

# AFRICAN EAST-ASIAN AFFAIRS

## THE CHINA MONITOR

**Issue 3 | September 2014**

Frank Youngman

**Engaging academically with China in Africa:  
The institutional approach of the University of Botswana**

Peter Wasamba

**Prospects for Korean Studies in Africa:  
The case of The University of Nairobi**

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**The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network:  
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## African East-Asian Affairs

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The African East-Asian Affairs (AEAA) is an international, African based journal. It focuses on the developments and nuances of the relationship between Africa and East-Asian nations, including China, Japan, Korea and the ASEAN states. Topics covered include both the domestic developments and the international relations of these states, with a focus on their engagement with Africa. Articles published fall within the social sciences and related disciplines, such as politics, economics, environmental studies and law. The AEAA was formerly known as the China Monitor, a title that has now been reserved for special topical issues only. The journal has been in circulation since 2006. The AEAA in its current form was re-launched in 2012.

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## Editors introduction

By **Ross Anthony\***

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In anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss's 1962 book *The Savage Mind*, he uses the term "bricolage" to describe how societies draw on pre-existing materials to solve new problems. The "bricoleur" draws on "odds and ends" at hand to grapple with emergent realities. The field of "Asia-Africa" studies is, in many respects, a field of bricolage. As with any form of area studies, it demands a comprehensive approach in which no single field of analysis will suffice: the economic angle, the political angle, the development angle, the anthropological angle, even the engineering angle, are all constitutive tools which seek to articulate the "totality" of the engagement. To complicate matters, it is not simply a question of engaging in one area of study, but two. The field has, for instance, obliged the likes of Sinologists to become novice Africanists, and Africanists, novice Sinologists. And as any Africanist or Asian specialist worth their salt will tell you: Africa/Asia is not a single place, with a single culture; it is highly varied, with different dialects, languages and social structures. This is particularly pertinent to Africa, where the "China-Africa" discourse – notably in high level, official circles – sometimes comes perilously close to embracing "Africa is a country" mode of thinking. To complicate the field even more, the Asian-Africa engagement, at least in its post-1990s market-driven incarnation, is a novel form cross-continental engagement,

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upon which no prior template guides investigations. Until a decade ago, the literature on globalisation, its political, economic and cultural effects, was dominated by a single circuit: the West and the rest, and the flows to and from these dispersed but ultimately interlinked centres of developed-world power. The Asia-Africa branch of globalisation, part of an emerging “South-South” interconnectivity, is a rapidly emerging counter-current – a phenomenon whose understanding requires practitioners, analysts and theoreticians to draw on their existing disciplines in new and interesting ways; in short, obliging them to become bricoleurs.

### **The Centre for Chinese Studies and its partners**

The Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, testimony to how interest in China within an African context has grown from strength to strength over the past decade. But an even greater testimony to growth in this field has been the parallel rise of other institutions either focusing on the Asia-Africa relationship or functioning as Africa-based institutes teaching and researching on Asia. This special edition of AEAA offers a selection of papers by academics and practitioners who have been instrumental in pioneering in the field, offering an overview of the educational forms which exist with this area of study. Moving somewhat away from the journal’s usual scholarly tone, the papers share the experiences of running such institutions and will be of interest to those engaged in the management or setting up of similar institutions, as well as offering readers insight into how these institutions and networks have been built up. These papers are written by those who have already built up or have begun building Asia-Africa centres, networks and institutions. As a result these papers constitute primary participatory research on this process.

Setting up an Asian focused centre within an African context comes with its own unique set of challenges. One such challenge at the CCS has been forging a stable identity with regards to what the centre does. The centre has chosen as its key focus, the China Africa engagement; the topic has witnessed a phenomenal rise in relevance over the past decade and has a wide amount of interest, not only from actors within Africa but also more broadly, in China, the United States of Ameri-

ca, Europe and beyond. In this sense, the centre has tried to play on its strengths: being located in Africa means that research on the topic can be carried out comparatively easily; it also draws interest from non-African students carrying out China-Africa research, many of whom have made the CCS a temporary home during their fieldwork expeditions. For a long time being the only bricks and mortar research institute of its kind on the continent, the centre has attracted an extraordinary calibre of interest. Diplomats, special envoys, ministers, vice-rectors, counsellors, military personnel, officials from the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Europe Union (EU) and CEOs have visited the centre. Our relative isolation, coupled with the fact that the field of China-Africa studies has become such a hot international topic, has meant that the CCS has created a “niche market”.

Thankfully, this is no longer the case. As this special edition of AEAA showcases, there are now not only several Asian-focused institutes within Africa (the University of Botswana’s China programme and the University of Nairobi’s Korea programme) but also an incredibly healthy series of online networks covering this dimension of global affairs (The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Network and the China-Africa Project). In addition to the institutes covered in this edition, there are several other African institutes which devote at least part of their work to the Asia-Africa engagement, including the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), the Mapungubwe Institute, the Council for the Development of Social Science Development in Africa (CODESRIA), the Institute of China-Africa Studies in Southern Africa (ICASSA), the Centre for Japanese Studies at Gibbs Business School, amongst others. To quote Mao Zedong somewhat out of context: “Let a hundred flowers bloom!”

### **Contextualising “China-Africa”**

The open-ended nature of the field of study is surely a great strength. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, it seems like common sense that disciplinary cross pollination will better help apprehend the vast-scale social phenomena occurring around us and of which we are a part (this approach has its instrumental values too, in a world where “inter-disciplinary research” has become a term of

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great importance in the world of administrators, policy makers and donors). And yet, there is something lodged deep in the collective mind of institutions which finds the idea of the "open ended" intolerable. That which is often novel, contingent and experimental, can rapidly turn into dogma and orthodoxy. Signs of this are evident particularly in the "China-Africa" discourse. As certain scholars in this field of study have noted, there is a tendency to "bracket" out China's engagement in Africa from various other influences, particularly other international actors. So fixated on "what China is up to in Africa" – and certainly, there is an abundance of activity – this growing body of knowledge, can, to paraphrase Sautman and Hairong (2007), run the risk of not seeing "the forest for the trees". Thus, there exists the danger of "China-Africa" studies becoming a discipline which designates, and thus essentially fixes its object of study: China and Africa, no more and no less.

There is good reason as to why academic interest in, for instance, China-Africa related affairs, should strive to constantly contextualise the field of study within broader economic and geo-political contexts. For instance, China is increasingly engaging within Africa in both commercial and development projects with multinationals from other countries. China's presence on the continent, at least since the 1990s, should be viewed within the context of China's domestic shift toward increased integration into the global economy. China's "resource scramble" in Africa, for instance, goes not only into the development of China's rapidly growing middle class, but also toward massive consumer markets in regions such as Europe and North America. To take a single example, it is commonly asserted that China as an importer country is driving illegal logging in regions such as Africa. However, a *Forest Trends* report argues that a key driver of China's illegal logging is the "the critical role of developed countries, particularly the US and those in the EU, and their growing demand for low-cost forest products, as key 'drivers' in these global forest product commodity chains" (Sun, Cheng & Canby, 2005: 16). These vast global chains of which China's engagement in Africa are a part (and we could make similar linkages in resources such as oil, iron ore, copper and so forth) serve as a reminder of how un-reflexive dominant western discourses critical of China's

role in Africa are. In fact, we might even argue that that these regional and nation-state discourses, which put China and the West at odds with each other *vis-à-vis* Africa, obscures a far more prevalent reality: at the level of vast and interconnected networks of extraction, production and consumption, China and the West feature increasingly as two sides of the same coin.

In this sense, it is crucial that investigations into the Asia-Africa relationship maintain an openness not only in embracing an interdisciplinary approach in researching the interface of these two regions but also in the sense of Asia, and particularly China's increasing integration into what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed "the world system". A rejoinder to this might argue that if this is the case, then the task of China Africa studies is to study the world at large and in doing so, dissipate the focus of study altogether. A key challenge then, is to continue the often excellent research into the engagement whilst insisting on persistent contextualisation of findings. This will help navigate researchers toward the gold-standard of all empirical study: accounting, however modestly, for what is actually going on in the world.

### **Can an African institute study Asia?**

As the CCS is fundamentally dedicated to research and education within the African continent, an important dimension of navigation has been weighing up the large domestic and global demand on the Asian (and particularly Chinese) engagement in Africa against the need for Africans to be schooled in the domestic politics, economics and culture of Asia. If we think about Chinese Studies centres located in, say the United States of America (USA) or Europe, we do not automatically assume that these centres are expert in USA-China relations, or EU-China relations. They may be, but first and foremost, we assume that they exist to educate students and carry out research on China. Within Africa, there is almost an immediate assumption that the task of such an institute is to study the China-Africa relationship. For all its activity, for all its growth, for all its immediacy of need, for all its global concern, the China-Africa relationship is only one component of a much larger field. It is most certainly a spectacular trajectory, and one

which the likes of the CCS is in an advantageous position to focus on. But an important point to keep in mind here is that institutes involved in growing African expertise on Asia will only get so far if their focus is how that region relates to “us”. To bring the urgency of this point home, I was recently invited to China with a number of African colleagues in media, industry and government, all of whom were engaging with China professionally. Over breakfast one morning, I was alarmed to discover that none of the colleagues had heard of “Tiananmen Square”, the “Taiwan issue” or “the Cultural Revolution”.

One could argue that, given the rapid rise of China in Africa, these are obscure, academic issues which do not directly address the needs of Africans engaging with China. A simple counterpoint to this would be to apply the same standards to, say the EU: “China’s engagement in Europe has risen rapidly over the past decade – why bother about learning Chinese history, culture and domestic political economy? We should be focusing on industrial engagement and trade agreements!”. Developing comprehensive Asian focused expertise in Africa, in fact, directly feeds back into practical and immediate concerns. African actors who have acquired a sound knowledge of Chinese politics, economics, history and the cultural context are better equipped to engage with Chinese actors, to inform on policy and media issues and to engage more skilfully in business contexts. In light of this, the papers in this edition by Frank Youngman, at the University of Botswana and Peter Wasamba, at the University of Nairobi, directly speak to this need. Youngman covers the pioneering trajectory of developing a full undergraduate programme in Chinese studies, which comprehensively trains students in Chinese history, culture and contemporary affairs. Likewise, Wasamba covers the development of several full-time Korea studies degrees. These programmes, in line with the “East-Asian” angle of this journal, echo the increasing engagement of regional actors beyond China and signals the growing influence and relevance of the likes of Japan and South Korea within Africa.

Both the Botswanan and Kenyan programmes are charting new territory on the continent and their efforts are to be highly commended. As both papers highlight,

a key challenge is the question of resources (a well-worn theme for academic institutions the world over). In the author's accounts of funding structures, we see both institutes receive significant support from the governments of the countries which they are studying. Given the financial constraints of African higher education (which make similar complaints in the Euro-American sphere look quaint), it is only realistic to engage in such a strategy. However, as Youngman rightly points out, in terms of long-term sustainability and credibility, governments need to come to terms with the fact that the rise of Asia in Africa is not a passing fad: it is now an increasingly permanent feature of the African landscape and African states need to increasingly nurture "home-grown" Asian expertise. On this topic, it is worth noting that within the context of the CCS, one of the first questions which visitors pose to us is: "who are your funders?" This is reflective of the highly politicised field in which particularly the China-Africa scholarly field exists. I doubt whether this is the first question which comes to mind when people visit, say, the Classics Department. Some assume we receive funding from America and Europe; others assume we are funded by the Chinese government. In truth, we are predominantly funded by our own university (Stellenbosch University in Stellenbosch South Africa) which has had the vision to see the strategic value of investing in such a centre. Beyond university funding we mostly generate income through grants and projects.

In the following years, the CCS will be taking our cue from the likes of the University of Botswana and the University of Nairobi, insofar as we too will be engaging in a Chinese Studies programme, as well as short courses, which focus on Chinese domestic politics, economics, regional affairs, international relations, business and management, culture, history, language and, our speciality, China-Africa relations. In this sense, the challenge which lies ahead for the centre is how to maintain a strong research focus on China-Africa relations, while simultaneously branching into teaching Asia related affairs.

This brings to mind another significant challenge for the African continent: attracting the necessary expertise. Until recently, there have been no home grown institu-

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tions producing Asia literate African scholars, we are obliged to attract expertise from abroad (or African scholars who have been trained abroad). As the enterprise of Asia literacy within Africa increases, we will, ideally, eventually be able to recruit the bulk of scholars from within an African-trained context. Additionally, with increased expertise, it is the centre’s intention to cover a broader focus on East-Asian engagement, including Japan and Korea. Supplementary to this has been our co-operation with various other institutions, both within Africa and abroad. Scholarly exchanges with colleagues within Africa, Asia and the Euro-North American sphere have been the life-blood of the centre, exposing our staff to cutting edge research abroad, familiarising us with trends in various countries and, not least of all, contributing to our research output in the form of policy briefs, research reports, working papers and journal articles.

