

New Perspectives on China and Africa

Nov. 15, 2024

The September 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation turned the world's attention to the strategic connections between China and African nations. This forum, which was held in Beijing, featured 51 African heads of state, indicating the increasing importance of these relations. China is also hoping to expand relations with African states, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and soft power ambitions. While positive aspirations seem abundant on both sides of the Africa-China links, there are a number of challenges and complicated tensions. Balancing trade and security concerns, developing infrastructure in a way that does not handicap nations with overwhelming debt, and enhancing knowledge and education in a culturally sensitive framework are some of the issues facing China-Africa relations. How these two regions continue to develop in a multipolar global economy will have an enormous impact on the world economy and geopolitical state of affairs. This symposium gathers experts who will discuss the status of Africa-China ties from multiple perspectives. Topics covered include how military engagements may mitigate or enhance security concerns, the effects in African nations of Chinese infrastructure loans, the influence of the African Diaspora in the US on China-Africa relations, environmental risks that Chinese investment brings to some regions of Africa, and how Chinese diplomacy utilizes "relational power" through training African government officials. Through these talks, this symposium hopes to further promote informed discourse on Africa-China connections and the implications of these for global governance and the rest of the world.

Panelists

Ambassador David Shinn (George Washington University)

Title: China-Africa Security Engagement Since COVID-19

Abstract: COVID-19 interrupted most China-Africa collaboration in the security sector. China continued its personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and its PLA Navy escort missions operating out of Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden. Most other security contact, except for some done by video link, stopped until China ended its COVID-19 lockdown at the end of 2022. This presentation will indicate the degree to which China has resumed its security engagement with Africa, including support for UN peacekeeping operations, the anti-piracy mission, its response to Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping, military exercises with African counterparts, PLA Navy ship visits to Africa, arms sales, and military exchange visits. The presentation will also comment briefly on China's probable approach to its future security goals in Africa.

Bio: David Shinn has been teaching in the Elliott School of International Affairs at George Washington University since 2001. He previously served for 37 years in the U.S. Foreign Service with overseas assignments at embassies in Lebanon, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Cameroon, Sudan, and as ambassador



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to Burkina Faso and Ethiopia. He is the co-author of *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (2012) and *China's Relations with Africa: A New Era of Strategic Engagement* (2023). He has a PhD in political science from George Washington University.

Jyhjong Hwang (The Ohio State University)

Title: Built Higher, Dug Deeper: the effect on Chinese debt financing on African infrastructure coverage

Abstract: The critical role that Chinese loans play in developing countries' infrastructure has become a widely circulated understanding in the Africa-China discourse. While Chinese loans do concentrate in the infrastructure sector that faced a financing vacuum after the retreat from traditional financiers, there are few studies that investigate whether accumulating more debt in fact yielded more infrastructure coverage for the debtor countries. Using World Bank and African Development Bank infrastructure coverage measures, and the World Bank International Debt Statistics data, the author finds that there are sectoral variations in how sovereign debt affects infrastructure coverage in Africa, with some sectors benefiting from debt financing, while other sectors negatively correlate with more debt. The author believes that this variation across sectors results from differences in revenue prospects, as well as the political and economic environment in the debtor country.

Bio: Jyhjong Hwang is Ph.D. Candidate in The Ohio State University's Political Science Department, and a Global China Pre-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center. Hwang specializes in Chinese loans and financing to Africa, China-Africa relations, and Africa infrastructure development. Hwang was a SAIS-CARI Fellow and Senior Research Assistant at the China-Africa Research Initiative in the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where she also holds an M.A. in International Development and International Economics.

Phiwokuhle Mnyandu (Howard University)

Title: The Evolution of Chinese Soft Power in Africa: Implications for Technology, African Languages and Cultures in Africa and the Diaspora

Abstract: Using the lens of African languages, culture, and great power competition, my talk will analyze the China-Africa 10 Point Partnership Action Plan, declared at the conclusion of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2024, and how it signifies a transformation of the Chinese strategy, from a circumstantial to a primordial one. This talk argues that the growth of the African Diaspora in the U.S. has had an impact on great power competition such that China-Africa's soft power nexus is no longer confined to the 1.4 billion people who constitute 'geographical Africa' but also to the 200 million who make up 'conceptual Africa.' Consequently, this is transforming U.S. academic spaces, including Centers for African Studies, into critical spaces for intra-diasporic understanding and great power contestation on Africa; spaces for new disciplines or majors; and spaces of cultural justice.

