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Why Do We Need 'Myth-Busting' in the Study of Sino–African Relations?

MIWA HIRONO and SHOGO SUZUKI*

The literature on Sino–African relations has debated whether or not China's growing presence is a threat to Western or African interests, and has come to the conclusion that China's behavior is not uniquely immoral. Many countries, including Western liberal democracies, similarly give aid to local autocrats to secure natural resources. Why, then, has so much effort been made to come to this perhaps unsurprising conclusion? We argue that the literature on Chinese foreign policy remains heavily influenced by Western states' policy interests, resulting in an impoverished debate that is primarily concerned with the idea of a China threat. In order to recover the diversity in our research on Chinese foreign policy, we argue for the need to go beyond the confines of Western strategic interests.

Introduction

No topic of China's international relations in recent years has captured the imagination of both popular and academic audiences more than China's relations with the African continent. The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) relations with Africa date back much earlier. Beijing was particularly active there from the late 1950s to the 1970s, when it was attempting to escape from the diplomatic alienation imposed on it by both the Western and Soviet-led Eastern blocs.[1] The Chinese poured

1. Peter Van Ness, *Revolution and Chinese Foreign Policy: Peking's Support for Wars of National Liberation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973); Alaba Ogunsanwo, *China's Policy in Africa 1958–1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

substantial resources into providing aid (the Tan–Zam Railway being the most famous example), and trumpeted its support for the anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic struggles of the developing world. After Deng Xiaoping initiated the opening up policy in the 1980s, however, Sino–African relations faded from China's diplomatic priorities. Eager to achieve economic growth and bolster the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime's legitimacy, Beijing concentrated on deepening economic and diplomatic ties with the industrialized world. Aid to Africa was cut back, and the revolutionary rhetoric of Third World solidarity was muted.[2] For a while—bar the early 1990s, when Beijing again found itself isolated following its suppression of the 1989 demonstrations in Tiananmen Square—the PRC's relations with the African continent appeared to be put on the backburner.

All this has seemingly changed since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The growth of the PRC's influence and presence in Africa has indeed been remarkable. Politically, the PRC has sought to enhance its relations by convening a number of high-level summits between Chinese and African leaders, as seen by the convocation of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) since 2000. The Chinese government has also increased its aid to Africa, and cancelled debts.[3] Meanwhile, under the slogan of 'going out' (*zou chu qu*), Chinese firms have sought to expand overseas, including Africa. China's growing need for natural resources has meant that Chinese enterprises are increasingly active in developing mines and oil wells, and today China's oil import from Africa accounts for 30% of the country's entire oil supply.[4]

This growth in Chinese political, security and economic activity has generated a flurry of literature, which can broadly be divided into two genres. The first generally sees the PRC as a threat to the interests of both Africa and the international community, because of their alleged role in supporting corrupt African autocrats and preventing the spread of 'good governance' in the region. These negative views find traction within the highest levels of the Western political elite—British prime minister David Cameron echoed these themes when he was quoted as being 'increasingly alarmed by Beijing's leading role in the new "scramble for Africa"', and 'warned African states over China's "authoritarian capitalism" . . . claiming that it is unsustainable in the long term'.[5]

This literature has, in turn, generated the second group of works whose primary purpose is to engage in 'myth-busting' in the study of Sino–African relations.[6] Scholars put Chinese foreign policy in Africa in context, and point out that not only

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2. Philip Snow, 'China and Africa: consensus and camouflage', in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds, *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

3. Hu Jinshan, *Feizhou de zhongguo xingxiang* [*Africa's Image of China*] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010).

4. US Energy Information Administration, *China Energy Data, Statistics and Analysis: Oil, Gas, Electricity, Coal* (2011), available at: http://www.eia.gov/cabs/china/Full.html. Also see Joshua Eisenman, 'China–Africa trade patterns: causes and consequences', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(77), (2012), pp. 793–810.

5. Jason Groves, 'Cameron warns Africans over the "Chinese invasion" as they pour billions into continent', *Mail Online*, (20 July 2011), available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2016677/Cameron-warns-Africans-Chinese-invasion-pour-billions-continent.html (accessed 23 February 2013).

6. Chris Alden, *China in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2007); Erica S. Downs, 'The fact and fiction of Sino–African energy relations', *China Security* 3(3), (2007), pp. 42–68; Shogo Suzuki, 'Chinese soft power, insecurity studies, myopia and fantasy', *Third World Quarterly* 30(4), (2009), pp. 779–793; Ian Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2009); Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Chinese but also Western actors are responsible for their lack of political will to solve Africa's security and governance problems. It is indeed not too difficult to search for examples to illustrate the point that China and many Western governments often behave very similarly in the realm of foreign policy. Western governments have provided support for regimes with notorious records for suppressing human rights— British and American support for the Mubarak regime in Egypt is a case in point. Similarly, despite its rather convenient change in tune of late, the British government was also complicit in cultivating closer relations with the Gaddafi regime in Libya. In sum, the recent debates on China in Africa have taught us that China is actually not that 'different' compared to many other Western states—while the effects of the PRC's growing influence in the African continent have been mixed, this does not make China a uniquely pernicious presence.

These studies have certainly enriched our knowledge of Chinese foreign policy behavior in Africa. However—and without wishing to downplay the contribution of these works—should we be surprised by these conclusions? While realism has come under considerable criticism within the discipline of International Relations (IR) of late, one of its most enduring and important insights is that *states are not radically different from one another*, in that they pursue their own strategic self-interests, often with scant regard for the international norms they rhetorically claim to adhere to. Yet, this arguably predictable point is presented almost as a surprise or a discovery in the literature on Sino–African relations.

Why is this so? In this article we suggest that this is because the study of Chinese foreign policy continues to be structured by a powerful discourse which claims that China's rise to power presents a unique and almost unprecedented challenge to the maintenance of the Western-dominated world order. This consequently results in a myopic and dichotomized debate of whether or not Chinese policies in Africa are 'bad' or not. We aim to problematize this starting assumption that has colored the study of Sino–African relations. In doing so, we forward two arguments. First, the study of China has been closely linked to the national interest of Western states, and this structural dynamic means that the field of Chinese foreign policy revolves around one primary axis that is chiefly concerned with whether or not the PRC is becoming a threat to Western power and interests. Second, it argues that the enduring Eurocentrism in IR means that the rise of non-Western powers is under-theorized, resulting in an impoverished vision of a world order where Western hegemony is no longer guaranteed. This, in turn, generates suspicions and fears analogous to the 'Yellow Peril' thesis: the rise of an Asian power is implicitly seen as a 'unique' and 'unknown' development that would somehow threaten the moral fabric of the international order that has historically been constructed and dominated by the West. We will conclude by suggesting an alternative research agenda in Sino–African relations that go beyond national security and Western-centric agenda.

