

# China aktuell



### China in Africa: Who Benefits?

- China-Africa Relations through the Prism of Culture – The Dynamics of China’s Cultural Diplomacy with Africa
- The “Doing” and “Undoing” of Community: Chinese Networks in Ghana
- Contemporary China-Nigeria Economic Relations: Chinese Imperialism or South-South Mutual Partnership?
- Aid within the China-Africa Partnership: Emergence of an Alternative to the NEPAD Development Paradigm?
- Towards China’s Integration into the Aid Donor Architecture: Learning from Chinese Participation in International Regimes

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- Contours of China’s “Africa Mode” and Who May Benefit
  - Beyond the New “Two Whateverisms”: China’s Ties in Africa
  - Taiwans Energiepolitik: Klimaschutz ist sekundär
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## Editorial

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Dear Readers,

China's growing involvement with the African continent has been the object of much public and academic debate over the course of the past year. The momentous China-Africa Summit in Beijing in late 2006, which brought virtually all African leaders together on Chinese soil, served as a wake-up call for policy makers and observers alike, which in turn sparked a flurry of related activities both in the political and the academic arenas.

While Chinese are quick to point to the historical roots of Sino-African friendship all the way back to Zheng He and beyond, many Western observers perceive China's current presence on the continent as a novelty, and rightly so. Both in terms of its breadth and its magnitude, the current Chinese involvement in Africa is unprecedented, with individuals, companies, and government bodies present in such diverse areas as commerce (including the all-important trade of commodities), investment, aid, cultural exchanges, and tourism. Within only a few years' time, China has climbed to the forefront of Africa's trade partners, being topped only by the United States of America. Given the volume and variety of activities, China's African venture is bound to have significant economic, political, social, and ecological implications. In other words, the whole will be more than the sum of its parts.

But of exactly what nature will these effects be? While the benefits for the Chinese side seem to be obvious, the effects of a growing interdependence between the two regions appear to be less clear for the African side. Advocates of the new relationship between Africa and China speak of a genuine South-South partnership as well as of increased economic opportunities and political clout for almost all African countries, while critics fear the emergence of neo-colonial structures which could perpetuate past patterns of exploitation on the continent.

A number of these issues were addressed at an international conference hosted by Frankfurt University in December 2007, "China in Africa: Who Benefits?", from which most of the articles in this volume are derived. Supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and jointly organized by the Interdisciplinary Centre for East Asian Studies (IZO), the

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Africa (ZIAF) – both Goethe University Frankfurt – and the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Mainz University, the conference brought together 120 students and scholars from all over the world.

Not surprisingly, there are no definite answers yet to the question of “Who benefits?”. The ecological footprint left by China (and other nations) aside, there are no clear-cut answers to the question of the costs and benefits of the new Sino-African scenario. In many locations, Chinese small-scale traders and their cheap merchandise, for example, provide affordable consumer goods and employment for the poorer segments of society, but at the same time they may also prevent local products and traders from joining the market in the long run.

If anything, the Frankfurt conference served to highlight the complexity of the issues involved. The current situation obviously holds opportunities and risks for African players and their Chinese counterparts alike, a fact which is often overlooked. The latter consist mostly of direct or indirect conflicts, such as violent encounters with disgruntled Africans on the ground, or a loss of face in the international sphere linked to the Chinese handling of its African engagement.

With this volume of *China aktuell – Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, we invite you to look at some of the issues touched upon by China’s venture into Africa. Giving an overview of this Chinese engagement and its complexities, Helmut Asche cautions against rapid conclusions. To him, “China in Africa” is above all a lesson in multipolarity, ranging from the variety of Chinese players active at the African grassroots to the new “multipolar challenge posed by China”, i.e., the existence of an alternative “Chinese option” for African governments in the realm of politics and economics.

Like Helmut Asche, Ian Taylor warns against a monolithic view of both “China” and “Africa” when discussing the growing interactions between the two regions. In his paper, he examines Western criticism of China, which he sums up in the theory of the “Two Whateverisms”: “[...] whatever China does in Africa is wrong, and whatever others (either “the West” or Africans) do – or do not do – can be rationalized and justified”. Instead, Taylor calls for a more differentiated view of the matter, putting both Chinese actions and related Western fears into their corresponding political contexts.

Among the diverse and disparate Chinese actors on African soil, independent migrants play a particular role. The recently increased influx of mainland Chinese immigrants to Africa, who come to open restaurants, do business or even engage



in agriculture, has altered existing overseas Chinese communities on the continent and created many new ones. Offering an anthropological perspective, Conal Guan-Yow Ho provides insights into one such community of migrants in Ghana. Chinese ethnicity alone is not enough to create a sense of community, he concludes. Rather, a number of social dynamics are at work within the group of migrants that cause group cohesion to inflate or deflate according to the situation at hand.

Apart from work-related migration, the realm of cultural encounters offers opportunities for direct and indirect contacts between Chinese and African citizens. In her contribution to this volume, Liu Haifang analyzes Sino-African relations from a cultural policy perspective. Early cultural exchanges with various African countries in the post-colonial period served as a gate-opener for Chinese involvement in other areas, a trend that continues until today, she writes, when orchestrated efforts are being made to create mutual interest and understanding. These efforts range from Chinese television series for potential travellers to the establishment of Confucius Institutes in an ever-increasing number of African countries.

At the core of the Chinese engagement in Africa these days, however, are economic activities. Offering a Nigerian perspective, Olukoya Ogen provides an overview of contemporary economic relations between Nigeria and China. He comes to the conclusion that while Chinese investment in the area of infrastructure is much-needed and may be beneficial for Nigeria, the existence of Chinese manufactured goods endangers the country's nascent industries.

Turning to the area of development assistance, Sara Van Hoeymissen examines the role of aid within Sino-African relations. Are we witnessing the emergence of a new cooperation paradigm and development model that could act as an alternative to NEPAD?, she asks. Given the inherent discrepancies in the approaches underlying both NEPAD and the Chinese development model, most importantly the understanding of the ideal form of governance to promote development, this does not seem likely at this point, she concludes.

Continuing with the theme of aid, Stefan Stähle analyzes the possibilities of integrating China into established mechanisms of international aid. Past experiences with China's integration into international regimes have shown the country's general willingness to cooperate within existing structures. A structured approach combining learning opportunities with international pressure should be applied so as to induce China to join international donor regimes, Stähle recommends.

The call for a concerted African response to the Chinese venture into the continent is one of the recommendations aimed at ensuring that Africans benefit as much as their Chinese counterparts from the new engagement. Ultimately, however, safeguarding the interests of African citizens in this context, as elsewhere, depends on the willingness of political leaders to let their populations participate economically and politically. As Sanusha Naidu from the Centre for Chinese Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, concluded at the Frankfurt conference: "Whether it is with or without China, Africa's development is ultimately dependent on good governance". The Chinese card, so much seems clear, is only part of a bigger game. It is up to African governments to play to the strengths of the hand they are given, and avoid its pitfalls.

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