

Introduction: China, Africa and Internationalization

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The changes in both the scale and the visibility of China's dealings in Africa in the last decade have been astonishing. Trade, particularly in imports of natural resources to China and exports of Chinese merchandise to Africa, has grown exponentially since 2001. Lucrative deals have been signed with a range of African governments. A Chinese merchant presence in African cities and town is increasingly visible. And China now has a high diplomatic profile in Africa, not least as a guarantor and protector to important individual states such as Sudan. These quickly moving developments have occasioned a first wave of comment, excitement and reflection. Yet much of what has been published to date has been broad brush overview, policy analysis or opinion piece.¹ Academic work based on primary research has been relatively scarce.

This volume represents a preliminary attempt to deepen understanding of the emerging relationship between China and Africa, in presenting work that is based on primary research of both the Chinese and the African sides of the relationship. These authors and other scholars gathered in September 2008 at a SOAS workshop in London to share their research and sharpen their analyses. Geographically, the articles in this volume cover a wide-ranging group of African countries from Equatorial Guinea to Sudan, from Tanzania and

1 E.g. Harry G. Broadman and Gozde Isik, *Africa's Silk Road: China and India's New Economic Frontier* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007), pp. xxvi, 391; Raphael Kaplinsky, Dorothy McCormick and Mike Morris, "The impact of China on sub-Saharan Africa," *Report Presented by the Department for International Development, UK* (Brighton: University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, 2006), Marcel Kitissou (ed.), *Africa in China's Global Strategy* (London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2007), pp. ix, 205, Piet Konings, "China and Africa in the era of neo-liberal globalisation," *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 1 & 2 (2007), pp. 17–22; Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, "China–Africa relations in the post-Cold War era: dialectics of rethinking South–South dialogue," *CODESRIA Bulletin*, No. 1 & 2 (2007), pp. 8–16; Firoze M. Manji and Stephen Marks, *African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Oxford: Fahamu, 2007), pp. ix, 174; Domingos J. Muekalia, "Africa and China's strategic partnership," *African Security Review*, Vol. 13 (2004), pp. 5–12; Robert I. Rotberg, *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), pp. ix, 339; Ian Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise* (London: Routledge, 2006); Denis M. Tull, "China's engagement in Africa: scope, significance and consequences," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (2006), pp. 459–79; Jian-Ye Wang and International Monetary Fund, African Dept, *What Drives China's Growing Role in Africa?* (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund African Dept., 2007), p. 30; and Leni Wild, David Mephram and Institute for Public Policy Research (London England), *The New Sinosphere: China in Africa* (London: IPPR, 2006), pp. viii, 72. Within some of these works, especially the edited volumes, there are a few case studies, but for the most part they take a broader, macro-view.

Zambia to Gabon, as well as China itself. Analytically, they deal with three inter-related themes: the need to disaggregate both “China” and “Africa” and focus on a rising multiplicity of actors in this relationship; patterns of globalization and development; and the ways in which rhetoric and reality are presented and are themselves undergoing a process of change.

Much of what has been written to date on China and Africa has tended to reify “China” and “Africa” as relatively undifferentiated, unitary entities.² This is understandable, as actors and spokespersons in China and Africa have themselves tended to represent the relationship in this way, but the articles in this collection are virtually unanimous in suggesting that shorthands that pre-suppose rational unitary actors obscure more than they illuminate. Where most journalism and policy analysis see unitary, coherent actors, we see variety, complexity and multiple actors with different relationships to state power and state institutions. Some of our articles turn to disaggregating “Africa” into more manageable, analytical units: Lee’s masterful paired comparison of labour regimes in Tanzania and Zambia shows how different social and political environments within Africa have led to very different outcomes in terms of resistance to the casualization of labour, while Sautman and Yan’s survey work on how China and the Chinese are perceived in different countries in Africa lays out variation in perception by both country and occupational group. Since Africa spreads over such a vast geographic scale, contains so many different sovereign states, political systems, languages, ethnic groups and historical experiences, analysis of “Africa” must lend itself to diversity.