### **The online revolution**

Another crucial dimension of grappling with skills shortages in Africa has been the boon of the internet. The CCS relies heavily on our web presence to both engage with the world and for the world to engage with us. We send out a weekly mail on China-Africa affairs to over 6000 subscribers and have on average around 2000 unique hits on our website each month. As any tech-savvy expert will tell you (in my case, Eric Olander at the China-Africa project), the key is to keep the content coming. While we cannot compete with the Herculean efforts of the China-Africa project team, who have tweeted on China-Africa affairs every 24 hours for several years now, the CCS nevertheless has Twitter and Facebook updates and dedicated weekly commentaries and the regular release of substantial bodies of research. Again here, the web has been crucial: we are regularly contacted by scholars around the world who want to publish their research on our platform. We walk a tight-rope between insisting on research of quality while simultaneously offering junior scholars an opportunity to put their work out. Our “working paper” series is our primary vehicle for this type of scholarship while the largely online AEAA journal is reserved for more in-depth research. The brainchild of our previous director, Sven Grimm, the AEAA journal (previously referred to as the “China

Monitor”) has gone from strength to strength and we anticipate that it will become accredited in the first half of 2015. With its stellar international advisory board and a significant growth in the quality of the articles, AEEA will be the first accredited journal of its kind in the world. The global support from scholars, junior, mid-career and senior, has been overwhelming and the CCS thanks you all for your efforts in helping produce the journal.

The virtual presence of the CCS on the web has risen in tandem with a host of new and exciting online forums focusing on the China-Africa engagement. In the contributions by Yoon Jung Park on the “Chinese in Africa/Africans in China” forum and Cobus van Staden’s article on “the China-Africa Project”, we are led through the processes of how online intuitions are born. What is remarkable about these two incredibly successful online forums is how modest their origins were. The former began with a small research working group which eventually morphed into an online network; the latter began with the weekly posting of an online podcast, which now has a Facebook page with over 200 000 followers. There were no grand schemes here. Rather, it appears as if there was an initial idea of online community for a specific, small scale need, which snowballed through the sheer amount of interest on the topic. Through a natural evolution, with a fair bit of tinkering, tweaking and chance, these sites now play a pivotal role in shaping the global discourse on China-Africa relations. At the risk of making our own centre obsolete, I am tempted to say that this is the future not only of China-Africa relations but of higher education in general! What is compelling about the online presence is the way that these various forums do not compete with each other but rather complement one another, both on the web but also in their engagement with “on-the-ground” institutions and forums. The “Chinese in Africa/Africans in China” forum focuses on scholarly work and debates in the field, making linkages with other scholarly forums and organising conferences. The China-Africa network focuses on the media aspect of the engagement, with the bulk of their followers under 25 and with the co-ordinators using the forum as a teaching tool.

An opportunity for other research institutions, online or otherwise, is how to artic-

ulate their interests with forums such as these. In Chinese official parlance, there is much in the way of potential “win win” and “harmonious co-operation” with the likes of such networks. From the CCS’s perspective, both of these forums have been indispensable in both promoting our own output but also in offering an amazing array of factual and intellectual input for our staff to mull over, keeping us abreast of debates, opinions, conference calls, publication calls, job listings and the like. In return, our centre offers content to these forums (research outputs, conference calls, interviews) and, on the odd occasion, a punchy rebuttal to this or that debate. Another important aspect of online networks is how they, in turn, make contact with other networks, which means at times the work of the CCS ends up in places we would never have imagined. This is remarkable work which is being done and, in some senses, it is outstripping what we traditionally imagine as the concept of the university, fixed in one place, where students come to learn. This latter paradigm, of course, still dominates higher education and academics have been slow to make this transition. However, the likes of the “Chinese in Africa/ Africans in China” forum and the “China-Africa project”, are changing the mould of how knowledge is produced. The CCS consists but of humble students in the wake of these online communities; but we are eager students and will remain open to learning from and working with such networks.

The essays in this edition offer an insight into some of the various strategies which have developed in grappling with the Asia-Africa engagement. It is precisely the heterogeneous nature of the field which is its greatest strength. The institutions discussed here include the domestic teaching of China and Korea in an African setting as well as institutes, both physical and virtual, focusing on the China-Africa relationship. Within the near future, it is anticipated increasing numbers of, perhaps even more novel, institutions focusing on the engagement will arise. The fact that most of the institutions discussed here are less than a decade old, entails a degree of overlapping and co-operation which more established, identity-laden university departments might shy away from. We at the CCS are proud to introduce this special edition which showcases some of the achievements of our partners and we look forward to many more fruitful years of collaboration.

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## **Engaging academically with China in Africa – the institutional approach of the University of Botswana**

**By Frank Youngman\***  
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### **Abstract**

In 2006 the University of Botswana adopted the *Policy on Internationalization* which had three objectives: 1) to expand international student and staff exchanges; 2) to expand international research co-operation; and 3) to enhance the internationalisation of all curricula. As a result of the policy, the University has developed a number of academic partnerships in East Asia since 2006. The policy made a commitment to increase the number of university partnerships, not only in the traditional areas of Europe and North America, but particularly within Africa and with key economic powers in Asia, which were identified as China, India, Japan and South Korea. The most intensive academic engagement within East Asia has taken place with China and a strategic institutional approach has been adopted to develop this engagement.

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## Introduction

The University of Botswana (UB) is the nation’s flagship university and until 2005 it was the country’s only public university. It was established as an autonomous institution in 1982 but has antecedents going back to the formation of the University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland in 1964. It has grown steadily over the years and now has approximately 18, 000 students and 900 academic staff. It plays an important role within national life in terms of developing human resources, creating and applying research knowledge, and engaging with the wider community. Since 2004 it has sought to project itself more vigorously as an international centre of academic excellence. In particular, in 2006 the University adopted the *Policy on Internationalization* (University of Botswana, 2006) which had three objectives: 1) to expand international student and staff exchanges; 2) to expand international research co-operation; and 3) to enhance the internationalisation of all curricula. The policy made a commitment to increase the number of university partnerships, not only in the traditional areas of Europe and North America, but particularly within Africa and with key economic powers in Asia, which were identified as China, India, Japan and South Korea. To advance the internationalisation agenda, an Office of International Education and Partnerships (OIEP) was set up in 2006, the first such office in Sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa, with a Director reporting to the Deputy Vice Chancellor – Academic Affairs.

As a result of the policy, the University has developed a number of academic partnerships in East Asia since 2006. It has memoranda of understanding with three universities in South Korea with which student exchanges have taken place, and with four universities in Japan where the linkages have also included staff exchange and some joint research. But the most intensive academic engagement within East Asia has taken place with China and a strategic institutional approach has been adopted to develop this engagement. This approach includes the establishment of a distinctive organisational architecture to encompass a number of different, though related, academic objectives. This architecture comprises the Confucius Institute, which is responsible for outreach to the general public on Chinese language and culture, the Department of Chinese Studies which is responsible

for the academic study of China, and the multi-disciplinary Africa-China Research Group which focuses on the relationship between Africa and China. This structure is underpinned by strategic partnerships with two Chinese universities.

## Background

UB's strategic institutional approach to academic engagement with China and its organisational embodiment has developed since October 2005 when I first held initial discussions at the Chinese Embassy about the possibilities of partnerships with Chinese universities in my capacity as Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs). During 2006, the Office of International Education and Partnerships supported a number of visits by UB academics to China and in November it organised a discussion panel which I chaired. The panel included a representative of the Chinese Embassy. The meeting was reported in an article in the *University of Botswana Newsletter* entitled "UB takes initiative for educational co-operation with China" (University of Botswana, 2007, pp. 1 & 3). The academics on the panel indicated that joint research, staff and student exchange, and conferences were potential areas of co-operation although they felt that there was a problem of language that could hinder collaboration. The representative of the Chinese Embassy reported on the outcome of the recently held Beijing Summit of the Forum for China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) where the Chinese Government had announced major initiatives in educational co-operation. He stressed the importance of developing Chinese language learning in Botswana.

The section on Education in the *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007 – 2009)* included the commitment by the Chinese Government to "Establish Confucius Institutes in African countries to meet their needs in the teaching of the Chinese language ... " (Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, 2006, 5.4.4). The concept of the Confucius Institute had first been announced in 2004 under the aegis of Hanban (the Office of Chinese Language Council International). The concept is a soft power initiative of the Chinese Government to promote Chinese language and culture, in a manner comparable to the cultural diplomacy of France's Alliance Francais and Germany's Goethe Institute. But in con-

trast to the French and German organisational model, a Confucius Institute is a partnership between a host country university and a Chinese university, with resource support from Hanban. Hence at the invitation of Hanban, through the Chinese Embassy, I led a UB delegation to China in October 2007 comprising the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Dr Rasebotsa, and the Director of International Education and Partnerships, Professor Holm. The trip involved visiting seven universities in Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou in order to identify a partner university for the establishment of a Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana. In preparing this article I came across a note that I made at the end of this trip which crystallises the delegation’s overall conclusions. The note is entitled *UB’s China Initiative – Basic Precepts* and contains five bullet points, reproduced verbatim as follows:

- China now a global leader politically and economically – it is important to have soundly-based international relations
- China now a leading player in Africa (momentum of November 2006) (i.e. FOCAC Beijing Summit) and of great significance to Botswana particularly. Increasing interactions at level of the state AND of ordinary people
- Misconceptions about China in Botswana and low level of knowledge/understanding amongst general public. Potential points of friction
- Need for UB to take a leadership role in developing knowledge, analysis and awareness that will enhance foreign policy, strengthen economic interactions and provide public education, so that Botswana is better able to benefit from China’s role and avoid potential disadvantages
- Need for China to understand Africa better and have broader base of analysis and public understanding

The note captures the key arguments for UB’s academic engagement with China. Four major areas of academic activity emerge from these basic precepts. First, there is need for public education about China and its language and culture. Sec-

ond, there is need for the academic study of China. Third, there is need for research on China's role in Africa in general and in Botswana specifically. Fourth, there is need to support African Studies in China. This is the basis for the organisational structure, university partnerships and academic activities that have evolved since 2007 and which are discussed below.

### **The Confucius Institute**

The UB delegation that visited China in 2007 signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Confucius Institute Headquarters at Hanban to establish a Confucius Institute at UB. Sahlins (2013) in a critique of Confucius Institutes states that agreements with Hanban are standardized and have clauses stipulating secrecy and conformity to Chinese law. He further argues that there are built in curriculum restrictions whilst host university oversight of the Institutes is weak. In the case of UB, the Memorandum of Agreement (University of Botswana & Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2007) was negotiated by Professor Holm, the very experienced Director of the Office of International Education and Partnerships at the time, who ensured that UB's interests were safeguarded and that the document was tailored to the UB context. The document has no secrecy stipulation and in Article 13 on Dispute Settlement says that in case of dispute the parties should "submit the issue involved to a Court of competent jurisdiction in terms of the laws of Botswana". It establishes a governance structure in which the Director of the Confucius Institute reports to the UB Dean of Humanities on administrative matters, whilst the UB Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs) is Chair of the Board of Advisors, the body responsible for policy matters that is comprised of representatives of the two universities. Furthermore, Article 5.4 states: "The academic staff of the Institute shall be free to select the teaching materials that will be used in class."

The Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana (CIUB) started operations in 2009 as a partnership between UB and Shanghai Normal University (SHNU), which was chosen partly for its interest in Africa evidenced by its Centre for African Studies. CIUB has developed as the community outreach arm of the University for the promotion of Chinese language and culture amongst the general public.

It receives an annual budget from Hanban, which has varied from US\$ 80,000 to US\$ 140,000 depending on the planned activities. SHNU incurs expenditure in relation to the Chinese Director and the language teachers employed. UB pays for the salaries of the local Director, the administrative officer and the secretary, and makes a small provision for operational expenses. It also provides the office and teaching facilities, staff accommodation, and meets the overhead costs. CIUB currently has 15 staff, including the Chinese director and 11 language teachers from China. Its main activity is to offer evening classes in Mandarin to working members of the public. There are several intakes per year and enrolments rose from 80 in the first intake in 2009 to 316 in 2013, totalling 2675 enrolments over the four years. These students have the opportunity to join annual study visits to China. CIUB has also provided specialised language training courses, for example for the Department of Immigration, and runs Confucius Classrooms in three private schools. It has organised 44 scholarships for Batswana to study at Chinese universities. It has also arranged cultural events, including hosting groups from SHNU, and it has sent teams of staff members to visit schools around the country promoting Chinese culture. The first local Director was the former Dean of Humanities, Dr Rasebotsa, who ensured strategic management from the beginning, whilst her successor, Professor Mgadla, has the extremely important attribute of being competent in Mandarin. In co-operation with the Chinese co-directors from SHNU, they have provided excellent leadership for the development of the Confucius Institute.

In the West there is an expanding critical literature on Confucius Institutes which argues that they are propaganda tools of the Chinese Government, which limits their academic freedom and restricts their curriculum. Wikipedia, for example, has an entry entitled “Criticisms of Confucius Institutes” which is 27 pages long and has 151 footnotes (Wikipedia, 2014). However, King (2013: 173-185) in his discussion of Confucius Institutes and soft power in Africa sees CIs in a positive light and casts doubt on whether they do have a “politicised mission” and whether there is Chinese Government interference in their operations. In the light of these different perceptions, it can be concluded that after five years of existence, the

time is ripe for an in-depth, empirical case study of the Confucius Institute of the University of Botswana within a global perspective.

