

BEYOND ‘DRAGON IN THE BUSH’: THE STUDY OF CHINA–AFRICA RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of China’s Year of Africa in 2006, China–Africa relations are currently the subject of unprecedented attention. However, although those relations are widely covered they are also under-researched. This article offers an introduction to China–Africa relations, covering background to the history and politics of Chinese involvement in the continent and identifying areas of further research. It concludes by calling for the study of China–Africa relations to develop a culture of serious research beyond current ‘dragon in the bush’ preoccupations and so engage a complex subject that is about to become a mainstream issue in African politics.

RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICA AND CHINA ARE TOPICAL. Once again, ‘a new Wind from the East is blowing across Africa’,¹ and it is attracting unprecedented attention. This is driven in part by the wider resurgence of China in world affairs, but much is also the result of the recent visibility and interest in the growing presence, roles, and impacts of Chinese actors throughout the continent. China’s ‘Year of Africa’ in 2006 saw cascading media and academic interest and, fifty years after Egypt became the first country on the continent to establish diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), culminated in the high-profile third Forum on China–Africa Cooperation. The scramble by Western governments, international organizations, and NGOs to assess the implications of China’s rise in Africa and how to ‘engage’ China over Africa, and Africa over China, continues.

In 1968 George Yu, a leading contributor to China–Africa research, wrote that “‘studying China in Africa is much like pursuing a dragon in the bush. The dragon is imposing but the bush is dense’.”² The notion of a Chinese

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1. John Cooley, *East Wind over Africa: Red China’s African offensive* (Walker and Company, New York, 1965), p. 3.

2. George T. Yu, ‘Dragon in the bush: Peking’s presence in Africa’, *Asian Survey*, 8, 12 (1968), p. 1026.

‘dragon’ operating in the African ‘bush’, its actions constrained by yet selectively visible against ‘unfamiliar terrain’, persists in much of the language and assumptions used to describe China–Africa relations today. This is particularly the case in Western coverage.³ The effect is often emotively to describe China’s rise in Africa in terms of a monolithic Chinese dragon in an unvariegated African bush stripped of historical and political content. It is time, however, to go beyond this framework of presenting and thinking about different levels and dynamics of the emerging Chinese relations with 48 (53) African states.⁴

The background to issues of current concern has at times been understandably neglected amidst a general preoccupation with the present. The subject has produced a number of studies to date even if it has been an under-researched area overall. In China the Institute of Asian–African Studies was established in July 1961 following Chairman Mao’s observation that ‘We don’t have a clear understanding of African history, geography and the present situation.’⁵ Subsequent research would be affected by politics inside and outside China and, as Li Anshan has noted, ‘African studies in China have been more or less a mystery to Africanists in other parts of the world.’⁶ Within the Western academy, however, the study of China–Africa relations is probably too formal a description of what has proceeded hitherto in a rather *ad hoc*, limited fashion, especially since the 1960s. It has been – and largely remains – disadvantaged by the longstanding divide between research on African and Chinese politics and foreign relations. This has produced a persisting symmetrical neglect: like China’s relations with Latin America or the Middle East – studied yet comparatively marginalized in the literature – Africa has never been a mainstream subject in the study of Chinese foreign relations. It has tended to be subsumed as part of the Third World – and even then as not an especially noteworthy constitutive member.⁷ In the study of African politics and foreign relations, China similarly has never been deemed sufficiently important to merit dedicated, sustained research. This might be attributed to the apparently ambitious and ideologically prominent post-colonial Chinese engagement in Africa

3. Emma Mawdsley, ‘Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the Dark Continent: popular geopolitical images of Sino–African relations’, paper presented at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference, London, 29 August 2007.

4. Depending on how those states that currently recognize Taiwan Burkina Faso, the Republic of The Gambia, the Republic of Malawi, the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe, and the Kingdom of Swaziland are considered.

5. Li Anshan, ‘African studies in China in the twentieth century: a historiographical survey’, *African Studies Review* 48, 1 (2005), p. 62.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

7. One established textbook on Chinese foreign relations, for example, lacked a dedicated chapter on Africa. See Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *China and the World: Chinese foreign policy in the post-Mao era* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1984); and also Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (eds), *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2006).

that was in practice limited and mostly upstaged by the major vectors of colonial and post-colonial change: decolonization, Cold War competition (China's rivalry with the Soviet Union – and Taiwan, to an extent – tending to attract more attention than its actual conduct in Africa), followed by the structural adjustment period that coincided with a more inward-focused, modernizing China.

This article is aimed at those familiar with and interested in African affairs but for whom China, and China–Africa relations, is new. It offers an accessible introductory guide to the literature and sketches aspects of the background to the history, and especially the politics, of China–Africa relations. The former has been somewhat overlooked, apart from the popular rediscovery of the Muslim eunuch Admiral Zheng He, and the latter is an area whose importance is set to grow as Chinese actors become more established in Africa. Secondly, it identifies avenues of further research in an area that is showing signs of developing into an eclectic subject of academic study. The conclusion calls for the study of China–Africa relations to develop a culture of rigorous applied research capable of engaging the complexity of what will soon be a mainstream issue in African politics.

Historical background

History is frequently invoked as a common reference point in the official discourse of contemporary China–Africa relations. Current appreciation of China's historical involvement in the world, including Africa, contrasts with former notions about its supposedly isolated position at the centre of a hierarchical tributary system.⁸ Recognition that Chinese foreign relations over time have been characterized by a plural approaches, as opposed to a single dominant and enduring tradition, thus provides a suitable framework for considering its current relations.⁹ In this, Africa figures in the contemporary reassessment of China's earlier involvement in the world. The Ming Dynasty's (1368–1644) lack of a lasting colonizing project in eastern Africa provides a different chapter in the history of comparative world colonialisms.¹⁰ However, the way in which history plays in the present is

8. See Mark Mancall, *China at the Center: Three hundred years of foreign policy* (The Free Press, New York, 1984), p. 63. See also Joseph Fletcher, 'China and Central Asia' in John Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1968), pp. 206–24; Morris Rossabi (ed.), *China Among Equals* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1983), Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2005).

