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Real Estate Speculation and its Social Consequences

Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence* / Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* / David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement*

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instances of upward reporting by cadres during the height of the terror, but not many.

5. *Peasant survival methods*. Some ate tree bark and grass; other consumed "immortal earth" (D-88). Still others sold children. Quite a few fled; some young women turned to prostitution. Others turned to spirit mediums and faith healers: "If you want food to eat, you should follow spirits, not cadres" (D-68). Cannibalism was the most extreme survival tactic. The book contains cases from Gansu, Sichuan, and Guizhou. In one Gansu municipality, 41 such cases were found as of March 1961. The list of culprits, stratified by class, reports "survival" as the reason for eating human flesh (D-26).

Collective actions included widespread food riots. A striking and perhaps politically motivated incident took place in 1961, when 20-30 peasants invaded a county Party compound in Changshou, Sichuan, "peeled the bark off all the trees and consumed it" (D-88). Between September 1960 and late January 1961, 30,000 incidents of train robberies by "groups" in 23 provinces were reported to the Ministry of Public Security (D-83). There were acts of resistance to the levelling of graves and careless exposure of bodies, part of a "war on the dead" (D-47). Revolts of unspecified size were reported from Hunan, Guangxi, and Jiangxi involving secret societies and clustering around December 1958 (D-62). Bitter satires about life in the communes were posted in a variety of places.

In early 1959, some villagers in a Shandong commune wanted to go to Beijing. "They want Chairman Mao and the Party to seek revenge for them" (D-108). Conversely, in 1961, "Down with Mao" posters were found in a commune in Ningxiang County, Hunan. But rumours also circulated that Mao had appointed Peng Dehuai, purged in 1959 for criticising the Leap, to the governorship of Hunan (D-113).

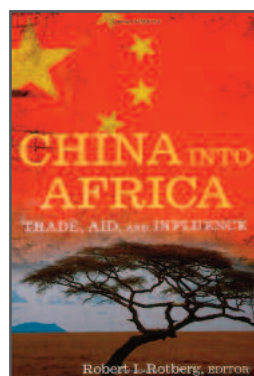
Harsh denunciations of Mao came from Xinchang, a Tibetan prefecture in Sichuan in early 1959. In one township it was said that "Chairman Mao is more brutal than Deng Xiuting," a former-warlord. "We are treated worse than slaves." Ethnic groups can organise "to wreck this so-called people's government." Han cadres are worse than indigenous ones. "When it comes to grain procurement, the people's government is much more brutal than former slave owners." But only "very small" counterrevolutionary organisations were formed (D-111).

A truly subversive act was a letter written by two Youth League members from Nanjing and mailed to various Party committees in early 1962. It was a wholesale indictment of the disasters caused by communisation. The letter appealed to the Centre to "discard dogma" and abandon the whole enterprise. Rather naively, the authors suggested that China advise other communist countries to avoid this kind of disaster. Recipient officials were ordered to destroy the letter (D-110).

Finally, the chapter on "Devastation in the countryside" sheds further light on the immense damage done during the Leap to agriculture, forests, water resources, and peasant housing, etc. Hu Yaobang, then head of the Youth League, spent 25 days travelling through Hunan and Anhui in the fall of 1961. He commented: "Unless one sees the situation with one's own eyes, it's impossible to believe how awful it is" (D-42).

In sum, while this book raises questions of balance, it is nonetheless a highly informative collection of original documents.

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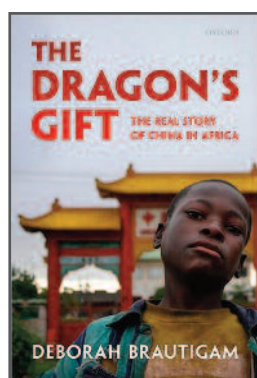
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With 54 countries, a land size of 30.2 million km² and a population of about one billion,¹ Africa is far from being a homogenous entity. Favourite backyard of the colonial powers, this fictional construction of Africa has always been the object of a multitude of attentions and fantasies. These many hopes and fears have recently taken a new dimension as another giant has strategically penetrated the African territory, giving rise to numerous concerns and comments. Since the 2006 Beijing summit and publication of the first comprehensive Chinese *White Paper on China's African Policy*, China's presence in Africa is indeed being scrutinised by many observers from policy makers to businesses and academics. While this "strategic partnership" is not always welcomed and envisaged as the "win-win cooperation" advertised by Hu Jintao in his 2006 Beijing address, some analysts deliberately take the opposite side to deconstruct myth and discourse and tell "the real story" from proven facts.