### **The Department of Chinese Studies**

The belief that there was need for the University of Botswana to provide opportunities for the academic study of China led to the development of a BA in Chinese Studies, which commenced in 2011, and the establishment of the Department of Chinese Studies in 2013 to provide the organisational base for teaching and research on China (that is, the discipline area of Sinology broadly conceived). A deliberate decision was taken that this initiative should be separate from the Confucius Institute and its special funding arrangements so that the academic autonomy of the Department would be transparent. The Department is located in the Faculty of Humanities and the degree is a standard programme within the Faculty's curriculum. Thus it is a normal part of the University's budget and has the same status as other departments. This was seen as an important principle given the global concerns about Chinese Government funding of Confucius Institutes. However, it is noted that in some African universities, such as the University of Nairobi and the University of Zimbabwe, degrees in Chinese language and culture are offered through the Confucius Institute.

The University of Botswana's BA in Chinese Studies was approved in 2010 and had its first intake of 20 registered students in 2011, with subsequent intakes of 16 in 2012, 30 in 2013 and 19 in 2014. The degree is a four year programme with the standard structure for a Single Major degree in the Faculty of Humanities. In the document formally proposing the degree it was stated that the aim of the programme was to produce graduates with the following competencies (University of Botswana, 2010a: 2-3):

- Language skills in Mandarin Chinese at Level 4 in the Chinese Proficiency Test (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi: HSK). Level 4 means they will be fluent for practical purposes. They will be able to translate both ways with contextual appropriateness.



- In-depth knowledge of Chinese history and culture. The students will learn about the background to Chinese civilization so that they can communicate as informed and educated people, and develop their general education.
- Academic and experiential understanding of contemporary China, inter-cultural fluency and communication skills. The students will spend a year in China and will gain an understanding of the language, history and culture of the Chinese people.
- An understanding of modern Chinese issues, and especially an ability to analyse Africa-China relationships.
- A sound basis for employment and further study related to China.

To develop these competencies, the curriculum includes courses in Mandarin and non-language courses in Chinese history, culture, literature, philosophy, religion, politics, economics and international relations. It is mandatory for students to spend the third year in China and currently they all go to Shanghai Normal University for this period. The programme structure enables Chinese Language or Chinese Studies to be a Minor subject for students following other programmes, for example in the Faculty of Business.

The Department of Chinese Studies was established in 2013 and has a staff establishment of four. The Founding Professor is Professor Fang, who is on leave of absence from Shanghai Normal University. He has written on the issues facing the development of the BA programme that must be addressed through on-going operational research, such as student demand, curriculum structure and content, language proficiency attainment and graduate employability (Fang, 2013). It is clear that the Department of Chinese Studies will face a number of challenges as it develops its academic curriculum and research programme. The major challenge in the current situation of limited resources will be capacity-building to develop local staff with Chinese language competence and PhD qualifications in linguistics and other specialisations who will be able to sustain the undergraduate programme and develop graduate studies and research. A deep understanding of Chinese language

and culture (the traditional strength of Sinological training) is necessary for scholarship that goes beyond “translated China” (Australian Centre on China in the World, 2014) and encounters directly the Chinese world. At the moment, as a short-term solution, some of the language tuition on the BA programme is undertaken by instructors from the Confucius Institute and some of the non-language courses are undertaken by non-specialists from other departments.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, the importance of the study of China makes it imperative for the University to sustain and develop the Department. Holcombe in his book *The Genesis of East Asia, 221 B.C. - A.D. 907* states that East Asian civilization may be said “to represent the single most important major alternative historical evolutionary track to Western civilization on the face of this planet with a continuing history of success that can rival that of what we call the West.” (Holcombe, 2001: 3). Within East Asian civilization, it can be argued that China is the dominant factor, both historically and in the present. Africa’s colonial and post-colonial experience has linked it closely to the West, economically, politically, socially and intellectually. But the contemporary rise of China has introduced new realities to which African academic institutions, such as the University of Botswana, must respond. This “alternative ... to Western civilization” must be understood, analysed and critically engaged by African scholarship. Hence it is of particular importance how the Department will develop its intellectual identity in the context of international debates on defining contemporary Sinology (for example, Barme, 2005) and on the nature of Asian Studies in Africa (see: International Institute for Asian Studies, SEPHIS and the University of Zambia, 2012).

### **The Africa-China Research Group**

In May, 2011 I convened a meeting on “UB and the Study of China” in my role of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Affairs). The meeting comprised three Deans, the Director and Deputy Director of OIEP, the University of Botswana Director of CIUB, and four staff members actively involved in Africa-China issues. One outcome was the formation of the “Botswana-China Interest Group”, an informal multi-disciplinary group that met under the dynamic leadership of the Dean of the

Faculty of Humanities, Professor Moahi, to promote research and scholarly exchange. In May 2013 this group organised a workshop entitled *Developing a Research Agenda on Botswana-Africa-China Issues at the University of Botswana* (Moahi & Author, 2013). The workshop was attended by around fifty participants who included UB staff, representatives of the Botswana Government, members of civil society and the private sector, and representatives of the Chinese Embassy and the Chinese community. Two key presenters were from UB partner universities, namely the Director of the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch and a representative of the Institute for African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University. The workshop showed a significant level of interest in Africa-China research both inside and outside the University and a major outcome was the establishment of the Africa-China Research Group (ACRG) in May 2013 with formal Terms of Reference. Its stated purpose is to promote multi-disciplinary research by University of Botswana scholars and UB partners on issues connected to the Africa-China relationship and its ultimate aim is the establishment of a research centre. It has an electronic mailing list of around 100 and this has been the platform for exchanging information and academic resources. In its first year, ACRG had five business meetings and held two seminars and a research workshop.

In June 2014 it organised a major conference entitled *Africa-China – Advancing Mutual Understanding through Multi-Disciplinary Research*. The conference was a closed event for participants from UB and its strategic partners, namely Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University in China and the Centre for Chinese Studies of the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. An invitation was extended to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and to the Confucius Institute of the University of Zambia. Invitees also included representatives of Government departments, the Chinese Embassy, the business community and civil society. In total, there were over 100 participants. There were thirty seven presentations covering seven research themes primarily from the disciplinary areas of education, the social sciences and the humanities, namely: education; language, culture and the media; economics; interna-

tional relations; the environment and tourism; health; and design. The Conference showcased original work by African and Chinese scholars on many issues that are encompassed by the Africa-China relationship and it provided an opportunity for interaction between the two scholarly communities, exemplifying South-South intellectual co-operation. It was funded by contributions from the Confucius China Studies Programme of Hanban, three faculties at UB, the Chinese Embassy, the UB Public Affairs Office, various local Chinese businesses, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation.

The mission of ACRG is located within the wider context of the politics of knowledge production on Africa-China issues. The rise of China has initiated a restructuring of the global political economy over the last decade, signalling the end of the uni-polar world dominated by US American hegemony since the end of the Cold War in 1991 and creating in the West what Ambassador Liu of the China-Africa International School of Business at Zhejiang Normal University has called “strategic anxiety”. This structural change has had major consequences for Africa, as China’s engagement with the continent has intensified at every level (from the state to the individual) and the pattern of post-colonial relations with the West has been disrupted. Many questions have arisen about the impact of China on the continent and about the nature of the African presence within China. Where does the information and analysis come from to address these questions and to guide responses to their implications? Too often it has been refracted through the lens of Western concerns and interests embedded in media discourse, technical reports and scholarly output.

It is clear that the economic and political dominance of the West also has an intellectual dimension. One outcome is the phenomenon of “constructing the Other” through the generation and reproduction of hierarchies and stereotypes about non-Western cultures and peoples, most famously analysed by Edwin Said in his book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). This idea of Orientalism has recently been applied by Vukovich (2012) to the analysis of Western knowledge production on the People’s Republic of China since the 1970s and its essential location in Cold War discourse

and neo-liberal ideology. The idea of cultural and ideological bias may be extended to characterize much Western writing on the relationship between Africa and China. The problem is compounded by the fact that both African and Chinese scholars are very much reliant on Western literature. This argument is well made by Hirono and Suzuki (2014) in their article in the *Journal of Contemporary China* entitled “Why do we need ‘myth-busting’ in the study of Sino-African relations?” They conclude that it is necessary “... to encourage Chinese and African scholars to set the research agendas of China-Africa relations” (Hirono and Suzuki, 2014: 459) and to produce their own critical perspectives.

This is a position that the Africa-China Research Group has fully endorsed. Indeed its use of the couplet “Africa-China” (as opposed to the more usual China-Africa or Sino-Africa) is a deliberate signal that it adopts an Africa-centred approach to its mission. The importance of this mission was made clear in quantitative terms in 2011 in a study by Mohamed Salih for CODESRIA which found that only 7 per cent of 900 recent publications on China-Africa relations had been produced within Africa, whilst the rest were produced outside Africa and primarily by non-Africans (Liu, 2011). A key aim of the ACRG is to increase the volume of work being published by African scholars, especially those of the University of Botswana. It is considering how to develop both a “think tank” function of responsive applied research and a coherent long-term research programme centred on selected thematic areas.

It also seeks to promote collaborative research with Chinese scholars as part of the process of challenging Western hegemony. It is evident that the study of Africa by Chinese scholars is expanding rapidly and is being supported by the Government, for example through the 2012 competitive funding programme for area studies that designated three universities as centres of excellence in African studies (Beijing University, Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University). However, it has been observed that too little of this research is based on fieldwork in Africa. Ambassador Shu at the recent UB conference referred to those Chinese scholars who make short visits to Africa as “dragon flies”. There is need for African institutions to facilitate Chinese scholars to undertake in-depth empiri-

cal study in Africa. Above all, it is imperative that there is more *joint* research by African and Chinese scholars pursuing research agendas of mutual interest and generating shared knowledge on significant issues. ACRG is actively seeking to support the formation of joint research studies and to identify funding sources.

However, to sustain the momentum of this intellectual project, there is need for a stronger organisational base than that provided by a research group. Hence the ACRG is now pursuing its most important long-term goal, namely to establish the Centre for Africa-China Research. In 2010, the Senate of the University of Botswana approved a policy entitled *Guidelines for the establishment and implementation of research institutes and research centres* (University of Botswana, 2010b). The *Guidelines* provide quite clear procedures and criteria for the establishment of a research centre. The ACRG has already developed the critical mass of researchers from different disciplines and the track record of academic activity that will enable it to meet the stated criteria. The *Guidelines* also include a section on how the University will contribute seed funding to assist a Centre for the first three years of its existence. However, UB is currently undergoing a budget crisis and the relevant line item in the institutional budget has been suspended and it is unlikely to be restored in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the University Research Committee has agreed to approve new Centres that have their own funding.

Therefore the main challenge for the envisaged Centre will be to find its own sources of funding, particularly sustainable funding for salaries and core activities as opposed to funds for research and publication projects or specific events like conferences for which once-off donor funding is often available. It will be necessary to study closely how other centres around the world have solved this problem and learn from their funding solutions. The key issue will be how to raise funds whilst ensuring academic independence and the capacity for critical analysis. Furthermore, to be viable the Centre will need to project a profile and usefulness beyond the confines of Botswana, particularly within the SADC region. As Professor Mazonde said in his presentation to the recent conference, a centre “must be locally relevant and internationally competitive”. (Mazonde, 2014)

## Critical issues

On the basis of the University of Botswana’s experience over the last nine years, six critical issues can be identified which are also of relevance for academic institutions in Africa that engage academically with China, as follows:

- *Staff development.* The most critical constraint on the future development of UB’s academic engagement with China is the lack of staff fluent in Mandarin, which is necessary for the teaching of Chinese language, for teaching about different aspects of China, and for undertaking research related to China, including its involvement in Africa. Considerable effort and resources will be required to develop a group of UB staff with the language fluency required to sustain this area of academic work, and graduate study opportunities must be found both in China and elsewhere to develop this capacity.
- *The role of institutional management.* In developing and sustaining a strategic institutional approach, the role of management is crucial. The development of UB’s approach was based on a shared vision at the most senior levels of the University’s management system, namely executive management, deans and directors, and it involved strong teamwork. However, a significant number of personnel changes have taken place in UB management recently and hence it may be a challenge to sustain a coherent institutional approach and effective support to unit-level activity.
- *Funding.* Very generous funding for academic activity is available from China through a variety of sources, including Hanban’s Confucius China Studies Programme, the China-Africa Joint Research and Exchange Programme within FOCAC, the Chinese Ministry of Education “20+20” programme for China-Africa university co-operation, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs “10+10” programme for China-Africa Think Tank co-operation, local Chinese Embassy funds, Chinese Government scholarships, individual Chinese universities, and local Chinese businesses. In my experience, these Chinese funding sources have not influenced the content

of academic activity but nevertheless the perception of this possibility needs to be addressed. Hence institutional funding is vital to ensure and demonstrate academic independence, as well as diversification of funding to include other sources within the country and internationally. The nature and availability of funding constitutes a major challenge for the sustainability of UB's China initiative.

