

David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman. 2023. *China's Relations with Africa: A New Era of Strategic Engagement*. New York: Columbia University Press 484 pp.

China's Relations with Africa: A New Era of Strategic Engagement is an outstanding and urgent piece of scholarship. Researched in an exemplary level of detail and then written in clear and precise language, Shinn and Eisenmann have delivered a major contribution to China-Africa scholarship that will be invaluable to a variety of readers, including scholars of development studies, political science, international relations, policymakers, and general readers.

Seeking to understand and analyze the growing influence of China in Africa and building on their previous title on China-Africa engagements, the authors point to what they termed the “overlapping latticework of relationships with thousands of African elites traversing four distinct levels: bilateral, global, regional, and subregional” (p. 1). This is not an easy task. China-Africa engagements are multiple and complex. Meticulously researched, the eleven chapters speak to all these different levels of influence, demonstrating how relations between China and Africa evolve and, importantly, how they flourish in different contexts. This book offers valuable insights about Africa in general and individual countries, including those that are often under-studied. Moreover, as the authors demonstrate, not all China-Africa relationships are equally important to China. This is also reflected in the book, with more attention given to certain African states and their relationships with China.

The book follows a logical progression, with an introductory chapter locating Africa in China's strategy and worldview. Subsequent chapters examine bilateral and global relations (Chapter 2) and regional and sub-regional relations (Chapter 3). For those seeking insights into public and private strategic relations, Chapter 4 on party-to-party relations and particularly Chapter 5 on Africa-related propaganda, provide a rich picture. Chapters 8 through 10 delve into various dimensions of security: Chapter 8 examines diplomacy, Chapter 9 addresses maritime security, and Chapter 10 explores technological considerations. The book concludes with an insightful chapter that discusses future predictions and trends in China-Africa strategic relations, including important insights into how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these relations without fundamentally derailing them.

The notion of security and strategizing around security rightly takes up a great deal of space within the book. The authors' multi-faceted engagement with security works well, with several chapters devoted to this. One of the most interesting aspects of the book was the discussion of food security on (pp. 172-77), which is also revisited in the conclusion (pp. 334-33). While food security is not typically a focus of security studies, it is clearly an increasingly important issue. The authors highlight that food security is a top priority for China both domestically and in foreign policy and is likely to become even more significant in the future. Given its importance, this aspect of the book could have been explored more extensively, perhaps even warranting its own chapter. It presents a promising area for further scholarly research, which the authors could approach with the same strong empirical and theoretical focus demonstrated in this book.

Throughout the book, the authors rightly talk about China-Africa relations rather than Africa -China relations. In this wording, the authors recognize that these relationships are uneven while at the same time recognizing that a process of calculating possible gains happens

on both sides. This level of nuance matters because the authors take us behind the narrative of win-win and shared benefits, recognizing that gains are not felt equally by different actors in China-Africa engagements. While questions of African agency are present in the book (pp. 44-49), this is the one area that could have been developed more explicitly throughout and argued for more strongly in terms of what African agendas are and, crucially, how these are advanced (or not) by African actors at different levels. Such a focus would expand the excellent material the authors have, but perhaps that is a subject for another fascinating future book.

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