9. See Michael H. Hunt, *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY, 1996); S. M. Adshed, *China in World History* (Macmillan Press, London, 1988).

10. See Teobaldo Filesì, *China and Africa in the Middle Ages* (trans. David L. Morison) (Frank Cass, London, 1972); J. J. L. Duyvendak, *China's Discovery of Africa* (Arthur Probsthain, London, 1949). See also Gao Jinyuan for an orthodox Chinese account, 'China and Africa:

revealing. The symbolic and more instrumental uses of a shared, interpreted past is one salient facet of China's officially mobilized version of its historical connections with Africa today, the flipside of which often comes in the form of virtuous commitments against any future hegemonic role.

An historically informed approach to contemporary relations clearly affords a better perspective on China's route to and position in the modern world order,¹¹ as well as growing China–Africa relations.¹² Essential reading about the historical background to China–Africa relations is Philip Snow's *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa*.¹³ This pioneering work provides a comprehensive account of a subject that had fallen by the wayside in the 1980s, with an engaging narrative conveying the richness of historical contacts and instructive thematic coverage of post-1949 relations.¹⁴

Understanding the lineages of today's interest also constructively historicizes emerging debates on various issues. The current period departs in significant ways from its precursors in China's historical relations with Africa. Nonetheless, concern with the negative dimensions of China's re-engagement in Africa echoes a similar debate in the West during the 1960s. Literature from the Cold War provides an instructive point of comparison with recent coverage,¹⁵ much of which has reprised the concerns as well as the themes (and even the titles) of the 1960s.¹⁶ One such text from the heat of the 1960s is Cooley's *East Wind over Africa: Red China's African*

the development of relations over many centuries', *African Affairs* 83, 331 (1984), pp. 241–50. These missions can be too easily romanticized, however, as entirely benevolent.

11. See Gerrit W. Gong, 'China's entry into international society' in Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1984), pp. 171–84; Rana Mitter, 'An uneasy engagement: Chinese ideas of global order and justice in historical perspective' in Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (eds), *Order and Justice in International Relations* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003), pp. 207–35.

12. These are proceeding in a manner contrasting with that envisaged by certain European experiments with using Chinese labour to 'open up' Africa. On the most notorious episode of this, see Gary Kynoch, '“Your petitioners are in mortal terror”: the violent world of Chinese mineworkers in South Africa, 1904–1910', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31, 3 (2005), pp. 531–46; and Peter Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (Macmillan, London, 1982).

13. Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's encounter with Africa* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1988).

14. For a collection of Chinese experiences, see Li Anshan (ed.), *Feizhou huaqiao-huaren shehui shi ziliao xuan ji* (1800–2005) [Social History of Overseas Chinese in Africa: selected documents, 1800–2005] (Hong Kong Press for Social Science, Hong Kong, 2006).

15. Including the American African Affairs Association, *Red China in Africa* (1966); Peter Lessing, *Africa's Red Harvest* (Michael Joseph, London, 1962); Robert Scalapino, 'On the trail of Chou En-Lai in Africa' (Rand Corporation, April 1964). For a contrary PRC view, see also Nan Han-Chen, *Resolutely Struggle Against Imperialism and Neo-Colonialism and for the Economic Emancipation of the Afro-Asian Peoples* (Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1965).

16. Popular enduring themes include 'China in Africa' (e.g., S. K. G., 'China in Africa', *Africa Quarterly* 4 (1965), pp. 224–8; Leon Slawewski, 'Two Chinas in Africa', *Foreign Affairs* 41 (1963), pp. 398–409; a language of courtship and romance (e.g., R. W. Howe, 'China bids for Africa: a suitor amid chaperons', *New Leader*, 29 November 1971; Reuters, 'China seduces Africa while West watches', 6 November 2006); and lastly, of course, the 'China Threat'.

Offensive, which provides access to that heady time of ideological intrigue.¹⁷ This earlier literature also compares interestingly with some of today's media coverage: the PRC as an intentionally destabilizing revolutionary factor in Africa versus China's current inclination to support the *status quo* and established African governments; the PRC as an ideological threat to newly independent African states versus China as an interest-driven threat to 'good governance' or 'democratization' today. The language may have changed (Cold War period 'gun running', 'propaganda' or 'indoctrination' as opposed to more recent 'arms sales' or 'soft power'¹⁸), but concerns about the Chinese impact on African politics have reappeared and intensified in certain quarters.

China's post-colonial relations with Africa

Peter Van Ness's characterization of China's post-colonial interaction with the Third World as 'a shifting pattern of engagement and indifference'¹⁹ might be extended to academic and media interest in China's African relations. China's Africa relations last attained a comparable visibility during and after Zhou Enlai's path-breaking African tour in 1963–4. This provoked an upsurge of media and academic interest, not to mention West European and American government attention. As decolonization proceeded, and amidst Sino-Soviet competition in Africa, there were other reasons behind such interest. China was mostly approached as a less intimidating part of the broader Communist threat to Africa.²⁰ However, not unlike today's Africa variation of the 'China Threat' analysis, questions about China's expansionist or aggressive behaviour were also considered.²¹

17. Cooley, *East Wind Over Africa*; Colin Legum, 'Peking's Strategic Priorities', *Africa Report* 10, 1 (January 1965), p. 20. See also William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks: A personal adventure* (Hutchinson, London, 1967) for a sprinkling of detail on Chinese activities in Africa in the dry mould of diplomatic autobiography.