This is patently not the case for China: a large unitary state characterized by an unusual degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity, a tradition of statehood that stretches back into distant antiquity, and a government that insists on representing itself in strict post-Westphalian terms as sovereign, unitary and rational. Yet under the rubric of “China,” here too we see variety, complexity, and an emerging proliferation of state and non-state actors whose relationships with each other are opaque, in flux, or not quite what they seem. Sometimes it is even difficult to assert what is and is not part of the Chinese state. Alden and Hughes point to Huawei, a large Chinese company that used to be part of the state sector but is now ostensibly private, and to NORINCO, a shadowy company that still appears to be a commercial arm of the People’s Liberation Army. Given this degree of murkiness about the distinction between public and private in China itself, it is very difficult to come up with straightforward ways of determining governmental degrees of support for different Chinese actors in Africa.

2 For example see Denis Tull, “China’s engagement in Africa,” Domingos J. Muekalia, “Africa and China’s strategic partnership,” and Anthony Lake, Christine T. Whitman, Princeton N. Lyman and J. Stephen Morrison, *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic US Approach toward Africa: Report of an Independent Task Force* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2006), pp. xxi, 148.

Other authors' fieldwork in Africa, however, at least preliminarily suggests a very different picture. Haglund finds that Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that have taken up operations in the Zambian copper sector are expected to be financially viable without aid and support from the state, which in turn leads to the pursuit of short-term financial gains at the expense of long-term stability. And, at least on the border boomtown of Oshikango, Namibia, Chinese individuals and families who migrate to Africa in search of business opportunities are totally on their own, separated from each other in their diverse origins in China as well as from the agency of the Chinese state. Thus subject matter as different as general overviews of China's foreign policy towards Africa (Alden and Hughes), energy policy and "oil hunger" (Jiang), China's managerial experiences in Africa (Haglund), individual Chinese migration and small businesses in Africa (Dobler) and even the extremely important bilateral political relationship between China and Sudan (Large) are all subject to ever increasing numbers of actors who enjoy different relationships with the state.

Coming to terms with such variation, not only in Africa but in China as well, presents a range of methodological challenges and opportunities.³ How do we know what we know? How do we convince others that what we present is in fact knowable? As academics, our expertise comes through systematic inquiry that can be replicated or corroborated in some fashion, allowing us to present our hard-won knowledge with some measure of certainty. What is both intriguing and difficult about this topic is that truly to grasp the details, processes, and significance of China–Africa interaction(s) at this global moment requires access to and agility with multiple trajectories of knowledge, each of which assumes a disciplined practice. These in turn demand significant investment of time in learning languages, histories and methods. What is required is not just familiarity, but an intimate knowledge of both China and Africa that simultaneously investigates rapidly changing realities while giving voice to the participants involved. Since China and Africa are each so large and complex, this is a very tall order indeed, as the individual researcher is likely only to be able to focus on one small part of a much larger, complex whole. Collective and collaborative efforts are a good way forward, and several of our pieces take preliminary steps in this direction. Alden and Hughes, Sautman and Yan, and Bräutigam and Tang are collaborative efforts involving scholars with different disciplinary, linguistic and/or area skills. Contributions and commentary from Chinese and African scholars are another: the discussions on the papers presented were

3 This section draws inspiration from such work as Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots globalization and the research imagination," *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–19, and Michael Burawoy, "Grounding globalization," in M. Burawoy (ed.), *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 337–50, Paul T. Zeleza, "The disciplinary, interdisciplinary and global dimensions of African studies," *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies-Multi-, Inter-and Transdisciplinarity*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2006), pp. 195–220.; Adebayo Olukoshi, "African scholars and African studies," *Development in Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 6 (2006), pp. 533–44.

immeasurably enriched by the participation of Jing Gu, Adams Bodomo, He Wenping and Lucy Corkin.