- *Academic links and networks.* To support its activities, it is important that the institution has strong academic links with other universities and is networked with other relevant bodies. UB was able to forge strategic partnerships with Shanghai Normal University and Zhejiang Normal University because of the strong commitment of both institutions to Africa. As it develops new areas of research collaboration, it will undoubtedly require additional Chinese partner universities. Such partners must be chosen strategically and not haphazardly. In this manner, UB reached out to the Centre for Chinese Studies at the University of Stellenbosch as the continent's premier centre for the study of China. UB is also strongly committed to participating in CODESRIA's Africa Forum for the Study and Research on China and China-Africa Relations because of the importance of the Pan-African mission of CODESRIA. A critical mass of African scholarship can only be achieved by coordination at the continental level and CODESRIA's leadership is therefore indispensable. It must be noted that sustaining academic links and networks so that they are productive requires considerable time and effort by key people within UB, which therefore requires a strategic recognition of their importance.
- *Diplomatic partnerships.* An essential partner in the development of all UB's activities has been the local Chinese Embassy which has provided a high level of involvement and support from the beginning. It can be concluded that a good relationship with the Embassy is indispensable. The Botswana Embassy in Beijing has been consistently interested and helpful. A more recent partner is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-



operation and discussions are taking place in respect to its language and policy analysis needs. The diplomatic dimension of UB’s work with China needs careful attention.

- *Theoretical/methodological challenges.* Whilst the foregoing issues are essentially practical, the final issue is the extent and depth of the intellectual challenges facing the project of engaging academically with China that have to be addressed by African scholars such as those at UB. There is an extensive agenda here, situated within global knowledge dynamics and the need to challenge the dominance of Western academic discourse. It includes consideration of relevant theoretical debates in different disciplines and the methodologies and analytical frameworks appropriate to empirical research, including comparative studies. It includes developing distinctive African perspectives on the field of “area studies” in general and Asian/East Asian/Chinese Studies in particular, as well as the discipline of Sinology. Debate in these domains of theory, methodology, and disciplinary paradigms is necessary to enhance the quality and sustain the momentum of research being undertaken by African scholars. There is need for a regular continent-wide seminar on these issues, perhaps organised by CODESRIA in conjunction with institutions such as the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Botswana.

## **Conclusion**

This article has provided an account of the development of the University of Botswana’s academic engagement with China from the perspective of an actor who has been involved both administratively and intellectually. The account has sought to explain and analyse the organisational architecture built to advance various academic objectives, encompassing the Confucius Institute, the Department of Chinese Studies and the Africa-China Research Group. It demonstrates that UB has taken a strategic institutional approach suited to its own context. Finally, the consideration of critical issues has provided a reflection on aspects of the University of Botswana’s experience that may be of wider relevance for other institutions

in Africa. The rise of China has led to a major shift in the global political economy and it is essential that African higher education institutions respond accordingly.

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## Prospects for Korean Studies in Africa: The case of The University of Nairobi\*

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### Abstract

This paper discusses trends and prospects of Korean Studies in Kenya and Africa in general. The presentation is divided into five parts, namely: An introduction; The Korean Studies Project; the trends of the Korean Studies in Kenya; the results in Kenya; and the suggestions on how to develop and promote Korean studies in Kenya and African continent. I advance an argument that prospects for promoting Korean studies are bright based on internationalisation programmes pursued by many universities in Africa. Another enabling factor is the foreign policy shift in African countries to an enhanced engagement with East Asian countries mainly China, Japan and Korea as opposed to Europe and North America. In conclusion, I argue that a lot still needs to be done in terms of capacity strengthening, infrastructural support and having a focal point for supporting Korean Studies in Africa.

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## **Introduction**

Asian studies has in the past not attracted much interest from students and staff at the University of Nairobi. For decades, studies on Asian societies and cultures have remained scarce in Africa, because of the Eurocentric and American frameworks that have dominated African academic circles since the colonial era. This situation has, however, existed because language and communication barriers make it difficult for researchers and scholars from Africa and East Asia to share their views. The situation has changed rapidly in the past decade with Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Indian Studies being included in the university curriculum. Korean Studies projects have been implemented at the University of Nairobi, Kenya since November 2010. Out of the four areas mentioned, it is the Chinese Studies that commands the lead in terms of the number of students enrolled in the programme, local and international staff servicing the institute and the volume of exchange students, both inward and outward-bound. The second most popular Asian Studies programme at the university is Korean Studies which was officially launched in 2013. It is in this regard that this paper explores prospects for Korean studies in Africa with the University of Nairobi as a case study.

## **The idea of Korean Studies in Africa**

The partnership between the University of Nairobi and the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) was mooted at an international workshop on Korean Studies hosted by AKS on 26th November 2009. The workshop was attended by two scholars from the University of Nairobi: Dr. Wilfred Nyangena, an Economics researcher and this author, a literary scholar. One of the topics for discussion was "How to introduce Korean Studies in Africa." I presented a paper entitled, "Collaboration between Kenyan and Korean Oral Literature Scholars: What the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS) needs to know" (Wasamba, 2010). Dr. Nyangena presented a paper on "South Korean Economic Growth Model and its implications for Kenya" (Nyangena, 2010). In our presentations, we introduced the University of Nairobi and its strategic interests in East Asian Studies. We justified the introduction of Korean Studies in Africa with Kenya as a launching pad and outlined the steps

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needed to achieve the goal. The immediate outcomes of the conference were: the admission of two University of Nairobi students to the Graduate School at the AKS; and the funding of two Korean Studies Incubation projects at the University of Nairobi through the then Strategic Initiative for Korean Studies (SIKS), currently known as the Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS). The projects were; “Voices from the Cities: A Comparative Study on Urbanization in Kenya and Korea,” which ran from 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2012, and “Bridging the Divide: Korean Studies Networking Project,” from 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2013. The latest project to be funded by AKS is The Establishment of Korean Studies at the University of Nairobi (2012-2015). It is therefore appropriate that after nearly five years from the first workshop on the prospects of Korean studies in Africa, and four years since AKS started funding projects at the University of Nairobi, we reflect on the trends of Korean Studies in Kenya and Africa and future prospects.

### **The University of Nairobi**

It is essential to look at Asian studies in Africa within the larger context of university education in the continent, strategies for internationalisation and prospects for Asian studies. Is embracing Asian studies a product of internalisation efforts by African universities? Or is it a product of geo-political realignment by African countries to tap emerging opportunities in the East? The scope of this paper does not allow us to address these strategic questions. Instead, we look at how embracing internationalisation by the University of Nairobi has facilitated growth in Asian Studies locally. Internationalisation is generally described as the process of increased international cooperation and mobility of both students and faculty and the enhanced international orientation of curricula and programme structures (Mohamedbhai 2003:153). Internationalisation cannot be analyzed independently from the process of globalisation, which constitutes the fundamental context in which the internationalisation of higher education has been taking place (Langthaler, 2010:19). In education, globalisation mainly refers to the emergence of different forms of trans-border educational provision and of a global education market, which tends to blur national systems of education (Varghese 2009:14). In practice, the



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globalisation of education has taken the form of commoditization. Whereas globalisation is an extension of historical imbalances linked to Western colonisation and dominance, internationalisation has the potential to create more equitable relations (Young 2002: 81).

Africa's international academic relations or exchanges flow in two directions: among the African countries themselves and between African countries and countries on other continents. The majority of these collaborations take several forms, including the physical mobility of academic staff and students, networking in terms of research and libraries, and collaboration in the areas of curricula development, programmes, seminars and conferences, and publications (Zezeza 2005: 1). Attention to internationalisation in Africa is being formalised through continent-wide, national and institutional policy agendas, in focused research overviews and analyses, and through dedicated advocacy mechanisms (Singh 2004: 272). This is captured in the efforts currently being made by the African Union (AU), Association of African Universities (AAU), Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESSRIA), *Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa* (OSSEA), and African Network for the Internationalisation of Education (ANIE), among others. African Association of Universities (AAU) considers internationalisation as an important process in the revitalisation of higher education in Africa. The association supports internationalisation that is domesticated to suit Africa's higher education and research needs (AAU 2006: 14). It is hoped that this initiative will make academic exchanges to be truly reciprocal and mutually beneficial, unlike what it has been over the years.

The University of Nairobi is a premier institution of higher learning in Africa with over 73,000 students and slightly over 1500 academic staff. It is currently among the top ten universities out of 1,307 universities in the continent based on the International webometrics ranking. The College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) that houses Korean Studies is the largest college with close to 40,000 students and 12 faculties, institutes and schools. The University of Nairobi is not spared the challenges faced by many public universities in Africa. Majority of public universities in the continent are experiencing rapid growth in student popu-

lation, inadequate staff numbers, increased cost of delivering quality programmes coupled with ever declining financial support from the exchequer. This is mainly because of the rapid growth in population, slow economic growth and high recurrent expenditure by national governments. These challenges have compelled public universities to expand and diversify their sources of funds while at the same time enhancing cost reduction measures, optimising use of resources, increasing productivity, and internationalising curriculum for relevance. Through internationalisation, the University of Nairobi has established a wide range of area studies with Korean Studies as one of them. The university has embraced internationalisation to improve student preparedness, internationalise the curriculum, and create a rich diversity of intercultural students and staff.

### **Launching Korean Studies at the University of Nairobi**

The Establishment of Korean Studies at the University of Nairobi project is a three year project (1 July 2012 to 30 June 2015. It is largely funded by AKS and the University of Nairobi). The overriding goal of this project is to establish Korean studies at the University of Nairobi by launching, teaching, researching and popularising Korean studies as a multi-disciplinary programme in Kenya. The project is anchored on the already existing Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Nairobi (UoN) and (AKS). It is also supported by the other MoUs signed between the University of Nairobi and Korea University, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea Foundation and Sookmyung University. The long term objective of the Korean Studies in Africa is to produce local researchers who specialise in Korean language, culture, literature, history, politics and economics on the African soil.

The project is divided in to three calendar years which correspond to different phases in the implementation plan: curriculum development; registration of students and delivery of Korean Studies curriculum; and consolidation of the gains and reflections through an international conference. Year 1 of the project was dedicated to the setting up of the infrastructure for the Korean Studies at the University of Nairobi. The key activities were the acquisition, furnishing and the official opening of the Korean Studies office; the development of the Certificate and BA syllabi in Korean

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Studies; and publicising the project locally and abroad through essay competition, workshops and exchange visits.

With globalisation, it is becoming increasingly important to be able to speak a language other than your own in order to communicate with others. In Kenya, apart from Chinese and Japanese, Korea is increasingly becoming a significant development partner in various sectors such as economic development, the transport industry, construction, tourism, manufacturing and IT, among others. With the increasing global importance of Asia, including Korea, and the economic and cultural significance of the Kenya-Korea relationship, it is important that more Kenyans become proficient in the Korean language and Korean worldview in order to have a better communication with and understanding of the Korean people. By studying Korean, students in different fields are able to build strong foundations for their future career. They are also able to promote international exchange at the local level through fostering ties with the Korean counterparts.

### **Korean Studies Curricula**

The University of Nairobi has developed and mounted two Korean Studies programmes namely; the certificate course in Korean Language, Literature and Culture; and Ba in Korean Studies. The certificate course strives to equip learners with skills and ability to write using the Korean writing systems; explain the various aspects of Korean culture and society; and most important, express themselves in the Korean language and use culturally appropriate expressions, gestures, and actions for various cultural situations. The Bachelor of Arts in Korean Studies programme, on the other hand, aims at providing learners with the knowledge and skills that can enable them to demonstrate, through speech, writing and body language, in Korean, a mastery of the intercultural knowledge and communication skills necessary to operate successfully in social and professional environments; the bachelors programme also aims to equip learners with the knowledge necessary to: explain the literature, social development as well as current issues of Korea; carry out professional activities such as translation, text editing and technical writing; and enable them demonstrate through research, an understanding of the

techniques of research and presentation of research results.

One of the popular Korean literature courses taught at the University of Nairobi is Modern Korean Literature. Others are: Listening and Speaking Skills in Korean; Phonetics and Korean Phonology; Korean for Business and Tourism; Chinese Characters in Korean Writing; The Political Economy of Korean Development; and the Korean Entertainment Industry: The Wave (*Hallyu*). The Modern Korean Literature course unit, for example, offers a panoramic exploration of the modern Korean literature from the period of enlightenment to contemporary literature. The unit is segmented into three sections which correspond to the three significant epochs in the political history of Korea. These are the Choson dynasty, Korea under Japanese imperialism and post-independence Korea.

