

The Men Who Would Conquer China

by Liza Power
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Cleverly made, brilliantly edited documentary about two businessmen seeking their fortune.



Mark Bakal with Ronald McDonald in Chongqing.

Ideas of race and culture play a central role in the *The Men Who Would Conquer China*, a documentary tracing two friends (who also happen to be businessmen) - Mart Bakal and Vincent Lee - in their plight to make big dollars in that "virgin land for capitalists" otherwise known as China.

Cleverly made and brilliantly edited, the strength of this documentary lies in the juxtaposition of the central protagonists' personalities. Where Bakal plays the brash, in-your-face-I-don't-wait-for-nobody Jewish bulldozer from the-best-city-in-the-world New York, Lee is the milder-mannered family businessman who trades on reputation, respect and careful negotiation. They're chalk and cheese, in effect.

Bakal spends much of his time blustering around, making grand and offensive generalisations about the Chinese and their way of life - walking down a street in Shanghai, he comments that he's astonished to find Chinese people shopping in department stores just the same way they do in the US (who would have thought?) - and later, when travelling through the city's poorer districts, he reflects on how much richer - financially, culturally and emotionally - his life is than those who reside on the streets he's now walking.

Make no mistake about it, you want this guy to end up high and dry and totally bankrupt, preferably in an unpleasant way, before the credits role. He takes the obnoxious to a whole new level.

Still, his journey is one worth watching, regardless of the outcome.