

Forum*: China's Silk Road Economic Belt: African perspectives and implications¹

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Abstract

This forum piece seeks to probe the connection between China and Africa regarding the current Chinese concept dubbed the “Silk Road Economic Belt”, variously referred to by such synonyms such as “new Silk Road”, “Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road”, “Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road” and “Silk Road of the Sea”. What are the historical antecedents of the African dimension of this new Chinese zeitgeist? How is Africa featuring in the embryonic stages of this multifarious concept - one that has indeed been elevated to the heights of international relations policy levels? What are the historical, diplomatic, economic and cultural implications for Africa and what steps is China likely to take in the months and years

**Forum contributions are discursive and topical articles written by authors to encourage debate or share new information and ideas. Forum articles do not form part of the peer-reviewed section of the AEAA but contribute by extending the academic discussion beyond the limits of a review process.*

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ahead? How will Africans, especially African leaders and policymakers, respond to the anticipated implementation of the concept? I conclude by posing a couple of forward looking issues including perspectives on how African leaders and policymakers might react to the Silk Road when its anticipated roll out in Africa begins.

Introduction

This forum piece seeks to probe the connection between China and Africa regarding the current Chinese concept dubbed the 'Silk Road Economic Belt', variously referred to by such synonyms such as "new Silk Road", "Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road", "Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road" and "Silk Road of the Sea". What are the historical antecedents of the African dimension of this new Chinese zeitgeist? How is Africa featuring in the embryonic stages of this multifarious concept - one that has indeed been elevated to the heights of international relations policy levels? What are the historical, diplomatic, economic and cultural implications for Africa and what steps is China likely to take in the months and years ahead? How will Africans, especially African leaders and policymakers, respond to the anticipated implementation of the concept?

To answer these questions, I first trace the historical background informing the African dimension of the Silk Road Economic Belt. This is followed by a discussion of the literature on the Silk Road with a view to understanding the thoughts it has elicited from the intellectual and academic communities in China, Africa and globally. The analysis inculcates content from Xinhua News Agency, purposefully selected as representative of Chinese media reporting on the topic. Xinhua is considered the most appropriate in these regards because, as the sole state-run wire service, it is known to set the pace for the articulation of the Chinese party-state's voice on key issues³. Indeed, Xinhua News Agency rolled out a media campaign to promote the concept entitled: "China's Initiatives on Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk Road" in April 2014 (Xinhua, 2014). It is worth pointing out here that my initial diligent search for overt coverage of the new Silk

Road by leading African news media returned a blank on the topic, thus, we leave out African media. With respects to “Western media”, I take the view that analysis would be critical in keeping with the long held view that such organizations are inclined to pursue a less than rosy image of not only China but on occasion, Africa and even their own governments.

After synthesis of the literature, I assess to the implications which this new international policy has for Africa. I conclude by posing a couple of forward looking issues including perspectives on how African leaders and policymakers might react to the Silk Road when its anticipated roll out in Africa begins.

Background

Leafing through the flood that is China-Africa literature, it is nearly a given that any historical account on the topic must of necessity begin with, or at least take cognizance of the Ming Dynasty, Admiral Zheng He. He is lionized as a Muslim eunuch and intrepid leader of the Chinese expedition that made a pioneering foray onto the African continent. Such are his exploits that Life Magazine lists him as the fourteenth most influential man of the second millennium, even ahead of Chairman Mao Zedong, founder of modern China (Top 100 people of the Millennium, 2002).

The historical dimension of Zheng He’s voyages are part folk yarn, part archeologically backed. Historical accounts indicate that his fleet of as many as 300 ships navigated by a force of 28,000 sailors, docked on Africa’s east coast (Mogadishu and Kismayu in Somalia, Lamu and Malindi in Kenya) in 1418. This was well ahead of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator, who touched the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 – a fact that brings in competitive narratives between China and the West over the longevity of their contact with Africa. Pointed out with equal zeal by the Chinese side, has been the fact that the pioneering armada to East Africa came not to conqueror ill-armed local inhabitants but rather to seek trade links.

The trade dimensions of these early contacts are captured in the fact that the Chinese mariners brought porcelains, silks, lacquer ware, and fine-art objects. In turn, so goes

the well worn narrative, they went back with items such as ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, rare woods, incense, medicinal herbs, pearls and precious stones. The symbolic perceptions are deciphered in the fact that on at least one such occasion, the voyagers conveyed zebras and giraffes to the Ming dynasty ruling elite. Artistic impressions and written accounts of these tropical mammals, so exotic to China’s temperate climate, have been cited as evidence of China-East Africa contact eon upon eon ago.