Academia and the national security agenda

For Western scholars, studies of China's international relations are generally still in the service of the national security agenda of the Western policy community.

Historically, the study of the non-West has been closely linked to Western government policies. Long before the term 'area studies' came into existence in the United States (US) in the 1950s, there was a notion that scholarship should serve the political goals of the elite. 'Oriental studies' was recognized as a discipline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to Western colonialists' needs to control non-Western people.[7] For example, Sir William Jones, a British legal scholar,

> founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, and also worked as an official of the British East India Company; he felt absolutely no conflict of interest in serving imperialism and set the pattern which later Orientalists and area studies experts emulated.[8]

In addition to those who engaged in commercial activities, Christian missionaries laid the foundation for the development of Orientalism, with a belief that the West should help the non-West adopt 'superior' Western civilization.[9] Edward Said rightly states that the purpose of Orientalism was 'to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even incorporate, what is a manifestly different world'.[10] Later, social anthropologists joined the Orientalists by bringing more in-depth understanding of the customs and lifestyles of the colonized, in order to aid colonial administrators and missionaries.[11]

However, it was only after World War II (WWII) that area studies really flourished. One of the earliest and best known examples of this genre of scholarship was *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, written by American anthropologist Ruth Benedict in 1946. This was the product of Benedict's involvement with the US Office of War Information during WWII.[12] As the Cold War and the subsequent standoff between the US and the Soviet Union became entrenched in the 1950s, area studies served to fulfill the West's strategic need to understand the enemy or processes by which states hostile to Western interests could be brought into the so-called 'free world'. Research on Asia, particularly China and Japan, was a major beneficiary of this development. As Bruce Cummings states:

> Japan got a favored placement as a success story of development, and China got obsessive attention as a pathological example of abortive development. The key processes were things like modernization, or what was for many years called 'political development' toward the explicit or implicit goal of liberal democracy.[13]

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7. Asaf Hussain, Robert Olson and Jamil Qureshi, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Books, 1984), p. 11.

8. Stuart Schaar, 'Orientalism at the service of imperialism', *Race and Class* XXI(1), (1979), p. 68.

9. Miwa Hirono, *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

10. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 12.

11. Hussain *et al.*, *Orientalism, Islam and Islamists*, p. 11.

12. Ruth Benedict's wartime involvement with the US Office of War Information is presented in two US government reports published in 1943 and 1944. Sonia Ryang, *Chrysanthemum's Strange Life: Ruth Benedict in Postwar Japan*, Occasional Paper No. 32 (Japan Policy Research Institute, University of San Francisco Center for the Pacific Rim, July 2004), available at: http://www.jpri.org/publications/occasionalpapers/op32.html (accessed 12 November 2012).

13. Bruce Cummings, 'Boundary displacement: area studies and international studies during and after the Cold War', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29(1), (January–March 1997), p. 9.

Cummings also documents various area studies departments' close working relations with US government agencies in the early Cold War period, particularly their role in providing a steady source of new recruits and specialist consultants: 'For those scholars studying potential enemy countries, either they consulted with the government or they risked being investigated by the FBI; working for the CIA thus legitimized academics and fended off J. Edgar Hoover'.[14]

While the Cold War has officially ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union, there still remains ample state demand for the study of China, partly because of the 'concern' of Western elites that China is the only strategically competitive peer that could pose a real threat to the West's power and dominance. China is the last remaining communist great power, and its antipathy to liberal democratic governance, coupled with its steady military build-up, has made it a latent 'threat' to Western interests. Therefore, the research agenda of Chinese foreign policy in Africa continues to be influenced by this national interest. For example, the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) has published five reports between 2008 and 2009 on China's activities in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, showing heightened US interests and anxieties in this field.[15] Furthermore, China is the only non-African country to feature in the CRS's reports on Africa. Studies of the US or Europe in Africa are conspicuously absent.[16]

Scholars and analysts have also jumped on this policy bandwagon, and published a series of works that confirm China's 'threat' in Africa. Authors of these works voice their disquiet that the Chinese government is trying to sabotage Western attempts to introduce 'good governance' (such as liberal democratic governance or improved transparency) by propagating its model of 'authoritarian capitalism'. Many also warn darkly that an important part of China's objectives in Africa is to challenge US global hegemony.[17] China's non-conditional aid—denounced as 'rogue aid' by some critics—and trade-oriented relations with 'rogue states' such as Sudan and Zimbabwe are frequently criticized, because they undermine attempts to introduce democracy to the region, provide a lifeline for autocratic rulers, and encourage and exacerbate human rights abuses by them.[18] In the words of Gemot Pehnelt, 'Chinese engagement enables African governments to reject demands made by the IMF, the World Bank and other donors for enhancing transparency, implementing anti-corruption

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
15. Congressional Research Service, *China's Foreign Policy and 'Soft Power' in South America, Asia and Africa*, (2008), available at: http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/104589.pdf; Congressional Research Service, *Comparing Global Influence: China's and US Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World*, (15 August 2008), available at: http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/109507.pdf; Congressional Research Service, *China's Foreign Policy: What Does it Mean for US Global Interests?*, (18 July 2008), available at: http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34588.pdf; Congressional Research Service, *China's Foreign Aid Activities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia*, (25 February 2009), available at: http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40361.pdf; Congressional Research Service, *China's Assistance and Government-sponsored Investment Activities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia*, (25 November 2009), available at: http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/133511.pdf (all accessed 20 April 2012).
16. US Department of State, *Africa*, (n.d.), available at: http://fpc.state.gov/c20410.htm (accessed 20 April 2012).
17. Horace Campbell, 'China in Africa: challenging US global hegemony', *Third World Quarterly* 29(1), (2008), pp. 89–105.
18. Moisés Naím, 'Rogue aid', *Foreign Policy* 159, (2007), pp. 95–96; see also Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

strategies, and furthering their democratization efforts'.[19] China's priority is, these scholars argue, simply to secure energy resources rather than to improve human rights conditions in those states.[20] Chinese firms (often bundled together under the somewhat misleading label of 'China' or 'China Inc.') are also accused of neocolonial behavior, such as exploiting African workers, flooding the African market with cheap Chinese consumer goods and ruining the local economy, or stripping African states of their resources.[21]