Bio: Phiwokuhle Mnyandu is the Assistant Director of the Center for African Studies and Adjunct Professor in the Department of African Studies at Howard University. His current research focuses China-Africa



academic diplomacy, African languages, arts, and technology. He is the author of *South Africa-China Relations: Between Aspiration and Reality in a New Global Order*. He also consults various US Government departments on culture, geostrategy, and Africa-China relations. He is working on his latest book, looking at lives of African Diaspora students and professionals in China.

Asma Amita Belem (Georgetown University)

Title: China in Africa, environmental governance and civil society: the case of the Kua Forest in Burkina Faso

Abstract: In the past two decades, there has been a boom in Sino-Africa cooperation, exemplified by a substantial surge in the trade between the two sides and an increase in Chinese foreign direct investment and development finance to the continent. Environmental controversies have accompanied the expansion of these economic links. This study examines civil society mobilization to preserve a national reserve in Burkina Faso, which was at risk of partial declassification to make way for a new Chinese-sponsored hospital project. It argues that the domestic political context played a significant role in the formation of the movement and its outcomes. The study concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for environmental governance in Chinese-financed projects in Africa.

Bio: Dr. Asma Amina Belem is a Postdoctoral fellow at Georgetown University's Africa-China Initiative. She researches the political economy of Chinese foreign aid and investments in Africa, focusing on development assistance for health and environmental governance. Dr. Belem received her PhD. in Development Studies from National Cheng-Chi University in Taiwan. She also has a master's degree in Applied Economics and Social Development from the same university and a bachelor's degree in Economics from Université Thomas Sankara (formerly Université Ouaga II) in her native Burkina Faso.

Joshua Eisenman (Notre Dame)

Title: China's relational power in Africa: Beijing's "new type of party-to-party relations"

Abstract: Using a Chinese conceptualization of social capital—Qin Yaqing's "relational theory of world politics" (i.e. "relationality")—along with informal interviews and two decades of official data this study explains how and why the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (ID-CPC) is building relationships with African political elites. It shows how the department has become the institutional embodiment of relationality—the primary party organ tasked with enhancing what Qin calls China's "relational power" with likeminded political partners regardless of their ideology. The ID-CPC offers its African counterparts bilateral and multilateral "host diplomacy" and "cadre training" programs that share Chinese governance methods and rewards them for their praise and political support. Relationality helps explain why the ID-CPC continues to expand and deepen its relationships with African political elites, maintained them virtually during COVID-19, and quickly restarted in-person exchanges as soon as China's pandemic travel restrictions were loosened in early 2023. The literature on social capital theory has long been based on Western experiences and notions of relationship building. Applying Qin's



distinctly Chinese conception of social capital to systematic empirical data reveal how traditional Confucian sociocultural practices continue to shape China's contemporary international relations.

Bio: Joshua Eisenman (马佳士) is professor of politics in the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. He is a fellow of the Keough School's Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, and Pulte Institute for Global Development. Eisenman's research focuses on the political economy of China's development and foreign relations with the United States and the Global South —particularly Africa. His latest book, *China's Relations with Africa: A New Era of Strategic Engagement* (Columbia University Press, 2023) with Ambassador David H. Shinn, examines the full scope of political and security relations between China and Africa. It explains the tactics and methods that China uses to build relations with African countries and contextualizes and interprets them within Beijing's larger geostrategy. The book is a follow-up to *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (University of Pennsylvania Press), which was named one of the "Best International Relations Books of 2012" by *Foreign Affairs*.

Discussants

Yoon Jung Park (Georgetown University)

Bio: Yoon Jung Park is a leader in the growing field of China/Africa studies and an expert on Chinese people in Southern Africa. She is Program Director of the Africa-China Initiative and teaches in African Studies at Georgetown University; she is also Executive Director of the Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network. She was Associate Director of the China-Africa Research Initiative at SAIS from 2019-2021 and has taught on multiple campuses in the Washington, DC area and in South Africa. Park is the author of *A Matter of Honour: Being Chinese in South Africa* (Jacana/Lexington Books) and dozens of articles and book chapters in scholarly publications. Her work sits at the intersections of migration studies, Africa and China studies, and identity studies.

Joshua Hill (Ohio University)

Bio: Joshua Hill specializes in the study of modern China. Inspired by his experiences living in Ningbo, Zhejiang and Changsha, Hunan during the height of the "Reform and Opening Up" era, Hill's research focuses on the introduction, circulation, and transformation of political ideas and attitudes in modern China. His first book, *Voting as a Rite: A History of Elections in Modern China*, explores how Chinese leaders and thinkers in the 19th and 20th centuries conceptualized the meaning of elections and understood the purpose of voting.