As China’s Silk Road initiative begins to take shape, it will without doubt build on resuscitating these ancient links. Over the past couple of years, evidence of such links have been vigorously explored. British archaeologist Mark Horton³ excavated in the Kenyan villages of Shanga in Lamu between 1980 and 1986. He wrote a monograph; *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa* for the British Institute in eastern-Africa, which provided new information on the Chinese voyages. In 1996, an American, Louise Levathes⁴, wrote a book entitled *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405 – 1433*, describing how the Chinese *bao chuan* (treasure ships) came to Malindi, Kenya. Another American journalist from the New York Times travelled to Lamu, interviewed residents and wrote an article suggesting that China and Africa had been in contact 600 years before (Bodomo, 2012).

In the early 2000s, a coin with East Asian features, probably Chinese, was discovered in northern Australia and thought to have originated from Kilwa, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Southern Tanzania (Live Science, 2013). In 2006, China erected a replica of Zheng He’s treasure ship⁵ at a shipyard in Nanjing, an indication that the admiral’s sojourns in the Middle East, south-East Asia and eastern -Africa – the maritime Silk Road – were subject of China’s penchant for historical icons.

Archaeologists and anthropologists investigating the matter were of the view that Shanga village, thought to be named for the present Shanghai city, was the place where one of the Zheng He’s ships was wrecked nearly 600 years ago. Additionally, some local inhabitants had “Chinese characteristics”, in other words, oriental

physical features. This was bolstered by ancient tombs distinct from local Muslim burial graves and decorated with Chinese ceramics. In 2005, DNA tests irrefutably confirmed that a family in Washanga or Shanga village of Siyu islet, Lamu, bore Chinese genetic make-up traceable to Jiangsu province. Notable among them was Dr Mwamaka Sharifu – dubbed the “Chinese girl” by the media⁶ – who has since become the modern face of these ancient events. She earned a Chinese scholarship and is currently studying for a master’s degree at the Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Such past events add, from the present day vantage point, a potent people-to-people dimension to the modern project. In 2005, the Chinese government held the 600 anniversary of Zheng He’s expeditions in Jiangsu, exemplifying the admiral as a bridge between China and East Africa.

With information about Chinese contact with the East African coast rapidly spreading through China-Africa scholarship and in the media, the Chinese and Kenyan governments signed an agreement in 2005 for joint archaeological excavation, which ultimately kicked off in 2010. The Sino-Kenya terrestrial and marine archaeological exploration project was a US\$ 2.4 million project. Notably, this historical-cum-cultural project was funded by China’s Ministry of Commerce.

Fast forward

The Ming Dynasty expeditions and therefore the maritime Silk Road are said to have been abruptly terminated for a variety of speculative reasons pieced together by historians⁷. In the 19th Century, contacts between China and East Africa resumed when some 2,000 Chinese workers were brought to Tanzania by colonial Germany to build the Dar es Salaam to Mwanza railway (1400 are said to have died) (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012). It is interesting to note however that the recent flurry of activity in the Silk Road formulation comes at a time when Chinese resources are being used for the construction of a railway between Mombasa, through Kenya and into Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan.

China has mobilised significant “soft power” out of her old connections with East Africa. These ancient contacts are today an important source of her diplomatic *raison d’être* in Africa. In 2010, when the former Chinese ambassador to Kenya, Liu

Guangyuan received the so-called Peace Ark – a Chinese navy ship laden with medical personnel and equipment for free medical check-ups and treatment of Kenyans in the coastal city of Mombasa – he struck a historical chord by linking the ship to what he called “Giraffe Diplomacy”, drawing on Zheng He’s voyages in the fifteenth Century⁸. Standing with local and Chinese guests overlooking the Indian Ocean, the ambassador narrated how the Chinese voyager and his retinue had gone back to China with a giraffe that was then kept in the Ming Dynasty court as a symbol of luck. It is worth noting that in the recent past, in 2014, other such Chinese navy fleets have called on the coasts of South Africa, Namibia and Angola (Xinhua, 2014a; Xinhua, 2014b).

