

awkward and potentially harmful engagements. While both sides deplored the fact that relations had grown more distant over time, they saw it as inevitable.

Intimate distance also arises from misunderstandings, or rather, misunderstandings of misunderstandings. Even if gestures are well-meant, their outcomes can be disastrous. In his efforts to befriend Mongolian employees and business partners, for instance, Mr Jia only succeeded in creating enemies. While he stressed the affective dimension of his relationships, his counterparts viewed them as purely instrumental. As a result, this ambitious agricultural entrepreneur ended up in various altercations, one of which culminated in a libel suit. The Chinese tried hard, perhaps too hard, to be accepted. Many of their efforts backfired, as Bunkenborg, Nielsen, and Pedersen illustrate in their lively ethnographic vignettes.

The book's main contribution lies in the innovative methodology and rigorous reflexivity it uses. By taking the disagreements between themselves as part of the object of study and using their own positionality as a research tool, these anthropologists offer unique insights in field research as a *process*. The book provides a rare look behind the scenes, revealing the occasional ignorance, stubbornness and frustrations of researchers. This makes it a daring account. If it lacks the empirical and theoretical depth of recent explorations of intimacy, distance and empire in the context of China's global ambitions by anthropologists like Di Wu, Cheryl Mei-ting Schmitz and Derek Sheridan, the book adds an important comparative dimension to the growing body of literature on China in the world.

Engaging, candid, and at times amusing, *Collaborative Damage* makes an insightful as well as a delightful read. It would be a nice contribution to syllabi in anthropology and qualitative research methods and, as a witness to local manifestations of global China, to contemporary Chinese studies.

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China and Africa: The New Era

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Daniel Large has produced a first-rate primer on China–Africa relations since Xi Jinping took power in 2012. Written in a clear and accessible style, the book provides a solid foundation for students and policy analysts looking to understand this complex and wide-ranging topic from the vantage point of Beijing – which does, in fact, initiate and orchestrate China–Africa relations. It sheds light on the most important development in China–Africa relations over the last decade: the emergence of politics as the central focus of Beijing's engagement on the continent. Because economic factors are “determined by politics,” Large argues, it “needs to be returned to the centre of understanding China's Africa relations today” (p. 3). To accomplish this, he challenges the “conventional wisdom and popular associations” that hold that economics, not politics and security, dominate the relationship.

The book begins by reviewing the history, institutions and frameworks of China–Africa political relations before situating them in geopolitics, exploring the promotion of China's political model, and concluding with an examination of the expansion of

security relations. The background section in chapter one clarifies the political and institutional dynamics and historical trends in China's relations with Africans. This broad chapter also discusses, if perhaps too briefly, the role of the Belt and Road Initiative, the African Union, the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, and African sub-regional organizations.

Chapter two situates Africa in China's larger global strategy and explains how Chinese interlocutors build relations with Africans to advance the legitimacy of the country's political system and normalize its revanchist territorial claims – particularly Taiwan and the South China Sea. It explains why China prioritizes African support for its “core interests,” and identifies its geopolitical rivalry with the US as a central factor driving and shaping Beijing's policies toward African countries.

Chapter three looks at economics over the last decade and identifies five important themes: the continued dominance of a few resource exporting African states; the pronounced asymmetry between China's importance to Africa and Africa's minor position in China's foreign trade portfolio; the negative effects of China's economic activity in Africa; the growth of China–Africa trade along with large and expanding bilateral trade deficits favouring China; and a fall in trade with traditional European partners and the US. Although not necessarily innovative, each of these themes is both important and often overlooked. However, this chapter's fit in a book otherwise focused on politics and security is questionable. The aforementioned topics are introduced, but go largely unaddressed thereafter; probably because they are tangential to the book's main thesis that politics – not economics – is the primary driver of China–Africa relations. For instance, Large states that China is not a leading investor in Africa compared to European countries (e.g. The Netherlands) but does not unpack *why* China has invested so much less or explain how and why its debt-dominated approach affects its political relations with African countries (p. 3).