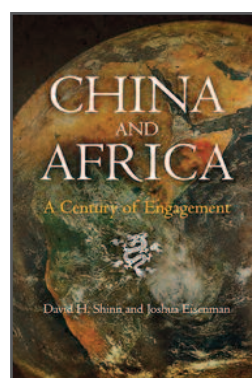
Among the many academic publications released in the past few years, I have chosen to present a group of three books, either individual or collective, which give a good account of the main issues arising from China's renewed engagement in Africa. In reviewing these books, this essay also proposes to reflect upon the many ways to approach this complicated question from a multidisciplinary perspective as well as the role Africa could play in China scholarship.

Let us start with a simple fact that sheds some light on an often heated but not always well-documented debate: China's presence in Africa is hardly new. In *China in Africa: A Century of Engagement*, David H. Shinn (former US ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso and adjunct Professor in international affairs at George Washington University) and Joshua Eisenman (Senior Fellow in China Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council) provide us with an excellent historical overview of China-Africa relations. Cleopatra herself was probably wearing Chinese silk, and the first trade relations could be dated from the Han Dynasty. According to a number of authors, however, it is with the fifteenth century naval expedition of Zheng He, a Chinese Muslim eunuch in the court of Ming dynasty Emperor Yongle, that China-Africa relations reached a significant level in a number of eastern African territories corresponding to the present Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania. This promising pacific encounter did not last for long, since Emperor Chengzu prohibited the construction of new ships for overseas expeditions in 1436 (Shinn and Eisenman, p. 17; Snow, 1988). But for today's Chinese leaders Zheng He remains the initial model of a "non-threatening" "going out policy"

1. Compared with 9.6 million km² for China with a population of 1.3 billion.



Deborah Brautigam,
The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story
of China in Africa, Oxford,
Oxford University Press 2009, 397 pp.



David H. Shinn and Joshua
Eisenman,
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as well as the possible ancestor of some African-Chinese (Shinn and Eisenman, p. 17).⁽²⁾

Later on, China-Africa relations were limited to some movement of labourers and merchants to Mauritius, Madagascar, or South Africa, and one had to wait for the Republican era and, more importantly, the Chinese Communist revolution, to observe the birth and development of a new type of engagement, that of a non-aligned People's Republic of China promoting peaceful cooperation while deconstructing Taiwan's ties with the continent. According to David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, from the early 1950s to mid-1970s, "China's Africa policy had three primary objectives: breaking out of international isolation, battling the former Soviet Union for primacy in the world communist movement, and displacing Taiwan as the internationally recognized government of China" (Shinn and Eisenman, p. xi). To reach these goals, China strategically cooperated with national liberation movements in seeking newly independent African countries to support its resumption of membership in the United Nations. From 1964 onward, Beijing developed its now famous "Eight Principles on Economic and Technical Aid" to which no condition of reciprocity or conditionality was attached: "The Chinese Government never asks for any privilege or attaches any conditions" (Ibid., p. xi). The flagship project of this post-colonial period was of course the now quasi-mythical Tanzania-Zambia railway inaugurated in 1975 between two countries that sympathised with the socialist revolutionary objectives and rhetoric.

From the 1980s, with the opening-up and the transformation of China's economy, Sino-African relations took a new turn towards a business-oriented partnership, with Africa offering both a market for China's manufactured products and a strategic target for investment in resources. During the same period, Chinese military assistance to Africa grew and diversified into a significant participation in UN peacekeeping missions or more direct supply operations with military equipment and training. From the early 2000s, the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) concretised these new relations by offering a diplomatic window to a fast-evolving partnership culminating in the newly adopted "Beijing Action Plan for Africa (2013-2015)," which gives a very precise overview of Sino-African ambitions in a variety of domains from economic cooperation to cultural exchanges and the promotion of peace and security.

