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Book Review

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Jodie Yuzhou Sun, *Kenya's and Zambia's relations with China 1949-2019*. Cambridge: James Currey, 2023. 260 pp. ISBN: 978-1847013392.

In the last two decades many books and articles have been published on the topic of China-Africa relations, but few take the *longue durée* and comparative view that Sun (2023) does in her first monograph: *Kenya's and Zambia's Relations with China 1949–2019*. The work examines the history of post-colonial Kenya's and Zambia's relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) from ideological, political, economic, and social perspectives.

As a relative newcomer on the African Continent, the PRC had to establish a diplomatic base and quickly gain knowledge to formulate its foreign policy. Sun's work sheds a refreshing light on how China-Kenya/Zambia relations developed from the 1950s to the present. Her research challenges national(ist) histories by employing a transnational historical approach that triangulates the Global Cold War, decolonisation, and Africa/China History. It shows *how* encounters and dynamics in these relations played out on the ground, and also, *how* these relations equally contributed to constructing historical narratives that not only (re)shaped, but also were used in negotiating contemporary issues on both sides. In that way, the work fills a gap in a neglected area, where Afro-Asian solidarity discourse is (re)used to both legitimise and undermine contemporary politics, economics and cultural engagements between Kenya/Zambia and the PRC. The book, therefore, not only covers the history of China-Africa relations, but also that of Chinese, Kenyan and Zambian individuals who shaped, witnessed, and actively participated in these historical trajectories. This is a welcome addition to other studies on China-Africa relations, such as those by Monson (2009), Lee (2017), Lahtinen (2018) and Benabdallah (2020).

The work consists of five chapters covering China-Zambia and China-Kenya relations from 1949-2019. The structure of the book, except for the final chapter, largely follows a historical timeline, but does so by interweaving the themes of Cold War, decolonisation and Afro-Asian solidarity. Highlighted in these relations is the concept of 'African agency', and the role various Kenyan/Zambian actors play in directing the nature of their relations with China, which will be discussed in more detail further below. To summarise the content:



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Chapter One provides the historical context of African decolonisation and the development of China's foreign policy from 1949-1964, which lay the foundations of China-Africa engagements as allies, through Marxist theories and through The Third World alliances. Chapter Two and Three comprehensively compare the relations between China-Kenya and China-Zambia from 1964-1975. Chapter Two thereby reveals that China-Kenya relations, although on occasions tense and confrontational, continued to be underpinned by gradually growing trade relations, denoting pragmatism on the Kenyan side in their dealings with China. Chapter Three outlines the intertwined nature of Zambia's domestic and foreign policy in its relations with China, showing how Zambia's ideology and its geographical constraints as a landlocked country played a significant role in its trade relations with China. Rather than pragmatism and national interest, idealism and regionalism played a much bigger role and revealed that the two countries were not always 'all-weather-friends' as claimed in official discourse.

Chapter Four focuses on the various political transitions in all three countries and the multi-faceted interactions and outcomes in the late 1970s and 1980s. This included Kenya and Zambia navigating democratisation, liberalising market reforms and engaging with a rapidly changing international environment. For China, it included ascension to the UN, 'opening up' and liberalising market reforms. In China's case, divergence from solely socialist political ideologies led to pragmatic state calculations of economic profitability and resources. This shift signified the fallibility of ideologically driven political friendships in a fast, ever-changing international environment. Chapter Five, the last chapter, employs three case studies in key sectors of mining, health, and infrastructure, *viz.* Chinese Copper mining in Zambia, China's medical practices, Chinese-built Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). They showcase and argue *how* historical relations and perceptions on both sides have shaped and continue to inform contemporary relations by focussing on China's so-called 'Return' to Africa through 1989-2019. Although, of course in reality, China never *left* the Continent.

