with an interview template and asked him to conduct semi-structured interviews with additional African traders. Kevin's interviews did generate information that I was unable to obtain from time to time. For several months Kevin also kept notes of the community and social events he attended in order to help me gain a better understanding of the internal structure and mechanism in the African diaspora communities in Guangzhou and a nearby city Foshan. For various reasons, this research did not generate in-depth data on French and Portuguese speaking Africans in Guangzhou. Since my strongest data are from semi-settled traders and visa overstayers, this book also does not give much voice to itinerant traders (a significant portion of them being women), who travel back and forth between China and Africa.

Structure of the book

This book consists of seven chapters. Chapter One starts with a historical review of Sino-African connections. It examines how the Chinese knowledge about Africans and blacks are developed, contested, and mediated by China's encounters with Africa and the West in different historical periods. I then discuss the structural and personal reasons for recent African migration to South China, followed by an analysis of some key characteristics of the African diaspora communities in Guangzhou. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how the African presence in Guangzhou contributes to racial knowledge formation in China in important ways. Chapter Two examines how knowledge about Africans and blackness is constructed on the Chinese internet. I identify five major narratives and two counter narratives in our data base: the black threat discourse, xenophobia, Han chauvinism, critique of state immigration policy, learning from western examples, the Sino-African friendship discourse, and stories of Chinese

wives of Nigerian men. I argue that the Chinese internet construction of black African identity is a multilayered and contested process that needs to be contextualized and historicized. Black Africans are not always constructed as an exclusively racialized category in China, but are sometimes conflated with foreigners, Muslims, and African Americans. Chapter Three examines the multiple reasons for the formation of mutual stereotypes between Chinese and African petty traders. It situates grassroots business transactions between Chinese and Africans in the larger context of Sino/African trade relations and the intersection of internal and international migration in global cities such as Guangzhou. It moves beyond economic analysis by contemplating the pros and cons of racial knowledge formation in cross-cultural business settings. I argue that issues of credibility and trust not only reflect language barrier and cultural misunderstandings, but highlight Chinese and African migrants' shared status of marginalization in an increasingly stratified Chinese society. Chapter Four examines the introduction, nature and implementation of an anti-immigrant legislation in Guangdong province and its larger implications in the regional, national and international contexts. It analyzes state regulation of undocumented African migrants in three aspects: 1) the legal production of African "illegality" in the Guangdong context; 2) the contradictions in the implementation of the Guangdong Act and its unintended consequences; 3) the discrepancy between anti-African immigrant campaign at the local level and pro-African political ideology at the national and international levels. Finally, I critically discuss the possibility of structural racism against black Africans in China. Chapter Five examines the tension between mobility and immobility in the daily life experiences of undocumented Africans in Guangzhou. Specifically, it focuses on "illegal" residence as a business strategy in maintaining vital transnational trade networks between China and Africa. For many African migrants, "illegal" residence in Guangzhou is only one special phase of their

life for the purpose of capital accumulation. It enables them to maintain a transnational advantage over traders in Africa. By voluntarily choosing a lifestyle of circumscribed mobility, undocumented Africans are instrumental in forging translocal ties among blacks in China, Africa, and different parts of the world. The major theme of Chapter Six is interracial romance/marriage between female Chinese migrants and undocumented Nigerian men. It explores how interracial romance is both structured and constrained by opportunities and challenges in grassroots trade activities between China and Africa. Due to their structurally marginalized status vis-a-vis the Chinese state, the majority of men and women in this study are compelled to maintain their romantic and business relations within a constrained transnational space. The transnational mobility dreams of most Chinese/Nigerian couples are likely to be passed on to the next generation due to everyday racism and institutional barriers to raising mixed-race children in China. Chapter Seven compares the African Christian experiences in a government-approved church (Yide Lu) and several underground Pentecostal churches. The African leaders at Yide Lu have to negotiate the tension between Christian universalism and ethnic particularism by subordinating themselves to Chinese church leadership and state laws. Yet they manage to cultivate a relatively autonomous space offering spiritual and social support for African members. Underground churches are faced with constant challenges in finding a safe worship place, fluctuating attendance, and financial constraints. Yet they have played an important role in offering spiritual support for undocumented Africans and in evangelism among Chinese.

Finally, I want to make a note on terminology. Generally speaking, the Chinese understanding of Africans in Guangzhou is centered on Sub-Saharan Africans or black Africans. Arabic-speaking migrants from North Africa are usually identified by Chinese as whites or

Arabs, not as Africans. While I choose to adopt this emic practice by using Africans and blacks interchangeably in this book, I also emphasize blackness as a translocal subjectivity that is forged in the global African diaspora, of which China is merely a part.

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ⁱ The English media carried a different version of the story, claiming that the African man died after jumping from the building. Interviews with Africans who witnessed the 2009 incident revealed that the man was severely injured, but did not die.

ⁱⁱ I use "traditional Chinese ways" or "traditional Chinese society" to describe China before its encounter with the West.

ⁱⁱⁱ *hukou* means household registration in English. It is one of the major means for the Chinese state to control the movement of people between urban and rural areas. In August 2008, the Guangzhou government, in its attempt to control undocumented foreign migrants in the region, announced that foreigners would be included in the "floating population" category and were subjected to the rules and regulations for its management.

^{iv} Personal communication, April 5, 2012, Guangzhou.

^v All personal names in this book are pseudonyms.