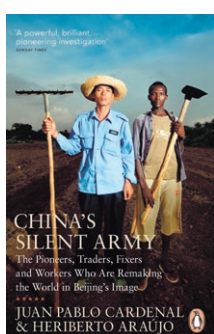


Two views about China's spreading influence

The two books under discussion here were written by investigative journalists, and it is clear that the authors endured many discomforts and dangers in their pursuit of information in parts of the world where travel is difficult and even dangerous. Cardenal and Araújo claim to have undertaken eighty flights pursuing investigations for their book, conducting more than 500 interviews. French provides a map showing his routes through twelve African countries. All three speak several languages, e.g., English, French, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish, which clearly helped their research. Both books deal with China's expanding influence around the world; specifically in Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Asia. The main theme is China's struggle to secure supplies of natural resources, open new markets for its products and create strong alliances. There is a sense throughout that this is an existential struggle for the Chinese as individuals and as a nation. Chinese emigrants have consistently displayed the ability to make great sacrifices, work extremely hard, and take audacious risks. Chinese people also have a traditional system of lending money to each other and an ethic of repaying it. This gives them great economic power.

Reviewer: Julia Read



Reviewed title
Cardenal, J.P. & H. Araújo. 2014.
(translated by Catherine Mansfield;
first published in Spanish as
La silenciosa conquista China, 2011)
*China's Silent Army: The Pioneers,
Traders, Fixers and Workers Who Are
Remaking the World in Beijing's Image*,
London: Penguin Books, ISBN
9780241957530

China's silent army

The idea behind *China's Silent Army* came in 2009 when Juan Pablo Cardenal and Heriberto Araújo became fascinated by the magnitude of China's phenomenal economic expansion and decided to carry out an investigation on the ground, which took two years – though they state the English edition is thoroughly updated. They suggest that the Beijing Olympics in 2008 was a watershed event because it rehabilitated China in the eyes of the world, eclipsing issues like the Tiananmen Square massacre and persecution of Falun Gong members. This gave China a better public image and more credibility, and since then Chinese expansion of trade and influence has not received much interference from international scrutiny because the West has been preoccupied by the GFC and its aftermath. This book is critical of what the authors describe as unprincipled activities by Chinese authorities and individual emigrants – the 'silent army'.

Cardenal and Araújo accuse China of harming the environment of its neighbours and trading partners. For example, the four provinces of northern China that border Russia have a population of 132 million people and a great need for natural

resources. On the other side, a vast territory is home to just 6 million people with abundant natural resources needed by the Chinese: water, wood, oil and fertile land. Since the collapse of the USSR, Siberian forests have been subjected to unsustainable looting of trees and forest products for an increasingly anarchic unregulated trade with China. In Kazakhstan, cheap Chinese products have flooded its markets – in the process destroying its industries – in exchange for oil, which is piped into China.

In Central Asia, the hereditary ruler of Turkmenistan is richly rewarded by China for supplying gas. In Iran – while supporting US efforts to stop Iran developing a nuclear arsenal – China has played an important role in Tehran's ambitions to develop a medium-range ballistic missile (capable of carrying a nuclear warhead) by supplying components, materials and chemicals through third countries. China also sells arms to Iran and enables Iranian exports via Hong Kong, despite international sanctions.

Chinese goods are sold in every corner of Africa, from Cape Verde to South Africa. A good proportion of the 750,000 official Chinese immigrants in Africa have gone into retail business, setting up shops in all the urban hubs and conquering the sector, which until recently was generally dominated by local businessmen or more traditional immigrants. This has been possible because of China's acceptance into the World Trade Organisation in 2001 – with support of the US, which hoped to sell its products to China, but with the result that Chinese products have taken over world markets through WTO negotiations.

In Latin America, a Chinese state company now controls 320,000 hectares of Argentinian agricultural land. Argentina is now China's third biggest food supplier and the Chinese have also created an empire of over 8,900 supermarkets in the country. In Peru, Shougeng – a Chinese iron and steel producer – owns a concession covering 670 square kilometres, including the original town, and "treats the local residents like unwanted

guests", while the Peruvian government gets rich dividends and ignores the problem.