Chapter four is a comprehensive analysis of the “China model”: an issue that has received an increasing amount of attention in recent years. Large traces and analyses how China went from “downplaying to promoting” its political model which he argues is now “central to Beijing's relations and role with Africa” (p. 117). This examination is particularly welcome because while some scholars have shied away from identifying China's transition towards a more assertive posture in Africa, Large spends several pages explaining the evolution of the Chinese leadership's thinking on this important topic. He not only elucidates China's desire to promote its political model, but also identifies how this approach is specifically oriented to oppose the spread of Western liberalism and universal values and is presented as a response to the “West's failure to contribute specific development gains to Africa” (p. 118).

Chapter five describes relations between Chinese and Africans, especially the growing Chinese presence in African countries. Particularly valuable are its subsections on Chinese gold mining in Ghana and investment in Namibia, which shed light on those important, yet under researched, grassroots issues. The chapter also touches on – albeit all-too-briefly – Beijing's Africa-focused propaganda and the United Front work that it undertakes among Chinese in African countries. The book's “Africans in China” section is also too short and does not provide timeseries data or unpack how these seemingly innocuous interpersonal, diplomatic, educational, and business interactions facilitate Sino-African political relations.

Chapter six looks at China's growing security engagement with Africa. It covers topics beginning with the Communist Party of China's (CPC) expanding concept of security under Xi Jinping, the establishment of the People's Liberation Army's first overseas military base in Djibouti, Beijing's arms sales, and its contributions to UN peacekeeping. Here, the reader would have appreciated more detail on the

question of how China's expanding economic interests and the growing number of Chinese on the continent have, in turn, precipitated Beijing's growing focus on security. How have Chinese perceptions of the security environment in Africa evolved over time? Can we trace how security concerns have affected specific Chinese government policies? How do African leaders and populations view and respond to China's growing security presence in their countries?

Although an important contribution, the book does have limitations. Specifically, its paucity of systemic data and primary sources, and lack of a coherent theory-driven explanation for the phenomena it so expertly describes. Without these two elements both the book's shelf life and its ability to change or influence scholars' understandings of China–Africa relations are constrained. Instead, Large relies primarily on a rich variety of examples mostly from scholarly, policy and popular press reports. The limits of this approach can be seen in the subsection on relations between the CPC and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) party, which is helpful, but does not place that bilateral political relationship in comparative context or offer systematic data on the number and frequency of party-to-party exchanges. Similarly, numerous illustrative examples of China training African political elites are cited, but without timeseries data and interviews with Chinese or African participants it is hard to comprehend the actual scale, content, intentions, and impacts of these engagements. Another shortcoming is that while the discussion of the evolution of the China model is quite strong, Beijing's efforts to alter the norms of international relations among states to reflect its own re-emerging primacy and centrality – an arguably more important and lasting strategic objective – are not well addressed.

In sum, Large has produced a well-written book that is accessible to various audiences from casual observers to experts. It flies at just the right level for a book of this breadth and is chocked full of facts and information making it a useful textbook for an undergraduate level course on the topic. Moreover, Large's work offers scholars a refreshing change of pace from the increasing number of narrowly focused studies on primarily economic topics. His conclusion – that the CPC's insertion of itself into all aspects and levels of China's domestic and foreign policy means that politics will remain Beijing's top priority in Africa for the foreseeable future – is an essential, if unnuanced, reminder to researchers that it is time to move beyond readily accessible economic indicators of China–Africa relations.

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The Political Economy of Transnational Governance: China and Southeast Asia in the 21st Century

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Hong Liu's latest book on the political economy of relations between China and South-East Asia is an important contribution to the latest analyses of the rapidly changing socioeconomic and political dynamics in the region. Undergirding this study is a novel argument on multidimensional interactions between China and Southeast Asian countries. The book documents with careful detail and empirical