It is, of course, necessary to acknowledge that not all works portray China as a threat, as evidenced from the 'myth-busting' literature. Brautigam demonstrates that much of China's allegedly pernicious political influence is greatly exaggerated, and that its aid can, at times, actually deliver real benefits to the recipient states.[22] China's aid to authoritarian leaders has not been as vast as is often claimed, and is not as susceptible to being misused. With regard to weapons trade, Western corporations also engage in arms trade with rogue states (at times far more than the Chinese), making Western criticisms of Chinese weapons sales ring somewhat hollow—in fact, a recent study has concluded that the US 'tends to transfer conventional arms to authoritarian regimes to a greater extent than does China, which in turn tends to export more to African democracies and regimes that generally respect human rights'.[23] Studies on China's development activities in Africa have also found that Beijing's role in propping up isolated African autocrats is greatly exaggerated: there is, for instance, no concrete evidence of a systematic attempt to export China's development model of authoritarian capitalism, whose existence is highly debatable.[24] African scholars such as Adekeye Adebajo have also pointed out that the US has provided 'support for a cantankerous warlord's gallery',[25] which again reminds us that many governments support undemocratic regimes, provided that it is in accordance with their national interests. With regard to economic exploitation of

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19. Gemot Pehnelt, *The Political Economy of China's Aid Policy in Africa*, Jena Economic Research Papers No. 051 (Friedrich-Schiller-University and The Max Planck Institute of Economics, Jena, Germany, 2007), p. 8.

20. Ngaire Woods, 'Whose aid? Whose influence?: China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance', *International Affairs* 84(6), (2008), pp. 1205–1221; Clemens Six, 'The rise of postcolonial states as donors: a challenge to the development paradigm?', *Third World Quarterly* 30(6), (2009), pp. 1103–1121; Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model will Dominate the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Jonathan Holslag, 'China's diplomatic manoeuvring on the question of Darfur', *Journal of Contemporary China* 17(54), (2008), pp. 71–84; Jonathan Holslag and Sara Van Hoeymissen, eds, *The Limits of Socialization: The Search for EU–China Cooperation towards Security Challenges in Africa* (Brussels: Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies, 2010).

21. 'The Chinese in Africa: trying to pull together', *The Economist*, (20 April 2011), available at: http://www. economist.com/node/18586448; 'Africa and China: rumble in the jungle', *The Economist*, (20 April 2011), available at: http://www.economist.com/node/18586678 (both accessed 4 December 2012). On 'China Inc.', see Bates Gill and James Reilly, 'The tenuous hold of China Inc. in Africa', *The Washington Quarterly* 30(3), (2007), pp. 37–52.

22. See Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift*.

23. Indra de Soysa and Paul Midford, 'Enter the dragon! An empirical analysis of Chinese versus US arms transfers to autocrats and violators of human rights, 1989–2006', *International Studies Quarterly* 56, (2012), p. 844. Also see Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa*.

24. Suzuki, 'Chinese soft power, insecurity studies, myopia and fantasy'. Also see Suisheng Zhao, 'The China model: can it replace the Western model of modernization?', *Journal of Contemporary China* 16(65), (2010), pp. 419–436; and Scott Kennedy, 'The myth of the Beijing Consensus', *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(65), (2010), pp. 461–477.

25. Adekeye Adebajo, 'An axis of evil? China, the United States and France in Africa', in Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu, eds, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon? Africa and China* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), p. 233.

African labor, Chinese enterprises are found to be neither better nor worse than many of their Western counterparts, and their buying up of African natural resources often pales into insignificance compared to Western purchases. Yet, it is important to note that even this type of literature is essentially an extension of the same question that dominates the Western policy community: does China's rise present a threat to Western interests in Africa? The starting point of their enquiry is the same as that of their respective governments' national security concerns.

This close link between the academic and national security agendas in the West suggests that there is still a key governmental interest in understanding the Chinese 'enemy'. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the core objective of US foreign policy was to combat communist regimes and advance liberalism and capitalism. After the end of the Cold War, US foreign policy has strived for the maintenance of US hegemony or, at least, US strategic superiority vis-à-vis China. Therefore, the US government has encouraged social scientists to study subjects that assist such policy purposes. This is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that state funding for Asia-related topics has been linked to government programs such as the National Security Education Act.[26] In addition, since 2008, the US Department of Defense has provided a number of million-dollar-level Minerva Research Initiative funds to university-based social science research programs, focusing on 'areas of strategic importance to US national security policy'.[27] It has seven priority research topics, including science, technology and military transformation in China and developing states. China is the only country specifically mentioned in all seven priority research topics.

This tendency of government funding policies fostering close links between academic and policymaking communities is replicated in other states as well. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Research Councils UK pay particular attention to the importance of 'non-academic impact',[28] such as that on political decision making. This includes 'fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom; increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy; enhancing quality of life, health and creative output'.[29] According to this academic strategy, one of the most effective ways to make non-academic impact in area studies (as well as other academic disciplines, for that matter) would be to demonstrate their utility in achieving these goals set by the policy community. The prospect of a positive evaluation of research impact, which leads to increased state funding to universities, coupled with greater opportunities for applying for external funding, could serve to encourage research that addresses the interests of the policy elites.

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26. Cummings, 'Boundary displacement', pp. 19–22.
27. US Department of Defense, *Minerva Research Initiative: Program History & Overview*, (2012), available at: http://minerva.dtic.mil/overview.html (accessed 12 December 2012).
28. The REF is a grading exercise carried out throughout the UK to assess the quality of research undertaken by UK universities. Government funding is allocated partly on the basis of the level of 'excellence' universities achieve in the REF.
29. Economic and Social Research Council, *What is Impact?*, (2012), available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/tools-and-resources/impact-toolkit/what-how-and-why/what-is-research-impact.aspx (accessed 23 February 2013); Economic and Social Research Council, *UK Strategic Forum—Areas for Further Consideration*, (2012), available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/about-esrc/information/five-areas.aspx (accessed 23 February 2013).

