

BOOK REVIEW

Chapurukha M. Kusimba, Tiequan Zhu, and Purity Wakabari Kiura, eds. *China and East Africa: Ancient Ties, Contemporary Flows*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. 277 pp. \$117.00. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-4985-7614-7.

China and East Africa: Ancient Ties, Contemporary Flows is an edited volume authored by an impressive team of East African and East Asian scholars that examines the deep history of the relationship between two regions long tied to one another but whose relationship has been underanalyzed. Tracing connections between East Africa and China chronologically from the early Stone Age to the present, the analyses of trade, diplomatic, and cultural relationships between the two from deep history to contemporary times is especially relevant given modern tensions and complexities between East Africa and China.

The core emphasis of this edited volume is that the connection between East Africa and China is not a modern phenomenon but in fact has existed for centuries, if not millennia. Modern economic and political relationships between East African countries and China are predicated upon the deep history of the Indian Ocean and overland trade networks and East Africa's early globalization. The authors in this volume explore the intricacies of these relationships chronologically, from the early Stone Age to the present with an emphasis on the sixth to sixteenth centuries in the first half of the book, and the twenty-first century in the latter half.


The book is broken up into two parts: "Ancient Ties" and "Contemporary Flows." The Ancient Ties section is noteworthy in its inclusion of lithic assemblages in the early Stone Age in eastern Africa and China (3–22). The section's real strength is showcasing some of the newest archaeological scholarship on the Swahili Coast. Chapters in this section include new data and analyses from sites such as Mtwapa (65–78, 121–34), Manda (147–63), Siyu (89–104), and Kunduchi (105–20). The focus of this section as a whole is not only on trade goods from both continents recovered from various archaeological sites, which are found across the Swahili Coast from various regions in China, but the flow of people between the two regions.

Several chapters in this section cite evidence for direct contact of Chinese and Swahili merchants or dignitaries before the fourteenth century (52–53, 65–78). The most-referenced piece of evidence is Admiral Zheng He's journey to East Africa, presumably to the northern stretch of the Swahili Coast (52–54, 167–85). Not only did Admiral Zheng He visit the Swahili Coast on several occasions, but there are many across the Swahili Coast, especially in Shanga, who trace their lineage to Chinese survivors of a shipwreck during one such journey (54, 72–73, 92–93). More abundant is evidence of the flow of trade goods between China and

East Africa, such as Chinese ceramics and African ivory, ambergris, tortoise shell, and pearls. This section represents some of the most exciting archaeological research being done on the coast, especially given that China's cultural and material presence in East Africa's history is often overlooked in favor of scholarship aimed towards the Middle East, India, and later, Europe.

The Contemporary Flows section highlights the complexities and tensions between East Africa and China today. Focusing mainly on modern commerce and financial investments, these chapters explore the tensions inherent in these relationships and East Africans' complicated feelings about Chinese business presence in East Africa and underlying motivations on both sides. These chapters, such as Chapters Twelve and Thirteen, demonstrate that both China and East African governments have a lot to gain from mutually beneficial agreements (187–234). The fraught relationship between locals and Chinese immigrants in East Africa is best illustrated in Chapter Thirteen, focused on the imbalanced profits and treatments of locals in second-hand clothing trade in Kenya (215–34). This is not to say that East Africa is at the whims of international influences; rather, African countries are actively shaping world trade networks and globalization (215). However, given that land-grabbing and neocolonialism are becoming increasingly urgent issues in Africa, a critical assessment of these relationships is urgent.

Overall, *China and East Africa: Ancient Ties, Contemporary Flows* represents a critical intervention into connections between East Africa and China. This volume demonstrates incredible depth, both in terms of chronological time covered and the analyses of archaeological, historical, political, and anthropological evidence. The authors in this edited volume present important and exciting research into an underexplored relationship's deep history and contemporary implications that shall hopefully continue in the coming years, especially in further areas of the Swahili Coast.

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