Some of the topics addressed are crumbling feudal society of the Choson Dynasty; importation of new ideas from the West; rising Japanese imperial power in East Asia; influence of the western style of education on literary works: the Enlightenment (*Kaehwa Kyemong*); emergence of newspapers; serialised novels in newspapers; classical Korean literature (*shijo* and *kasa*); new poetic style – free verse, politicising poetry; emergence of biographies; the new novel (*shinsosol*) written in Hangul; time reversal as a literary technique in the *shinsosol*; Second Period: Japanese colonial period (1910-1945); emergence of literary magazines, novels and short stories with themes of suffering, self-discovery, realistic tendencies; literature of resistance, gender and colonialism, cultural nationalism, patriotism (*monjok*); Third phase (1952 to contemporary): period of national division on industrialization, urbanization, alienation, governance, democracy and westernization; literature for political expression, multiculturalism; Korean Diaspora; critical analysis of literary works of the period. Listening and Speaking Skills in the Korean course unit exposes learners to Spoken Korean: pronunciation drills: individual sounds, single words, phrases and sentences; intonation in Korean; mastering the tones of the Korean language: contrastive words; oral drills for articulating new words and phrases; reading aloud short passages on simple matters, on common topics from authentic materials and pedagogically-prepared materials; aural comprehension: dictation, word recog-

inition in minimal pairs; daily conversational skills; introduction of cultural notes and social linguistic knowledge of appropriate behaviour in a Korean-speaking society; listening to aural speech, video tapes, different types of expressions; further exercises in listening and speaking for natural flow of speech; exercises with native speakers of Korean. The Korean Entertainment Industry: The Wave (*Hallyu*) addresses the history and musical traditions of Korea: *arirang*, folk music and dance, mask plays and puppet shows; the traditional Korean Opera Pansori to the Korean wave (*Hallyu*); contemporary Korean popular culture; Western influences from classical Western opera, musicals and pop to K-pop music and K-rock; Japanese influences of J-rock; music industry; record labels and talent agencies – training, promotion and exposure through TV variety/ reality shows, comedy shows, talk shows, endorsements by idols, music charts; the Korean Wave : spread and globalisation of K-pop music and dance through live concerts; music festivals, awards, the Hallyu stars, idols and phantoms; music censorship in Korea; practical viewing and analysis of popular K-pop music videos and recorded live shows; Korean wave in the cinema: history of the Korean film, influences from the West and Japan; genres: Korean drama for the small screen - TV serials (soap operas) and historical drama (sageuk); animation studios; recurring themes and characters in the Korean film, common clichés in Korean drama; pop idols in film; award shows; the Korean Wave in film exports; practical viewing and analysis of Korean films. The brief exploration of the content offered in selected course units in Korean Studies shows the depth and scope of the programme. The idea is to benchmark the delivery with that of the best institutions in Korean Studies in Asia, Europe and America.

In Year 2, the project focused on delivering Korean Studies to students at the University of Nairobi. The project enrolled the first group of Korean Studies students (45 in number) for BA and Certificate Courses. We were also able to receive two visiting professors with the support from Korea Foundation (KF). In addition, the project was able to acquire necessary literature for teaching; conduct a students' essay competition; start the development of the curriculum for a MA in Korean Studies; facilitate exchange of students and staff; officially launch Korean Studies

at the University of Nairobi and have the Coordinator of Korean Studies appointed by the University of Nairobi. In the Year 3, which is the final year of the project, we plan to consolidate the gains of the first two years of the project. The main activities include increased enrolment of students in Korean Studies programme, and hosting the international conference on Korean Studies in Africa entitled, "Korean Studies in Africa: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies." Additional activities in the final year include exchange of professors and students, publishing the best essays from the two students' competitions, and completion of the MA in Korean Studies Curriculum.

### **The trend of the Korean Studies in Kenya and Africa**

The implementation plan for the Korean Studies project indicates that introducing Korean Studies in African universities is a gradual process and can at times look frustratingly slow for those who may want quick outcomes. However, it is better to build a strong foundation for a foreign studies programme taking into consideration human and financial resources available, cultural differences, expectations, and different administrative structures in host universities. Using the University of Nairobi experience, I can say that awareness creation among staff, students and university administration is critical in mounting a foreign studies programme. The main question asked by students is, "what do I stand to gain by taking Korean Studies as opposed to, for example, Chinese studies?"

At the University of Nairobi, there is a lot of enthusiasm among students reading Asian Studies. They can either register for BA in Korean Studies or for a Certificate Course in Korean Language, Literature and Culture. Compared to Chinese Studies offered by the Confucius Institute, the main drawback is lack of financial support. All students must pay fees for all the course units they register for. This has affected enrolment in Certificate course and to an extent the BA programme. We have tried to address this by providing partial scholarships to students. We hope to find ways of providing incentives to pioneers in Korean studies to retain the numbers and hopefully attract many students. The next level is in starting a postgraduate programme in Korean studies. We are developing a MA in Korean Linguistics curricu-

lum. In Kenya, having a multidisciplinary postgraduate is unpopular. As such it has not been possible to mount an MA in Korean studies. We have therefore opted for a discipline-based MA in Korean Studies syllabi. We hope to have the syllabus in Korean Linguistics approved by the University Senate in March 2015. This will allow the university to admit MA students in September 2016 to further their education in Korean studies locally. By that time, the first crop of Korean Studies students currently enrolled in the BA programme will have completed their course. We believe that the future of Korean Studies in Kenya and Africa lies in the ownership by students. This explains why we are investing a lot in strengthening the Korea Studies Association in Kenya (KOSAK). This association has taken leadership in creating awareness on Korean studies, mobilising students to register for the courses and conducting community service to popularise the idea of Korean studies. Through the AKS project, we have been able to support the association to implement its activities.

### **The Studies Project results in Kenya and Africa**

The main result of the project is the realisation of the broad objective of delivering Korean Studies course units in a Kenyan University. The Korean studies office has become a rendezvous for both Kenya government officials keen to know more about Korea and its education system, and Korean private and official visitors to Kenya. In February 2014 we officially inaugurated the Korean studies at the University of Nairobi. The chief guest was the outgoing Korean Ambassador to Kenya, HE Kim Chan-Woo. It was his personal dream to leave when Korean studies had been launched at the University of Nairobi. He realised this dream, just before his departure. When we registered the first students in September 2013, we only had 10 students. This number increased to 45 students shortly. Some of the results of the project are:

- Increased employment and internship opportunities with Korean companies for students with Korean culture and language background in Kenya.
- Increased awareness of Korean studies through university wide "Students' Essay Competition" and award of prizes to winners in three consecutive

years.

- There is increased participation of Heads of Departments through the Korean Studies Committee.
- Enhanced exchange of staff and students. This year, a professor from the University of Nairobi has reported to Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in early September to teach Kiswahili for two years.
- Korean Studies Curricular for Certificate, BA courses developed for use at the University of Nairobi
- An International Conference on Korean Studies in Africa to be held 12-13 December 2014.

The Korean Studies project has created awareness of Korean studies in Kenya. We receive enquiries from Kenyans keen to study the Korean language, culture, literature and history for various reasons. Nairobi serves as a hub for East Africa in terms of people-to-people exchange, business transaction and cultural promotion. Thus, if the Korean studies are established at the University of Nairobi, which is a prestigious public university in this region, the Korean studies and culture will be expanded to the entire Africa region. Considering that there has not been any Korean studies set up in sub-Saharan Africa, this project will be a milestone for students, academicians, citizens, and business people interested in cultural and academic exchange between Korea and Africa.

The strategy we employed in popularising Korean Studies at the University of Nairobi involved learning from the experiences of the Confucius Institute and German Studies. We involved the University administration in the project by appointing the Principal of the College as the project Director. This has ensured ready administrative support whenever we have needed it. We then formed the Korean studies Project consultative committee comprising Heads of Department of Linguistics, Political Science and Public Administration, Philosophy and Religious Studies, History and Tourism and Literature. This committee has ensured broad ownership of the project. It has also made it possible for the Depart-



ment to identify specialists in East Asian Studies to handle Korean Studies Units. To involve the students, we have always conducted activities such as essay competitions on Korean Studies, and a Korean gala. Such competitions encourage students to read, research and discuss Korean cultural, economic and political ways of life. We have also facilitated the formation of the Korean Studies Association in Kenya (KOSAK). The association is run by students under the guidance of a patron who is currently the KF visiting professor.

In our assessment, there are not many Universities in Africa offering Korean Studies. I have reliably been informed that Korean Studies is offered at a university in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), University of Ghana, University of Cairo and the University of Stellenbosch. My research has however not established whether these institutions have Departments of Korean Studies or even students registered in the programme. Plans are underway to launch an Asian studies program (including Korean studies) at Stellenbosch University in 2016. It would be highly beneficial to identify Korean Studies institutions in Africa for purposes of regional networking and experience sharing.

### **Proposals on strengthening Korean Studies in Kenya and Africa**

Korean Studies has a promising future in Africa. Nevertheless, it still has a long way to go to enhance its visibility and impact in local universities. There seems to be a lot of infrastructural support available for institutions running Korean Studies programmes in Korea. However, these initiatives are scattered between ministries or are delivered based on different policy considerations. It is important that there is a well-coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to Korean Studies programmes in Africa.

The Korea Foundation is doing an excellent work in establishing Korean Studies professors and chairs at distinguished international universities such as the University of Nairobi. This should be sustained and expanded in other institutions in Africa. The two professors sent to the University of Nairobi in August 2013 were instrumental in making the teaching of Korean language and Economics take off smoothly. Such efforts are the most important drivers in developing and growing

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Korean Studies worldwide. There is the need for AKS to continue liaising and lobbying KF, Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) and other relevant agencies to support universities offering Korean studies in Africa.

AKS should host a consultative meeting bringing together participants from universities implementing the Korean studies Programmes KF, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KOICA, and other key agencies involved in supporting Korean Studies abroad, especially Africa. Such a forum should come up with a one-stop-shop for information on Korean Studies. It would assist in identifying support gaps and minimise chances of duplication.

The Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS) should create time and visit the implementing partners in their locations. While reports sent to AKS are valuable monitoring and evaluation tools for the projects, being on the ground to meet students, the host university leadership, and staff can make AKS understand local situations partners operate for a more productive collaboration. Such visitations can enable the KSPS staff to understand the structures and policies of the universities implementing Korean Studies programmes in order to provide the required strategic guidance to strengthen the programme.

One of the main challenges the Korean Studies programme faces at the University of Nairobi is that of being overshadowed by the Confucius Institute. The support from the Chinese government to the Confucius programme is enormous. The majority of the students who cannot raise fees are given scholarships locally while those who excel are guaranteed scholarships to study in China. The Chinese embassy also supports infrastructural development in the university on a large scale. The Confucius Institute therefore attracts many students based on these incentives.

## **Conclusion**

As this paper has illustrated, there is potential for growth of Korean studies at the University of Nairobi, and by extension Africa. This can be realised when the host university, AKS and other relevant stakeholders work together to address teething problems which is a normal occurrence in new projects. The University of Nairobi will work closely with the

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Korea Foundation, KOICA and the Korean embassy in Nairobi to ensure that Korean Studies grows in strength and spreads to other universities in Africa.

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## **Using the internet to teach China-Africa relations: The China-Africa Project in the seminar room**

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### **Abstract**

Compared to resource economies, geo-politics and migration, the internet has not received much attention as a factor in China-Africa relations. This is unfortunate, not only because its influence is growing larger and more complex daily, but also because it increasingly affects many other aspects shaping the relationship. In particular, the internet plays an important role in shaping the international discourse about China-Africa relations; because of online archives it also provides an opportunity to make the development of this discourse understandable to newcomers. This article is an attempt to take a first step towards analysing the value of online resources in providing African students greater insight in China-Africa relations. In particular, it will focus on one set of resources: The China-Africa Project (CAP) and its related China in Africa Podcast.

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## Introduction

Compared to resource economies, geo-politics and migration, the internet has not received much attention as a factor in China-Africa relations. This is unfortunate, not only because its influence is growing larger and more complex daily, but also because it increasingly affects many other aspects shaping the relationship.

In particular, the internet plays an important role in shaping the international discourse about China-Africa relations; because of online archives it also provides an opportunity to make the development of this discourse understandable to newcomers. This article is an attempt to take a first step towards analysing the value of online resources in providing African students greater insight in China-Africa relations. In particular, it will focus on one set of resources: The China-Africa Project (CAP) and its related China in Africa Podcast.

The China in Africa Project is a multi-media project aimed at expanding the global conversation about China-Africa relations. This expansion happens in two ways. First, it is aimed at expanding across platforms, drawing in blogging, Facebook, Twitter, podcasting, email newsletters and mobile apps. Second, it is aimed at bridging the gap between the journalists, academics and the think tank researchers who generate China-Africa research, and the wider community. The project is particularly aimed at opening conceptual paths for undergraduate and even high school students into the conversation about China-Africa relations, while also providing a way for insiders to spread their work to a wider audience.

In writing about the uses of CAP in the classroom I am attempting to draw together my work as one of CAP's founding members, with my work as a lecturer in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. I am in the dual position of contributing to the online conversation about China-Africa relations as well as drawing on internet resources to research and communicate the mediation of these relations. This article will be divided into five sections. First, I briefly contextualise China-Africa internet relations. Second, I introduce

the China-Africa Project and lay out how the project evolved since its inception. Third, I lay out what I see as the value of CAP in introducing students to China-Africa relations. Fourth, I relate how I have used CAP as a teaching resource up to now, showing how it can be integrated into various aspects of the curriculum. Finally, I point out a few limitations of the project as it currently exists and offer a few suggestions for how online resources can further contribute to deepen the global conversation about China-Africa relations.

### **China-Africa relations and the internet**

The internet shapes China-Africa relations in many unseen ways and for that reason it also affects several issues that are currently being hotly discussed in the field. These include diplomacy, migration, governance, as well as Africa's wider ability to maximise profits from its natural resources and drive more advantageous bargains with its international partners. In addition, Chinese companies have played a key role in providing the infrastructure, telecommunication and electricity networks, and technical support upon which African internet expansion depends.