Nevertheless, Stephen Walt, Joseph Nye and Alexander George argue that the gap between scholars and policy community is ever growing.[30] They claim that policymakers tend to ignore academic research because of its irrelevance to their day-to-day work of policymaking.[31] While this gap may be the case for the disciplines of Political Science and International Relations since WWII in general, China-specific discussions have remained, as discussed above, closely related to the strategic interests of the state. When area studies falls into this trap of policy research, academic research tends to end up focusing on a predictable and stereotyped agendum that fit with national interests. This results in what Amitav Acharya calls a state of 'entrapment', which

> . . . occurs when scholars, after having offered consequential intellectual input at an early stage of policymaking . . . , remain beholden to the choices made by officials and thereby [become] unwilling or incapable of challenging officially sanctioned pathways and approaches for the fear of losing their access and influence.[32]

It is not our intention to claim that the close link between academia and policy community is necessarily problematic. However, what we need to be vigilant about is the tendency for policy needs to influence the academic research agenda in the study of Sino–African relations, rather than the other way around (i.e. academic research agenda influencing policy direction). Other options for academia include deliberately maintaining intellectual distance from the policy community, so that scholars can freely advance their research without being constrained by structural and political obstacles that the policy community faces. It is problematic that much of the scholarship on Sino–African relations remains focused on whether or not China is a threat: such a debate is influenced by and remains confined to Western governments' strategic interests, and could crowd out the intellectual space for alternative research topics.

This is not to say that all literature that revolves around the China threat and 'myth-busting', necessarily seeks to inform Western policymakers and their interests.[33] Particularly, scholars outside Western academic circles often do not have ties with Western policymakers and may regard the latter as antagonistic to African and/or Chinese interests. However, research on Sino–African relations undertaken by Chinese analysts has frequently been reactive to *Western* debates of Sino–African relations, which results in defensive essays refuting Western criticisms of the PRC's role in Africa.[34] Ironically, this only serves to further entrench the 'myth-busting'

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30. Stephen M. Walt, 'The relationship between theory and policy in international relations', *Annual Review of Political Science* 8, (2005), pp. 23–48; Joseph S. Nye Jr, 'Bridging the gap between theory and policy', *Political Psychology* 29(4), (2008), pp. 593–603; Alexander L. George, *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993).

31. For example see Walt, 'The relationship between theory and policy in international relations', pp. 23–24.

32. Amitav Acharya, 'Engagement or entrapment? Scholarship and policymaking on Asian regionalism', *International Studies Review* 13(1), (2011), p. 12.

33. We are grateful to the anonymous referee for this point. One good example of critical work on China–Africa relations led by African scholars includes Ampiah and Naidu, eds, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?*

34. He Wenping, 'Zhongfei guanxi fazhan chudongle shei de shenjing?' ['Who's nerves have the development of Sino–African relations touched?'], *Shijie zhishi* [*World Knowledge*] 19, (2006), pp. 30–32; Li Anshan, 'Wei zhongguo zhengming: zhongguo de feizhou zhanlüe yu guojia xingxiang' ['Establishing a name for China: China's Africa strategy and national image'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [*World Economy and Politics*] 4, (April 2008),

narrative, irrespective of their intention to inform or not to inform Western policymakers.

Western exceptionalism and international relations

The close link between the national security agenda and the academic literature in the West can be also seen as a by-product of Western exceptionalism that remains prevalent in the discipline of IR. As a field of study which emerged in the West as a self-conscious academic discipline, Acharya and Barry Buzan argue, it is almost a truism to say that 'the main ideas in this discipline are deeply rooted in the particularities and peculiarities of European history, the rise of the West to world power, and the imposition of its own political structure onto the rest of the world'.[35] This cultural/geographical bias has often resulted in a somewhat one-sided interpretation of global order, in that Western dominance is seen as progressive and thus the *only* form of hegemony that matters historically and normatively. The rise of a non-Western state or non-Western hegemony is both poorly theorized and almost axiomatically seen as a threat. The in-built Eurocentric biases of IR theory have resulted in the European regional order being conceptualized as a product of something rational and liberal, as it ensured the survival of individual sovereign states and prevented the emergence of a (universal) empire.[36]

Thus, the global expansion of this order in the nineteenth century is celebrated as an event where 'Europe expands outwards and graciously bequeaths sovereignty and Europe's panoply of civilised and rational institutions to the inferior Eastern societies'.[37] Consequently, IR scholars working in the constructivist and English School approaches have a tendency to interpret international normative change as a two-step process, where 'international norms' are essentially seen as emanating from the West and are transmitted via socialization to the 'non-West'. This narrative 'allows for the continued imagination and invention of Europe's intellectual and political superiority, treating the West as a perennial source of political and religious tolerance'.[38] This line of thinking can also be discerned in Buzan and Richard Little's work on international history when they note that there is a 'story of unevenness ... on the difference between the West and the rest', where 'the Western states began to

Footnote 34 continued

pp. 6–15; Li Ruogu, 'Xifang gui zhongfei hezuo de waiqu ji qi zhengwei' ['The West's distortions and falsifications of Sino–African cooperation'], *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* [*World Economy and Politics*] 4, (2009), pp. 16–25; Luo Jianbo and Zhang Xiaomin, 'Multilateral cooperation in Africa between China and Western countries: from differences to consensus', *Review of International Studies* 37(4), (2011), pp. 1793–1813.

35. Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, 'Why is there no non-Western international relations theory? An introduction', *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 7(3), (2007), p. 293.

36. Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

37. Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira and John M. Hobson, 'The big bangs of IR: the myths that your teachers still tell you about 1648 and 1919', *Millennium* 39(3), (2011), p. 22; see also Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

38. Turan Kayaoglu, 'Westphalian Eurocentrism in international relations theory', *International Studies Review* 12(2), (2010), pp. 195–196.

develop a much more intense set of shared rules, norms and institutions amongst themselves'.[39] The Western world is depicted as a 'more highly developed core', and again serves to demarcate the West from 'the rest'.[40]

In the context of international politics today, this intellectual tradition frequently manifests itself in a sense of Western exceptionalism.[41] Proponents of American exceptionalism paint 'the world as a hostile place, an environment in which America must constantly strive to control and eliminate evildoers before their malevolent acts hit the American homeland'.[42] This 'permanent aura of exaggerated insecurity may also help create and sustain the role and efforts' of the US 'to liberate others' and guide them to the trappings of liberal democracy and capitalist development.[43] Given this ideological belief, it is perhaps not surprising that the US is seen by some IR scholars as an almost uniquely benevolent state in the contemporary international system, as 'no other country can make comparable contributions to international order and stability'.[44] The US is seen as 'the only major power whose national identity is defined by a set of universal political and economic values',[45] and is frequently praised for its almost selfless distribution of public goods, such as its provision of aid for the restructuring of Germany or Japan after WWII, or the opening up of its markets that would allow other states' economies to flourish.[46] Even more altruistically, the US is said to have chosen to surrender part of its power to a series of international institutions, making its actions predictable and allaying other states' fears. Thus it is claimed that

> ... the creation of rule-based agreements and political–security partnerships were both good for the United States and for a huge part of the rest of the world. The result by the end of the 1990s was a global political formation of unprecedented size and success—a transoceanic coalition of democratic states tied together through markets, institutions, and security partnerships.[47]

The case of Europe is somewhat different, as European states individually do not have the same degree of political, economic and military clout that the US enjoys. Nevertheless, Europe does count itself as part of the West, which still remains the dominant force in the international order. Furthermore, the same sense of moral superiority can also be found in European visions of itself as a 'civilian power' that is

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39. Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 338.