All these developments, as well as their inscription in a given historical continuity, illustrate the growth and changing nature of China's international ambitions and regional presence. This particular attention paid to the history of China's re-engagement in Africa is perceptible throughout Shinn and Eisenman well-structured book. With 12 chapters covering mostly the post-1949 period and dealing with both general (historical overview, trade, investment, and assistance, military relations) and precise issues from a

geographical or topical perspective (China and Sahel, China and Southern Africa, the Media), *China in Africa: A Century of Engagement* provides the reader with a pleasant read and a detailed scientific approach to the China-Africa debate in relation to previous China-Africa scholarship. Departing from purely optimistic or alarmist views on an imperial China re-colonising Africa, Shinn and Eisenman have managed to methodically review a number of very diverse issues from a comparative perspective, resulting in one of the most accurate and balanced publications on China-Africa relations.

This academic detachment is far from being the rule in most Sinological or Africanist productions on the China-Africa issue. In her controversial yet influential book *Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa* (2010), Dambisa Moyo, a former Goldman Sachs investment banker from Zambia, scorns Western aid as a curse and an agent of corruption while praising China's unconditional engagement and the many merits of a "Beijing consensus," popularised by Joshua Cooper Ramo, and bringing growth on the basis of the Chinese development model.⁽³⁾ This critical enterprise based on the deconstruction of presumably false assumptions with systematic fact-finding is somehow shared – although in a less provocative and much more rigorous manner – by Deborah Brautigam, who in her well-advertised and reviewed *Dragon's Gift* aims to reveal the real story of China in Africa.⁽⁴⁾ As a long-time observer of the Sino-African relationship, and now Professor and Director of the International Development Program of the Johns Hopkins University, Deborah Brautigam has carried out extensive fieldwork in Africa and gained access to first-hand materials in many countries. She is absolutely right to try to demystify a number of expressly sensationalist and unverified news items published worldwide, including by influential media such as *The Economist* or *The Atlantic* or academics quoting the same news, on how China is grabbing land, polluting territories, or exploiting African workers. This courageous and much-needed attempt is exemplified by her fascinating piece on "Chinese Engagement in African Agriculture: Fiction and Fact," in which she takes a number of examples of poor media investigation and scholarship that mix rumour with fact and confuse currencies and countries to systematically raise feelings of anxiety over how and where China is now operating to "grab" land.⁽⁵⁾ And yes, fears

2. Indeed, in 2005, a Kenyan girl of possible Chinese descent was invited to visit her ancestors' country. See "Kenyan Girl Traces Chinese Roots over 600 Years Later," Chinese Embassy in Kenya, available at: www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceke/eng/sbgx/t204436.htm (accessed on 14 January 2013).

3. See Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010, note 22. See as well from the same author, *Winner Take All: China's Race for Resources and What it Means for the World*, Basic Books, 2012.

4. See as well her blog: www.chinaafricarealistory.com (accessed on 14 January 2013).

5. See Deborah Brautigam, "Chinese Engagement in African Agriculture: Fiction and Fact," in John Anthony Allan, Martin Keulertz, Suvi Sojamo, Jeroen Warner (eds.), *Handbook of Land and Water Grabs in Africa*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 91-103.

about China are “misinformed” and used by other powers with the indirect complicity of non-vigilant media looking for more China bashing. But regardless of its international success and defensible objectives, the *Dragon's Gift* does not bring as much clarity as it could to the China-Africa “real story.” Filled with hundreds of loosely-structured anecdotes and many interesting facts, the book is a sort of patchwork of 11 chapters with a multitude of catchy titles in which the “crouching tiger” competes with the “orient express”! Nevertheless, timely and the first of its kind, the *Dragon's Gift* reaches some of its objectives in publicising the debate beyond specialised academic and media circles. Deborah Brautigam's blog and publications are useful reads for all those who are interested not only in learning more about China in Africa, but also in understanding China as a global actor as well as related pressing contemporary issues in international relations.