Worldwide, China makes up for some technology it lacks with political connections and financial clout. Developing countries (such as Angola, which urgently needed to rebuild its basic infrastructure but did not have access to a qualified workforce, let alone the necessary funding) can obtain quick results and highly favourable financing on the basis of a simple pact: Chinese construction companies carry on projects across the country and receive payment directly from the Chinese Exim Bank, while the borrowing country supplies China with natural resources to pay the Chinese loan. In this way the leaders of the borrowing country are prevented from misusing the loan money and the project is assured of completion. While state-owned Chinese businesses have considerable resources, both financial and political, the authors also put a human face on the individual efforts and sacrifices of the labourers, engineers, tradespeople and entrepreneurs who are the unsung heroes and in many ways also the victims of China's global expansion. The indigenous workers on the projects in most cases are victims too, because they are badly paid, work in dangerous conditions and are not given training by Chinese contractors. The extractive industries employ few locals and only in menial positions. It works very much like classical colonialism.

These are only a few of many stories in *China's Silent Army*. This book is a fascinating roller-coaster ride, but it is clear that as the authors were researching, they were publishing numerous articles, which largely make up the book. This makes it hard to come to grips with the implications and suggestions that continually pop up and get swept aside in the onward rush. It is, after all, journalism, albeit investigative, rather than scholarship. However, investigative journalists often uncover things that point the way for scholars who might otherwise be unaware of them.

Quo Vadis China?

The discussion of China's growing prominence in international life attracts increasing attention from publics, policy-makers, and scholars alike. Usually sidelined by the mainstream, such interest in China's roles and attitudes on the world stage has grown exponentially in the context of the deepening concomitant economic, social, political crises across Europe and North America – which, until very recently, have been considered the traditional locales of powers and influence in world politics. Indicative of the emergent weight and significance of non-Western actors on the global stage, the trend set by China seems to challenge the conventional frameworks of both the study and practice of International Relations (IR).

Reviewer: Emilian Kavalski



Reviewed publication
Shao Binhong. 2013.
*China and the World: Balance, Imbalance,
Rebalance*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, Series:
'China in the World: A Survey of
Chinese Perspectives on International
Politics and Economics', Volume 1,
ISBN 9780739178508

IN THIS SETTING, most commentators suggest a nascent 'Sinicization' of global politics – seemingly confirmed by China's extensive involvement not just in the developing world, but also its palpable outreach to all regions on the globe. According to a number of commentators, backstopping such a drive are the perceived and actual aspirations of Beijing's external outlook. Thus, more often than not, the contention in the literature is that regardless of whether China chooses to develop a cooperative or conflictual stance, it will nevertheless have an important bearing on the patterns and practices of world affairs. The volume edited by Shao Binhong goes to the heart of this conversation. It brings together a diversity of Chinese perspectives on the transformations in and the transformative potential of Chinese foreign policy. In this respect, the collection offers invaluable insight into the concerns, challenges, and hopes of the Chinese academic and policy community.

Reviewed title

French, H.W. 2014.

*China's Second Continent:
How a Million Migrants Are
Building a New Empire in Africa,*
New York: Alfred A. Knopf,
ISBN 9780307056989

China's second continent

China's Second Continent explores the Chinese impact on Zambia, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali, Ghana, Mozambique and Namibia. Howard French's major interest is in Africa's evolution and the relationship between Africa and China, which he predicts will be one of the most crucial relationships of the 21st century. French became fascinated by China's rise because he was struck by the omnipresence of Chinese immigrants throughout Africa. There is more focus in this book on individual Africans and Chinese and their interactions and mutual misunderstandings. French's account is nuanced; he attempts to analyse what makes it possible for people from these two very different cultures to work together, and what impedes successful collaboration between them.