Sun's research is based on secondary literature, as well as extensive archival resources (national, provincial, municipal, party, and private), the press, and oral histories (elite interviews, memoirs, and participant observations). Both Kenya and Zambia have more-or-less functional state archives pertaining to their foreign relations with China, and in the case of Zambia, the *United National Independence Party Archives* (UNIP) forms a key source. Sun's ability to include Chinese resources, including a private diary from Ma Faxian, a retired Chinese military officer who was based in Zambia, provide unique insights into historic interactions and in what ways these sometimes deviated from official discourses. Where archival sources were lacking or not accessible, Sun resorted to the local press, mostly in the English language, and oral histories (many in Chinese). Sun's merit lies therein that, through her painstaking research, she decentres and decolonises western epistemic narratives and knowledge production through a critical China-Africa lens.

By contrasting Kenya and Zambia, both former British colonies with very different historical trajectories, the book explores the much-debated concept of 'African agency' and its diversity in space and time. Not only from a structural state perspective, but also from the angle of different political, economic, and cultural actors. This reflects discussions on structure and agency in China-Africa relations, and international relations more broadly. More particularly the 'agency debate' or 'agency turn' that Zajontz (2022) refers to, and which he nuances following Links (2021). Zajontz reasons that in response to a lack of agency in prior discussions, agency now seems to take centre-stage thereby often overruling structure. Both he and Links (2021, p.124), as does Sun (2023),

advocate a 'contextual approach...that considers the contours and specificities of African agency' moving beyond the African 'agency turn' characterised by conceptual structure-agency dualism. In the case of Kenya and Zambia, the dynamic interplay of domestic and foreign politics attest to the leverage domestic actors held in wielding 'African agency' in the face of Global Cold War politics and ideological pressure (be it communist or capitalist). The global influenced the local, and vice-versa. Both for different reasons and with a different focus. In Kenya this played out in complex and competing political and ethnic factions, whereas in Zambia this was more linked to regional and idealistic differences. Sun's conclusion that Kenyan ruling leadership was probably more pragmatic and Zambian more idealistic in this matter is plausible. As becomes evident from her case-study on the failed 'maize deal' in Zambia in 1967 and the cooling of ties due to the China-US rapprochement in 1978 (Chapters Three and Four). The latter dented the 'all-weather-friends' narrative forged by the renowned Mao-era Chinese-built Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) completed in 1975. On the other hand, Kenyan trade continued despite their diplomatic distancing from China during the Cultural Revolution for fear of the chaos of 'red' communism (Chapter Two). And, Daniel arap Moi, the first Kenyan president to visit Beijing after the reform and opening up, was seemingly unaware of the ongoing power dynamics on the Chinese side after Mao passed away (Chapter Four). These are glimpses into the history of constructed Afro-Asian solidarity that Sun (2023) in her conclusion refers to as at times being more like 'brotherly strangers' than the more commonly used 'all-weather-friends' in official discourse. This problematizes and nuances the relationship, as Sun argues, between the constructed 'past' in the Maoist-discourse and the expectations on both sides towards contemporary engagements in the 'present' and towards a desired future, which forms the main thrust of her book.

Sun's furthering of the arguments on 'African agency' ties in with recent scholarship on re-focusing western-centric epistemology to the Global South. 'China as Method' has emerged as one of such efforts to critically rethink and pluralise pedagogy. Ching Kwan Lee in a recent discussion of 'China as Method' at a Global China seminar in Lund called for a study of China devoid of essentialism, an argument echoed by Franceschini (2022). This essentialism comes in two forms; the arguments of China as an 'other' fundamentally different from the west, or the Chinese government's arguments on how China is much better than the west. The challenge to this essentialism is seeing the embeddedness of China in the structures, dynamics and processes of the global world, where China both influences and is influenced by the global world. Sun's three case studies challenge China's essentialism by being indicative that China's relations in Africa are influenced by its role in the global world. The Socialist solidarity of the 1960s and 1970s that underpinned the Chinese construction of the TAZARA stemmed from China's role as a leader of the Third World, and as an alternative to the Soviet Union and the west. However, China's role as the largest financier for the construction of the SGR, rather than from any brotherly solidarity, is a reflection of China's current and future aspirations in the global world after the opening up of its market and pursuit of economic goals. As part of the projects of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the SGR is a representation of Chinese statecraft following its status as global economic power, and orienting itself as an alternative to the United States and the west. This positioning again reflects the embeddedness of China in the global world and its navigation of the structures, processes, and dynamics that it has to contend with.