The latter is mainly affected by data network provision – a site of major investment in Africa from China. The private conglomerate Huawei and its state-owned sometimes-collaborator, sometimes-competitor ZTE are building cell phone and data networks in several African countries, including Kenya, Angola, Ethiopia and Tanzania (Clark, 2014). The impact of these companies expand beyond the construction of networks to the provision of telephony and data services, collaborating with African and international partners to tailor data services to African audiences, and providing equipment and logistical support to African mobile phone conglomerates like MTN (IT News Africa, 2014). Huawei has also launched low-cost cell phones and smartphones aimed at the African market. Chinese companies are also increasingly launching internet-based services in Africa. For example, the Chinese social media service WeChat is aggressively advertising in South Africa, a phenomenon I saw first-hand when I passed a massive WeChat display during Wits University's 2014 orientation week. In a related field, the Chinese cable television conglomerate StarTimes has also secured several contracts to implement the tran-



sition from analogue to digital broadcasting in several African countries (Nassaka, 2014).

The width of this engagement means that Chinese internet provision also has slowly become conflated with wider controversies related to Chinese engagement with Africa as a whole, and African governments in particular. As an example, Huawei and ZTE have been accused of aiding the governments of Zimbabwe and Ethiopia in oppressive surveillance, which led to crackdowns on dissidents. ZTE also faced government investigations over allegedly flawed tender processes (Malakata, 2014).

Chinese internet provision is also accelerating wider societal change in Africa. A study I conducted with Jinghao Lu (2013) showed that Chinese social media is playing a fundamental role in Chinese migration to Africa. Chinese expatriate businesses looking for staff use Chinese-language message boards as a recruitment tool, while Chinese nationals interested in moving to Africa engage with online communities to make connections and gather advice (Lu & Van Staden, 2013).

More pertinent to this essay, the Chinese contribution to the growth of the internet in Africa is also leading to increased political discussion, both regarding China-Africa relations and the relations between publics and governments. However, in a comparative study of the political use of social media in South Africa and China, Yu-Shan Wu showed that South Africans are lagging behind Chinese in directly engaging political elites via social media. South African leaders are also slow in responding to social media pressure, unlike their Chinese counterparts (Wu, 2013). However, this is not because South Africans lag behind in social media use. In 2014 I conducted an informal survey among Wits students on their total media consumption over a week. Social media was among the most used forms of media and many students indicated that social media like Twitter represent a central mechanism for maintaining relationships and keeping abreast of news. Rather, Wu argues that differences in political systems between South Africa and China makes social media a more central political tool for Chinese netizens.

Against the background of the complexity of China-Africa internet relations, I

believe the China Africa Project provides an interesting tool to track both how online discussions about China-Africa relations are evolving and to widen them beyond the logic of bi-lateral relations. I elaborate on this point below, but first I will briefly introduce the project.

### **Background: The China-Africa Project**

The China-Africa project originated in 2009 as a podcast called China Talking Points, run by Eric Olander, an US American journalist who spent extensive time in China and Africa. Due to work pressure, the project lapsed. In 2011, Olander decided to revive it redesigning it slightly to focus on China's relationship with Africa. He tweeted a call for collaborators, which led to us working together to revive the podcast and expand the project across more platforms. The podcast re-started in late 2011 as a regular bi-weekly show covering three topics. From late 2012 we changed it to a weekly podcast. Listeners told us that they found a single hour-long episode covering three topics too long. We then experimented with single-topic twenty-minute episodes uploaded twice a week, which received positive feedback. The podcast is currently downloaded about 100,000 times per month, although download rates are influenced by external factors, like the podcast's placement on the iTunes page.

In 2012, we expanded the China-Africa Project to include a Facebook page<sup>1</sup>. The original aim was to create a space to engage with podcast listeners and to gather suggestions for future topics. The page quickly evolved into a news aggregator service. We post about eight to ten links to news stories about different aspects of China-Africa relations every 24 hours. These show up in members' Facebook timelines. At the time of writing (early September, 2014), the China-Africa Facebook community has about 235,000 members. The community has slowly developed into a space for discussion of China-Africa relations. Users frequently tag certain links for other members' attention, and engage each other in debates (although, as I will show below, this function is sometimes limited by the nature of social media interaction).

We subsequently expanded the China-Africa Project across more platforms. The main addition was a dedicated website<sup>2</sup>, which features original content, as well as collecting all the podcast episodes in an easily streamable format. In addition, we also added mobile apps for Apple, Android and Blackberry smartphones, an incipient Chinese-language presence on Sina Weibo, daily updates on Twitter (under the handles @eolander and @stadenesque), and a regular email newsletter. We also added the podcast to the Stitcher and Soundcloud streaming services.

Comparing Facebook and podcast usage patterns has given us a certain level of insight into the needs of users. The Facebook page is overwhelmingly used in the developing world (especially North Africa and South Asia), while the podcast is mainly consumed in the developed world. In particular, it is downloaded in the suburbs surrounding Washington DC and in Beijing. This seems to indicate a few trends. In the first place, usage patterns seem to be shaped by the availability of bandwidth. Whereas it is easy for users in the developed world to download large sound files, their counterparts in the developing world seem to use the fact that CAP updates appear automatically in their Facebook timelines as a way to conserve clicks. In this sense, our habit of adding a brief outline of each news story might provide a useful way to skim China-Africa news without having to wait for pages to load. In the second place, legislation shapes usage patterns. The fact that Facebook is blocked in China profoundly affects the reach of the project, while the high number of downloads in Beijing indicates that Chinese internet users are interested in China-Africa relations. In the third place, CAP shows that interest in China-Africa issues extend far beyond China and Africa. In fact, in certain cases, these two are almost marginal to the conversation. In the following section I will expand on these factors in order to draw some conclusions about the project's utility as a teaching tool.

### **CAP's potential in the seminar room**

In thinking about the use of Facebook and the wider CAP in widening students' knowledge about China-Africa issues, I drew on debates that took place over the last few years about the use of social media in teaching. However, I also distin-

guish it from other studies that developed pedagogical methods in order to get students to focus on Facebook as an analytical object (see for example Mathison Fife, 2010) or to use Facebook as a tool for cyber-ethnography (Farquhar, 2013).

Rather than focus on Facebook as a field of study, I concentrate on its utility as a window on to a field of study – in my case, China-Africa relations. In general, I concur with Manca and Ranieri (2013) that Facebook offers three advantages as a teaching tool: it facilitates a richer mix of information resources, it brings in other sources of expertise beyond the lecturer and reading list, and it widens the context within which learning takes place.

I have found CAP a useful way to enrich my teaching about China-Africa relations for a few reasons. In the first place, because Facebook is a resource most students use on a daily basis anyway, it presents few barriers to entry. It is relatively easy for them to include it in their daily routines and presents few onerous demands (like for example creating new passwords or downloading software). It also gives students the opportunity to chart the development of China-Africa discourse in real time. They can follow conversations as they happen, while also taking note of the range of responses around a particular issue. In the third place, they can use Facebook to better understand the demographics of Facebook commenters. Because most people's Facebook data is partially public, students can get an idea of where China-Africa issues are being discussed, and this can give them an inkling of how China-Africa relations have become integrated into national political discourses in certain other countries (for example, the United States and India). The page therefore gives them ever-evolving insight into how the discussion around China-Africa relations reaches beyond China and Africa.

The page also becomes a useful resource for further research. It is a repository of links to various newspaper stories across the globe, which can also function as a sort of online database. However, we have found that Facebook sometimes does not display all the posts in a timeline, so I advise students to also keep personal repositories of particularly useful articles on resources like Instapaper. The Facebook page is also a useful place to disseminate multimedia content like interactive

maps, video clips and infographics, as well as Soundcloud links to podcast episodes.

My main use of the CAP Facebook page is to nudge students across the gap between the issues discussed in their seminars and those playing out in their lives. In most university courses, coursework is hermetically sealed in the classroom and never seeps into everyday life. In the case of contemporary African students, their relationship with China and the rest of Asia is developing right now and it will determine their futures in fundamental ways. It is therefore crucial to get them to think about Asia-Africa relations outside of the reductive educational environment where everything relates to tests and essays. At the same time, it is essential to bring academic rigor to the wider conversation about China-Africa relations. One of the maddening aspects of following China-Africa discourse on a daily basis is realising that misinformation, myths and half-truths keep circulating in the popular press, despite having been debunked in heaps of scholarly papers. It is therefore essential to instil the rigor of academic research into students while sending them out to encounter China-Africa discourse in its raw form. The CAP Facebook community offers exactly such an opportunity.

The China in Africa podcast backs up this role, by offering students the opportunity to engage more deeply with the field. In the first place, because the podcast takes the form of a freewheeling conversation between Eric Olander, various guests and I, students can move beyond Facebook's comment/response format, where commenters frequently speak past each other and ignore each other's questions. In the second place, because our Facebook members are so young (most are under 25), we aim to provide a wide range of guests, from established academics and journalists to PhD students and even undergraduates. We have in the past interviewed filmmakers and journalists in their early twenties busy preparing for their first major projects or undergraduate students about their final research papers. The aim of these interviews is to give listeners an idea of the different steps one has to go through to become an established scholar, researcher or journalist. In other words, the podcast is designed to disseminate research about China-Africa relations, but also to build bridges between listeners and institutions. In both direc-

tions, the aim is to widen the knowledge base and the conversation relating to China-Africa research. We have received feedback that teachers and lecturers have used the China-Africa Project in teaching courses on Chinese foreign policy at the University of Botswana, and in Washington DC high schools. In the following section I will describe how I have employed CAP in my own teaching.

### **Turning clicks into learning**

My use of these resources in class is still developing, but up to now I have developed the following approach. I take the students through successive stages of engagement. At first, I make it a class requirement that all students have to join the Facebook community by 'liking' the CAP Facebook group. This will allow all the article posts to automatically appear in their personal timeline. For the first few weeks of the seminar, I require them to submit short weekly reports on the main tropes of coverage and commentary that appeared on the Facebook page that week. In certain cases I ask them to concentrate on either negative or positive coverage, or to make an argument about which particular news story would have the most significant impact on China's image in Africa that week. During this phase, we also engage with theories around soft power and public diplomacy, and I ask them to apply these theories to their arguments.

In the second phase, I instruct them to start interacting with other Facebook users. This can be through posting comments or responding to other commenters. I assign them a minimum number of such interactions per week. I monitor this activity through student feedback, while also making sure that they retain their privacy during these interactions. The aim of this exercise is to motivate them to step outside of the disengagement induced by tertiary teaching, by making them interact with real people preoccupied with these issues. I encourage them to develop more personal areas of interest within the wider field of Asia-Africa relations, in preparation for later or further postgraduate study. In addition, they can also use these interactions to expand their own knowledge about these issues.

In the final phase, I assign them the task to find and suggest new, as yet unposted,

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news stories, resources or opinion pieces relating to China-Africa relations. This phase is aimed at getting them to critically think about the nature of news sources, to hone their antennae for misinformation and to get them to explore aspects of the China-Africa relationship that have not yet been explored in existing scholarship. In each case they have to bring such stories to class, and I will then take them through the decision-making process that govern our own posting.

The course's main essay assignment draws on these previous smaller assignments, and calls on students to identify overarching tropes that define China-Africa coverage. They have to engage with debates around the concept of soft power and its relationship to media, theorize the discursive tropes' impact on Chinese soft power in relation to these debates, and finally provide suggestions about how Chinese public diplomacy might react to these tropes. The essay is designed to encourage students to think of public diplomacy as a dynamic, reactive process, rather than as a static object of study. In order to make this reality comprehensible, it is important for them to have engaged with the different currents of China-Africa discourse in real time. The CAP Facebook page offers a useful starting point for this process.

### **Challenges and limitations**

While the China-Africa Project offers many useful teaching tools, it also faces certain limitations. While our running of the project is sometimes constrained by other professional responsibilities, travel schedules and the occasional damaged undersea internet cable, more widespread factors inherent to the internet also present challenges.

The main challenge is the legal status of Facebook in China. The fact that Facebook is blocked in China makes it harder to use it as a forum to make direct contact with people within the People's Republic of China. We have tried to compensate for this reality by commissioning regular translations of Chinese conventional and social media reactions to controversial incidents in the China-Africa sphere. These are then disseminated through the Facebook page, website and promoted via interviews with the translator on the China in Africa Podcast. However, this work

is limited by budgets and personnel. In the future we would like to expand beyond Facebook to find a space that enables more organic interaction between Chinese and African users. These interactions are of course also limited by wider language gaps and for this reason the nature of CAP user interactions will change as more Africans learn Chinese and more Chinese learn English, Arabic, French, Portuguese and KiSwahili. We are very aware of the limitations caused by both Facebook and the current lack of a lingua franca. The first step towards further expanding the conversation about China-Africa relations is by expanding a China-language version of the project to Chinese social media. Our long-term goal is to create multiple China-Africa Project pages over various social networks in Chinese, French and Arabic, in order to communicate with more users worldwide.

