

China in Africa: Global Perspectives

Thursday, April 26, 2018 • University at Buffalo

PROGRAM

9:00 Registration and Welcoming Remarks

9:30 African Perspectives

“Understanding China's Embrace of Africa in a Broader Historical Perspective”

Howard W. French, Professor, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University

This talk will discuss how China's economic and political push to engage the African continent, beginning in the early 1990s, set the stage for China's current and much broader global ambitions, and especially for President Xi Jinping's trademark Belt and Road Initiative.

“In the Shadow of China: African Development Prospects in the 21st Century”

Fantu Cheru, Senior Researcher, African Studies Centre, Leiden University and Associate Senior Fellow, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

In the popular media, there is an exaggerated perception of China's power in Africa. Labeling China as the new imperialist in Africa is too simplistic. In fact, China is not the sole power in search of Africa's resources and it is subject to the same political gravity as many western powers trying to exert influence on Africa. Therefore, we need to carefully frame the China issue to help African policy makers choose the right course of action in their engagement with China. The rise of China in Africa will neither necessarily lead to a new “colonial-type” relationship nor does it automatically guarantee “policy space” to African countries. Transforming the new relationship into a “win-win” partnership will ultimately depend on African agency. African countries can negotiate with China from a position of strength only if committed political leaders with long-term visions are prepared to act regardless of the risks involved. In the absence of this, the relationship with China could turn out to be “colonialism by invitation”.

“The Changing Dynamics of Chinese Oil and Gas Engagements in Africa”

Cyril Obi, Program Director, African Peacebuilding Network, Social Science Research Council

The paper examines how Chinese State Oil Corporations have engaged African Petro-States through investments in the oil and gas sector, the different phases of what has been tagged as “Chinese Resource Diplomacy”, and its impact on Sino-African relations. It proffers explanations for how lessons learnt and experiences gained by both sides have impacted the dynamics of China-Africa relations in the past decade. The presentation then weighs in on the debate over the implications of the entry of Chinese oil companies into Africa's oil fields—traditionally dominated by Western Oil Multinationals—for Africa's development, and explores the prospects for future relations.

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Chinese, European and American Perspectives

“The Relationship between the Belt-Road Initiative and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation”

Liu Haifang, Professor and Deputy Director, Center for African Studies, School of International Studies, Peking University

At the BRI Summit held in Beijing in May 2017, Africa was included in the “Belt and Road Initiative.” Scholars in China and elsewhere are tempted to ask which projects already under way in Africa will be included in the BRI and which will continue simply under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). In other words, how should we understand the relations between FOCAC and BRI? What kinds of projects could we expect to result from the combination of the two strategies and how might they benefit Africa more? These questions arise in anticipation of the next FOCAC Summit that will be held in September 2018, when a new action plan will be worked out for the next three years. In this presentation, I will try to provide answers to these current issues based on my long-term observation of the evolution of China’s African policies and my empirical research on particular cases. I will review the roles of relevant institutions and mechanisms developed since 2000 and report on my latest trips to three African countries that will serve as case studies.

“China’s Involvement in African Mega-Infrastructure: The Case of Kenya’s Madaraka Express”

Uwe Wissenbach, Diplomat, European Union

This talk will describe and analyze the decisive impulse of Chinese financing and know-how in African infrastructure mega-projects through a case study: Kenya's new railway, the Madaraka ("self-rule") Express between the Indian Ocean port of Mombasa and the capital Nairobi. It's a story of an unlikely achievement against many odds that plague mega-projects in general and those in African countries in particular: institutional voids, lack of local skills and inefficient bureaucracies, Kenya being notorious for grand corruption. While the train is now up and running, and is Kenya's pride, there are critical issues such as African agency, project organization, corruption, vested interests (trucking), skills transfer, labor and ethnic issues, compulsory land acquisition, impact on wildlife, and the long-term cost-benefit and debt calculations. Uwe will address some of those and focus on differences between traditional "Western" approaches to infrastructure financing in African countries and the specific Kenyan-Chinese one.

“How the U.S. Engages across the African Continent and How China Factors into their Thinking”

Sarah Margon, Washington Director, Human Rights Watch

With an emphasis on good governance, humanitarian aid – particularly in areas of health and education – and private-sector led investment, the United States’ priorities on the African continent and how it pursues policy objectives are vastly different from those of China, which includes “non-interference” and political independence, infrastructure development, and state-sponsored investment. The Trump administration’s lack of interest in prioritizing Obama and even Bush-era initiatives enhances growing concern over China’s influence in the region, now the continent’s largest trading partner. The White House has yet to define an Africa strategy, while the general foreign policy agenda signals a move towards bolstering security initiatives. This, in addition to a hollowing of the State Department and USAID – with proposed budgets cuts and numerous vacant seats at senior-level positions – raises concerns over whether the U.S. is “ceding Africa to China” and leaves the door open for Chinese “soft power” to become a substitute for long-standing U.S. support in areas of democratic processes, human rights, civil society, and independent media.