Method always matters, but it is often hidden, implied and assumed in particular disciplinary frames. In this volume, we are a decidedly social science bunch, trained mostly in politics, though also in sociology, anthropology, law and economics. In addition, some of us are influenced by history and cultural studies. Within our fields, we specialize in international relations, foreign policy, law and diplomacy, comparative politics, development, public administration, labour studies, and even witchcraft. Our methods are for the most part qualitative, with the exception of Sautman and Yan's survey research on African perceptions of China. The articles include the analysis of original texts (official documents, speeches, television series, bills of goods), archival work, ethnography (short-term, long-term, single and multi-sited), survey data, field interviews and participant observation, and many include more than one of these sources.

Some authors provide detailed snapshots of a place and time (Esteban, Haglund); others approximate a more longitudinal approach (Dobler – five years; Bräutigam and Tang – 25 years). Several authors draw on a deep, long-term engagement with their respective topics (Hughes and Alden on foreign policy, Jiang on Chinese energy policy, Large on Sudanese politics), and others on decades-prior consideration of China–Africa relations (Bräutigam, Sautman). As Strauss's intervention suggests, historicizing these relations is important methodologically as well as theoretically.

The language of investigation is also significant. Linguistically, the majority of the authors have some if not full proficiency in Mandarin Chinese. Linguistic fluency allows for interviews and insights that would otherwise be lost. Some are proficient in local African languages (particularly Large and Saavedra). Others (Lee, Sautman and Yan) draw on wider collaborations with African researchers. The textured analyses that result makes the case for continuing to broaden the linguistic base of research on China–Africa relations, and shows the critical value of a dual area studies approach to this topic.

Patterns of Globalization and Development

The core of our investigation into the evolving relationship between China and Africa confronts a larger set of questions about globalization and development, and how China's entry into this sphere may (or may not) differ from earlier models and patterns. These articles cover the analytical sub-topics of capital flows and investment, migration, and the ongoing problems inherent to working with and through those regimes in Africa that remain extraverted and highly personalized. Key questions about Chinese business in Africa, particularly in terms of natural resource acquisition, have generated the most media and policy attention, as well as the most concern. Prominent in this coverage are Western fears over a new "scramble for Africa," concerns about China's self avowed determination to avoid conditionality, and questions over the lack of attention to

governance in the contracts China signs with African governments, particularly in locations such as Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo.⁴

The articles that directly address China's investment in Africa all suggest a much more nuanced picture, that China's business dealings in Africa are conditioned as much by its structural position of relative inexperience and late entry into the field as its own "Chinese" presuppositions about the correct way to engage in business. In the very different sectors of mining, textiles and oil, Haglund, Lee, Jiang, and for the agricultural sector Bräutigam and Tang, all argue that Chinese business management in Africa replicates long-held domestic assumptions about what has (and implicitly has not) worked in China. African charges of exploitation and cultural insensitivity, and more general worries over China's lack of corporate transparency, may well be valid, but these authors make the point that Chinese business practices in Africa are not significantly different from domestic business practices *within* China. Chinese managerial narratives of hard work, self reliance, getting ahead, delayed gratification and sacrifice may vie with African counter-narratives of exploitation, arrogance and insensitivity (Lee), but these are extremely powerful domestic narrative understandings of China's developmental "success," particularly among a certain class of managers who go on to projects in Africa. China's managerial culture of vertical integration, limited spillover effects and residence in separate enclaves (Haglund) disadvantage Chinese enterprises in terms of learning the norms and cultures of the African environments in which they operate, but these are typical ways in which large enterprises and development projects within China work. Complaints in Sierra Leone about "the Chinese thinking that the government is the owner of land all over the country" detailed in Bräutigam and Tang merely reflect Chinese understandings of land ownership in China itself – that the government is indeed the owner of the land all over the country.

But from another perspective, these same authors grapple with a larger question of the universal versus the particular. How much of the behaviour of Chinese companies in Africa is symptomatic of contemporary global capital flows in general, and how much is down to norms and practices that are distinctively Chinese? Jiang points out that a good deal of the criticism that Chinese energy companies have been subject to in Africa can be explained by their relatively late entry into this set of markets. As newcomers, Chinese enterprises almost by definition have ended up with oil companies and contracts in exceptionally unstable, difficult places to work, like Angola and Sudan.