And just as Zheng’s massive fleet of treasure vessels of the fifteenth century brought exotic oriental goods, the Peace Ark mission of 2010 equally wowed when it docked on the Kenyan shores: a rescue helicopter on board, 32 medical departments, 300 hospital beds and a wide range of diagnostic medical equipment. Kenyans in various states of indisposition flogged the ship for a week. It then glided away to the Dar es Salaam port and on to the Seychelles to bless other shores with its “good luck”. The re-enactment of the earlier voyages via a navy-cum-medical ship sought to tie together conventional diplomacy, medical diplomacy, historical diplomacy and political diplomacy⁹. This is but one instance of China’s skill in bundling symbolism with pragmatism in Africa since the 1960s - a skill which is likely to be deployed in discourses articulating China’s Silk Road.

FOCAC as a shaper of the China-Africa Silk Road

From the foregoing historical account, it is evident that the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road strikes deep symbolism in the relations between China and Africa. For instance, that Zheng He’s exploits are of immense symbolic significance to China was evident at the July 2012 edition of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). China’s Director General at the International Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture Ms Hou Xianghua announced that her country would build a park on the Kenyan coast and plant a sculptured bronze statue of Zheng He there (Wekesa, 2014). Indeed some have referred to activities of unveiling Zheng as

“China’s marine diplomacy” and “soft power at sea” one that could be leveraged to China’s construction of the maritime Silk Road via the Mombasa port as indicated by the “Silk Road Economic Belt” maps (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2006:244).

Literature Synthesis

Zheng He’s expeditions to the East African coast have in the recent past been pressed into the service of legitimising what is now known as the “maritime silk road”. However, the polemics that are likely to be sparked by China’s appropriation of the maritime Silk Road will elicit contestation about the dating of the Indian Ocean trade sea routes. If Zheng He’s visits have been primed as having predated the colonial settlement of Europeans on the East Africa coast, the contestation would be that Marco Polo’s thirteen century travels were much earlier and, in turn, maritime trade between Africa and other Asian regions had been going on for at least two centuries before Marco Polo (MacEgan, 2014).

The whole coinage of the phrase has become a contest in symbolism. In 1999 and 2006, the United States of America (US) Congress issued and updated *The Silk Road Strategy Act* to maintain US influence in Eurasia. In 2004, *China Daily* published an article outlining China’s concept of its Silk Road as a Eurasian “land bridge” connecting China to Europe across the Eurasian continent (Lin, 2011). The connection here, as we saw above, is that 2005 is the year when the African perspectives of the Silk Road via Zheng He-related initiatives rose to prominence with East Africa as the beachhead.

In the immediate present, before the concept rose to the status of official Chinese geo-political policy, it had been used by US officials with a nearly similar road, maritime and air infrastructure vision – “The New Silk Road Initiative” – from 2011 onwards (Tracy, 2013). Indeed, former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton chaired a conference dubbed the “New Silk Road” in New York with 30 Asian nations, as one of her last Asia-focused diplomacy before retirement. This was in the context of the withdrawal of US’ armed forces from Afghanistan. In what amounts to “who blinks first”, it would thus appear that the Chinese authorities may have plucked the rug under the US’ feet, at least in terms of deploying the phrase to its global geo-

political intents. As far as Africa is concerned, it is likely to be same competitive “who blinks first” as the recalibration of global financial and political architecture gallops apace.

The point to note in undertaking a loose content analysis of Xinhua News Agency’s coverage, is the sheer preponderance of the coverage of the China’s Silk Road Economic Belt concept¹⁰. As explained above, Xinhua News Agency takes the cue from the Chinese party-state and thus, we can conclude that the Chinese Silk Road and Economic Belt is a product of a well thought out plan. Furthermore, we can conclude that the Chinese Silk Road and Economic Belt is part of China’s grand strategy, as well as its Comprehensive National Power design. It is in this context that Xinhua’s promotional special issue on the topic beginning April 2014 should be seen. However, it is evident that Xinhua reporting is heavily tilted towards the Eurasia and the South East Asia regions with only three articles focused on Africa for the whole period from April to December 2014. A perspective we nevertheless glean from the reporting is that the coasts of Kenya and Egypt will likely be the landing sites for the African Silk Road as they are focused on in three articles. Interesting absences in the literature are the Indian Ocean countries of Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius that – speculatively – seem to have been part of the ancient Silk Road!