40. *Ibid*.

41. This is not to suggest that exceptionalism is something unique to the West: for an interesting discussion of *Chinese* exceptionalism vis-à-vis Africa, see Chris Alden and Daniel Large, 'China's exceptionalism and the challenges of delivering difference in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary China* 20(68), (2011), pp. 21–38.

42. K. J. Holsti, 'Exceptionalism in American foreign policy: is it exceptional?', *European Journal of International Relations* 17(3), (2011), p. 392.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

44. Samuel P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72(3), (1993), p. 82.

45. *Ibid*.

46. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

47. G. John Ikenberry, 'Power and liberal order: America's postwar world order in transition', *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 5(2), (2005), p. 139.

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characterized by its ability to lead through ethical example.[48] The European Union's (EU) existence as a post-Westphalian political entity has spawned an implicit belief that it is an inherently progressive, cosmopolitan entity that has overcome and transcended conflict arising from nationalism. In this sense, it is a pioneer that 'changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from the bounded expectations of state-centricity'.[49] Furthermore, in an age where the US is either seen to be in decline or has squandered its moral authority through its unilateral policies during the Bush presidency, the EU is seen to be uniquely positioned to 'share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world',[50] primarily through the promotion of 'sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance'.[51] Such policies are a strong reflection of the EU's own self-identity as an 'ethical' actor whose historical trajectory of development is universal and highly worthy of emulation across the world.

Of course, not all theories of IR would necessarily see Western states as somehow uniquely 'ethical' than the rest: as noted above, structural realism assumes that all states are equally *amoral*, regardless of their cultural or ethnic makeup.[52] Yet, even in these theories, a curious sense of Eurocentrism lingers, albeit implicitly. As Isabelle Grunberg has noted with reference to realist theories of hegemonic stability, while most theorists concede that 'great powers … pursue hegemony and open trade policies for self-seeking motives', it is assumed that in the cases of *Western* hegemony 'the effects of their policies are beneficial to other states as well …. This is because they help create a structure that profits everybody by promoting growth'.[53] The end of American hegemony thus becomes something not only bad for the US—it is to the detriment of the entire world.

The big unknown of IR: the rise of a non-Western power

IR's Eurocentrism, which originally derives from its almost exclusive focus on historical periods of Western dominance, produces other problems. Crucial for our argument here is the fact that the significantly long period of international history where Europeans interacted with non-European polities and people *from a position of military inferiority* is all but ignored.[54] Consequently, the rise of a non-Western power somehow becomes an 'unknown', an unprecedented and potentially dangerous development. When Asian states are perceived to be on the ascendant, Western leaders have claimed that the state in question 'is an adversary who does not respect

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48. Hartmut Mayer, 'Is it still called Chinese whispers? The EU's rhetoric and action as a responsible global institution', *International Affairs* 84(1), (2008), p. 62.
49. Ian Manners, 'The normative ethics of the European Union', *International Affairs* 84(1), (2008), p. 45.
50. European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, (12 December 2003), available at: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf (accessed 23 February 2013).
51. Manners, 'The normative ethics of the European Union', p. 66.
52. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002); Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).
53. Isabelle Grunberg, 'Exploring the "myth" of hegemonic stability', *International Organization* 44(4), (1990), p. 440.
54. But see John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the rules of the game and whose overwhelming desire is to conquer the world'.[55] Worse still, its peoples have been depicted as 'yellow dwarfs' who 'sit up all night thinking of ways to screw us'.[56]

Crucially, these words were not uttered in the late-nineteenth century, but in 1991 by then French prime minister Édith Cresson. Furthermore, they were not referring to China, but *Japan*, which is not an authoritarian state, but a liberal democracy. These statements have interesting similarities with the 'Yellow Peril' discourse, which can be defined as a discourse that

> ... orders the peoples and phenomena of the Far Eastern 'Orient' into a praxiologically constituted modal moral 'logic' .... In the matter of the 'Yellow Peril', the Asian aggregate, or some subsegment of it ... are feared because the dominant group ... believes that it, i.e. the particular element of the Asian aggregate under discussion, 'is not keeping to its [appropriately subordinated] place but threatens to claim opportunities and privileges from which it has been excluded'; even more fearsome is the belief 'felt [that the Asian aggregate or its subset is] ... a threat to the status, security, and welfare of the dominant ethnic group'.[57]

In the context of contemporary international politics, this translates into an assumption that relations between 'Asia' and the West are of a highly competitive, zero-sum nature. As can be discerned from Cresson's remarks above, the rise of an Asian power is a grave challenge to the security of the West. Regardless of the type of regime, the Asian state in question is (somewhat mysteriously) assumed to be opposed to Western values and interests, and will inevitably seek to overturn the international status quo of Western dominance. This will also rob the West of its privileged (but apparently deserved) position as *the* 'norm maker' in the international community. Cresson was not alone in trumpeting the Japan threat theory in the early 1990s. Such views were gaining some traction in the US, with books such as *The Coming War with Japan* declaring that the Japanese would overthrow American hegemony in the Asia–Pacific.[58] A report drafted for the CIA also 'described the Japanese as "creatures of an ageless, amoral, manipulative and controlling culture"',[59] and darkly warned of 'the potential of a Japanese–Soviet alliance that would give Japan a hedge against an "American backlash"'.[60]

While these views may seem sensationalist and idiosyncratic in the context of Japan's subsequent economic stagnation and China's rise today, it is important to remind ourselves that the potential threat of Japan was taken seriously in academic circles as well. Political scientists such as Christopher Layne claimed that Japan was beginning 'to develop the capability to gather and analyze politico-military and

55. 'Outspoken Edith Cresson appointed as prime minister', *The Economist*, (18 May 1991), retrieved from Factiva database.

56. Robert Cottrell, 'Profile: France's Nicholas Ridley, Edith Cresson', *Independent on Sunday*, (21 July 1991), p. 26.

57. Stanford M. Lyman, 'The "Yellow Peril" mystique: origins and vicissitudes of a racist discourse', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 13(4), (2000), p. 687.

58. George Friedman and Meredith LeBard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

59. Laurie Goodstein, 'Cap and gown, cloak and dagger at RIT; university's CIA links generate stormy debate', *Washington Post*, (20 June 1991), p. A3.