4 See Robert I. Rotberg, *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008), pp. ix, 339; Andrea E. Goldstein, *The Rise of China and India: What's In It for Africa?* (Paris: Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006), pp. 151; Esther Pan, "China, Africa, and oil," *Backgrounder*, Vol. 26 (2007); I. Taylor, "China's oil diplomacy in Africa," *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 5 (2006), pp. 937–59; Chris Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo S. de Oliveira, *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. xx, 382.

Much can also be explained by the inexperience of Chinese managers working in African environments. This occurs both in dealings with weak, non-transparent African regimes, like Gabon, and in countries with strong oppositions and a critical press, like Zambia. In the former, Chinese oil companies faced severe criticism for despoiling protected forest, but their lack of knowledge became clear upon later explanation that they had simply never been told by the host government that their exploration sites included protected forest land. Large-scale agricultural projects, like the Magbass Sugar Complex in Sierra Leone described by Bräutigam and Tang, have also run into trouble with different local factions over land rights, as the agreement signed by the government took scant account of the interests of many local stakeholders.

In the latter, Haglund suggests that Chinese investor expectations of high growth, combined with lack of international experience and unfamiliarity with demands for transparency and stakeholder consultation have run into problems in the relatively open and critical political atmosphere of the Copper Belt in Zambia. Lee suggests that the brutal labour casualization practised by Chinese management in both the Urakafiki Textile Mill in Tanzania and the Chambishi copper mines in Zambia simply reflect a contemporary global logic of capital accumulation. Esteban demonstrates that in Equatorial Guinea, Chinese firms are less, rather than more, advantaged in terms of oil exploitation, and their per hectare extraction rate in logging is similar to those of other multinational corporations with logging concessions. Similarly, Bräutigam and Tang point out that, controversial as the promotion of hybrid seed stock may be, in so doing Chinese companies are merely following in the footsteps of older larger multinational corporations such as Monsanto and Sygenta. And China's shift away from straight agricultural aid and big projects to what works, what will make profit, and "both getting and giving" may simply be part of a larger, more universal frame of free market capitalism, now applied to countries and sectors in which an earlier ethic of straight aid and fraternal help was dominant.

A rising incidence of transnational human flows between China and Africa, particularly in the growing number of small Chinese family businesses that have been set up all over Africa, is a particularly visible manifestation of the larger complex of burgeoning contact and involvement; the Chinese family shop is where the most Africans directly experience the Chinese presence in Africa. Gregor Dobler's work on small Chinese businesses on the Namibia–Angola border describes a situation which also has unexpected complexities. Although the number of Chinese shops and warehouses in the town of Oshikango has increased enormously over the past ten years, the typical experiences of individual family businesses are not what one would expect, given extant literatures on chain migration and enclave communities. Not only do Chinese traders get no help and support from the Chinese government, they also get little in the way of help and support from each other. At least in Oshikango, Chinese families migrate in search of business opportunities as individual units. As they come

from different regions, speak different dialects and belong to different classes, thus having little in common. Older better-established businesses with good working relations with Namibian officials and customs agents do well, and do not hesitate to take advantage of newcomers, who have a much more difficult time. And turnover rates are high, so that even as the “Chinese” presence in small businesses grows, individual families are unlikely to remain for the long haul. More comparative research in sites other than a border trading town, and between different groups of sojourning business families, is needed to ascertain how typical or atypical the patterns found in Oshikango are, but in the interim, worries about a “Chinese takeover” of local economies hardly seems to be warranted.