3:30 - 4:00 Wrap-Up General Discussion

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SPEAKERS

(In order of presentation)



Howard W. French (hf2205@columbia.edu) is Professor in the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University and former New York Times journalist. His most recent publications are *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa* (Knopf, 2014) and *Everything Under the Heavens: How China's Past Helps Shape its Push for Global Power* (Knopf, 2018).



Fantu Cheru (fcheru@american.edu) is a Senior Researcher at the African Studies Centre, Leiden University, The Netherlands, and Associate Senior Fellow at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). From 2007-12, he was the Research Director at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. Previously, Dr. Cheru served as a member of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Panel on Mobilizing International Support for the New Partnership for African Development (2005-2007), as well as Convener of the Global Economic Agenda Track of the Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy, a joint initiative of the Governments of Finland and Tanzania. Dr. Cheru served as the UN's Special Rapporteur on Foreign Debt and Structural Adjustment for the UN Commission for Human Rights in Geneva from 1998-2001. He also has served as an advisor and consultant to a number of governments and donor institutions, including the UN Economic Commission for Africa, UNDP, UN-Habitat, SIDA, DANIDA, and NORAD.

Dr. Cheru's publications include: *Agricultural Development and Food Security in Africa: The Impact of Chinese, Indian and Brazilian Investments* (2013); *Africa and International Relations in the 21st Century*, co-edited with Scarlett Cornelissen and Timothy M. Shaw (Palgrave, 2011); *The Rise of China and India in Africa* (2010); *African Renaissance: Roadmaps to the Challenge of Globalization* (2002); *The Millennium Development Goals: Mobilizing Resources to Tackle World Poverty* (2005); *Ethiopia: Options for Rural Development* (1990); *The Silent Revolution in Africa: Debt, Development and Democracy* (1989). His articles have appeared in numerous international journals including *World Development*; *Review of African Political Economy*; *International Affairs*; *Third World Quarterly*; *Global Political Economy*.



Cyril Obi (obi@ssrc.org) is Program Director of the African Peacebuilding Network (APN) program at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) based in Brooklyn, New York. He previously held the positions of Associate Research Professor at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) in Lagos, and Senior Researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) in Uppsala, Sweden (2005-2011). He earned his doctorate in Political Science from the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He co-authored/edited *The Rise of China and India in Africa* with Fantu Cheru.



Liu Haifang (liuhaifang@pku.edu.cn) is Associate Professor in the School of International Studies, Peking University. She serves as Executive Director of the Centre for African Studies, Peking University and Vice President of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies. She previously worked for the Institute of West Asian and African Studies (IWAAS), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and was a visiting scholar at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University and The Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. Dr. Liu has authored, edited and translated numerous publications in English and Mandarin, including books such as *Agricultural Foreign Direct Investment in Zambia* (both English and Chinese versions) and *General History of Africa, Angola*. She has contributed chapters on aspects of China's comprehensive presence in Africa to several volumes published by Zed, Brill, Fahamu Publishing house and Routledge. She has also contributed to international academic journals as both a reviewer and author. Dr. Liu's current research topics include Chinese migrants in Africa, Chinese company history in Africa, African perceptions of China and Chinese migrants, Chinese Aid, China-African relations and African sustainable development studies.



Uwe Wissenbach (Uwe.WISSENBACH@eeas.europa.eu; uwewi@hotmail.com) is a diplomat of the European Union and also a researcher who completed his Ph.D. in International Relations in 2017. During his career, Uwe was posted to China, Korea and Kenya, and was also the European Community's Coordinator for Africa-China Relations, shaping policy as the European Union adjusted to Asia's growing influence in Africa. He speaks fluent Mandarin. Dr. Wissenbach attends in his private capacity and can thus freely share his long experience in policy making and diplomacy.



Sarah Margon is the Washington director at Human Rights Watch. In this role, she serves as the organization's main point of contact with the U.S. government, and provides strategic and advocacy guidance, including legislative and policy development. Prior to joining Human Rights Watch, Margon was associate director of sustainable security and peacebuilding at the Center for American Progress. She also served as senior foreign policy advisor to Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) and as staff director to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs. She has been a guest on various national and international media programs, and has published in a wide range of outlets from the *Washington Post* to *USA Today* to *Foreign Affairs*. Margon holds a graduate degree from Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service and an undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University.

Sponsored by the Alison Des Forges Memorial Committee and the University at Buffalo Asian Studies Program, Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, Department of Comparative Literature, Confucius Institute, Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Department of History, Gender Institute, Humanities Institute, James Agee Chair in American Culture, Department of Philosophy Samuel P. Capen Chair, Department of Political Science, and Office of the Vice Provost for International Education.



This symposium honors the life and work of human rights advocate Alison Des Forges. For more information, email Roger Des Forges at rvd@buffalo.edu, Ellen Dussourd at dussourd@buffalo.edu, or Shaun Irlam at irlam@buffalo.edu.