The new Silk Road has been primed as Chinese economic diplomacy calculated to advance China’s economic expansion to the world as a counter to the Western countries and supranational financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (Kemp, 2014). When the US\$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund was unveiled in 2014, it was bundled with China’s promotion of a new US\$ 50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which South Korea and Australia declined to join ostensibly due to pressure from officials in Washington, which went all the way up to Secretary of State John Kerry and President Barack Obama himself (Kemp, 2014). The apprehension by the West is that war chests such as the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank could be used by countries not accessing funds from the West, this being a lamentation that African countries have long expressed.

The new Silk Road has been imagined as a challenge to the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) announced early 2014 by the Obama administration, aimed at creating a Free Trade Area in the Asia Pacific region with the exclusion of China and obviously, the preclusion of Africa. Geo-political perspectives can be seen in the deduction that the TPP builds on the US' pivot to Asia thought to be a scheme to encircle and contain China in its East Asian "sphere of influence". Africa has not featured directly in the pivot to Asia discussions. However as this balance of power manoeuvring gains pace, it is likely that Africa will be drawn in one way or another. For instance, analysts have linked the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to the BRICS US\$ 100 billion New Development Bank to be headquartered in Shanghai. Africa is represented in the BRICS by South Africa and South Africa has often argued that it is not in the BRICS for its own national interests but as representative for wider continental interests. Still, there is a broken link between China and Africa in that China's own Free Trade Agreement for Asia and the Pacific (FTAAP) – as an answer to the TPP – equally and obviously precludes Africa. Notably, the Chinese authorities have invited all APEC member-states (in which Africa is geographically precluded) to join the FTAAP (Zepp-LaRouche, 2014), thus, African leaders would be interested in figuring out what avenues exist for their participation in this unfurling globalization 2.0. This is regardless of President Xi Jinping's words (in the context of the Silk Road and APEC) to the effect that he 'recognise(d) the positive actions both (China and the US) have taken in helping African countries (Zepp-LaRouche, 2014).

Much as the new Silk Road details China's global protrusion, a review of the literature indicates that its objectives are currently best articulated with regards to transport corridors in the Eurasian region even though there are contestations here over the prioritisation of the western, central or southern corridors (Pradumna, Rana and Chia, 2014). Some have gone as far as lobbying for the pivotal role that some Asian countries would play in the structural development of the new Silk Road¹¹. In the cartographic models that have been generated, Africa features not by road extensions but by a maritime route that touches Mombasa on the East African coast with a short dash to Nairobi and then extends via the Red Sea to Egypt. Egypt with

its Suez Canal that links northern Africa, Europe and the Levant with Asia is crucial for the new Silk Road today as it was in the ancient times. Indeed, rather than the flow of traders coming from China or Asia to northern Africa, it is recorded that trading caravans escaping the expansion of the Roman empire established trade routes the other way – into Asia (Chaturvedy, 2014).

Much of the literature hardly accounts for the African dimension of the new Silk Road, mentioning it only in passing. It is worth pointing out that the ancient maritime Silk Road did not necessarily and directly extend to Nairobi. In this, we see the possibility that the Chinese framers of the new Silk Road are prepared to use the ancient Silk Road as the launch pad for newly minted Silk Roads! Nonetheless, it is not far-fetched to suppose that the African dimension of the Silk Road is currently a matter of conjecture rather than based on overt official articulations as happened in much of south-East Asia, south and central-Asia, eastern and central-Europe and in parts of western-Europe. Analysis seeking to factor in African perspectives would therefore need to consider where Africa stands in China’s grand strategy. Some sources indicate that the grand strategy includes:

“Acquisition of comprehensive national power with an eye on global great power that is second to none, access to global natural resources, raw materials, and overseas markets to sustain China’s economic expansion, pursuit of the ‘three Ms’: military build-up, multilateralism, and multi-polarity; and creation of a worldwide network of friends and allies”. (Chaturvedy, 2014)

Literature shows that China’s interests in the Silk Road are more inclined towards economic considerations and geopolitical considerations only secondarily. In the specific African circumstances, security concerns such as those seen in the evacuation of Chinese nationals from Libya in 2011 and the anti-piracy activities by the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Gulf of Aden, are motivated by securing economic interests there (Lin, 2011). But because China’s military presence could be construed along the lines of the “China Threat” in eastern-Africa’s Indian Ocean regions, it has been argued that the Zheng He narrative would help recall China’s peaceful intentions in the past as in the present (Li, 2005), away from

the spectre of a rising, neo-colonial and aggressive power.

