

Africa-China Studies

China: The New Imperialists and Neo-Colonialists in Africa?

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Born in Ghana, West Africa, Kwame A. Insaidoo is the author of *China: The New Imperialists and Neo-Colonialists in Africa*. Insaidoo obtained his Bachelor in Economics degree from Southwest Missouri State University in 1979 and his Master's degree from New York University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1989. He has authored and co-authored a total of nine books covering a range of topics from religion and life to specific texts on Ghana and China (Insaidoo, 2016).

Insaidoo's book on China is reviewed here because I initially thought he was going to examine whether or not China's behavior was neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist rather than arguing that it is both and setting out to support his argument. While recognizing there are significant methodological weaknesses to the work, the book is an essential read since policymakers and intellectuals in some parts of the world make the case that only Westerners with an anti-China political agenda hold such views. Africans who hold such views are often dismissed or perceived to be on the payroll of certain countries.

Book Review

Published in 2016, the book contains a total of nine chapters. Unlike the previous books reviewed in this chapter, this one is treated a bit differently in that the strengths and weaknesses are discussed within the context of each chapter's summary. It was thought that this might be the best way to engage this particular piece of scholarship since the author uses analogy rather than a more rigorous methodological approach to engage whether China is neo-imperialist or neo-colonialist.

Chapter 1 begins with an overview of Western imperialism and the impact on Black Africans to set up the main point that the Chinese are no different and that their main aim in Africa is imperial in nature—that is, seeking to exploit and colonize Black Africa as the Westerners and Arabs had done in the past. The latter part of the chapter turns to look at Chinese prejudice toward Africans living in China and their conquest of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia to set up the argument that by these actions, Black Africans should expect the same in the future (Insaidoo, 2016). The chapter lacks systematic, rigorous analysis and suffers from bias.

“Chinese Invasion of Africa” is the title of Chapter 2. After introducing some scholarship about the preference for the Chinese over Africans in Africa and a desire for their migration to the region to eventually supplant or outnumber the native African populations, examples of European colonialization of the Americas through military conquest are provided. These are used to infer that the Chinese will do the same once they have settled in sufficient numbers (Insaidoo,

2016). The author uses selective data from a variety of academic, media and government sources on Chinese migration to Africa, the nature of their businesses, as well as investment and assistance to make his argument.

Chapter 3 begins with the military conquests and subjugation of African countries and their leaders by French, British and Belgian colonialists before turning to China's military aggression in Africa, which the author argues began in the 1960s. Covering the period from the 1960s to the present, the author draws from a variety of media and academic sources in order to argue that China's proclaimed brotherhood and solidarity with the African people is nothing more than a façade, since it supplied arms to governments to suppress their own people following independence and has continued to supply them equally to countries at war. The author argues that China's actions are either because of its imperial or colonialist design, its desire to depopulate the continent, or its inclination to perpetuate conflict in and between nations in order to continue extracting African resources (Insaidoo, 2016).

Chapter 4 seeks to answer the following question: "Why Africa?" The author argues that like the Americans who sought African resources in the form of human capital, the Chinese seek Africa's natural resources. He then presents data on the continent's vast natural resources to argue that Africa could be very rich and plentiful but instead it is poor and ranks low in terms of human development. Data are provided on poverty and human development index (HDI) (Insaidoo, 2016). The author allows the data to answer the question without engaging in any analysis after their presentation. Readers are left to interpret the data.

"Raw Materials and Overseas Markets: The Nuts and Bolts of Colonialism or the Great Chinese Takeout?" is the title of Chapter 5. The author argues that the abundance of African resources is the catalyst for Chinese interest in and migration to Africa, and African countries' dependence on their exports have led to a relationship of dependency and curtailed the potential for economic diversification. He discusses the types of resources being extracted and uses data from a variety of sources including statements by former government officials, non-governmental and international organizations, and media sources to support his argument (Insaidoo, 2016).

The sixth chapter examines infrastructure for development. Drawing on a variety of academic, governmental, and media sources, the author argues that Chinese infrastructure projects are not benevolent gifts to African nations but instead necessary means for enabling their extraction and exploitation of African resources. The Chinese are complicit in the corruption and robbing of Africa's wealth by repressive leaders and the African countries' economic and political elite. He provides examples from a variety of development projects to support his argument (Insaidoo, 2016).

Chapter 7 starts off with the exploitation of African slave laborers by the Americans and Europeans before turning to examining Chinese treatment of Africans in the 21st Century. Using a combination of narratives from African workers employed in Chinese firms in a variety of countries, statements by former or current government personnel, and media and human rights reports, the author paints a picture of forced labor and significant labor and human rights abuses. He does so in order to reinforce his assumption that the Chinese are in Africa to simply exploit the countries' natural resources and people for financial gain rather than out of a brotherly spirit. The chapter concludes that China has become an imperial power in Africa, whether others choose to believe it or not (Insaidoo, 2016).

Commencing with a definition of imperialism, Chapter 8 argues that China's behavior in Africa is illustrative of its imperialist designs. Drawing on investment data obtained from a

variety of sources, the author argues that Chinese imperialism is different from the imperialist design of past colonial powers. The Chinese, he argues, prefer a financial colonialism to ensure their domination over the African continent. He cites Chinese government officials' recognition that there is a growing number of voices claiming that China's behavior is neocolonialist to reinforce his point. The chapter concludes by making the case that if the Chinese are truly comrades-in-arms with their African brethren, then they would help in building Africa's human capacity rather than aiding oppressive African governments in suppressing their people (Insaidoo, 2016).

The last chapter starts with the Beijing Consensus, highlighting the preference for social and economic rights over that of civil and political rights. The discussion then turns to reports of violations of civil and political rights within China. Next, examples from countries in Africa where the civil and political rights of the African people are repressed are provided to highlight the similarities between China and repressive leaders in the continent. A discussion of the Washington Consensus follows, with the author giving preference to it over that of the Beijing Consensus since power resides with the people and their civil and political rights are protected and, in fact, needed in order for there to be true socioeconomic development in a country (Insaidoo, 2016).

Book's Greatness

Although there may be some criticism for this book's inclusion as a great book, since it has significant methodological weaknesses, I chose it because it is reflective of some of the growing negative opinions among ordinary Africans about China's engagement in Africa and Beijing's preference for elite-driven politics and diplomacy. These voices need to be addressed because it is ordinary Africans and the Chinese living in Africa that will determine the nature and depth of future relations. To suppress or dismiss these opinions, will have an even greater negative long-term effect on Africa-China relations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Reflecting on the criteria established in the introduction for the selection of books included in this review, it provides significant understanding of the relations between China and Africa and touches on some of the trends in the Africa-China Studies literature. Insaidoo's work touches on some of the debates raised in the scholarship covering China's economic engagement with Africa and identity.

From the analysis of the reviewed book, there are a number of areas I suggest for additional scholarship. They are as follows: (1) Africa-China military and security engagement from an African perspective by region and covering a number of case studies, (2) the role of sub-state actors and their impact on Africa and China relations, (3) the role of civil society and its influence on Africa-China relations and effectiveness in bringing attention to key issues raised by ordinary Africans, (4) collection of case studies examining critical African voices of Africa-China relations, and (5) more theoretical and empirical analyses examining the varying aspects of Africa-China relations.

Reference

Insaidoo, K. A. (2016). *China: The New Imperialists and Neo-Colonialists in Africa?* Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse.