Robert I. Rotberg, *China Into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence*

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Before China’s WTO accession, students of China’s political economy were mainly interested in understanding various puzzles surrounding how China opened up and sources of its economic success. Now, 30 years after Deng Xiaoping’s brave political move, China’s success has gone beyond its national border and raised a whole new set of questions in the international political economy. In the recent burgeoning literature on China’s rise on the world stage, Robert I. Rotberg’s edited volume, *China into Africa,* carves out a niche by providing a detailed descriptive account for questions about China’s political and economic activities in resource-rich Africa.

First and foremost, what does China want in Africa? Li Anshan’s and Wenran Jiang’s chapters on the evolution of Sino-Africa relationship in both pre- and post-reform periods argue that the relationship has changed from one serving ideological goals to another driven by economic demands for Africa’s natural resources. This point is then further substantiated by anecdotal as well as statistical evidence in Harry G. Broadman’s chapter on bilateral trade patterns between China and Africa, and Henry Lee and Dan Shalmon’s two case studies on China’s oil diplomacy in Angola and Sudan.

Given this understanding of Sino-Africa relationship, the following chapters in the book offer insights into another even more fiercely debated issue: “Is the current relationship *déjà vu* of Africa’s colonial past?” Stephenie Rupp’s chapter confronts this question directly by arguing that, given China’s respect for African countries’ sovereignty and emphasis on reciprocity, both sides are actually engaged in what she calls “the post-colonial interdependence”. Moreover, on more solid empirical ground, Harry G. Broadman’s chapter, on the one hand, shows positive shifts in complementarities between China and Africa, and Martyn J. Davies’ research on the transplantation of SEZ (special economic zone) model to Africa, on the other hand, also rejects the view that China’s presence in Africa is purely extractive since its investment in African SEZs is mostly in the manufacturing sector.
While the revival of Sino-Africa relationship since 1990s has been essentially driven by China’s resource hunger, its implications are by no means limited to economic domains. First of all, David H. Shinn’s and Joshua Eisenman’s chapters analyze how the economic turn transformed political and security aspects of the relationship from a revolutionary alliance in the pre-reform period to a pragmatic cooperation geared towards maintaining secure sources of energy and raw materials. In addition, although China’s current presence in Africa has to a large extent strengthened its image as an economic-cum-political giant from Asia, it should not be ignored that China has also invested heavily in developing its soft power in Africa.

In this regard, this book has much to recommend it for putting together chapters that help highlight the tension inherent in China’s pursuit of soft power in Africa. On the one hand, as Debra Bautingam’s and Paul Hubbord’s chapters describe, even though China is trying to circumvent the established aid regime dominated by Western powers in order to gain more room for their own diplomatic maneuvering, it is without a doubt becoming a critical alternative source of development finance for African countries. On the other hand, however, China’s non-interventionism in its Africa diplomacy has put the cultivation of its soft power through aid programs under the risk of Africa’s rampant corruption. As Stephen Brown and Chandra Lekha Sriram’s and Ndubisi Obiorah, Darren Kew, and Yusuf Tanko’s chapters document, the no-strings-attached approach has made it easy for China to be held culpable to human right charges.

On balance, the collection provides an informative and useful survey of recent hotly-debated issues in the Sino-Africa relationship ranging from trade to security. That said, the book, except Paul Hubbord’s chapter, essentially ignores how China’s domestic politics might affect the making of its Africa policy. In addition, while the book is rich in anecdotes, it fails to relate them to analytical issues in either economics or political science. For instance, Li Anshan’s optimism that China’s demands for natural resources benefit resource-rich African countries by increasing their income can be much more convincing if he takes into account economists’ long-standing concern with the resource curse that over-relying on natural resource exports might have negative effects on the manufacturing sector and political development.

Despite these weaknesses, readers in the policy community will still find it useful to understanding the Sino-Africa relationship. For academics, however, this is a wake-up call for some collective efforts from all disciplines to come up with an explanatory framework that goes beyond the simple facts.

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