

genuine contributions beyond contentious ideas of modernity. It opens the ground for studies that problematise and spell out not just complexities but also local transformations and real attunements of infrastructural articulations in Africa and other contexts.

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China's Relations with Africa: a new era of strategic engagement

by D. H. Shinn and J. Eisenman

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This is a very important and deeply impressive book. It could be seen as a sequel to the authors' 2012 tome on the same topic and it is just as comprehensive and meticulously researched. The book theorizes China's engagement with Africa from the standpoint of its global 'geostrategy' to sub-regional relations. It then engages some of the most important topics of Chinese engagement in Africa, such as party to party relations, propaganda, security and information technology. Both authors are political scientists and this disciplinary background and training is evident in the writing and structure, as economic engagements and issues are arguably downplayed, however this also gives the book a distinctive focus and feel, and makes sense given the importance of the analysis of Chinese geostrategy to it. In particular it analyses the 'overlapping latticework of relationships with thousands of African elites' (p. 1).

The most surprising aspect of this book is that it details the vast network of relationships and influence that the Chinese state and Communist Party has across the continent with actors ranging from the military to journalists. No other work, to this reviewer's knowledge, has covered this in such breadth and depth and with such attention to detail. The book's major contribution is to uncover this and it shows that despite declining investment and loan volumes from China, the country's influence in and on the continent remains vast. Western powers would have a huge task to try and compete with these networks across multiple thematic areas and scales, and it is not clear that they could (whether that is desirable or not is a different matter). The authors argue that while COVID-19 reduced some exchanges, training programmes and

other vectors of interchange will likely increase the influence of China on the continent in the future.

In order to make its arguments the book draws on secondary sources from China, Africa and around the world and primary data from interviews and a survey of African opinions towards China conducted with a non-governmental organisation. The authors are very critical and sceptical of Chinese intentions and involvement in Africa, often with good reason. In general arguments are empirically well supported, but at times it appears as if somewhat nefarious motives are imputed to the Chinese state or Communist Party without being substantiated. As many deliberations and decisions within the Chinese governance structure are taken in camera, it is difficult to say whether or not some motives are accurately imputed based on results, although the authors also make use of extensive official and grey sources to support their arguments.

It is not possible to do justice to the magnitude of the contribution of this work in a short review like this. However all of the chapters provide illumination. For example the chapter on *Security Strategy and Interests* addresses the 2021 amendment to the Chinese National Defense Law which notes that the country will increase its national defence capabilities, including those which may be used 'overseas for just causes'. This is an important qualification of the long-established Chinese foreign policy position of 'non-interference' in the affairs of other countries. This hardening of Chinese security policy is however offset by a creative mix of soft power and other engagements that downplay the country's strategic and military interests. The authors also cite research on the Chinese policy on civil-military fusion that requires its companies and individuals collect information on technology which could be militarily useful when operating abroad. This chapter also covers fascinating and underreported topics such as deep seabed mining and rare earth elements, while also dealing with other crucially important areas, such as the role of fishing in food security. China has the largest fishing fleet in the world, and its firms control an estimated 90% of the trawlers operating in Ghana's coastal waters for example.

The authors provides some surprising conclusions. For example Chinese official policy documents talk about a 'partnership of equals' with Africa. However, Shinn and Eisenmann argue that Chinese foreign policy is characterised by formal inequality and informal equality as China seeks to construct a Sino-centric world order through conviviality with key policy elites overseas.

The writing in the book seems a little breathless as almost every sentence, at times, is referenced. However readers will be richly rewarded for their time investment as the book gives a new, keen, important and insightful account of China's evolving relations with the continent.

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