Vague as China's Silk Road Economic Belt may seem, scholars have seen a link between it and China's acquisition [of] controlling and operational stakes in various container ports across the Indian Ocean Littoral, Coast of East Africa, and the Mediterranean. On the East African coast, China is involved in the construction or revamping of seaports in Kenya (Mombasa and Lamu), Tanzania (Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo) as well as interests in the ports and maritime transport shipping lines along the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt). This is seen as a means of securing sea lines for trade and ferrying of natural resources as well as quelling sea-based crime and piracy (Anthony, 2013). It has also been indicated that China (in partnership with Thailand) has fashioned a "Strategic Maritime Distribution Centres (SMDC)" initiative that would see to the construction and servicing of 12 ports and Sea Lines of Operation on the continent although details on which ports these would be is still hazy (Eyler, 2014).

Analysis of the implications for Africa

Any number of implications can be ascribed to China's Africa dimension of the new Silk Road. To start with, the fact that China's immediate neighbourhood in Asia and central and western-Europe seem to have been the targets of the concept is unlikely to impress African leaders and policymakers. This is particularly so considering that we are living in an era where China is such an important player that whatever major policy initiatives it rolls out, they are observed with more than passing keenness globally, Africa included.

On the cultural front, it appears that the pledge, during the 2012 FOCAC ministerial meeting, for the erection of the deeply symbolic statute of Zheng He in Mombasa, has not been met. If, or when, it is constructed, it would join the tombs of Chinese TAZARA construction workers who died and were interred in Dar es Salaam. It would stand in the same city where Fort Jesus, the Portuguese relic still stands but with the reminder that China did not built any forts used for conquering Africans. In the same vein, the release of the findings of the archaeological investigations in Kenya by the Kenyan National Museum and China National Museums/Peking

University that have been undertaken since 2010 would provide further “soft power” if China elects to promote the concept in Africa. Given that the promotion of the Silk Road in China and elsewhere in the Eurasian region has included artistic productions, the possibility of joint artistic endeavours around the ancient Silk Road – including China Central Television’s (CCTV) documentaries¹² on the topic, to fully fledged films – is not altogether far-fetched. Indeed, there are ample cultural resources and initiatives available when it comes to the promotion of Zheng He.

A related cultural consideration could take a decidedly educational approach. Many Africans are well familiar with the historical contacts between their countries and Europe – born of centuries of contact. Few however have an understanding and appreciation of the fifteenth century contacts. This stands in contrast to the fact that most literate Chinese are well familiar with the Chinese *bao chuan* (treasure ship) voyages to the “seas of the west”. Chinese and African educational officials could work together in the course of implementing the new Silk Road policy to insert these historical accounts into African curriculums.

Obviously, a question to be posed is whether China-Africa engagements have changed over the past 600 years since Zheng He’s voyage. Then, China brought porcelains, silks, lacquer ware, and fine-art objects to East African – all these being “manufactured products”. In turn, they went back with ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, rare woods, incense, medicinal herbs, pearls and precious stones – in other words “raw materials”. This is largely the case today with lamentations – right or erroneous – being that China’s trade relations with Africa are structured in such a way that Africa is a net importer of “finished” products and a net exporter of “unfinished” materials. It would be interesting to see how the African dimension of the Silk Road would address this conveyance of goods across the international waters. Would the Chinese authorities’ magnanimous pledges to help Africa climb up the value addition chain be part of the “new” Silk Road relations? Would Africans themselves see the Silk Road as a means to step up to the plate and fashion a shipping of manufactured rather than primary goods rather than whining incessantly over the matter?

It has been observed that the new Silk Road is a metaphor that finds its tangible implementation through free trade zones (the TPP for the US and the FTAAP for China) and financial vehicles such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank. This poses a challenge since – geographically speaking – Africa does not belong to any of these trade areas nor does it expressly qualify to benefit from the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank. The closest Africa gets to the proposed funds will be with respects to the US\$ 40 billion Silk Road fund – although again, these funds seem earmarked for projects in China’s littoral areas and toward Europe. Even the BRICS cannot be seen as directly beneficial to Africa notwithstanding South Africa’s ostensible representation of the continent. Indeed, apart from South Africa’s own economic challenges that distract it from effectively playing a financial support role for Africa, it (South Africa) has to reckon with competition from as such other continental rivals as Nigeria and Egypt (Wekesa, 2014).