18. See Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007) for a recent discussion.

19. Peter Van Ness, 'China and the Third World: patterns of engagement and indifference' in Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *China and the World: Chinese foreign policy faces the new millennium* (Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1998), pp. 151–168. See also Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking's support of wars of national liberation* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1971).

20. See 'The Chinese in Africa' in Fritz Schatten, *Communism in Africa* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1966) pp. 187–223; Richard Lowenthal, 'China' in Zbigniew Brzezinski (ed.), *Africa and the Communist World* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1963), pp. 142–203. For a Taiwanese deconstruction of communist 'smiling face diplomacy', see Chang Ya-chun, *Chinese Communist Activities in Africa: Policies and challenges* (World Anti-Communist League, China Chapter, Asian Peoples' Anti-Communist League, Republic of China, April 1981). See also G. P. Deshpande and H. K. Gupta, *United Front against Imperialism: China's foreign policy in Africa* (Somaiya Publications, Bombay, 1986).

21. See the comparatively balanced treatment by W. A. C. Adie, 'Chinese policy towards Africa' in Sven Hamrell and Carl Gosta Widstrand, *The Soviet Bloc, China and Africa* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1964), pp. 43–63.

One pattern characterizing coverage has been for commentary to wax and wane in tandem with officially declared Chinese policy on African affairs and its related actions. For instance, at the last peak period of Western interest, in the mid-1960s, Africa was often considered important to the PRC's foreign relations. As Yu wrote: 'Africa occupies without doubt a central place in the contemporary foreign policy of Communist China.'²² Not long afterwards, in the context of a number of setbacks for China's strategic objectives in Africa (including the aborted second Asian-African Conference of 1965) together with other world events (escalating US engagement in Vietnam, political convulsions in Indonesia), Yu also wrote about 'China's failure in Africa'.²³ On the back of the quiet 1980s, Segal dismissed China in Africa (though he, like Yu later on, did allow for the future development of relations).²⁴

The literature on China's foreign relations with the Third World features Africa as part of a wider approach to 'non-aligned', 'developing' or 'Southern' countries.²⁵ In this vein, Jackson's detailed case study of Chinese foreign policy towards Angola and Mozambique sees the country strategies as operating within the framework of China's Third World foreign policy.²⁶ Where attention was devoted more specifically to China, this was often in the context of its competition with Taiwan in African context.²⁷ China also features as a case study in the literature on Communist relations with the Third World²⁸ and 'Great Power' relations with Africa.²⁹ A leading textbook on China's foreign relations departed from this pattern by having a dedicated Africa chapter by Philip Snow, probably the best overview of the subject before the recent upsurge of interest.³⁰

22. George T. Yu, "Sino-Africa Relations: a survey", *Asian Survey* 5, 7 (1965), p. 330.

23. George T. Yu, 'China's failure in Africa', *Asian Survey* 6, 8 (August 1966), pp. 461–8.

24. See Gerald Segal, 'China and Africa', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 519 (1992), pp. 115–26; George T. Yu, 'Africa in Chinese Foreign Policy', *Asian Survey* 28, 8 (1988), pp. 849–62.

25. See Lillian Craig Harris and Robert L. Worden (eds), *China and the Third World: Champion or challenger?* (Croom Helm, London, 1986); Lowell Dittmar, 'China's search for its place in the world' in Brantly Womack (ed.), *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 209–61; Peter Van Ness, 'China as a Third World state: foreign policy and official national identity' in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim (eds), *China's Quest for National Identity* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1993), pp. 194–214. See also Harish Kapur, *China and the Afro-Asian World* (Prabhakar Padhye, New Delhi, 1966).

26. Steven F. Jackson, 'China's Third World foreign policy: the case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961–93', *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), pp. 388–422.

27. For example, George T. Yu, 'Peking versus Taipei in the world arena: Chinese competition in Africa', *Asian Survey* 3, 9 (1963), pp. 439–53.

28. Alvin Z. Rubinstein (ed.), *Soviet and Chinese Influence in the Third World* (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1975).

29. Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Great Powers and Africa* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1969).

30. Philip Snow, 'China and Africa: consensus and camouflage' in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh (eds), *Chinese Foreign Policy: theory and practice* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1994), pp. 283–321.

Journal coverage was complemented by monographs. Of note here is the work of Emmanuel Hevi, a Ghanaian who studied in China and wrote both from the perspective of 'Africa in Peking'³¹ and 'Peking in Africa'. Dedicating his book *An African Student in China* 'To Mother Africa', he sought 'to tell Africa what Communist China is really like'.³² This explicitly political volume warns Africans that Nkrumah will lead Africa down a dangerous Chinese road, recounting 'the China I saw and experienced: the China which so enchants many leading figures in African politics that they want to make it their model'.³³ Hevi's *The Dragon's Embrace: The Chinese Communists and Africa* presented a forceful argument against Chinese communism in Africa. His conclusion, and call to 'have faith in Africa', illustrate an earlier interest in, and attempt to formulate, 'African responses' to China that resonate with today's calls for strategic African responses to the challenges and opportunities China's engagement with Africa has brought.³⁴

Other texts included Ogunsanwo's *China's Policy in Africa, 1958–71*, a chronological examination of how China's involvement developed in importance as part of China's overall foreign policy; he argues that Chinese behaviour was characterized by a combination of state-determined pragmatic interests and revolutionary ideology ('revolutionary pragmatism').³⁵ A different, more theoretically engaged approach was employed in Larkin's *China and Africa 1949–1970: The foreign policy of the People's Republic of China*. This contextualized Africa within wider Chinese foreign policy as less important, advocated 'a more complex understanding' of China's African engagement, and called for analysis to transcend convenient explanations for China's African engagement (variations on separately identified or combined issues such as Taiwan, the Sino-Soviet dispute, and short-term economic or political gains).³⁶ Arguing that ideological commitment to world revolution was driving China's role in Africa, even if this was 'more expressive than substantive', Larkin considered this longer-term objective unlikely to succeed. Larkin departs from contemporary coverage by offering a more disaggregated account of China's African policy within a more theoretical analysis of its ideological motors, resting in part on available Chinese sources.