The second major limitation is related to technology. According to a recent report by the Groupe Speciale Mobile Association, mobile phone subscriptions in Sub-Saharan Africa have increased by 18 per cent from 2007 to 2012, with 502 million SIM card connections currently active. Yet many Africans still do not have access to these technologies. GSMA estimates that 65.7 per cent of South Africans have mobile phones, while this is only true for 29.5 per cent of Nigerians and 31 per cent of Kenyans (GSMA, 2013). Even when students have nominal access to social media, mobile phone data is still expensive and slow in Africa. Many Africans are dependent on 2G networks, although 3G and 4G networks are expanding (thanks in no small part to Chinese conglomerates). Many Africans use prepaid data plans, and they frequently do not have access to land lines. Whereas GSMA reports 502 million SIM cards in use, only 253 million of those are mobile subscribers (GSMA, 2013). This indicates the prevalence of so-called pay-as-you-go plans in Africa, which affects both the range of data services consumed and the stability of Africans' internet access. All of this means that the number of African universities where this kind of teaching tool can be used are still limited. The only reason why I was able to make Facebook such a central part of my course was because I knew that the students have internet access on the University of the Witwatersrand's campus. This is not true for all African universities.



A third limitation is inherent to internet communication. While many scholars have predicted that social media will expand global collaboration around pressing issues, many have also pointed out that actual usage patterns do not necessarily bear out these predictions. Internet scholars have recently come to question the very concept of online participation, pointing out that only a minority of social media users really post original content or interact with other users at all (Jenkins et al, 2013). In addition, contemporary web economies tend to blur the lines between self-expression and participation, frequently assuming that the former will lead to the latter (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013). In my tracking of user comments on the CAP Facebook page, I have seen similar trends. Whereas several people might comment about a particular post, they do not necessarily engage each other in conversation. Or comment on other comments. More frequently, conversations take place between page administrators and individual users, rather than between users. For this reason, I explicitly made starting such conversations a part of the students' course duties. In the process I hope that they will gain insight into some of the trends defining internet communications. This does not only include the behaviour of individual users, but also the way certain controversial issues attract the attention of activist groups who sometimes tend to repeatedly post pre-prepared pieces of content as if they are individual comments. Because this kind of activism occasionally manages to frame China-Africa issues [for example around Darfur and the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 (Wu, 2012) and currently around the issue of ivory and rhino horn trade], it is important for students to see this process in action.

A fourth limitation to a comprehensive conversation about China-Africa relations might be called generational. While much of the valuable research on the reality of China-Africa relations is happening within traditional academia, the dissemination of these findings to a wider audience is hampered by the wider problems besetting academic publishing as a whole (see, for example, McCabe, 2013). In addition, unlike journalists, most academics are not necessarily encouraged to make use of social media. This culture adds to a communication gap between them and the younger generation who are experiencing the effects of China's relationship with

Africa on a daily basis and are enthusiastic to discuss it. As I mentioned above, the majority of CAP's members are younger than 24 and avid users of social media. Reaching them will necessitate a shift in how academics view their audiences and how academic publishing functions.

Finally, the online conversation between China and Africa is still new, and reflects the limitations of this conversation in reality. The fact is, Africans and Chinese are not yet fully communicating online because they are not fully communicating in real life. As more Chinese move to Africa and more Africans to China, and as new forms of African identity develop, new spaces for discussion and sharing will emerge online as well. This sharing is already taking place through migration, business links and academic exchange. However, more spaces are needed where Africans and Chinese can discuss shared concerns. While the China-Africa Project is still in its early stages, we hope that it will increasingly be one of these spaces, and that African students will increasingly be able to contribute to and keep track of these conversations via the China-Africa Project

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have outlined my attempt to use the China-Africa Project as a multimedia resource in my teaching on the concept of soft power and China-Africa engagement. While I am in the unique position of being able to use this resource while also helping to shape it, I feel that these kinds of multimedia resources could be useful in all teaching on Asia-Africa relations. For Africa to have a more fruitful engagement with Asia, Africans need spaces to enrich their knowledge of Asia. Media can provide some of these spaces. However, I would also suggest that they will become even more useful if students are trained to decode discourse and to question their own assumptions about Asia. Only if Africans can see Asia as less monolithic and more shaped by a multitude of cultures and discourses, will Africa and Asia be able to build a more permanent and constructive relationship.

### **Endnotes**

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2. [www.chinaafricaproject.com](http://www.chinaafricaproject.com)

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## The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network: The role of a virtual network on increasing Africa's "East Asia literacy"

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### Abstract

The focus of this special issue of the *Africa-East Asia Affairs* journal is on "institutions" engaged in East Asia education and learning in Africa. The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network (CA/AC Research Network, referred to hereafter as the Network) sits somewhere along the margins of this topic – neither a centre nor an institution; without a permanent, physical home; the Network is a sort of global virtual network. It is, nonetheless, worth including in this discussion for a number of reasons. The Network is unique insofar as it is not based at a single institution, but functions in the broader, virtual, digital space and maintains partnerships with various organisations. Network "operations" utilise a closed online network for internal communications (a google group) and an open webpage<sup>1</sup> to share resources and information with the wider public. It is a membership-based body, with minimal entry requirements, drawing members from around the globe, so that, in effect, the Network's members are self-selected and self-governing, and the Network, itself, stateless. Finally, the Network's inclusion in this special issue is justified by the vital role it has played in strengthening China-Africa literacy through our various activities, not only amongst its member

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scholars and researchers but also amongst policy makers and the wider public in Africa, China, and elsewhere.

## History of the Network

The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network began its life as a small research working group, founded by a handful of scholars at the conclusion of a public seminar in July 2007, hosted by the Centre for Sociological Research at the University of Johannesburg and the South African *Mail & Guardian* weekly newspaper, with funding from the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the *Mail & Guardian*. The event, "Chinese in Africa: Race, Relations, and Reflections", attended by over 100 participants was intended to draw attention to the people-to-people dynamics of increasing China-Africa linkages. Following this event, the organisers, Yoon Jung Park and Tu Huynh, both based at the time at the Centre for Sociological Research at the University of Johannesburg, invited some of the speakers as well as other China-Africa scholars to a small, closed workshop to discuss the possibilities of research collaboration<sup>2</sup>. Mutual interest in China-Africa engagements beyond the macro, political-economic sphere – on issues of migration and settlement, labour issues, and relations – served as the glue for the nascent body. At the conclusion of the workshop, we formed a research working group, aimed at studying the various on-the-ground manifestations of the engagements between people in smaller sub-groups.

The first tasks of the research working group included extending invitations to several other early China-Africa scholars not present at the meeting, drawing up a preliminary list and descriptions of proposed research projects, and identifying potential funding sources. Of this preliminary list of proposed research projects, several were carried out while others were postponed due to lack of funding. The South Africa-based team managed to carry out preliminary research on the growing new Chinese migrant communities in South Africa with additional funding from the NRF, Fahamu, and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg<sup>3</sup>.

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This second NRF grant also provided sufficient funds so we were able to host a second public seminar and a more substantive closed academic conference to present our research. This was hosted, again, by the University of Johannesburg, on their Auckland Park campus in August 2009. The conference, which involved an internationally publicised call for papers, drew academics from well beyond our initial research working group. Papers presented at this first conference examined Chinese in Angola, Cape Verde, Mali, Senegal, Mozambique, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Sudan, South Africa, and Zambia; still others were beginning to conduct preliminary research on the growing numbers of African traders in Hong Kong and Guangzhou. The papers presented at the conference were all based on empirical research and offered early glimpses and thick descriptions of Chinese migrants in several African countries and African traders in China as well as local perceptions of these new migrants. In addition to local media coverage including interviews with several of the presenters, we were also able to publish a selection of the conference papers in a special issue of *African and Asian Studies*.

At this stage, although we had run through all the available funding, it was clear that there was need and tremendous support for continued networking and further research. Media and academic interest in China's Africa engagements had been increasing, matched by growing interest in the activities of Africans in China. Our small research working group had also expanded at the conclusion of the conference to include members from around the globe by the end of 2009. Beyond the initial South Africa- and Hong Kong-based members of the research working group (who were from the US<sup>4</sup>, South Africa, Australia, the UK, Ghana, Hong Kong, and China), we now had researchers from France, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, as well as Mauritius and Mozambique.

Given the high levels of interest, we decided to transform ourselves from a research working group into an international research network and through word-of-mouth we continued to grow, add members, and transform our scope of work from a focus on the actual research to broader networking and information-sharing functions. While individual members would find ways to fund their own research, we



refocused our attentions on facilitating contact and communication both within the group and with others interested in China-Africa relations and issues; in other words, we became a network focused on networking and the dissemination of information.

### **The work of the Network**

The CA/AC Research Network is a unique group in a growing field of China-Africa and Africa-Asia centres, blogs, and other bodies in that we retain a primary focus on the people-oriented aspects of China-Africa engagement. As we have grown and developed, we have attempted to “institutionalise” or formalise leadership, management, and partnerships. This has meant refining our purpose. As such, we now define our mission thusly:

*“to promote cutting edge research, debate, and ideas about China-Africa issues by supporting and encouraging the work and communication of a large and rapidly growing network of international scholars, students, media professionals and practitioners who are involved in short- and long-term field research in or work on Africa and China”.*

The CA/AC Research Network provides the only independent and international platforms for real time discussions, interactive debates, and insightful knowledge sharing through the use of digital media and conferences. The Network fosters exchange and discussion about the growing relationship between Chinese and Africans by playing a leading role in developing an active community of researchers and experts.

Making the decision to move from direct email communications to a listserv in mid-2010 facilitated the sharing of information. Originally via email and later through the listserv, we circulated media articles on China-Africa engagement; reports and academic publications; scholarship, fellowship and job announcements; and calls for papers. Equally important, however, was our networking and discussion function: the listserv permitted an open, global and largely unmoderated discussion and debate about topics of mutual interest, questions related

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to field research, and the sharing of insights and opinions amongst colleagues in a safe and neutral space.

In addition to providing a dynamic interactive virtual platform where members meet, debate, inquire, and stay in touch, the CA/AC Research Network participates in and organises conferences, workshops, and events in different parts of the world for face-to-face engagement between our members and with the public. Since our founding we have hosted three public seminars (in 2007, 2009, and 2012) and two conferences (in 2009 and 2012); plans are in place for our third working conference, to be hosted in Guangzhou, China at Jinan University. In addition to the events that we have hosted we have also organised and/or participated in larger international conferences, including those hosted by the International Conference of Asia Scholars/Asian Studies Association (2011), the African Studies Association (2012, 2013, and 2014), International Society for the Study of Overseas Chinese (2009), the Centre for African Studies at the University of Edinburgh (2012), and the Institute of African Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences (2014) amongst others.

Beyond the virtual engagement through the listserv and the website, and periodic face-to-face engagement of smaller sub-groups of Network members at academic conferences and workshops, the Network has also spurred the birth of two local social networking groups, in Washington, DC in the USA and Johannesburg in South Africa. Sino-Africa DC (SADC) serves the greater Washington, DC area and is the brainchild of Winslow Robertson. Through an electronic newsletter, he and his team circulate information about local events; conference, job, and publications listings often culled from the Network's listserv; and relevant news items with brief summaries and links. SADC also hosts happy hours, lectures and similar events about once a quarter, providing opportunities to meet and network. The membership, which overlaps to some extent with that of the Network, is now over 200, and includes students, members of the business community, international lawyers, journalists, non-profits, think tanks, officials from US government departments and agencies, and officials from African governments. Based on Winslow

Robertson's accounting, the make-up of the group is approximately 45 per cent American, 35 per cent Chinese, and 20 per cent African.

The Johannesburg group, China Africa Social (CAS), hosts events about once a month or so, involving a speaker and discussions, and appears to have a more business and business networking emphasis. This group was initially started by another member of the Network, Jinghao Lu, who has since left South Africa; it continues to be managed by Patrick Ache and the CAS team. While both of these groups have ties to the Network, they run quite differently and are independently managed. The Network has also been approached by members in Beijing about the possibilities of starting another such group in China's capital city.

Perhaps most importantly, we support and organise the publication of new, cutting edge research and continue to circulate and publicise these publications. Beyond our network, the academic community, and these local networking groups, we aim to share our knowledge, experience, and expertise from the field to a wider interested public through the dissemination of research findings and expert commentary. Our members have published widely in online journals and newsletters, such as *Pambazuka News* (Fahamu), *The China Monitor* and the *African-East Asian Affairs* journal of the Centre for Chinese Studies, and occasional papers for the Global Powers and Africa Programme (encompassing China in Africa) at the South African Institute for International Affairs. Network members provide the media with nuanced perspectives based on grounded research and are regularly cited in the news<sup>5</sup>. In addition to individual member publication of articles in peer-reviewed journals and their own books, we periodically undertake the publication of special issues of academic journals focused on China-Africa issues; examples of these can be found in *African & Asian Studies Journal* (Vol 69, No 3, December 2010), *African Studies Review* (Vol 56, No 1, April 2013), and the *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* (Vol 43, No 1, 2014).