The articles in this collection also consider some of the difficulties China faces in working with and through authoritarian and neo-patrimonial states, notably Equatorial Guinea and Sudan. Here our authors see sharp differences, depending on the particular African context. In Equatorial Guinea, China’s avowed principles of non-interference, absolute state sovereignty, non-conditionality and mutuality have more or less free rein. Esteban’s lengthy excursion into China’s principles and practices in its dealings with Equatorial Guinea details the ways in which both Chinese and Western companies have been unsavourily implicated in supporting a deeply authoritarian, corrupt rentier regime because of their respective interests in business (particularly oil concessions): the foreign concessions get the oil, the ruling family gets the money, and health, education and welfare for the rest of the country all sink. Esteban suggests, however, that not all foreign concessions in Equatorial Guinea are created equal. The combination of regulatory oversight and scrutiny from civil society in Spain and the United States renders the regime an embarrassment for Western oil companies while the lack of effective civil society and regulation allows China’s principles of non-interference and respect for absolute state sovereignty to be translated into nearly unconditional and open support for a repressive and authoritarian regime.

Daniel Large’s piece on Sudan chronicles a very different picture. Here, there is deep international mistrust of the Sudan regime, and recent conflicts in Darfur, on the border with Chad and in the on-and-off war with the South have prompted a great deal of international scrutiny at just the time that China was moving into a position of prime power responsibility for Sudan. Domestic political instability and the shifting sands of civil war factionalization have meant that Chinese personnel now are as liable to become the targets of anti-government forces as Westerners. Interestingly, despite its principles of non-interference and the sanctity of state sovereignty, China’s deepening involvement in Sudan is now beginning to move beyond its historic support for the authoritarian central government, include overtures to the semi-autonomous government of Southern Sudan and voice at least guarded criticism of the central regime’s actions in Darfur.

Another way of considering global patterns of development is in terms of South–South flows; in which case the comparative referents will be India and some parts of Latin America, particularly Brazil. South–South connections are particularly important at a time when the global financial meltdown has revealed not only

how interconnected “emerging economies” are with the “developed, industrialized” world, but also how vulnerable to downturns these economies can be. While China’s economy will also slow down considerably and the effects of this in Africa may not yet be realized, the fact of alternative partnerships and models to the holy grail of “development” remains. This in itself provides a new meaning and urgency to “South–South” comparisons. Haglund and Lee’s work both begin to develop the basis for a systematic comparison of the size, timing and range of Chinese involvement relative to other South–South connections throughout Africa.

As a growing web of South–South connections emerges, it is important to bring African voices, perceptions and agency – in all their own variety and complexity – to the fore when considering the China–Africa relationship. Many of our authors touch on this, but Sautman and Yan, and Lee are particularly concerned with restoring African narratives, voices and perceptions to a central position. Interestingly, these two pieces focus on different subjects (university students and casualized workers) and utilize different methods (multi-country surveys and ethnographic paired comparison). Not too surprisingly their conclusions also differ. Sautman and Yan’s multi-country survey on African perceptions of China among university students complements extant survey work on this topic and finds that when Africans are directly asked, with only a few exceptions they are mostly strongly positive in their perceptions of China’s development and its impact on Africa; indeed in surveys Africans are significantly more positive about China than they are about the United States. Lee’s ethnographic work among casualized workers in Zambia and Tanzania reveals a very different picture, one of significant cross-cultural misunderstanding, contest between fundamentally different narratives of Chinese industrial practices, and negatively charged perceptions all the way round.

Old Rhetorical Framings in the Face of Complex Emerging Realities

China’s own articulation of the principles by which it lives in general and towards Africa in particular have been remarkably consistent for the past 50 years. Principles of non-interference, mutual benefit and absolute state sovereignty that were worked out with India in the interests of lessening border tensions in the mid-1950s and then expanded more generally have been set in aspic, leaving very little rhetorical room for the Chinese government to encompass other discursive rhetorics to legitimate and explain its actions domestically and abroad. Yet clearly there have been significant changes in China’s foreign policy over the last half-century. Alden and Hughes lay out the ways in which the People’s Republic of China wishes to promote an image of China as a responsible international stakeholder that is part of a “harmonious world” promoting “peaceful development.” They argue that there is a fundamental incompatibility with these newer notions and the older rhetoric of absolute state sovereignty, non-interference and mutual benefit.