31. See the review in Sheldon Weeks, 'Africa in Peking', *Africa Today* **XI**, 4 (1964), p. 14.

32. Emmanuel John Hevi, *An African Student in China* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1963), p. 9.

33. *Ibid.* 201.

34. Hevi, *The Dragon's Embrace: The Chinese Communists and Africa* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1967), p. 136. His frustration at paternalistic Western responses to China-Africa relations is arguably still relevant.

35. Alaba Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa, 1958–71* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1974).

36. Bruce D. Larkin, *China and Africa 1949–1970: The foreign policy of the People's Republic of China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1971), p. 8.

Yu sought to illuminate Chinese foreign policy in Africa through the example of Tanzania.³⁷ *China's African Policy: A study of Tanzania* examined the 'foreign policy and interaction pattern' between China and Tanzania in what was characterized as 'the Chinese-Tanzanian partial informal alliance'.³⁸ Yu argued that wider dynamics of Chinese foreign policy could be shown using a detailed case study of Tanzania, and aimed to demonstrate how China-Tanzanian relations extended beyond bilateral connections to embrace and contribute to China's relations with Africa and the Third World more generally. Besides discussion of Chinese and Tanzanian 'national images', Yu analyses the nature of the China-Tanzania alliance, including mutually advantageous 'triangular' relations involving China and Sweden in development projects, notably the Tazara railway, China's key development assistance project in Africa completed in 1975. Themes of continuing relevance include the potential 'agency' of African governments, and the challenges of managing relations to optimal African advantage: 'The problem for Tanzania was how to maintain the special relationship yet not become economically and politically dependent on China.'³⁹ One route to maximize African benefit from Chinese involvement, and possibly foreclose new forms of dependency, is suggested in non-aligned Tanzania's 'judicious balancing of aid from different sources'.⁴⁰ In contending that the behaviour of China fell within the limits of Tanzania's tolerance of external interference, Yu presages an emerging area of contention today, namely the necessary evolution of China's African involvement once the boundaries of its 'late-entry' non-interference mode of engagement are tested and transgressed.

The 'China model': development in Africa

Africa was cited by certain reforming Chinese intellectuals, including Liang Qichao, as a warning example to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) of the perils of full colonial domination. The thrust of much interest in a 'model' to follow, however, has come from those looking to China for potential answers to questions of African development. Whereas post-1949 China was devastated by war, and levels of 'development' in certain African states were above that of China and other East Asian countries, today China offers an impressive, if highly mixed, demonstration of a developing yet already significantly advanced economy. The widespread current interest in China

37. George T. Yu, *China and Tanzania: A study in cooperative interaction* (Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Berkeley, CA, 1970).

38. George T. Yu, *China's African Policy: A study of Tanzania* (Praeger, New York, 1975), p. xv.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

as a 'development model' that might be looked to for ideas and assistance is happening in a very different political context from that of the post-colonial period, when the radicalism of certain African leaders had conjoined with a desire for colonial emancipation to render Communist China a promising object of interest.⁴¹ The PRC encouraged this with political exchanges and extensive aid programmes. These are outlined in a number of contemporary sources;⁴² others consider Chinese operations in Africa and different parts of the world.⁴³

The lack of empirical research on Chinese aid in Africa was highlighted and corrected by Deborah Brautigam. China's 'largely unexamined' foreign aid programme, she wrote, 'has as deep a history and as broad a range of experience as any established in the West'.⁴⁴ A leading part of that history in Africa is explored in Jamie Monson's work on the history of the Tazara railway.⁴⁵ However, in her seminal *Chinese Aid and African Development: Exporting Green Revolution*, Brautigam demonstrated that 'the absence of documentation on the work of the People's Republic of China is a major gap both in the literature on development and in studies of China's relations with the Third World'.⁴⁶ Unlike other publications that mostly used available secondary English language sources,⁴⁷ Brautigam drew on extensive field-work and Chinese sources to explore China's agricultural aid programme with Liberia, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Spanning the Cultural Revolution and post-Mao periods, she engaged three phases of Chinese politics, allowing questions about the domestic sources of China's foreign aid programme to Africa and impact over time to be explored. Development policy reflections are also presented as part of an analysis of variables affecting

41. Ismael noted, in a different period, the importance of this model over China's ideological example. See Tareq Ismael, 'The People's Republic of China and Africa', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, 4 (1971), p. 527.

42. For example, Kurt Muller, 'Soviet and Chinese programmes of economic and technical assistance to African countries' in Sven Hamrell and Carl Gosta Widstrand, *The Soviet Bloc, China and Africa* (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, 1964), pp. 101–30.

43. Peter Andrews Poole, 'Communist China's aid diplomacy', *Asian Survey* 6, 11 (1966), pp. 622–9. John Franklin Cooper, *China's Foreign Aid* (Lexington Books, Lexington, MA, 1976); Law Yu Fai, *Chinese Foreign Aid: A study of its nature and goals with particular reference to the foreign policy and world view of the People's Republic of China, 1950–1982* (Verlag Breitenbach, Saarbrücken, 1984).

44. Deborah Brautigam, *Chinese Aid and African Development: Exporting Green Revolution* (Macmillan Press, London, 1998), p. 4.