Indeed, a dicey consideration in terms of the products shipped from Africa to China along the new Silk Road will be in relation to illegal wildlife poaching for products such as ivory and rhino horns. In the recent past, China (and other Asian countries) have been berated for their roles of omission or commission in these illegalities. Yet, latching on historical antecedents as the primer for the new Silk Road would bring to mind the fact that ivory and rhino horn were two of the valued products that Zheng He’s ships conveyed to Ming Dynasty China. On a more potentially salutary consideration, African governments could use the fact that Zheng He’s ships are said to have taken giraffes and zebras to the Middle Kingdom to donate just such wildlife to China. This innovation, if feasible, could come with lots of soft power for African nations. It would in a small measure demonstrate that, rather than being on a receiving end of Chinese largesse all the time, they can give something back.

A limiting factor in the African dimension of the new Silk Road is that it brushes the continent on the Kenyan coast and then travels via the Red Sea to Egypt. It can almost be anticipated that other African countries will feel envious of this exclusion. China does not have to strictly follow the ancient sea and land routes in constructing the new Silk Road. In these respects, an updated map linking the new Chinese-funded infrastructure on the continent could go a long way. In any case, just such a

proposal – for construction of pan-African road linkages – was made by Premier Li Keqiang during his April-May 2014 tour of the continent (Xinhua, 2014).

Throughout capitals in the West, analysts and strategists must be burning the midnight oil fashioning a response to China’s new geo-political tentacles. The Chinese Silk Road diplomacy is sure to trigger counter offers not just to the rest of the world but to Africa as well. Western powers already have a major naval presence on the continent. They would clearly be interested in upping their game. One positive picking for Africa – in what echoes the Cold War of yore – will be that western powers are likely to intensify their “return” to Africa if and when China clarifies its China-Africa Silk Road plans. A magic wand in China’s arsenal however is that in the recent past, it has been involved in quelling piracy off the coast of East Africa within the wider context of China’s contribution to Africa’s peace building efforts. Does peace and security offer pathways in which China could smooth its African Silk Road?

Conclusion

Traditionally, Africa is the continent where Chinese leaders initiate new diplomatic moves every New Year. With China’s Africa Silk Road still very much *tabula rasa*, the China-Africa academic community will be waiting to see if early 2016 will be a time for the moulding of an approach that can then be subjected to a more informed conversation. As things stand, much of the discussion will remain speculative. Whichever way things go, questions will be posed as to whether Africa will be spurned or not as China unfurls a major geopolitical plan into the future.

Endnotes

1. This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the Overseas Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road Conference at Jinan University, China, 13 December 2014, organised by Jinan University and the Chinese in Africa, Africans in China Research Network

2. The author acknowledges the support of the Wits China Africa Reporting Project housed in the Journalism Department, University of the Witwatersrand for continuing support in researching China-Africa issues from whence many of the perspectives in this paper are derived.
3. Professor Mark Horton of Bristol University is reputed as one of the foremost archaeologist on matters East African coast complete with a TV and documentary career in the field.
4. Levathes, a former National Geographic writer introduces her book with a dramatic tale of how each of Zheng He's ships were, "...the size of many houses...a city of ships".
5. As of July 2012, Xinhua News Agency reported that China was building a massive replica of "Zheng He Treasure Ship," that would debut sailing in 2014.
6. For instance In March 2012, CCTV Africa revisited the China-Lamu story and ran with the banner: *Zheng He's Peace Journey*.
7. The most plausible reason advanced is that the successor of the emperor of Yongle (who had been supportive of the expeditions) did not have time for the expeditions.
8. Guangyuan wrote in an opinion article in Kenya's leading newspaper, the Daily Nation drawing on the speech he had made during the event.
9. The political dimension was evident in the presence at the event of Kenya's former speaker of national assembly, Kenneth Marende and former Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka
10. Based on the author's wide reading of Xinhua's reporting from April 2014 to early December 2014
11. For more information see, Chulanee Attanayake, 2014, Sri Lanka; the Best Stop-over in China's Maritime Silk Road

12. See video: joint dig of ancient Malindi, <http://english.cntv.cn/program/cultureexpress/20120822/106754.shtml>

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