

Book Reviews

Ashley Kim Stewart*

MARCUS POWER, GILES MOHAN AND MAY TAN-MULLINS - *CHINA'S RESOURCE DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA: POWERING DEVELOPMENT?*

Timothy M. Shaw (ed.): International Political Economy Series, published 17 July 2012, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 352 pages, ISBN: 978-0-230-22912-9.

Since the redoubled interest that China has shown in cultivating its relations with African nations, there have also been extensive and long-running debates about its aims and motivations, some of which have been quite heated and even, at times, vitriolic. *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa: Powering Development?* contributes to these current discussions and debates in the – often somewhat murky – field of Sino-African relations, by continuing the trend of arguing that a more-nuanced view of Chinese engagement in Africa than that which has been offered in IR until relatively recently is necessary.

In this broad-scoped book, which seeks to use a novel approach in studying China-Africa relations, Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins state that they intend to use representations of negative views of China in Africa “as a springboard to explore a number of important issues that [they] feel are vital in analysing the complex and changing relationships between China and Africa ... to factor in the rise of China in the context of major geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts ... [create] a disaggregated analysis of China-Africa relations ... [and] to reinsert African agency into the picture” (pp. 8-9). In doing so, they unlock another side of the gradually-expanding awareness in IR of a need to rethink current interpretations in the wake of the global financial crisis and transforming global economy, including the materialisation of so-called ‘rising powers’ or ‘emerging actors’.

The volume, which uses Angola and Ghana as comprehensive case-studies throughout, starts out by contextualising the conventional discourse surrounding China-Africa relations, and gives a broad overview of the mercantile, cultural and migratory facets of their lengthy history over two millennia and into that of the more-modern aid and development aspects, with their corresponding constructed narratives. In the opening chapters there is also a more-detailed analysis of the African repercussions of Chinese policies in various industries,

* Ashley Kim Stewart is PhD Fellow, Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University, Denmark. Email: stewart@cgs.aau.dk.

sectors, and projects – including a useful comparative breakdown and summary of the four Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) action-plans. Afterwards there is an exploration of the development of Chinese-African trade and markets partially due to the expansion and restructuring of the Chinese economy and its international investments (including its significant policy of supporting state-owned enterprises abroad), and then an inclusive debate of to what extent China – especially because of its socialist elements – may be described as neoliberal.

This is followed in the second half of *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa* by examining Sino-African development cooperation, comparing and contrasting it (and the various responses to it on two levels) with 'traditional' aid to Africa along historical, modality, strategic and structural lines, before scrutinising the political economy of these relationships, looking at the impact of Chinese engagement in Africa on institutions such as governance and stability, and the civil-society and media responses to it. The book later turns to environmental concerns about the Chinese presence in Africa, and looks at both the abundance of anaemic African policy-milieus and Chinese businesses' increasing awareness of – though not necessarily compliance with – corporate social responsibility. Finally, the authors consider China's approach to Africa in a geopolitical context: analysing China's past and contemporary use of 'soft power', cataloguing states and organisations currently engaging with Africa, teasing out the array of Chinese foreign policy actors, and recent policy developments.

China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa weaves elements of political economy, political ecology, neoliberalism, postcolonialism, globalisation, geopolitics, and IR and critical IR theories in a very interesting way into what the authors call a 'postcolonial geopolitical economy' approach to study the mounting interactions between Chinese and African governments, economic, corporate and development sectors, and the implications of these interactions, including on governance, the environment, and African civil-society. This extremely timeously-published book comes at a stage when the international order is being restructured; traditionally-dominant economies have undergone adjustments and restrictions necessitated by the global financial crisis and its aftermath, while many emerging economies – including those in Africa and Asia – not only seem to have gotten through the crisis comparatively unscathed but are positively thriving, experiencing faster growth-rates than ever. This makes a creative and novel analysis, such as the one in this book, of the qualities and growing scales of these transformations and their consequences especially important in

working towards building a conceptualisation that incorporates and explains these changes and predicts likely outcomes. One point that the book states that it intends to make but does not quite achieve, is to answer a question it initially poses: the complex issue of *how* the current understanding of international development should be transformed in light of the rise of China, except to say that it should be more-nuanced. While it is rapidly becoming a consensus in some spheres of the Sino-African relations domain that this needs to be done, this book may not contribute directly to the (likely to be long and difficult) task of fostering a comprehensively reformed re-construction of current IR interpretations of China's – and also those of other emerging actors – dealings in and with Africa.

The volume takes a wide-ranging approach, looking at the Sino-African relationship on many levels and from a variety of perspectives, which makes for a broad and comprehensive analysis and a more-balanced view. It is illustrated throughout by photographs of the range of the Chinese presence in projects and commerce in various African countries, and also deftly by images of fascinating Chinese propaganda-posters on China-Africa relations and interactions from the Stefan R. Landsberger collection, which offer thought-provoking insights into the perspectives that the Chinese government would like their citizens and those of other nations to have about their international interactions with Africa.

Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins' well-written *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa* will be of particular interest to China-Africa scholars and recognised as a valuable contribution to the discipline, presenting an excellent exploration of and deepening awareness about the nature and scope of Chinese interests in Africa and contextualising the concerns that have been raised about them.

THEIRRY BANGUI – CHINA, A NEW PARTNER FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT: ARE WE HEADING FOR THE END OF EUROPEAN PRIVILEGES ON THE BLACK CONTINENT?

Asian Political, Economic and Security Issues Series & African Political, Economic, and Security Issues Series, published March 2012, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 192 pages, ISBN: 978-1-613-24923-9.

Most of the discourse on China-Africa relations (like that of many academic fields) has tended to be Western-dominated, and has paid relatively little attention to Chinese and African opinions. Theirry Bangui's *China, A New Partner for Africa's Development: Are We Heading for the End of European Privileges on the Black Continent?* would like to redress this imbalance and provide an African voice in the discussion. It seeks to answer four questions: "Are [critical Western opinions of China's engagement with Africa] justified? Are

they shared by the African people? Is the growing Chinese presence an opportunity for the continent? What is the role of the West and especially of Europe in Africa today?” While it is not always clear that there is a definitive answer to these questions and others asked throughout the book, this volume does open a conversation about these important questions, and attempts to give a different perspective than that which has dominated the media over the last decade or so. Bangui’s standpoint is atypical in the body of Sino-African literature as it comes from his stance as a non-academic in this field, but perhaps represents a more-popular view.

The book, which is divided into three parts, starts out with a discussion of the nature and increase in the level of China-Africa interactions, including trade and infrastructure, and the viability of China as an alternative to Africa’s more-traditional Western partners. This is followed by a very brief description of the FOCAC action-plans and those of other meetings African countries have had with other emerging partners, and of the “grey areas” in Chinese-African cooperation, including conflicts between Chinese employers and African workers. There is also a chapter in which the author disagrees with Western criticisms on the issues for which China is most-often censured for not protecting and even worsening: good governance, environmental concerns and human rights, and the blame for these problems is portioned to ex-colonial powers too. The second part of the book, which is concerned with Africa-EU relations, first gives a short historical overview of them, and then a portrayal of European reactions to emerging actors in Africa. Afterwards, there is a chapter about selected European dealings in Africa (with a particular emphasis on those of France), and subsequently the final part of the book begins with some remarks on the growing potential and economies of African countries and regions, and, after that, a mention of some of the impediments to African development.

There is a growing trend in discussions on the Sino-African relationship to recognise that African agency, although often significant in directing the interactions themselves, frequently does not play a part in current IR interpretations of them. This book strongly emphasises the need for this recognition, and also the need for African agency to play a bigger part in managing future relations. There are some sweeping overgeneralisations in the book, and also an inclination in places to make statements without supporting data or concrete examples. However, other parts of the volume contain ample quotes and interviews, which help to personalise the text and offer many concrete examples as illustrations in those sections.

China, A New Partner for Africa's Development accuses the usual China-Africa popular commentary of being overly critical, unbalanced, and too Euro- or Western-centric. However, by attempting to mitigate this, it then falls into the same trap and makes a similar mistake. In places the book is too *uncritical* of Chinese engagements in Africa and uses the approach of pointing out that 'the West used to do it too', which distracts from the criticism but, it could be argued, fails to actually answer it. For example, the book praises the Chinese for being hard workers who do manual labour working in 12-hour shifts, but does not mention any human rights concerns in this regard, and notes that the Chinese do not have a monopoly on underpaying African workers, but does not discuss whether this exacerbates problems like fewer human rights- and employee-protections and easily-exploited workforces in some African countries.

Bangui begins the book by differentiating geopolitics from 'geo-strategy', opting to use the latter and defining it as "the implementation of operational tools to serve a great purpose of international or military policy. It is a method of political action in space, a study of power relations between powers, from all geographic angles" (xvi), but then does not appear to return to a discussion of this (or any other) theoretical position again. This volume, whose tone might be described as non-academic in places, is also somewhat out of date; for example it does not include South Africa's entry into the BRICS countries which would be relevant in a discussion about emerging actors in Africa, does not seem aware of China's own 2011 accounts of it having prioritised Africa over all other regions to which to donate its foreign aid funds since 2009, and it vastly overestimates the amount of Chinese aid, which according to the most recent and comprehensive data available now is much smaller than was previously thought.

While it offers an important viewpoint on the Sino-African debate, having been written by an African from what Thierry Bangui asserts is "an African perspective" on China's interactions with Africa, when too often the loudest voices in the commentary have been Western ones, *China, A New Partner for Africa's Development's* contribution to the academic discipline of Sino-African relations is unclear. The book is more likely to appeal to the general public than to Sino-African scholars, especially those members of the public who would like to read a more-contentious view of this increasingly-important relationship.