45. See Jamie Monson, 'Freedom Railway: the unexpected successes of a Cold War development project', *Boston Review* 29, 6 (December 2004/January 2005); 'Defending the People's Railway in the era of liberalization', *Africa* 76, 1 (2006), pp. 113–30; and 'liberating labour? Constructing anti-hegemony on the TAZARA railway in Tanzania, 1965–76' in Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa* (Hurst, London, 2008).

46. Brautigam, *Chinese Aid and African Development*, p. 4.

47. See Joseph P. Smaldone, 'Soviet and Chinese military aid and arms transfers to Africa: a contextual analysis' in Warren Weinstein and Thomas H. Henriksen (eds), *Soviet and Chinese Aid to African Nations* (Praeger, New York, 1980), pp. 76–116.

the relative success or failure of Chinese aid programmes, including how the conjunction of agriculturally innovative projects and weak institutional situations produced problematic development outcomes.⁴⁸

The current period

There were comparatively few publications on China–Africa relations during the 1990s: Ian Taylor was one of the few Western scholars to work on the subject,⁴⁹ and coverage of Taiwanese diplomacy in Africa continued.⁵⁰ However, Chris Alden's book *China in Africa* stands out amongst the recent publications in providing a measured, condensed single-volume analysis.⁵¹ Other publications include Taylor's *China and Africa: Engagement and compromise* and *China in Africa: Mercantilist predator or partner in development?* (edited by le Pere)⁵². Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong's analysis of China's 'distinctive links' with Africa provides a more critical departure.⁵³ Generally speaking, coverage has neglected Chinese-language sources and the expanding body of recent literature on Chinese foreign relations.⁵⁴ Nonetheless,

48. See also Deborah Brautigam, 'Close encounters: Chinese business networks as industrial catalysts in sub-Saharan Africa', *African Affairs* 102, 408 (2003), pp. 447–67. See also her articles 'What can Africa learn from Taiwan? Political economy, industrial policy, and adjustment', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 32, 1 (1994), pp. 111–38; and 'Local entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa: networks and linkages to the global economy' in Ernest Aryeetey, Julius Court, Machiko Nissanke and Beatrice Weder (eds), *Asia and Africa in the Global Economy* (UN University Press, Tokyo, 2003), pp. 106–27.

49. His works include 'China's foreign policy towards Africa in the 1990s', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, 3 (1998), pp. 443–60; 'The "Captive States" of Southern Africa and China: the PRC and Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 35, 2 (1997), pp. 75–95; and, with Scarlett Cornelissen, 'The political economy of Chinese and Japanese linkages with Africa: a comparative perspective', *Pacific Review* 13, 4 (2000), pp. 615–33. For official Chinese views, see the English language journal *ChinaAfrica*.

50. George T. Yu and David J. Longenecker, 'The Beijing–Taipei struggle for international recognition: from the Niger affair to the UN', *Asian Survey* 34, 5 (1994), pp. 475–88; Deon Geldenhuys, 'The politics of South Africa's "China Switch"', *Issues and Studies* 33, 7 (1997), pp. 93–131; Ian Taylor, 'Africa's place in the diplomatic competition between Beijing and Taipei', *Issues and Studies* 34, 3 (1998), pp. 126–43; Richard Payne and Cassandra Veney, 'Taiwan and Africa: Taipei's continuing search for international recognition', *African and Asian Studies* 36, 4 (2001), pp. 437–50; Ian Taylor, 'Taiwan's foreign policy and Africa: the limitations of dollar diplomacy', *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, 30 (2002), pp. 125–40.

51. See Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (Zed Books, London, 2007). See also his 'China–Africa relations: the end of the beginning' in Peter Draper and Garth le Pere (eds), *Enter the Dragon: Towards a free trade agreement between China and the Southern African Customs Union* (Institute for Global Dialogue/South African Institute for International Affairs, Midrand, 2006), pp. 137–53 and 'China in Africa', *Survival* 47, 3 (2005), pp. 147–64.

52. Ian Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and compromise* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2006); Garth le Pere (ed.), *China in Africa: Mercantilist predator or partner in development?* le Pere. (Institute for Global Dialogue, Midrand, and South African Institute for International Affairs, Johannesburg, 2007).

53. See Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, 'Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa', *African Studies Review* 50, 3 (December 2007); and 'Forest for the Trees: Trade, Investment and the China-in-Africa Discourse', *Pacific Affairs* 81, 1 (Spring 2008).

54. Including Yongjin Zhang and Greg Austin (eds), *Power and Responsibility in Chinese Foreign Policy* (Asia Pacific Press, Canberra, 2001); Yong Deng and Fei-Ling Wang (eds), *China*

other works include a special edition of the *South African Journal for International Affairs*⁵⁵ and *African Perspectives on China in Africa*, which provides a mixed collection of views ranging from critical to celebratory.⁵⁶

Trade and resource extraction have generated the most literature to date.⁵⁷ Resource extraction is generally presented as the primary motivating dynamic behind the current Chinese engagement in Africa.⁵⁸ The related and contentious subject of governance has not been the subject of the same degree of academic research.⁵⁹ This theme emerges in more generalist coverage characterized by 'thin' and 'thick' critical interpretations on the impact of the Chinese role on politics in Africa, and is foregrounded by development policy publications.⁶⁰

Rising: Power and motivation in Chinese foreign policy (Rowman and Littlefield, London, 2005); Rosemary Foot, 'Chinese strategies in a US-hegemonic global order: accommodating and hedging', *International Affairs* 82, 1 (2006), pp. 77–94. Johnston and Ross (eds), *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*; Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, 'The changing ecology of foreign policy-making in China: the ascension and demise of the theory of "peaceful rise"', *The China Quarterly* 190 (2007), pp. 291–310; Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham, and Derek Mitchell (eds), *China and the Developing World: Beijing's strategy for the twenty-first century* (M. E. Sharpe, Armonk, 2007).

