

Book Review

Axel Harneit-Sievers, Stephen Marks and Sanusha Naidu (eds), *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa*, Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2010, 274 pp. + xvi.

This is a quality publication from Pambazuka Press on the state of relations between China and Africa, regarding Chinese activities on the African continent in contemporary times. Through the eyes of mainland Chinese and African scholars as well as members of civil society organizations (CSOs) from each side, *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa* provides invaluable information to readers on how Chinese foreign assistance, investments and trade etc. activities in Africa are being perceived by both sides.

There have already been many books written about China and the Chinese in Africa and there will likely be a lot more to come in time. This book is however different from the rest in that it demonstrates the importance of allowing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to express their respective opinions, in relation to the state of Chinese involvement in the political and economic developments of Africa, opinions which may otherwise remain unheard.

The book is comprised of five main portions the first of which provides an introduction into the mutual perceptions (or misperceptions perhaps) between China and Africa from a historical point of view and how little academic research on Africa from China, have taken place till date and how such research and engagement between the two sides could improve. Part two looks at the macro or big picture of Sino-African relations in contemporary times from the economic and trade perspectives and also discusses whether Chinese economic aid to Africa really qualifies as 'aid'? Part three of the book is actually the specific country studies of six African nations namely: Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their respective trade and investment relations with China. It is interesting to take note that China and Chinese companies in Africa are often viewed in a more benevolent manner by the African sides as far as the formers' investment and trade activities are concerned in Africa, in that the failure of the market and state sectors in Africa are recognized as the results of inefficiencies and ineffectiveness from respective African governments than otherwise. African NGOs and CSOs are being urged to play a bigger

role and advocate for change in Africa. Part four of the book touches on China's increasing role in peace and security building in Africa. In the case of Sudan, China's usual practice of "non-interference" in African nations' domestic affairs was being put to the debate by the African side; it is being argued that China should do more in Sudan and also in Africa, to advocate for improvement in governance. However, the Chinese side notes that China is already doing more to pressure the Sudanese government (in allowing a joint United Nations-African Union force into Sudan during the Darfur crisis) etc. Lastly, part five in the book pushes for further collaboration between Chinese and African CSOs and NGOs, including collectively advocating for changes in African governance and also increasing exchanges by the CSOs and NGOs from both sides. It is hoped that a shared Chinese-African vision of a civil society, one whereby joint efforts in the pursuit of mutual understanding and development directed towards greater responsibility of government policy-makers from both sides, will prevail.

Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa is a welcome addition to the literature in at least three respects. Firstly, this book is a good following up of two earlier volumes *African Perspectives on China in Africa* (2007) and *China's New Role in Africa* (2008) both of which provided an initial introduction to interested readers, the voices of civil society and especially the views of civil society organizations (CSOs) on China's numerous inroads into Africa in recent years. Secondly, several papers in this volume, while acknowledging and appreciating the benefits of China's investments into Africa, argue a similar point: China's usual practice of "non-interference" in the domestic affairs (especially on human rights related issues) of certain rogue elements within African nations' governments with whom business is conducted, cannot continue as it is indefinitely. While some efforts may have been put into the promotion of good governance on certain African governments by China, the Chinese government and Chinese corporations need to do more in this regard to help improve overall governance in partnering African nations. Thirdly, there is a convergence of views between both Chinese, African and non-African scholars and activists that greater collaboration between NGOs and CSOs from both sides ought to take place in the future; this would complement the existing structure of cooperation between the governments and business corporations from both sides.

However, it ought to be highlighted that in spite of the tremendous amount of effort that has been put into cooperation and confidence building between the various CSOs and NGOs as discussed above, it remains to be seen if the respective governments both in China and in African nations will change the status quo on the way things have been done in Africa i.e. without seeking consultation from the CSOs and NGOs!

In summary, the editors and contributors of this book must be congratulated on this very well-rounded and readable volume. Though the book is a compilation of essays from 2009, plus there will most certainly be more related works on China and on the Chinese in Africa in due course, this book is recommended reading for students, scholars, government policy makers and those whom are interested in the current Chinese-African relations subject matter.

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International Journal of China Studies

Volume 1

Number 1

January 2010

ISSN 2180-3250

Inaugural Issue: Changing China

China's Self-Extrication from the "Malacca Dilemma" and Implications <i>Chen Shaofeng</i>	1
China-Southeast Asian Economic Relations in the 21st Century: Evolving Features and Future Challenges <i>Shen Hongfang and Chen Linglan</i>	25
China and East Asian Regional Integration: Inception of ACFTA and APEC at 20 <i>Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, Im-Soo Yoo and Lionel Wei-Li Liong</i>	46
Is Cross-Strait Unification Possible? <i>Mario Arturo Ruiz Estrada and Donghyun Park</i>	89
China's Model of Democracy <i>Bo Zhiyue</i>	102
Why China Needs to Build Shanghai into an International Financial Centre? <i>Yang Mu and Lim Tin Seng</i>	125
Interregional Comparative Analysis of China's Developmental Disparity <i>Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, Joanne Hoi-Lee Loh, Mario Arturo Ruiz Estrada and Susie Yieng-Ping Ling</i>	141
Migration and Trade: The Role of Overseas Chinese in the Economic Relations between China and Southeast Asia <i>Zhuang Guotu and Wang Wangbo</i>	174
Chinese Migrant Workers in Singapore: An Analysis Based on Interviews <i>Lin Mei</i>	194
Women, International Migration and Development: Chinese Women's Migration to Southeast Asia since 1978 <i>Shi Xueqin</i>	216
Book Reviews	230

International Journal of China Studies

Volume 1

Number 2

October 2010

ISSN 2180-3250

Special Issue

China in Transition: Social Change in the Age of Reform

Prologue

Changing China: Three Decades of Social Transformation / *Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh* 239

Social Change, State and the Civil Society

Dissent and the Chinese Communists before and since the Post-Mao Reforms / *Gregor Benton* 311

The Politics of China's *Wei-Quan* Movement in the Internet Age / *Chin-fu Hung* 331

Emergence of Middle Classes in Today's Urban China: Will They Contribute to Democratization in China? / *Shigeto Sonoda* 351

Gangs in the Markets: Network-Based Cognition in China's Futures Markets / *Lucia Leung-Sea Siu* 371

Social Change, Social Classes and Stratification

Chinese Migrant Workers: From Labour Surplus to Labour Shortage / *Kate Hannan* 393

Chinese Working Class and Trade Unions in the Post-Mao Era: Progress and Predicament / *Qi Dongtao* 413

Stumbling on the Rocky Road: Understanding China's Middle Class / *Yang Jing* 435

Social Change, Collective Action and Nationalism

Three Waves of Nationalism in Contemporary China: Sources, Themes, Presentations and Consequences / *Yang Lijun and Lim Chee Kia* 461

Large-Scale Mass Incidents and Government Responses in China / *Yanqi Tong and Shaohua Lei* 487

Explaining Ethnic Protests and Ethnic Policy Changes in China / *Shan Wei* 509

Cultural Heritage Tourism and the Ancient Tea Horse Road of Southwest China / *Gary Sigley* 531

China's Media Initiatives and Its International Image Building / *Lye Liang Fook* 545

Ethnoregional Disparity, Ethnoterritoriality and Peripheral Nationalism: Socioracial Dilemmas in Contemporary China / *Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh* 569

Book Reviews 647

Index 655

