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Dominik Kopinski, Andrzej Polus, & Ian Taylor, (Eds.)
China's Rise in Africa. Perspectives on a Developing Connection.
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This edited volume was originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* (vol. 29, issue 2) in 2011 under the title, “China's Rise in Africa: Beyond the Headlines.” As such, it lacks a central argument and the sort of coherence one might expect from a monograph; however, that said, the book’s eight articles are stitched loosely together with a general focus on the developing and deepening connections between China and Africa, as seen through various lenses. The first chapter, written by the editors of the volume, is an introduction; as such, it contextualizes Chinese engagement in Africa, summarizes the contested discourses, examines the various motivations of the partners of the relationship(s), and provides an overview of the collection. After the brief introduction, the collection follows with a piece authored by Wu Zhengyu and Ian Taylor on Chinese involvement in peacekeeping in Africa and a chapter by Péter Marton and Tamás Matura on one of the prevailing discourses of Chinese engagement in Africa – that of the “scramble” or “honey pot.”¹ These are followed by two pairs of chapters: Lucy Corkin’s examination of China’s relations with Angola and Dominik Kopinski and Andrzej Polus’ discussion of China-Zambia relations; these are followed by two chapters that focus on third parties to the China-Africa relationship, specifically India, in the chapter by Karolina Wysoczańska, and the European Union, in the chapter by Maurizio Carbone. The final chapter looks at China’s “soft power” in Africa and is authored by Lukasz Fijalkowski.

Any attempt to examine or make general statements about “China and Africa” is obviously challenging, given the nature of the two sides: one is a country, the other, a continent made up of over 50 different countries. As such, the value of a compilation such as this is found in the detailed focus on China’s relations with single countries, an examination of a specific sector or discourse, or investigations into third party attempts by the US, the EU, or other individual countries to take part in “trilateral” discussions or ventures benefit from X. These approaches allow for the kind of in-depth analysis that help us to understand and unpack the China-Africa relationship in its messy complexities; this sort of “drilling down allows us to move beyond the rhetoric.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the China-Africa public discourse (which also occasionally appears in academic publications) is the notion that (a fiendishly clever) China is somehow taking advantage of (the hapless) Africans and duping them into uneven partnerships in order to plunder their resources. In most of these Western media-driven narratives, the “West” plays the role of the responsible, caring, and senior partner to the junior Africa. This is not only disingenuous and patronizing but also racist. All of the articles in this volume, whether directly or indirectly, counter these paternalistic allegations with evidence based on case-specific study. The editors in their introduction also lay the responsibility of husbanding natural resources squarely at the feet of African leaders, where it belongs.

As with any collection of articles, there is some unevenness. The collection was specifically designed to be a showcase of emerging scholarship on Africa emanating from Central Europe, the origin of many of the authors. The contributors of the volume also range from senior scholars in the field to recent PhDs. Generally, the chapters with a narrow focus and those that were grounded in empirical research bring value-added to the growing body of work on China-Africa. In the past decade, the sheer volume of work by journalists and academics on China-Africa has been staggering; many authors seem to be joining the “China-Africa bandwagon” simply to get published, with the understanding that it continues to be a hot topic for publishers and readers alike. What we need, however, is not necessarily more articles and books on the China-Africa relationship but greater understanding of the complex

¹ These discourses refer to Africa’s natural resources and the various historical attempts by colonial and other powers to gain access to them.

dynamics of the webs of relations between increasing numbers of actors that are a party to those relationships. It becomes evident that with a tighter focus, for example, on specific Chinese actors' engagement in a particular sector in a specific African country, the generic "China-Africa" framing becomes less relevant, and we can see more clearly what is actually taking place. Many of the articles in this collection help us to understand such important nuances and complexities.

Wu & Taylor's piece, while nominally about Chinese peacekeeping activities in Africa, is actually a detailed account of China's shifting policies of engagement with the international community, necessitated by its emergence as an economic and global superpower. The authors explain China's evolving position regarding intervention, its practice of abstention from UN Security Council votes, and its increasing involvement in peace operations. They explain the various reasons for China's shifting policies, most important among these is China's growing recognition that (1) participation enhances its reputation as a responsible world power as well as its profile within the UN, (2) it needs peace and stability to realize economic development, and (3) it increases its strategic presence in Africa.

In the next chapter, Marton and Matura convincingly argue that the popular discourse of a "new scramble for Africa," emanating from the world's big powers and corporations (in shorthand, the "West") is both alarmist and inaccurate. The authors provide not only their own conceptual objections to the "honeypot" discourse but also China's counterarguments made via its own discourses and, perhaps most importantly, empirical objections to such discourse by looking at Angola and Sudan. The authors argue that the real underlying Sino-Western conflict in Africa is actually about norm contestation and self-interest; they conclude that there is no zero-sum game.

The following four chapters, set up as pairs, go far in terms of breaking down simplistic notions of "China-in-Africa." Corkin makes strong arguments about Angola's evolving capacity to negotiate with a diverse array of financial partners, including China, and manage its oil industry by leveraging its strategic partnership with China. Kosiński and Polus argue that China's relations with Zambia are exceptional by exploring the two nations' long history, the unique role of copper, and the rise of Michael Sata, the current president of Zambia, who was able to capture and mobilize growing anti-Chinese sentiment in two of the more populous regions of the country. In my view, focused attention on any African country will bring to the fore the unique elements inherent to that country's ties with China. Consider, for example, in addition to Angola, China's relations with South Africa, Sudan, Ethiopia, or Nigeria; China's relationship with each African country is unique—even exceptional. As such, it may be more useful to look at a range of *types* of relationships that China has with different African countries based on natural resources, strategic importance, historical ties, and size of the population, among others.

Wysoczańska's examination of Sino-Indian cooperation in the oil sector is enlightening and brings a fresh perspective on alliances and growing ties that are taking place in Africa. More studies like Wysoczańska's, focused on the multiple actors active in Africa's various sectors (e.g. mining, construction, or telecommunications), would be a welcome addition to the China-Africa literature. Equally instructive is Carbone's piece on the European Union. His dissection of the various branches of the EU and their conflicting views on "China in Africa" and the honest account of the European Parliament's deeply ingrained paternalism explains Parliament's inability to move ahead with any sort of joint program with China or Africa. My one complaint about this article is its use of "trilateral." This is a small, technical point, but it links to an earlier argument about "China-Africa," and it is simply this: Africa is *not* a single actor, certainly not in the same way that China is a country or even insofar as the European Union has agreed to act as one on any number of international issues, and, therefore, "Africa" cannot be the third party of any triangular relationship.

My harshest criticism is reserved for the last article of the collection, which, in my view, is the weakest of the collection. Perhaps this is because the article reads more like an exposition on the notion of "soft power" (as might be taught in a politics course) than an attempt to apply the concept to the

China-Africa case. Perhaps this shortcoming is linked to the slipperiness of the notion itself. Indeed, if no one can agree on a definition of what “soft power” is, it is unhelpful to attempt to understand it in operation in this particular case and even more challenging to try to find any causal links between soft power and the China-Africa relationship. This was an unfortunate selection with which to conclude an otherwise valuable collection of articles that add to our understanding of the complexities of deepening ties between China, the multitude of African states, and the other state and private sector actors engaged in what has broadly become known as “China-Africa.”

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