

Book Reviews



Book Review

Ian Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2010, 227 pp.

The rise of China and its unprecedented involvement in Africa in the new millennium has resulted in both doubts and speculations. As the whole world is gearing up for securing resources, the ever closer bilateral relations between China and Africa has been subjected to careful scrutiny worldwide. Vastly different conclusions have been drawn by politicians, policy-makers, as well as scholars. China, as a result, has been depicted as partner, economic competitor, and colonizer respectively. With the outstanding disagreements and controversy, there is an obvious need for further examination of China's involvement in Africa. Taylor's book meets this need by offering a systematic analysis of China's Africa policy which covers almost all major aspects of China's Africa policy that have stirred up international controversy, ranging from oil diplomacy, manufactured products, human rights, to arms sale and peace keeping. The book has well-demonstrated strength in the following areas.

First of all, there has been outstanding conceptual clarification. By challenging the existing misconception and confusion about key concepts such as "China" and "Africa" upfront in the book, the author lays a solid conceptual foundation for the research and clarified quite an array of misunderstandings developed out of stereotyped images or over-generalization. Frequently, China and Africa have been approached without being questioned conceptually. The over-simplification of concepts has made depth of research difficult to achieve. When researchers talk about China and Africa as a matter of fact, a wealth of nuanced information gets lost in the process, which in turn, results in misleading interpretations and conclusions that produces more confusion and policy anxiety rather than constructive outcomes. Neither China nor Africa is a unitary actor. Knowing which China and Africa we are talking about, is therefore, both imperative and crucial to improve existing knowledge of the bilateral relations between China and Africa.

Additionally, by conducting extensive interviews, field studies, as well as archival research, the book has challenged the existing frameworks of understanding regarding the China-Africa Relations via a constructivist perspective. Particularly, it shatters the colonizer-friend dichotomy that both has over-simplified the situation and exaggerated the anxiety felt by

the world about China's involvement in Africa. By contextualizing China's activities in Africa in both the domestic and international situations, the author makes insightful comments about Chinese activities in Africa. That is, instead of being centrally planned and controlled, Chinese efforts in Africa are more profit-driven efforts that are deeply grounded in pragmatism. China's appearance in Africa, therefore, represents more opportunities than political challenges to the development of the continent. Based on such findings, the author offers constructive suggestions to the West and the world as to how to engage China in becoming a more positive force for Africa's development via encouragement rather than criticism and scapegoating. Deriving from this analysis, the author draws the readers' attention to an important comment about the future development of Africa at the end of the book, that is, "it is up to Africa to organize, connect, and ensure that their leaders enter into relationship into Beijing with open eyes for the sake of mutual benefits" (p. 183). In terms of Western country's reaction to China's increased presence in Africa, the author reaffirmed the suggestion that "the objective should be to design a strategy towards China that does not only constrain competition but develops common commitments (to confront) pressing global challenges" (p. 174).

Overall, the book has done an outstanding job in assessing China's involvement in Africa as well as its implications for international order. The constructivist perspective and balanced approach adopted by the author is a valuable addition to the existing literature that is heavily dominated by realist thinking.

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