55. 'China in Africa' special edition of *South African Journal for International Affairs* 13, 1 (2006).

56. Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds), *African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Fahamu, Oxford, 2007); Henning Melber (ed), *China in Africa* (Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2007). See also Kinfe Abraham (ed.), *China Comes to Africa: The political economy and diplomatic history of China's relation with Africa* (Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, Addis Ababa, 2005).

57. Andrea Goldstein, Nicolas Pinaud, and Helmut Reisen, with Michael Chen, 'China and India: What's in it for Africa?' (OECD, Paris, 2006); David Hale, 'China's economic takeoff: implications for Africa' (Discussion Paper 1/2006, Brenthurst Foundation, Johannesburg, 2006); Harry G. Broadman et al., *Africa's Silk Road: China and India's new economic frontier* (World Bank, Washington, DC, 2006); Raphael Kaplinsky, Dorothy McCormick, and Mike Morris, 'The Impact of China on sub-Saharan Africa' (April 2006); Raphael Kaplinsky, Dorothy McCormick, and Mike Morris, 'The Impact of China on sub-Saharan Africa' (Institute of Development Studies Working Paper 291, November 2007); Owen Wilcox and Dirk van Seventer, 'Current and potential trade between South Africa and China' in Draper and le Pere (eds), *Enter the Dragon*, pp. 167–220; Martyn Davies, 'The rise of China and the commercial consequences for Africa' in *Enter the Dragon*, pp. 154–66.

58. See Erica S. Downs, 'The Chinese energy security debate', *The China Quarterly*, 177 (2004), pp. 21–41; Erica S. Downs, 'The fact and fiction of Sino-African energy relations', *China Security* 3, 3 (2007), pp. 42–68; Linda Jakobson and Zha Daojiong, 'China and the worldwide search for oil security', *Asia-Pacific Review* 13, 2 (2006), pp. 60–73; Ian Taylor, 'China's oil diplomacy in Africa', *International Affairs* 82, 5 (2006), pp. 937–59; Michael Klare and Daniel Volman, 'The African "Oil Rush" and US National Security', *Third World Quarterly* 27, 4 (2006), pp. 609–28; Jonathan Holslag, 'China's new mercantilism in central Africa', *African and Asian Studies* 5, 2 (2006), pp. 133–69; Wenran Jiang, 'China's booming energy ties with Africa', *Geopolitics of Energy* 28, 7 (2006); Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 'Making sense of Chinese oil investment in Africa' in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*; Margaret Lee, 'The 21st Century Scramble for Africa', *The Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 24, 3 (2006), pp. 303–330.

59. See Denis M. Tull, 'China in Africa: scope, significance and consequences', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, 3 (2006), pp. 459–79.

60. See Institute for Public Policy Research, *The New Sinosphere: China in Africa* (IPPR, London, 2006); Elling Tjønneland et al., 'China in Africa: implications for Norwegian foreign and

In terms of country studies, literature on South Africa is more extensive than other countries. This might be expected given its importance in China–Africa relations and the fact that interest ignited in South Africa significantly before the more prominent global coverage of today.⁶¹ Garth le Pere and Garth Shelton's *China, Africa and South Africa* is a notable recent publication.⁶² There are a small number of studies on other countries.⁶³ Amidst speculation about the impact of China's re-engagement in Africa over the medium and longer terms, two contrasting views stand out. Alden's consideration of 'Africa without Europeans' broaches the possibility of transformative impact, whereas Clapham, emphasizing the constraints on external actors in Africa, argues that China's intervention is unlikely to change Africa fundamentally.⁶⁴

Future research

Recent Western literature on China–Africa relations, with certain exceptions, could be considered as the first wave of sometimes reactive but generally broad-ranging assessments of a comparatively new or recently reanimated subject.⁶⁵ Generally these have not involved extensive sustained field research. The very 'China–Africa' formula in part reflects wider concerns of a geopolitical nature as well as a renewal of global interest in Africa, in considerable part because of China's interest and an underlying global reconfiguration of relations.

The separation between those studying Africa and China, broadly conceived especially in terms of foreign relations, has produced a theme

development policies' (Discussion Paper, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2006); Bates Gill, Chinhao Huang, and J. Stephen Morrison, 'China's expanding role in Africa: implications for the United States' (discussion paper, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 2007).

61. See Garth Shelton, 'South Africa and China: a strategic partnership?' in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*. See also Chris Alden, 'Leveraging the Dragon: towards an Africa that can say no', *E-Africa, Electronic Journal of Governance and Innovation* (February 2005), pp. 6–9.

62. Garth le Pere and Garth Shelton, *China, Africa and South Africa* (Institute for Global Dialogue, Midrand, 2007).

63. Gregor Dobler, 'Solidarity, xenophobia and the regulation of Chinese business in Namibia'; Manuel Ennes Ferreira, 'China in Angola: just a passion for oil?'; Jørgen Carling and Heidi Østbø Haugen, 'Mixed fates of a popular minority: Chinese migrants in Cape Verde', all in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*. See also Ali Abdalla Ali, *The Sudanese-Chinese Relations before and after Oil* (Sudan Currency Printing Press, Khartoum, 2006).

64. Chris Alden, 'Africa without Europeans' and Christopher Clapham, 'Fitting China in', both in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*.

65. See Giles Mohan and Marcus Power, 'New African choices? The politics of Chinese involvement in Africa and the changing architecture of development', *Review of African Political Economy* (forthcoming, 2008) for a more considered and stimulating approach. See also Stephen Chan, 'Ten caveats and one sunrise in our contemplation of China and Africa', in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*.

familiar in other contexts of the study of Chinese foreign relations concerning assumptions about and perceptions of Chinese 'power'. Breslin's question: 'Is China as powerful as some people are making it out to be?'⁶⁶ is pertinent in the African context where 'China's apparent (and, more importantly, imagined) presence, reach, and role appear to loom large and promise – or threaten, depending on outlook – so much. The distinction of approaching China from the 'inside out' and from 'outside in' captures much of the contrast between analyses that highlight Chinese 'power' ('outside in') and those that emphasize China's 'vulnerability and dependence rather than power' ('inside out').⁶⁷ The latest Chinese engagement throughout Africa might thus also be approached from two related but differently oriented starting positions, the first anchored in China and connecting Chinese dynamics to the African context, and the second, starting from within defined African locales and engaging the Chinese presence in grounded context.

What have been until recently somewhat estranged areas of academic research appear to be fusing as China–Africa relations become a subject of academic study, not to mention the object of increasing attention from development policy practitioners. At the same time, however, the subject to date remains paradoxically under-researched and, as Alves and Draper rightly note, 'a host of research questions remain'.⁶⁸ Despite wide coverage since 2006 in particular, there remain often basic knowledge gaps about many areas of China's expanding involvement in Africa.⁶⁹ Given some of the more inflated claims about the impact of China in Africa, often contained within arguments about a 'new scramble' or 'new imperialism', there is a marked gap between the perceptions and exaggerated projections of an inexorable Chinese rise in Africa and knowledge of how this is actually playing out. In 1975 Hutchison noted the 'striking discrepancy between what China was actually doing and what her critics said she was doing' but emphasized that he was not providing 'an apologia for China's African policies'.⁷⁰ Today, the tide of Western academic and media opinion on its

66. Shaun Breslin, 'Power and production: rethinking China's global economic role', *Review of International Studies* 31, 4 (2005), p. 735. This was prompted by Segal's article, which argued that China was overrated as a world power but had mastered the art of diplomatic theatre to suggest otherwise. See Gerald Segal, 'Does China matter?', *Foreign Affairs* 78, 5 (1999), pp. 24–36.

67. Breslin, 'Power and production', p. 742, or a cogent version of Lattimore's call to see 'China from the inside, looking outward'. Owen Lattimore, *From China Looking Outward – An Inaugural Lecture* (Leeds University Press, Leeds, 1964), p. 29.

68. Philip Alves and Peter Draper, 'China's growing role in Africa' in Garth le Pere (ed.), *China in Africa*, p. 28.

69. A good example of field-based research is that on the Chinese construction sector in Angola, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Tanzania. See Lucy Corkin and Christopher Burke, 'China's interest and activity in Africa's construction and infrastructure sectors' (Research Report, Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, 2006).

70. Alan Hutchison, *China's Africa Revolution* (Hutchinson, London, 1975), p. xi.

involvement in Africa has flowed more towards critical coverage, though that appears to be evolving as a reflection of broader dynamics. The difficulty of navigating between competing poles of binary positions for any critically aware engagement remains.

The challenge is to deepen research and analysis of key current areas of Chinese engagement in Africa. This includes the (global) political economy of resource extraction, but also, importantly, should entail extending research beyond concerns that dominate headlines and addressing a broader range of issues. In following this objective, ethnographic methodologies and work that integrates a range of Chinese and African sources will particularly enrich current and future research, as Gillian Hart and Nina Sylvanus demonstrate.⁷¹ Reliance on English-language sources has clear limitations, including the danger of playing out a self-referential logic. In this light, notable examples of multilingual ethnographic research enabling rich engagement with Chinese involvement include Elisabeth Hsu's work on Chinese medicine in Tanzania and Haugen and Carling's work on Cape Verde.⁷² While a select few countries have attracted most attention – Angola joining Sudan, Zimbabwe and, for different reasons, South Africa – 'small places' like Cape Verde provide insights not merely into the quotidian details of Chinese actors in Africa and the success story of Chinese business involvement, but also transnational processes casting light on aspects of contemporary China and the emerging pluralism of Chinese–African relations. This 'view from the edge' is enriching.⁷³

There are clearly a range of areas that remain to be researched in depth and a number of disciplinary perspectives will doubtless be mobilized as different fields of the social sciences engage appropriate concerns and theoretical debates. The growing interest in, and demand for, policy-relevant research from development agencies on questions of 'engaging China' about the conduct of its relations with Africa is indicative of the wider catalytic impact China's new African relations are likely to have within development studies. Concern over governance questions and the consequences of the new 'triangulation' in African foreign policy options, which reprise similar concerns in a very different context to those raised over Communist

71. Gillian Hart, *Disabling Globalization: Places of power in post-apartheid South Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, LA, 2002); Nina Sylvanus, 'Chinese devils, the global market, and the declining power of Togo's commodity queens' (Paper presented at the workshop 'Rethinking Africa's "China Factor"', UCLA, 27 April 2007).

72. See Elisabeth Hsu, 'Medicine as business: Chinese medicine in Tanzania' in Alden, Large and Soares de Oliveira (eds), *China Returns to Africa*; Hsu, 'Zanzibar and its Chinese Communities', *Population, Space and Place* 13, 2 (2007), pp. 113–24; Jørgen Carling and Heidi Østbø Haugen, 'On the edge of the Chinese diaspora: the surge of baihuo business in an African city', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, 4 (2005), pp. 639–62.

73. Richard Bulliet, *Islam: The view from the edge* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1994).

China's influence in decolonized Africa, appear set to rejuvenate a number of debates, including those over democratization and development.