French believes that there is an unstudied human factor in the equation because he estimates at least a million private Chinese citizens in the past decade have chosen to seek a new future for themselves on African soil, many of them pulling up stakes in China entirely of their own initiative. The way the individuals who make up this enormous unguided

Above: Detail - China's
Silent Army cover.

horde have gone about their lives and businesses, and their general behaviour and the relationships they have formed, are all shaping China's image in Africa and conditioning its ties with Africa, but, he claims, have largely escaped scrutiny to date because of their unofficial nature.

Chinese people, French reminds us, have been emigrating for hundreds of years, fleeing hunger, war, repression and social conflict. Many factors have contributed to China's having one of the largest emigrant populations in history, with around 35 million people of Chinese ethnicity (mostly from the Han ethnic group) scattered around the planet. They have consistently shown the ability to make great sacrifices, work extremely hard, and take audacious risks. Their capacity for hard work and saving money, as well as their sharp business sense, are handed down from generation to generation. There are numerous stories in both these books of heroic self-sacrifice and incredible efforts by individual Chinese people, which made me gasp in awe.

But these are not the only factors. Chinese people also have a traditional system of lending money to each other and an ethic of always repaying it. This gives Chinese communities great economic power. Emigrants can access a network of connections which amounts to a global enterprise, linked by a multifunctioning business network, with high mobility and dense flows of capital goods and information, while they retain a marginal social status or low profile within the local societies in which they live. With time, they intermingle and become active participants, contributing to the local community, but they remain conscious of carrying a legacy and certain values that must be passed down to future generations.

French stresses the point that Africa is at a critical juncture in its history when a combination of demographics, education and communication technologies have begun to open up possibilities for a number of African countries to break with their poverty and underdevelopment and rise into the ranks of middle-income countries. In terms of overall growth, Africa has nearly matched Asia and (based on current trends) is expected to take over the global lead, with the continent's population set to double from one to two billion by the middle of this century, placing most of it squarely in a zone known as the demographic dividend where young, working-age people outnumber unproductive dependents.

However, growth and development are not the same thing, and French's concern is that while some well-governed African nations will leverage natural resources and population growth in ways that will lead to prosperity in the next 50 years, others who have fewer resources or are badly served by their leaders will end up nightmarishly crowded and politically unstable, with depleted resources and destroyed environments. Strong demand and plentiful investment from China could fuel growth and expand opportunities in Africa; or China's voracious appetites could lead to harmful subjugation and exploitation.

Having had access to American advisers and diplomats over the years, French has some interesting comments on American attitudes and policies towards Africa. Five years earlier a US Ambassador to Chad had made light of China's

mounting profile in Africa, exhibiting an attitude that was both dismissive and patronising. It is ridiculous to think of China challenging the United States! he had said in exasperation. But French felt a widespread and growing sense that China, at least in economic terms, was on its way to becoming the indispensable and expeditious new partner that could change the direction of nations in ways that the West with its countless rules and procedural demands had promised but never seemed to get around to. He says the Americans always seemed to have bigger fish to fry.

French relates that countless conversations with Africans have suggested to him that they see the United States as the epitome of all their disappointments. Africans feel let down by the Americans, who make beautiful, principled speeches and impose countless conditions on all manner of things in the end, seeming to move the ball very slowly. Americans regard Africa not as a terrain of opportunity, or even as a morally compelling challenge to humanity, but as a burden and largely as one to be evaded if possible. He was told American builders show no interest in working on big projects in Africa. They fear high operating costs and all they can imagine is violence, corruption and disease. The Chinese are able to capture market share from Western business by cheaper financing from Chinese state banks, cheaper Chinese materials and cheaper Chinese labour.

Summary

These two books raise many questions. They show the thin line between the positive and negative implications of China's enormous population and energy. Both books examine the consequences of all this activity for the countries receiving money, support (e.g., construction of roads and hospitals) and investment from China. Cardenal and Araejo posit that China's conquest of the rest of the world is now entering a phase of penetration of Western markets, armed with cash, diplomacy, tireless entrepreneurs, and a massive, varied food of products that are becoming progressively more difficult to compete with. They see Chinese expansion as an unstoppable force. French's concern is that the Chinese expansion is very much like the earlier European colonial expansion: dominated by greed, haphazard, wasteful, wanton, and likely to leave Africa, in many ways, worse off.

