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[Review of: G. Mathews (2017) *The World in Guangzhou: Africans and Other Foreigners in South China's Global Marketplace*]

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## Understanding Globalization from Below in China

Gordon Mathews, with Linessa Dan Lin and Yang Yang, *The World in Guangzhou: Africans and Other Foreigners in South China's Global Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 256 pp., \$27.50 (paperback)

Like Gordon Mathews's previous book, *Ghetto at the Center of the World* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), *The World in Guangzhou* constitutes a fascinating case study of globalization from below, which refers to the transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital and informal, often semilegal or illegal transactions that are frequently associated with the developing world but in fact apparent across the globe. Mathews uses the term interchangeably with low-end globalization in several of his works. Focusing on China's southern global metropolis of Guangzhou, he examines the complex world of tensions, negotiations, compromises, and collaborations in daily life interactions between various groups of foreign (mainly African petty entrepreneurs) and Chinese inhabitants (mainly migrant workers and small entrepreneurs). To appeal to the general public, the book contains very little theory, with relevant scholarly literature mentioned only in the endnotes. The authors' vivid storytelling skills and the richness of the book's ethnographic materials offer an interesting read. Mathews shows readers how low-end globalization operates through transnational trade networks in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Due to the multicultural nature of the research team (Mathews, an elderly, male, Caucasian professor, who did fieldwork together with two young, female, Chinese graduate students), the book collects a wide range of data that incorporate multiple perspectives. This achievement alone cannot be rivaled by any single-authored ethnography in the same field.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first two contain an overview of the history of foreign populations in Guangzhou and a brief introduction of different types of international communities in the city. The rest of the book is devoted to the transnational trade experiences of African migrants and their interactions with Chinese inhabitants. While plenty of academic articles deal with African migrants in Guangzhou, only this book incorporates the experiences of other groups of foreigners (i.e., Europeans, North Americans, and Japanese). Mathews tries to demonstrate the heterogeneity within the foreign population in Guangzhou along the lines of race, ethnicity, and class. The authors also make interesting connections between the African trade experiences with that of Indians, Japanese, and Uyghurs (an internal migrant minority) in Guangzhou. The comparison between Christian and Muslim African communities in Guangzhou offers new knowledge and insights not previously discussed by other scholars. The privileging of African migrants' voices provides a nuanced picture of diverse African experiences in China.

The most interesting chapters for readers in mobility studies are chapter 4 (“Low-End Globalization”) and chapter 6 (“Logistics Agents, Middlemen, and Cultural Brokers”). Chapter 4 meticulously explains how globalization from below functions in daily life practices: from sourcing goods to managing international money transfers, from making distinctions between different types of counterfeit goods to devising strategies for evading customs control in cross-border trade activities. Through the research team’s extensive traveling experiences following the flow of people, money, and goods in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, the book identifies key nodes in low-end globalizations’ circuits such as Guangzhou, Yiwu, Bangkok, Dubai, Nairobi, and Accra. Chapter 6 focuses on African logistics agents who function as cultural brokers between suppliers in China and clients from Africa by facilitating and mediating the everyday politics of globalization from below. Although the concept of “culture brokers” needs further theorization, the chapter reflects Mathews’s efforts to move beyond economic determinism and explore the cultural dimension of globalization from below. Mathews’s own identity as a white, male scholar also proves to be a big advantage for his interactions with primarily male African traders, who sometimes offer him confidential information that may otherwise be considered business secrets and may not be openly shared with traders or researchers from other ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the aforementioned merits, I wish the book contained a bit more theory. While the authors’ intention is not to establish a binary between rich foreigners and poor foreigners, developed world and developing world, globalization from above and globalization from below, more elaboration on the connections between these binaries (i.e., how do African traders in Guangzhou disrupt or transgress the boundaries between these binary constructions?) would have added theoretical depth to the ethnographic data. While beyond the scope of the book, some critical reflections on the racial implications of grassroots Chinese/African interactions would have strengthened its analytical quality. It would also have offered more guidance for readers who wish to learn more about Chinese racism against blacks and South-South racialization processes. On another note, since the book is written in highly accessible language, it may appeal to a wide range of readers who are interested in understanding the daily operations of low-end globalization in China. It can also be good teaching material for undergraduate and graduate seminars on South-South migration, globalization and social inequalities, urban China studies, cross-cultural communication, and trade relations.

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