

Precarious Accumulation: Fast Fashion Bosses in Transnational Guangzhou, China



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My presentation traces the emergence of migrant “bosshood” across China, West Africa, and South Korea fast fashion commodity chains in Guangzhou. It is part of a larger book project that analyzes the global fast fashion industry as a historical movement in transnational capitalism that is tied to China’s post-socialist transformations of land, labor, and personhood. At the heart of these transformations is the emergence of the small-scale migrant “boss,” a figure of labor and livelihood that hovers between boundless riches and merciless ruin in southern China’s “workshop of the world.” While West Africans forge ties with Chinese manufacturers, South Korean bosses collaborate with members of the Chinese-Korean ethnic group to capitalize on the rise of K-pop trends and fashion around the globe. The rise of these migrant bosses engenders forms of governmentality that materialize through practices of criminalization, racialization, and policing. The disparagement of African and Chinese migrants by local officials and urban residents as “criminals” and “counterfeiters,” for instance, demonstrates the unequal access that aspiring entrepreneurs have to the state-sponsored welfare services and legal protections that are necessary for capital accumulation. In place of security and protection, nationalism, racism, and the policing of migrants have fueled a secondary economy of predation, rent seeking, and extraction.

Speaker’s Bio:

Nellie Chu is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke Kunshan University in Kunshan, China. She has published in *Modern Asian Studies*, *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, and *Journal of Modern Craft*. Her work can also be found in *Made in China Journal*, *Youth Circulations*, and University of Nottingham China Policy Institute blog.



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