China's Silent Army has a worldwide scope and contains only a 5-page index, but 180 pages of copious notes with detailed references, sources and resources make it a very useful resource for those interested in politics, development, economics, and the future of the planet as a whole. *China's Second Continent*, shorter and with a narrower scope, has a more comprehensive index but only a few pages of notes, making it a more limited resource, but highly relevant for people interested in African development. Both books should be of considerable interest to people in the field of intercultural communication.

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Dissecting China's international outreach

The growing propensity and willingness of China's international outreach presents an intriguing intersection of the discursive memory of the past with the dynamic contexts of the present and the anticipated tasks of the future. By bringing together Chinese-language sources rarely referenced in Western IR literature, the contributors to Shao's volume manage to construct a thoughtful and extremely vivid picture of the complexity and diversity that mark Chinese IR scholarship. In fact, many readers would perhaps be surprised by the lack of a uniform and centralized IR discourse in China. As Shao's collection deftly demonstrates such a surprise is reflective of particularly Orientalizing ways of imagining China in the West, which tend to remain detached from the nuanced socio-political, historic, and regional contexts of Chinese IR literature.

The collection includes a number of studies exploring the domestic and international changes and challenges impacting China's worldviews. At the same time, other analyses probe a diversity of perspectives on the so-called nascent China Model (p.69) of world affairs. According to its interlocutors, the China Model has simultaneously economic, financial, security, global governance dimensions. These dimensions either individually or in tandem are made apparent in the process and context of specific topics and practices of China's international outreach. The contributors to the collection also discuss at length China's interactions with a variety of partners located both in China's immediate vicinity and further away. In either case, perceptions of proximity appear to be created not according

to the geographic distance from Beijing, but on contextual interpretations of the historical, cultural and socio-political record. Perhaps, unexpectedly, the topic of power transition and the alleged waning of American global power provide an important undercurrent of this conversation. The final section of the volume offers a stimulating forum on the likely trajectories of Sino-American relations in the next decade.

The accounts of China's international affairs included in the collection edited by Shao testify to the vim and vigor of Chinese IR scholarship. At the same time, the vibrant analyses provided by the contributors to the volume demonstrate what might be termed as the two salient features underlying Chinese assessments of world affairs: their subjectivity and preoccupation with ensuring China's national interest. The collection therefore demonstrates that IR scholars in China are, on the one hand, much more forthcoming about their own personal predilections and, on the other hand, quite explicit that their theoretical peregrinations in IR are intent on strengthening China's international status. This appears to be the key distinction from Western IR theory, where the explanation and understanding of any school is expected to conform to a particular understanding of objectivity and scientific method. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the analyses included in the collection are underpinned by strong normative commitments, prescribing unequivocally that China should behave as a responsible power (p.123).

Whither IR with Chinese characteristics?

The collection edited by Shao offers ample evidence of the contested nature of Chinese discourses on international affairs. What emerges is a framing of world affairs premised on the fusion of complex innovation and its creative contextualization within the idiosyncratic experience of China. In this respect, the contributors to Shao's volume make a timely and extremely pertinent contribution to the discussion of Chinese (and, more broadly, non-Western) approaches to world politics. The erudite analyses included in the volume offer a much needed contextual understanding of how China views and interprets the world. In this way, the collection edited by Shao has succeeded to provide refreshing perspectives on the content, scope, and implications of Chinese IR scholarship. The accounts provided by the contributors make available thoughtful reconsiderations of China's global roles as well as offer a wealth of solid knowledge and perceptive insights into the evolution, patterns and practices of China's foreign policy. Thus, to the experts of China's international interactions, Shao's volume grants unparalleled access both to comprehensive overviews and a much-needed reassessment of the conceptual outlines of Beijing's nascent global agency. To the beginners, it makes available accessible, yet rigorous, analytical and empirical engagements with the discourses animating Chinese IR thinking.

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