60. 'Japan lacks global responsibility—CIA-funded study', *Jiji Press*, (10 June 1991), retrieved from Factiva database.

economic intelligence independently of the United States',[61] and concluded that this was preliminary evidence of Japan's desire to 'acquire the full spectrum of great power capabilities and its desire to seek international recognition of its great power status'.[62] Similarly, Samuel P. Huntington also warned:

> In the 1930s Chamberlain and Daladier did not take seriously what Hitler said in *Mein Kampf*. Truman and his successors did take it seriously when Stalin and Khrushchev said, We will bury you. Americans would do well to take equally seriously both Japanese declarations of their goal of achieving economic dominance and the strategy they are pursuing to achieve that goal.[63]

The assumptions behind the 'Yellow Peril' discourse against Japan in the 1990s are shared by more alarmist analyses of Sino–African relations today. The first of these assumptions is that China and Japan are/were both perceived by the West as a threat to the Western traditional dominance. Recent debates surrounding Sino–African relations may be more than just a simple concern over China's threat to the welfare of Africa and African peoples. Rather, they implicitly reflect deeply-rooted Western anxieties that their traditional dominance in Africa is about to be overthrown by a non-Western power (a trend perhaps accelerated by the recent global financial crisis), and that this is part of a broader trend of American and European decline.

This is why academic and political debates surrounding Sino–African relations are obsessed by the question of whether or not China's growing role on the continent is another manifestation of the 'China threat'. The underlying assumption of zero-sum competition between Asia and the West, which is a hallmark of the 'Yellow Peril' thesis, means that the PRC is axiomatically seen as a threat to the West's privileged position in Africa. In this context, many critics of China's Africa policy frequently fail to contextualize their arguments by considering the possibility that the EU could also be seen as a threat to the region. Europe's dominance in Africa has often been criticized for neocolonialism by African analysts,[64] and it is also worth noting that its economic presence still overshadows that of China's.[65]

It is, of course, possible to argue for the existence of a 'China exception' rule, in the sense that it is not Asian powers that get treated as a threat: rather, it is *China* that tends to be—perhaps unfairly—at the receiving end of the bulk of Western criticisms and fears, while other Asian states are hardly criticized. There is certainly a grain of truth to this point. For instance, Japan has hardly been criticized for its trade ties with Sudan, even though it was one of Sudan's key export partners along

61. Christopher Layne, 'The unipolar illusion: why new great powers will rise', *International Security* 17(4), (1993), p. 38.

62. *Ibid*., p. 37.

63. Samuel P. Huntington, 'Why international primacy matters', *International Security* 17(4), (1993), p. 76.

64. Chukwuma Charles Soludo, 'From Berlin to Brussels: will Europe underdevelop Africa again?', *New African* 516, (2012), pp. 10–17; see also Adebajo, 'An axis of evil?'.

65. In 2009, the EU's share of trade in Africa was 63.5%, as opposed to China's 13.9%. In the case of FDI flows to African countries, the EU's share between the years 2005 and 2010 was 43.7%, as opposed to China's 0.9%. See African Development Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, United Nations Development Programme and The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *African Economic Outlook 2011: Africa and its Emerging Partners* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011), pp. 97, 101.

with China.[66] Yet, such 'China-bashing' has interesting parallels with 'Japan bashing' that was prevalent in the early 1990s, and this suggests a thread of continuity in these discourses that cannot simply be reduced to factors unique to China. It is telling that some of the literature—consciously or not—uses the term 'China Inc.', which originates from 'Japan Inc.' and was used in the 'Japan threat' theses. It was seen as 'synonymous with a broader Japanese undertaking to pursue economic success regardless of the social and environmental costs at home or the detriment to relations with other nations, particularly the United States',[67] just like the PRC is accused of doing today in Africa.

The second of the assumptions shared by the Western study of Sino–Africa relations and the 'Yellow Peril' discourse is a curious sense of *cultural* bias which casts Asian states—be they democratic or authoritarian, as seen from the examples of the China and Japan threat theses—as entities that are somehow fundamentally different from the West, and therefore a threat. The result is an almost knee-jerk reaction that sees any influences in Africa other than Western ones as immoral and undesirable.

One famous example of this line of thinking comes from Samuel P. Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis, which posited that future conflicts would take place between different civilizations, rather than states. Here, states were deemed potential threats not only because of their potential to be strategic peer rivals to the US, but primarily because they were *culturally fundamentally different*. It is interesting to note that Germany—which like Japan was at times touted as a potential challenger to US hegemony in the early 1990s by some structural realists[68]—somehow gets taken off the list of potential enemies of the US, by the simple virtue of it apparently belonging to the zone of Western Christianity. Japan and China remain in different civilizational entities. Huntington assumes that different civilizations will almost inevitably clash, and the fact that Japan and China are different means that they will necessarily be a threat to Western civilization.[69] Although Huntington's controversial argument has been subjected to a wide range of criticisms,[70] other analysts seem to share Huntington's assumption that cultural difference somehow produces a threat to global stability. Emma Mawdsley's research into British broadsheet newspapers' representations of China and Africa shows that many pundits seem to reproduce implicitly the dichotomy between an inherently 'unethical' non-West and an 'ethical' West whose dominance is ultimately good for the rest of the world. Thus:

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66. The 2005 CIA World Fact Book, for instance, places Japan second behind China as Sudan's export partner, with 10.7% of the share of Sudanese exports. China had 66.9%, and Saudi Arabia, at 4.4%, came third. These can be accessed from http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/lps35389/ (accessed 9 February 2013).

67. Narrelle Morris, *Japan Bashing: Anti-Japanism since the 1980s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 23–24. In the China–Africa case, see for example: Gill and Reilly, 'The tenuous hold of China Inc. in Africa'. We are grateful to the anonymous reviewer's comments in helping us to develop this point further.

68. John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security* 15 (1), (1990), pp. 5–56; Layne, 'The unipolar illusion', pp. 5–51.

69. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', pp. 22–49.

70. For example Robert W. Cox, *The Political Economy of a Plural World: Critical Reflections on Power, Morals and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2002); Gerard Delanty, 'The making of a post-Western Europe: a civilizational analysis', *Thesis Eleven* 72(1), (2003), pp. 8–25; John Mandalios, 'Civilizational complexes and processes: Elias, Nelson and Eisenstadt', in Gerard Delanty and Engin F. Isin, eds, *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (London: Sage, 2003).