Strauss sees a partial, but still only very tentative, adjustment to the old rhetoric of common suffering at the hands of imperialism, analogous underdevelopment, and China's unique moral claims to be Africa's "all-weather friend." Although some newer notions of international division of labour and complementarity have begun to enter some of the official rhetoric, most official and semi-official pronouncements continue to be framed by appeals to China's unselfishness in its dealings with Africa, its spirit of co-equal partnership, and its exceptional morality in, for example, the heroic project of the TAZARA railroad in East Africa. Given how shopworn this rhetoric is in the light of China's current wealth, and how divorced from most contemporary realities either in China or Africa, this begs the question of why. Strauss suggests that the sheer longevity of the rhetoric has more to do with the relative importance of elite audiences in China (and until recently, in Africa) and a set of images about China that those audiences find comforting, legitimating and credible: that China has a long history (in Africa and elsewhere) of separateness, difference and implicit superiority to the colonial and exploitative West.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the *de facto* erosion of the old rhetoric of absolute state sovereignty, unconditionality and mutual benefit of is in the case of Sudan. Large's piece highlights discussions within China's policy-making elites on whether to stand up for Sudan under all circumstances or to circumscribe support for it as a "reckless country." He points to China's pragmatic engagement and negotiation with Sudan in support of acceptance of UN "blue helmets." And most importantly for the softening of China's hard-line rhetoric, the complexity and messiness of Sudan's repeated fracturing have led China to begin to move away from its previous position about the inviolability of state sovereignty. This is seen in its negotiations with the government of Southern Sudan, including the opening of a Chinese consulate in Juba (the centre of the emerging Southern Sudan state) which will almost certainly become an embassy should a referendum in the South lead to full independence.

Outsiders in Africa

While the argument has been made that China offers African partners a counterbalance and alternative to the often overbearing, domineering, exploitative and misguided interventions of the West, in fact, the Chinese investors, government and migrants often get it wrong. There are many examples of this within development and agricultural projects, trade and labour relations, and interpersonal exchanges. Chinese investors, managers, aid personnel and small entrepreneurs are not so unlike Western investors and aid personnel who go to Africa, interpret African realities from their own particular frames of experience, and are at best ineffectual and at worst the cause of grave damage. Is this aspect of Chinese engagement significantly different? Do the Chinese understand "Africa" any better (or worse) than other outsiders?

The articles here suggest that there is no one answer to this and it can only be examined in the diversity of grounded experiences in mining enclaves, border town shops, oil refineries, medical clinics and ministerial meeting rooms that are then linked back to the formative experiences, training and institutional location of the Africans and Chinese involved. Not surprisingly, outsiders from anywhere are liable to interpret African realities in the light of their own environmentally and culturally conditioned expectations. Rural development illustrates the point. At our initial workshop at SOAS, David Leonard suggested that over the last 30 years, Texas range management experts with experience in beef production in semi-arid conditions would go to East Africa to give advice to the pastoralists who were also operating in semi-arid conditions. But the Texas ranchers could never quite understand that the pastoralists in East Africa were using their cattle for dairy production for domestic consumption – something that no Texas rancher would ever dream of doing – and therefore their advice was often inappropriate. As revealed by Bräutigam and others, China's perception of Africa as a land of agricultural opportunity – having so much wide-open land and so few people working it – suggest at least as profound a misunderstanding of African agricultural conditions, which require lengthy fallow periods to maintain the soil. Rather like Tolstoy's unhappy families, each of which is unhappy in its own way, different kinds of outsiders in Africa are likely to get it wrong in slightly different ways for very different reasons. These subjective experiential aspects are revealed through ethnography and local interviews, such as those done by Lee, Dobler, Esteban and Large.