China is currently Africa's largest bilateral financier, yet it is not the only financial actor on the continent, a space it occupies with other organisations and countries, such as The African Development Bank, The European Commission, G8 countries etc. In this competition, China

operates within the global structures and processes of financing, and manages to outpace its competitors by positioning itself as the better or alternative candidate. The Chinese Copper mining in Zambia is also an example of China's navigation of its global processes. The mining industry in Zambia includes various actors, such as India and other western corporations, all vying for the extraction of economic resources and managing the nature of this economic venture with Zambia. The biggest difference is that this current Chinese Copper mining has to manage the expectations of its past socialist solidarity with Zambia. The multifaceted nature of these China-African relations and the ways they change from the past to the present reflect the position and role of China within the global sphere. These case studies thus become signposts that reflect the position and role of China within the global sphere from 1949-2019; as an actor that is as much influenced by the global world as it is an influencer. The underpinning conclusion that may be drawn is that it is debilitating to assume that relations (bilateral or otherwise) that happen or exist between China and the African continent are particularly insular.

The key question Sun raises in her conclusion at the end is how should Africa prepare itself? Especially in a rapidly changing global world where tensions between China and the United States intensify. In this same vein, how can China's historical relations provide insights in improving current African relations? Clearly, as the book widely attests to, China-Africa relations cannot merely be viewed in terms of reductionist altruistic frameworks and neocolonial or extractive terminology. They are diverse, complex and uniquely contextual, and most certainly do not lack actors, nor agency on either side, as is the case with Kenya and Zambia. Sun's work, in this regard, contributes to a growing body of China-Africa relations research that defies 'euro-or western-centric' epistemology and seeks to add a voice of its own, by pluralising voices and sources. Much more of such work is needed to push epistemic boundaries and promote theorising from the places that are being researched.

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Yuan Zeng, *Reporting China on the Rise: Habitus and Prisms of China Correspondents*. London, England: Routledge, 2019. 156 pp. £18.99 Paperback.

The rise of China, especially its rapid economic growth, gradually assertive diplomacy, and surging nationalist sentiments, has been of global relevance and aroused worldwide concern about China's power status. Foreign correspondents play a significant role in framing the world's understanding of a rising China by telling the China stories to their home audience. Based on the Bourdieu-inspired theoretical framework, the book *Reporting China on the Rise: Habitus and Prisms of China Correspondents* examines the dynamics that have shaped the coverage of China by foreign correspondents since the 2010s. "Confrontation and obedience" (Zeng, 2019, p. 17) is the central idea that threads through all seven chapters. Using a mixed-method approach to combine interviews and surveys, Zeng investigated 101 foreign correspondents in China and offered compelling analyses of the various power relations in China's journalistic field of foreign correspondence. The internal and external pressures on foreign correspondents who work in an increasingly constrictive journalistic environment are succinctly presented in the book, along with an emphasis on how journalists have responded to the pressure.

Following the introductory chapter, the book begins with a discussion of the overall landscape of the field of China correspondence, including China's media culture, the history of how foreign journalists have been reporting from China, institutional boundaries, and the configuration of China correspondents. The historical review offers valuable insights. It not only discusses the practices and strategies of foreign correspondents in China during different periods but also embeds the discussion of journalism in the significant changes in China's communication and political ecology and their relevance to China's evolving power status. The rise of China, particularly the "new era" marked by China's assertive foreign policies in the quest for "discursive power on the global stage" (Zeng, 2019, p. 24) and the tightening ideological constrain during the past decade, is identified as the historical context of the study. It helps frame the power relations between China's centralized media system with an "unwelcoming media culture" (Zeng, 2019, p. 17) and China-based foreign correspondents who aim to report the "un-reportable" China.

Chapter three of Zeng's book works well with habitus typology as the starting point for analyzing the power structure in the field. It makes a key argument through demographic analysis that the practices and behaviors of China correspondents, to a great extent, are shaped by their "Chinese habitus" and "journalistic habitus" (Zeng, 2019, p. 7). The former relates to journalists'



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