On a topic that has become fraught with misinformation, rumour and myth, and misperceptions, the Network has played a critical role in supporting researchers and getting new, nuanced and accurate research out to interested audiences. Great-

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er visibility and great collaboration with media can only further improve coverage of the complex web of relations between Chinese and African states, companies, and people. Through greater dissemination of short, accessible, and empirically-based research to media and academic outlets, the Network's members will continue to work toward increasing awareness, improving accuracy, and contributing greater understanding of the complexities of China-Africa engagements.

### **Membership, leadership and capacity building**

From a small research working group of fewer than a dozen researchers, the Network now has nearly 500 members plus an additional 250 odd members of spin-off groups. While the majority of our members are researchers – from undergraduate students to senior academics to undergraduate and MA students – an increasing number of practitioners and professionals from other fields are also filling our ranks. Amongst our newer members we have public servants, diplomats and consultants; development, environment and international security practitioners; donors and activists; as well as journalists and filmmakers.

Members work on a wide range of issues including migration, labour relations, race, gender, identity, as well as local politics, trade issues, security and environment, and public policy. The Network is also multi-disciplinary, with scholars from sociology, anthropology, history, geography, politics and international relations, economics, and journalism. Our members include some of the foremost scholars on China/Africa relations, representatives of many of the China-Africa focused research centres and projects around the globe, as well as Masters' and PhD candidates involved in cutting-edge field research. Finally, the Network's membership has become truly global with members from across Asia and Africa, the Americas, the United Kingdom (UK) and the rest of Europe.

When it became clear that the Network was in the throes of expansion, Park and Huynh recruited a small team to serve as a steering committee. The steering committee serves as a sounding board as well as a preliminary recruitment point for all the work involved in maintaining the Network. Together the small team has served as the core for several larger teams that have coordinated panels for international

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conferences, organised several Network conferences and public seminars, conducted fund raising, provided content for the website and other Network documents, and generally provided Park with much needed support, mentorship and guidance. The steering committee, as of 2013, includes Yoon Jung Park, Barry Sautman, YAN Hairong, Heidi Østbø Haugen, Jamie Monson, Bob Wekesa, and Solange Guo Chatelard; between us, we have institutional affiliations in the US, China, Hong Kong, Kenya, South Africa, Norway, France and Germany.

The Network has been closely involved with the Social Science Research Council, based in Brooklyn, New York since 2012. With generous seed funding from the Henry Luce Foundation, the SSRC has been assisting the Network in establishing a web space to amplify our impact and share resources with a larger audience. Since the launch of the China Africa Knowledge Project<sup>6</sup> we had been able to share blog rolls, curricula, bibliographies, new publications, and news of Network members in the news, as well as featured researchers with the general public. A research database should be available online shortly. In addition to our joint work on this exciting new web space, the Network is also collaborating with the SSRC on broader field-building work together with a working group on China-Africa. The working group “is a cross-regional, inter-disciplinary group of leading scholars. It helps guide the China-Africa Knowledge Project’s planning process to build more generative connections between scholars across disciplines and regions relevant for understanding Africa’s engagement with China and other emerging powers. This initial focus on China and Africa will serve as a model to explore new narratives and relationships in a changing global order”.

With the SSRC and Yale University, the Network co-hosted a conference in November 2013 at Yale. One of the key issues raised at a smaller workshop held after the conference involved capacity issues; participants from China and Africa mentioned the unevenness of capacity. All agreed that many of the leading scholars in the sub-field appeared to be based in the West. To this end, several participants suggested the following:

- build the capacity of African tertiary institutions

- engage in policy-orientated research
- build bridges between institutions, scholars, and civil society actors
- support summer school programmes such as those offered at CODESRIA
- increase opportunities for research exchanges between Chinese and African scholars, particularly ones that encompass field research opportunities
- create opportunities for junior scholars to write and research collaboratively across disciplines, skill sets and languages in order to shape the conceptual framing of concepts and theories

Clearly, this discussion dovetails with the concerns of this special issue especially regarding African capacity and interests on Asia-related issues. The Network aims to maintain its involvement in these discussions and find ways to contribute to capacity-building where needs are identified. Collaborations and partnerships as well as continued financial support are critical to all of these efforts, and these are discussed below.

### **Partnerships and support**

The CA/AC Research Network owes a great debt to two institutions in South Africa. The first of these was the Centre for Sociological Research (CSR) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ), which served as the birthplace and first incubator for the Network. Both Park and Huynh were employed at the CSR, which, as a research centre, allowed greater time and resources to be spent on research, thinking, and writing because we had no teaching responsibilities. We also had the support of Peter Alexander, the Director of the CSR and, for a time, several of the more senior administrators at UJ who encouraged us to develop this new research area. With Alexander's assistance and contacts we were able to successfully raise funds from the South African NRF to conduct the preliminary research, host the 2007 and 2009 events, and establish the research working group.

Our second host institution was the Sociology Department at Rhodes University.

Kirk Helliker, the Head of Sociology, arranged a research affiliation for Park. It also helped that Huynh managed to receive a Mellon award for a post-doctoral fellowship, which was also supported by Helliker. Rhodes is also home to a vibrant, new Confucius Institute (CI) under the leadership of Marius Vermaak; the CI also served as host and partner for specific events at Rhodes. Through the Network-Rhodes partnership, we were able to design and deliver several courses on China-Africa relations to mostly Sociology and Politics students. Beyond course development and teaching, we have helped to identify and attract senior China-Africa scholars to several events and symposia at the University, and encourage a growing number of Rhodes scholars and students to pursue research on China-Africa issues. The highlight of Rhodes' China activities is their "China Week", which is organised by their CI and held annually; "China Week" typically involved a keynote speaker, art exhibits, and seminars.

It is also worth mentioning here that while we have not formalised partnerships with them, two other South Africa-based institutions have been ever present in the life of the Network; these are the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA) based in Johannesburg and the Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS) at Stellenbosch University. Paula Cristina Roque, a former SAIIA researcher, and Nastasya Tay, a former researcher for the CCS, both attended the very first meeting where the idea for establishing the research working group was first raised. The Network has worked closely with both institutions over the years, and we will continue to discuss ways in which we might collaborate in future.

In terms of conference and event collaboration, we have thus far been incredibly fortunate to have generous co-hosts and sponsors. For events in 2007 and 2009 the Network worked with University of Johannesburg and received funding from the Faculty of Humanities as well as the NRF. Since 2010, the Confucius Institute at Rhodes University (CIRU) has hosted a China Week as well as other once-off symposia and seminars; the Network has worked in collaboration with them throughout the years. In 2012, Monash University-South Africa and their home institution in Australia hosted us in Johannesburg; this conference also benefited from some generous support from the American Council of Learned Societies

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through their Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation's Comparative Perspectives on Chinese Culture and Society grant. The next Chinese in Africa/Africans in China conference is currently being planned for December 2014; this time our partners and hosts will be the School of International Studies/Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, at Jinan University. Finally, we are already in discussion with possible hosts for our 2016 conference; at present these include Rhodes University in South Africa as well as institutions in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Our current partnership with the Social Science Research Council (based in New York) is different from those with our university partners insofar as the seed funding from the Henry Luce Foundation and the nature of the SSRC itself creates a different sort of engagement. The SSRC has, in the past, supported networks such as ours to flourish and eventually become independent, serving as a sort of incubator. Funding and support has already resulted in a further expanded membership, through the increase in the visibility of our work via the recent launch and continued development of a web space, which provides additional platforms for engagement on China-Africa issues. We look forward to the additional year (and possibly another) of partnership with the SSRC to continue to build on the work that we started in July 2013.

Finally, we are engaged in preliminary discussions with the Wits China-Africa Journalism Project, University of the Witwatersrand and the School of International Studies/Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, at Jinan University about possible partnerships. We will continue to explore these as well as other potential collaborations.

While all of these institutional linkages and partnerships are crucial to the Network's work, we believe that one of the reasons for the Network's continued vibrancy and relevance is that it remains, largely, a virtual network; this provides a democratic and open forum, wherein students, senior scholars, journalists and practitioners based around the world are free to engage in dialogue, ask questions, and contribute their thoughts. The lack of a 'home' is, in some ways our greatest strength and possibly our biggest challenge. This and other matters concerning the

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future of the Network are discussed in the next section.

### **The future of the Network**

Some of the Network's greatest advantages or strengths also present our greatest challenges, as is the case with our current lack of physical home. With the Google group listserv and the web space up and running, there are unlimited opportunities to share information and amplify our impact. Increasing numbers and quality of online publications, including peer-reviewed, academic journals provide opportunities for member researchers to get cutting edge research out to audiences quickly and efficiently. Institutional digital platforms such as those provided by SAIIA and the CCS, as well as others, also provide opportunities to share shorter essays, working papers, think pieces or opinion/editorial essays. With Skype and email as well as other, newer channels of electronic communications, we can speak to one another and even hold steering committee meetings across multiple continents and time zones. The global and virtual nature of the Network also allows us to be stateless and attempt to work outside the boundaries of nation-state and government influence. However, a lack of a permanent, physical home will also raise challenges to fundraising and financial management, as funds must be deposited, taxes and fees paid, somewhere. Thus far, we have managed to bypass these issues by working with partner institutions; however, the Network's steering committee and members will eventually have to grapple with this question of a physical "home" or perhaps multiple "homes".

Our rapid and recent growth is also a testament to the power of "word of mouth" as well as continuing interest in all things related to China-Africa. Alongside our tremendous growth in numbers, we have also become an increasingly diverse group. This has also meant that what was once a smallish group of social and political scientists with a relatively narrow interest in the human aspects of China-Africa engagement who had all met at one point or another has now a much larger body of individuals from a much broader range of countries, professions, languages, and disciplines. On a few occasions this has resulted in divisive and abrasive exchanges on the listserv. Fortunately, these heated and highly fraught discus-

sion chains have been few and most of our members remain respectful and collegial. As the Network continues to grow, we will have to find ways to mitigate the differences and perhaps address language issues. All new members are asked to read and agree to a sort of code of conduct. Periodically, the listserv manager sends out reminders of these simple guidelines. The language issue is something that we have not yet tackled directly. Nearly all of the exchanges on both the listserv and the webspaces are conducted in English; however, we have discussed the possibility of providing translations for sections of the webspaces into Chinese and French. There are obviously costs involved in professional translations, but we will remain mindful of this language and communication issues.

The Network's steering committee has plans to meet up in a face-to-face strategic planning session in the margins of the December CA/AC conference at Jinan University. Here, we hope to discuss ideas to secure further and more sustainable funding; on-going and new institutional linkages with partners Africa, China, and the West, including those with the SSRC, Rhodes University, the CCS, SAIIA, Jinan University, and the Wits China-Africa media project. Also on the agenda are our plans for publication based on the December 2014 conference, other ideas for increased and broadened dissemination of research, and future workshops and conferences. Pending further funding we also have a number of projects and proposals for our future; these include collaborative research projects, fellowships and grants for (post-) graduate research as well as short-term writing or reading workshops; a pot of funds for those in need of conference travel funding; the possibility of a Network journal; and further development of online resources, including some sort of digital forum.

## **Conclusion**

The emerging field (or sub-field) of China-Africa studies has developed in subsequent waves or generations. There were, of course, a few early scholars of China-Africa, who focused on relations during the Cold War up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Phillip Snow, Bruce Larkin, and George Yu, amongst a handful of others. A second and early wave of scholars picked up on shifts in China's attentions

to the African continent and these would include Chris Alden, Deborah Brautigam, LI Anshan, HE Wenping, Jamie Monson and Elizabeth Hsu. However, the numbers and the levels of interest remained relatively limited and did not include any significant number of Africans until after the Beijing Summit of Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2006. Even until about 2010 there were few actors or activities in the emerging Asia-Africa field in African academia and most of these appeared to be concentrated in South Africa.

Early actors in the sub-field included, of course, the Centre for Chinese Studies, which had been founded in 2004, and the South African Institute for International Affairs, which through the tireless work of Chris Alden was beginning to marshal some focus and funding to China-Africa issues. The Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) and the Institute for West Asian and African Studies (IWAAS) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has hosted an early China-Africa conference (also in Johannesburg), and published selected papers in an edited volume in 2007. The Institute for Global Dialogue had pulled together a few publications, under the leadership of Garth le Pere. The Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) was also involved in an early conference, also in 2007, which resulted in the book, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon? Africa and China*, edited by Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu. Naidu moved on to Fahamu and continued to support China-Africa research. The Network is proud to be part of this early group of actors in the continuing development of China-Africa research.

While we continue to struggle with funding, there is no shortage of interest, talent, or need. As an independent Network, we hope to maintain our contribution to Africa's growing literacy on Asia and specifically China and the Chinese migrants who venture to the African continent.

## Endnotes

1. See <http://china-africa.ssrc.org/caac-research-network/>

2. This preliminary group of researchers included YAN Hairong, Barry Sautman, Karen Harris, Paula Cristina Roque, Darryl Accone, and Nastasya Tay as well as Tu Huynh and Yoon Jung Park.
3. Other research teams carried out their research with funds from their respective institutions.
4. US refers to the United States of America
5. See <http://china-africa.ssrc.org/caac-research-network/network-in-the-news/>
6. See <http://china-africa.ssrc.org/>

Yoon Jung Park

*"The Chinese in Africa/Africans in China Research Network: The role of a virtual network on increasing Africa's 'East Asia literacy'"*

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