> Western actors—businesses, governments, national and international development NGOs—are typically portrayed as benign ... the mistakes of the past have been addressed, and the West is now the architect and energizer of a new drive towards good governance and development, with aid now accompanied by ethical conditionalities, while reformed commercial practices promise investment and trade that will enhance development rather than line the pockets of kleptocratic elites.[71]

The growing stature of the PRC in the African continent therefore not only becomes a strategic threat to the West: it also challenges deeply-rooted notions of the Western 'self'. As Mawdsley notes, 'Western political imaginaries of itself in relation to Africa remain dominated by an enduring notion of trusteeship, despite a long and ongoing history of exploitation, and lack of sufficient action to address systemic inequalities and injustice'.[72] US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton seemed to echo this theme when she stated that China must join the US efforts to support democracy and increase transparency in economic activities, otherwise we will see a 'new colonialism' on the continent:

> We are ... concerned that China's foreign assistance and investment practices in Africa have not always been consistent with generally accepted international norms of transparency and good governance, and that it has not always utilised the talents of the African people in pursuing its business interests.[73]

The 'Yellow Peril' discourse is also related to the issue of a perceived lack of China's 'responsibility' in its Africa policy. The PRC is criticized for its 'security free riding' and unwillingness 'to work with the international and African regional community',[74] which leads to the limited degree of Sino–Western cooperation in providing stability and security to Africa.[75] While it is true that the Chinese side does display reluctance to coordinate their Africa policies with a third party such as the US and EU, Western analysts frequently fail to question whether or not the uncritical acceptance of Western moral superiority, assumed benevolence towards Africa, or intellectual influences of the 'Yellow Peril' discourse result in a problematic *Western* refusal to coordinate its policies with the Chinese. This argument again shares a similarity with so-called 'Japan bashing', where a decidedly 'selfish' Japanese identity was constructed in order to warn against the threat a rising Japan would pose to Western dominance. Japan was, in similar fashion to China in Africa, accused of free-riding on American security provision, and 'reneging on its moral obligations to the United States, which it allegedly owed as a result of the United States' post-war

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71. Emma Mawdsley, 'Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone in the dark continent? Representing China, Africa and the West in British broadsheet newspapers', *Political Geography* 27(5), (2008), pp. 519–520.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 512; see also William Pfaff, 'A new colonialism? Europe must go back into Africa', *Foreign Affairs* 74(1), (1995), pp. 2–6.

73. Cited in Andrew Quinn, 'Clinton warns Africa of China's economic embrace', *Reuters*, (10 June 2011), available at: http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/06/10/us-clinton-africa-idUSTRE75962920110610 (accessed 23 February 2013).

74. Holslag and Van Hoeymissen, eds, *The Limits of Socialization*, p. 11.

75. Exceptions include UK–China–Africa trilateral cooperation. See UK Department for International Development website, available at: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Where-we-work/Asia-East-Pacific/China/, and UK National Archives, *Minutes for the Africa–Britain–China Conference on Agriculture and Fisheries*, available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dfid.gov.uk/documents/china-africa/mins-afr-brit-ch-conf-agr-fish.pdf (accessed 18 February 2013).

contributions to and support of Japan'.[76] It was also blamed for using its growing power irresponsibly, as epitomized by then *Newsweek* editor Robert J. Samuelson, who 'argued ... that Japan had acquired global responsibilities "before being capable, psychologically and politically, of discharging them"'.[77]

What is to be done? Burning questions of Sino–African relations

This article has analyzed why so much ink has been spilt to assess whether or not China is a unique threat to Africa, even though the conclusions have often indicated that the Chinese have acted neither better nor worse than many Western actors. We have argued that the study of Sino–African relations is closely linked with the Western governments' geostrategic interests, and that both sides of the debate remain deeply influenced by the Eurocentrism and the 'Yellow Peril' discourse that continue to linger in IR. These studies bring with them a myopic agenda that revolves almost exclusively around the question of China's 'challenge' to the West.

What, then, needs to be done to find new questions in Sino–African relations that go beyond national security and Western-centric agendas? We suggest a number of possible paths. First, the research agenda needs to be defined with attention paid to historical continuity, rather than simply following policy/academic 'fashions'. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, China's Africa policy has transformed every decade or two: from its support for proletarian revolutions in the 1960s, counter-hegemony to the US and to the Soviet Union in the 1970s, promotion of African self-reliance (a rhetorical term for indicating China's waning of interest in Africa) in the 1980s and 1990s, and to its return to Africa.[78] China's increasing interest in Africa may be 'hot' in scholarship today, but who can be sure that China will not lose interest in Africa again in the next decade?

Second, Chinese perspectives need to be explored further. Despite its official stance, China's primary foreign policy goals and interests are still based on its relations with the developed powers, particularly the US and Japan, not in the developing world.[79] It therefore does not have many Africanists compared to specialists on the developed powers. Yet, there is a growing number of institutions specializing in the study of Africa (such as Zhejiang Normal University, Xiangtan University, Beijing University, Chinese Foreign Affairs University, Yunnan University and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences). Furthermore, the nature of Chinese studies of Sino–African relations is undergoing a change. As mentioned earlier, previous research was frequently reactive to *Western* debates of Sino–African relations, and often resulted in defensive essays refuting Western criticisms

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76. Morris, *Japan Bashing*, p. 25.

77. *Ibid*.

78. Joshua Eisenman, 'China's post-Cold War strategy in Africa: examining Beijing's methods and objectives', in Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham and Derek Mitchell, eds, *China and the Developing World: Beijing's Strategy for the Twenty-First Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007).

79. Peter Van Ness, 'China as a third world state: foreign policy and official national identity', in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds, *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); Shogo Suzuki, 'Journey to the west: China debates its "great power" identity', paper presented at *Sino–Australian Security Relations: Regional Cooperation in an Interdependent World conference*, Australian National University, Canberra (October 2007).

of the PRC's role in Africa. However, there is emerging Chinese literature that goes beyond defending and promoting Beijing's Africa policies. Some have been critical of Chinese reliance on (outdated) Western stereotypes to understand Africa,[80] while others have critiqued Chinese officials for their lack of initiative in realizing cooperation agreements.[81] There is also increasing appreciation of exploitation of Africans by rapacious Chinese entrepreneurs, and that this is harmful to Chinese foreign policy goals.[82] Greater engagement is needed with these critical voices that exist in China. Furthermore, a number of Chinese scholars are now conducting field research in Africa for a lengthy period, and they bring an empirically rich and critical research to the study of Sino–African relations that go beyond the confined nature of the debate that serves the strategic interests of governments.[83]

Relevant to the second point, the third path is to encourage *Chinese and African scholars* to set the research agendas of China–Africa relations. The majority of the literature on Sino–African relations in English is written by US and European scholars who work on Africa, security and development, and international relations, with a heavy reliance on English-language materials. This, as Daniel Large correctly concludes, has 'the danger of playing out a self-referential logic',[84] as well as reproducing the national security agendas of Western states. The study of Sino–African relations therefore needs to be diversified further and reflect more African perspectives, rather than Western strategic anxieties. Sino–African relations are indeed the result of generalization of the relationship between China and individual African states. Yet, among 54 countries in Africa, there are only about a dozen countries that often attract attention in the study of Sino–African relations, such as Sudan, Angola and Zimbabwe. In recent years, however, there has been a welcome

80. Li Xiaoyun, 'Zhongguo yao gaibian ziji de feizhou guan' ['China needs to change its own views of Africa'], *Fenghuang zhoukan*, (15 June 2011).