Trade and investment flows are of course at the centre of these new concerns. In 2009, China became Africa's top trading partner. In 2010, outward foreign direct investment (FDI) from emerging economies accounted for 29% of global FDI outflows. Six developing and transitional economies were among the 20 top world investors. In this group, China occupied the second position globally, and for the first time surpassed Japan in outward FDI (OFDI) and accounted for 30% of the total number of cross-border mergers and acquisitions.⁽⁶⁾ A number of these new FDIs have been made in Africa. How much and how? This is difficult to say, as China, despite recent efforts from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), does not publish clear and systemic statistics on the topic – but then, neither do other main players such as the US who are very much involved in sensitive businesses throughout the continent. In 2007, *Africa Silk Road*, a report edited by Harry G. Broadman for the World Bank, was already highlighting China's and India's new economic frontier in presenting the performances and patterns of Chinese and Indian trade and investment flows with Africa at an original micro (firm) level. *China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence*, edited by Robert I. Rotberg in 2008, follows this path from a more general angle and provides us with 14 insightful chapters, including a number of specialised contributions on “Chinese concessional loans” (Paul Hubbard), “Trade and investment” (Harry G. Broadman), and “Aid” (Deborah Brautigam). The chapter by Harry Broadman (author of the *Africa Silk Road*) is particularly interesting as it insists on what is probably the most crucial transformation of today's international economic relations: the surge and possible future dominance of south-south trade and investment flows, which not only challenge the current balance of powers, but also the principles and rules on which these exchanges are based. In this regard, it will be fascinating to observe the next evolution of China's participation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its further engagement with the Dispute Settlement System (DSB) in relation not only to developed countries but also to other developing countries in Africa and Latin America that now represent a large share in Chinese trade.

What about aid, then? Is China the unconditional friend portrayed by African Sinophiles? And what about debt sustainability, governance, and environmental issues while money is supposedly massively injected in non-democratic regimes such as Zimbabwe that are portrayed as enemies of the West? Contrary to the proliferating clichés and media stories, Chinese aid can take a multitude of forms, from the preferential loans offered by China Eximbank to infrastructure building projects, and takes place throughout Africa, even in countries that are less rich in resources. The 2006 and 2010 *White Papers* were already quite clear about the explicit and implicit objectives of this aid policy. Sceptics will be convinced by the latest publi-

cations of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and recent news on the possibly imminent establishment of a BRICS development bank, which could provide an unprecedented alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In this peaceful yet planned conquest of African territory, another aspect of Chinese engagement plays a major role: the penetration and diffusion of Chinese culture through media coverage and the development of educational ties. China is setting up dozens of Confucius Institutes, and in July 2012, the Chinese government announced a three-year “African Talents Plan” aimed at training around 30,000 Africans and giving out 18,000 scholarships. Any traveller to Africa will notice the presence of these Confucius Institutes, which are now often bigger and better funded than many of the cultural institutes of former colonisers.

Very importantly as well, China has been making significant strides in expanding its media presence on the continent. In January 2012, CCTV chose Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, to set up a broadcast hub, and Xinhua now has 20 bureaus on the continent.⁽⁷⁾ Knowing the ability of China to use and transform its propaganda apparatus, this carefully thought-out media campaign will certainly have an impact on the African narrative and the role China plays in the scenarios to come. In this regard, one can only agree with Yu Shan Wu's observations in his 2012 Report for the South African Institute of International Affairs: “China has sent its state media on a global mission to advance its influence in the world, signalling an addition to China's outward movement project, which previously focused on trade, investment and diplomatic activities. In particular, China's state media in Africa provide insight into China's larger soft power strategy. At this particular juncture, China is giving Africa something that other media infrastructure sources are not: the capacity to create its own content and an alternative platform to tell Africa's own story and to view China's story” (Yu, p. 24).

Sinology is dead, long live Sinology! This surprising remark intentionally formulated in a dedicated first-class China academic journal is not only provocative, but also aims at reconsidering the evolution of Chinese power and with it the necessary transformation of social sciences studies on China. While many books have recently been published on China-Africa relations, these have often been released by media correspondents or diplomats with long-time experience in Africa and/or China. Specialised academic books are harder to find. This not only calls for a “going out” scholarship on China, but also for a more precise thematic approach (economic, legal, political, etc.) toward socio-economic realities that are not China-specific, but rather global. This “careful scholarship”⁽⁸⁾ based on original fieldwork and – but not only – a genuine knowledge of China could bring an immense contribution to many Chinese and social sciences studies in building bridges between “Sinology” and other disciplines in which interest in China is immense but not always filled with adequate knowledge.

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6. See UNCTAD, *World Investment Report*, 2011 and 2012, and UNCTAD, *World Investment Prospects Survey*, 2010-12.

7. Yu Shan Wu, *The Rise of China's State Led Media Dynasty in Africa*, South African Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Paper No. 117.

8. This expression is often used by Deborah Brautigam when referring to the need for more rigorous and fieldwork-based scholarship on the Chinese presence in Africa.