

CHINA-AFRICA WORKING GROUP

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The China-Africa Working Group is an interdisciplinary research group focusing on the relationship between China and African countries.

The rationale for the group's formation was the growing importance and impact of the relationship between China and African countries. The group invites scholars exploring the China-Africa dynamic to present their research in small group discussions that provide additional insights that lead to the publication of their research. Thus far, the group's focus has been on socioeconomic, cultural, and political, and media aspects of China-Africa relationships.

Since its inception in 2015, the group has held two research workshops, assembling scholars working on China and Africa from all over the world. The group's themes have tackled the major issues in the relationship between African countries and China. The first workshop brought together 15 participants from Africa, China, Europe and the United States. The theme was "China-Africa Relations: Political and Economic Engagement and Media Strategies." Howard French, author of *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants are Building a New Empire in Africa* was the keynote speaker for the event. The conference proceedings resulted in a peer-reviewed special edition of *African Studies Quarterly* (vol. 16 nos. 3/4) with Agnes Ngoma Leslie as guest editor.

In 2017, the China-Africa working group held a second workshop focused on African migration to China. The theme was

"China-Africa Relations: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives on African 'Migrants' in China." The main presenters included Adams Bodom and Heidi Østbø Haugen as well as Chinese scholars: Li Anshan and Dong Niu. All four have conducted extensive studies on African migrants in China. Their research was published in another special issue of *African Studies Quarterly* (vol. 17, no. 4).

In spring 2018, the China-Africa group took on the challenge of examining China's trillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative. Haifang Liu, Associate Professor and Deputy Director, Center for African Studies, Peking University, gave the keynote address "Africa and the Belt and Road Initiative," launching the group's conference initiative for 2018-2019. This was followed by an exhibit in the UF Grinter Gallery, portraying the massive extent and impact of the project on African countries. The exhibit ran from April–August, 2018 as a museum exhibit, and featured a gallery talk by Professor Emeritus Anita Spring titled "China's Belt and Road in Africa."

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013 by President Xi is an ambitious attempt by China to create a massive infrastructure, stretching from Beijing to Western Europe and through the Horn of Africa, to link China's maritime and land trade, economic, political and cultural interactions with 70 participating countries. East African countries in the maritime corridor include: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Mozambique, Somalia, and Tanzania. Southern and West African countries with

coastlines are also being included. China's extensive loans and investments by state-owned enterprises and private Chinese companies finance construction of transportation corridors (roads, railways, ports and airports, housing and storage facilities) in most African countries, and mineral and natural resource extraction activities and facilities in other countries. Among the infrastructure projects, the newly completed \$4 billion Chinese-built rapid railway from Addis Ababa to Djibouti is noteworthy. Nine trans-Africa highways hubs (six East–West routes and three North–South routes) are also under construction with partial Chinese funding.

The China-Africa working group continues to study the impact of the BRI on African communities during the 2018-2019 academic year and is planning its third conference on the topic for spring 2019. Also, in the works are two new courses for 2019-2020, "China-Africa Relations and Globalization" (undergraduate-level) and "China's Belt and Road: Foreign Direct Investment, Politics, Culture, and Media" (graduate-level).

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