81. Zhou Haijin, 'Lun xin shiqi zhongke wenhua yu hezuo' ['Sino–Cameroon cultural exchange and cooperation in the new era'], *Zhejiang shifan daxue xuebao* [*Journal of Zhejiang Normal University*] (Social Sciences) 36(4), (2011), pp. 16–20.

82. Zhao Minghao, 'Zhongfei minjian jiaowang: jinzhan ji mianlin de tiaozhan' ['Sino–African civilian interactions: developments and challenges faced'], *Guoji zhanwang* [*International Perspective*] 6, (2010), pp. 49–62.

83. Examples include Chen Fenglan, 'Wenhua chongtu yu kuaguo qianyi qunti de shiying celüe: yi nanfei zhongguo xinyimin qunti weili' ['Cultural differences and strategies for adaptation by transnational immigration group: a case study of new Chinese immigrants in South Africa'], *Huaqiao Huaren Lishi Yanjiu* [*Overseas Chinese History Studies*] 3, (2011), pp. 41–49; and Guo Zhanfeng, Li Xiaoyun and Qi Gubo, 'Zhongfei xiaonong jiating nongye shengchan zuzhi guocheng duibi fenxi: jiyu feizhou sancun de tianye diaocha' ['Comparative analysis of the processes of small-scale household agricultural production organizations in China and Africa: based on fieldwork in three villages in Africa'], *Guangxi Minzu Daxue Xuebao* [*Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities*] (Philosophy and Social Science Edition) 34(2), (2012), pp. 82–89. A number of Chinese scholars also advocate the conducting of field research as one of the key methods for 'Chinese African studies'. See, Ma Yankun, 'Renleixue feizhou yanjiu ji zhongguo xueke jiangou de xianshi suqiu' ['Anthropolitical African studies and the realistic seeking for its course building in China'], *Xiya Feizhou* [*West Asia and Africa*] 7, (2010), pp. 26–31; Liu Hongwu, 'Zai guoji xueshu pingtai yu sixiang gaodishang jiangou guojia huayuquan: Zailun jiangou you tese zhi "zhongguo feizhouxue" de teshu shidai yiyi' ['To construct Chinese national discourse rights on international academic platform and ideological high ground: a further study on the special significance of the era of constructing a unique "Chinese African studies"'], *Xiya Feizhou* [*West Asia and Africa*] 5, (2010), pp. 17–23; and Liu Hongwu, 'Guoji sixiang jingzheng yu feizhou yanjiu de zhongguo xuepai' ['International competition of thoughts and the Chinese school of African studies'], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [*International Politics Quarterly*] 4, (2011), pp. 89–97.

84. Daniel Large, 'Beyond "dragon in the bush": the study of China–Africa relations', *African Affairs* 107(426), (2008), p. 58.

trend of global research collaboration among scholars from China, Africa, the West and other parts of the world. For example, 'The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network'—a global independent network which has been hosted by the University of Johannesburg and Rhodes University—aims to facilitate discussions and collaboration on social, economic and political research on issues relating to people-to-people encounters.[85] More of these kinds of efforts will be necessary to diversify and deepen the study of Sino–African relations.

Research by African scholars may find both Western and Chinese policies on the continent contrary to African interests,[86] or could even demonstrate that support for Chinese policies in Africa is not limited to 'isolated autocrats' alone.[87] Whichever way, these works have the potential to serve as a powerful critique to the dichotomous and myopic debates of the 'China threat' that has impoverished the debate on Sino–African relations. It will also help overcome complacent Western views that Western ideological influences are axiomatically 'universal' and will be welcomed by the peoples throughout the world.

Fourth, it is important to take an anthropological perspective to what is often regarded by the West as universal concepts, such as democracy, human rights, security, poverty and development. While these are the major themes of the study of Sino–African relations, the meaning of these terms varies depending on the region. When using terms that originated in the West in a different context, researchers could fall into the trap of using a square peg in a round hole. The study of Sino–African relations is even more complicated, given that it requires examination of such terms in at least three different contexts—one in Africa, one in the West and one in China. It is essential to scrutinize how each actor conceptualizes these basic terms.

But more fundamentally, we need to overcome the deep sense of Western exceptionalism that has continued to color the lenses by which we view international politics. As has been noted with reference to Orientalism in strategic studies, it

> ... is not enough to show that myths about the enemy are empirically flawed. The exotic eastern warrior will not stop being a silhouette in the Western imagination. We therefore need to ask why, to understand what motivates our fascination in the first place, and recognise that these myths are powerful codes through which Westerners debate about themselves .... One-dimensional caricatures of Oriental warfare reflect the anxieties, fears, ambitions, confidence or self-doubt of Western observers ...[88]

In many respects, the same critique could be applied to the study of Sino–African relations today. Much of the literature that voices fears that China is systematically undermining Western influence and power on the African continent (as well as the

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85. Yoon Jung Park, e-mail messages to the authors, 26 February and 10 August 2013.

86. See for example Adebajo, 'An axis of evil?'; Lloyd Sachikonye, 'Crouching tiger, hidden agenda? Zimbabwe–China relations', in Ampiah and Naidu, eds, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

87. See Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, 'African perspectives on China–Africa links', *The China Quarterly* 199, (2009), pp. 728–759.

88. Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009).

stream of literature that refutes it) is more a debate about the West's own deep-seated anxieties, rather than what the PRC is actually doing or not doing in Africa. Such thinking, however, not only serves to impoverish our scholarship and understanding of China and Africa's interactions, but also has the danger of unnecessarily creating a new 'China threat' edifice which is nothing but a by-product of Western fears that its influence and thinking are no longer regarded as 'universal' and 'authoritative'.