Research could be pursued productively in a number of areas. From an 'Africa-China' perspective, these include unpacking the detail of African government reactions and policies and the unfolding institutional responses of the African Union and NEPAD to China. Business activity and the political economy of Chinese investment is another key subject. This includes but is by no means confined to resource extraction, as the examples of Chinese textile manufacturing in Southern Africa and issues concerning employment, labour relations, and the environment in various contexts illustrate. The related nature, reception, and impact of Chinese aid projects in Africa – including donor activities and financing, and the emerging politics of Chinese development in Africa – is a broad and topical theme, especially given the rapid rise and importance of the China Import Export Bank. Finally, the reception of Chinese actors by African communities over time, their social integration, and other questions of impact are themes that are woven into a number of issues. A notable and sensitive area where research is needed concerns the nature and impact of the growing Chinese social presence across the continent. This is apparently expanding in significant numbers, and has already emerged as a politically contentious issue, in places fuelling xenophobia and political tensions at different levels, although little hard information is available.

There is a pronounced need to deepen understanding of China and bring in Chinese perspectives on the subject.⁷⁴ Areas where further research exploring the Chinese side might be productive include the nature of Chinese policy making on Africa, in what currently is an engagement involving multiple state bureaucratic bodies that can operate with conflicting agendas on African policy. How political structures in China other than the central state – provincial governments and municipalities in particular – pursue relations in Africa, and how networked Chinese business investment in Africa plays out, are additional areas that pose connected questions concerning the issue of 'principal-agent' dilemmas at different levels of China's multiple bureaucracies seeking to enhance economic engagement.⁷⁵ Despite the merits of 'de-stating' coverage along these lines, this ought not to proceed at the expense of misunderstanding the importance and particular nature of the Chinese state, its position and growing role in the global

74. For a recent sample, see Li Anshan, 'China and Africa: policy and challenges', *Feizhou guojia minzuhua* 3, 3 (2005), pp. 69–93; He Wenping, 'The balancing act of China's Africa policy', *China Security* 3, 3 (2007), pp. 23–40, and her *Fei Zhou guo jia minzu hua jin Cheng yanjiu* [The Study of the Democratization Process in African Countries] (Shi Shi Chubanshi, Beijing, 2000).

75. Bates Gill and James Reilly, 'The Tenuous Hold of China Inc. in Africa', *The Washington Quarterly* 30, 3 (2007), pp. 37–52.

economy. Finally, there is the subject of growing African business activities, commercial links and social existence in China.

A further challenge is to move beyond China–Africa coverage that orbits almost exclusively around state elites, and disaggregate a number of areas too commonly presented as unitary bodies. Connecting and extending analysis of elites into wider social contexts would contribute to opening up key transnational processes of developing interactions. The micro-dynamics of China's current and developing relations with Africa is one area where ethnographic work, drawing upon appropriate languages, might be rewarding. The rich detail of Chinese links with Africa that this approach produces can lead to more general conclusions, as well as capturing those less visible but important subjects, such as race, gender and questions of power, that have been largely emasculated to date. This would open up interesting points of comparison with the thrust of Western engagement, including the contrasting entry points of external actors into Africa and those areas problematically upheld as distinctly Chinese (such as 'enclave existence'). Transcending the state-bounded framework of analysing economic ties would move beyond the misleading notion of a neatly bounded 'Chinese' economy to reflect the interdependent reality of the global manufacturing and trade system located in China and contributing in part to its African links.

Conclusion

Attention to China–Africa relations fluctuated in the post-colonial period amidst the Cold War and China's episodic involvement. Today, however, there is greater reason than before to argue that China's re-engagement with Africa will persist, deepen and be consequential. Similar views have been expressed by commentators from the 1960s, and the complexities and contingencies of current relations should not be underestimated, but much of China's involvement currently appears to be predicated on medium- or long-term objectives, and is occurring as China's economic and resource interdependence in the world economy becomes more of a reality than before. Rather differently to the notion of a 'dragon' conspicuously operating on 'unfamiliar terrain', the latest wave of Chinese relations looks set to become an established part of the African continent.

Chinese involvement throughout Africa and African engagement with China are two broad areas attracting increased attention at a number of levels. This article has merely begun to engage a dynamic field whose academic literature is set to increase exponentially. However, the subject and the analytical construction of 'China in Africa' should additionally challenge the way in which the predominant approach to studying China, Africa and

their growing interrelations has been developed. As pursued in the Western academy, at least, the subject is ripe for reflection on questions about studying and representing 'the other' (how African actors frame and engage China, and how China studies France, Britain, or America in Africa, as well as Africa itself, are related questions).

In contrast to the comparative neglect of Africa in coverage of post-colonial Chinese foreign relations, the unprecedented contemporary interest from the media, academic quarters and a range of governments and international organizations has not been matched by research thus far. It is to be hoped, however, that beyond the initial wave of interest, the study of Chinese engagement throughout Africa will develop into a fully fledged subject of inquiry in its own right and produce in-depth, more theoretically rigorous research to inform debate and deepen understanding. This would be one means to transcend the 'dragon in the bush' framework. Incorporating the study of China in Africa within the wider parameters of research directed toward Africa–Asia – or 'South–South' – relations would also help. The near-exclusive focus on Chinese involvement has upstaged rising Indian and continuing Japanese (not to mention Taiwanese) engagement, as well as that of other countries, including Middle Eastern ones.⁷⁶ A potentially more rewarding approach to studying China–Africa relations might be to pursue this within a wider framework of African–Asian relations. This might help break down binary China–Africa conceptions at the same time as engaging what could well be shaping up to become the most important development for the continent since the end of the Cold War.

76. See John Edward Philips, 'African studies in Japan', *African Studies Review* 40, 1 (1997), pp. 161–80; and Sanusha Naidu, 'Riding the Dragon's Tail? India's growing African strategy', *Review of African Political Economy* (forthcoming, 2008).