Taking a cultural studies approach, Saavedra also investigates the state of attitude and knowledge through an analysis of popular cultural expressions, in this case a Hong Kong television soap opera about medical missionaries in Kenya. She finds that much of what colours Western imagery of Africa is also present in this Hong Kong cultural expression. The tropes of exoticism, saving the continent and individual personal redemption feature large, just as they do in Western media. But there are also distinctly Chinese slants on how they are represented. The Hong Kong-based screenplay writers make a conscious attempt to positively distinguish an “enlightened” Chinese involvement in Africa from that of the West. They are ambivalent about China's own “development” and how well regions within China actually integrate into a progressive, distinctly modern form. The ambivalences expressed through a soap opera plot, as well as observations from the other authors, suggest that at present there is a large gap in the Chinese knowledge base about the diversity and dynamics of modern contemporary Africa. Whether, how quickly and in what way that gap will be filled remains to be seen.

Ways Forward in Future Research

The articles in this collection reflect the kinds of empirically based work on China and Africa that can now be done, but one volume can only scratch the surface of this large, complex and infinitely varied topic. As our meeting drew to a close, all

present agreed that the workshop had raised more questions about method, variation and globalization than it had definitively answered, and that there was a great need for further follow-up work, particularly work that incorporates African and Chinese perspectives and voices. Analytically there needs to be better and more careful disaggregation of the different layers of the Chinese state, how these layers cohere (or go off in quite separate directions), and how they support or ignore different kinds of Chinese actors in Africa. When figures as basic as the official amounts of China's investment and credits to Africa are opaque, and even the distinctions between official and private entities in China are unclear, this is a far from straightforward task. But more careful delineation of the official and non-official, and how those relationships work within China is a first and important step towards better understanding.

Second, there needs to be more systematic consideration of what is universal and what is particular about the China–Africa relationship. How much of China's action in Africa is distinctively Chinese and how much simply reflects what one would expect of any investor (or set of individual migrants) going to Africa is a very open question. More work that directly compares China's activities in Africa with the West and with other middle-income countries such as India and Brazil in the business, oil, minerals and small independent trading sectors would make significant strides in this direction, but as yet there is little of this kind of research available.

Third, there is a crying need for more comparative work that considers differences and similarities in the China–Africa relationship *within* Africa. More ethnographically based paired comparison or multi-country survey work will begin to get to grips with this large question of variation, but the very significant investments of time in the study of multiple languages and time spent in the field make this kind of work very difficult to carry through to completion. The way forward will be likely to involve much greater collaboration with African researchers in both setting out research agendas and gathering the necessary data. Research that relies on local African languages will almost certainly reveal a more nuanced and complex picture of the China–Africa relationship.

Fourth, we must recognize that the China–Africa relationship is a fluid, mutually constitutive one. At present in Africa there is a remarkable lack of general knowledge about China, although interest is growing; in China there is an only very small group of scholars and policy makers who have any direct knowledge of Africa. How Chinese knowledge of Africa and African knowledge of China is produced and assimilated in the coming years will be something to track; how this newer knowledge feeds into government policies, Western discourse and understanding, and attitudes and experiences on the ground will be extremely important.

Finally, we would like to suggest that the China–Africa relationship be looked at in a more even way. Rather than focusing exclusively on how Chinese actions have an impact on African state and society, we ought to begin to consider what engagement in Africa can add to an increasingly internationalized and complex

China. Some of the workshop participants have indeed begun to engage with these kinds of questions. Adams Bodomo's work on the African sojourning community in Guangzhou suggests that in this location at least, Africans are surprisingly well tolerated by locals and that business activities are promoted by municipal officialdom.⁵ Sautman and Yan are continuing to conduct research that includes surveys, interviews and close readings of documentary sources on Chinese perceptions of Africa and Africans. How Africa's vibrant political associations, vigorous civil societies, open presses, and variety in expression of cultural and artistic forms in music, dance and visual representation have an impact on different layers of Chinese state and society are just some of the preliminary questions to begin to take seriously, as the China–Africa relationship grows in depth, scale and complexity in coming years.

5 Adams Bodomo, "Africa–China relations in an era of globalization: the role of African trading communities in China," *Xiya Feizhou*, forthcoming.