

## *Book Review*

### **BRAUTIGAM, D. (2011). THE DRAGON'S GIFT: THE REAL STORY OF CHINA IN AFRICA. OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.**

Megan Mcculloch

In the ongoing conversations of international relations and politics, a rising China is the elephant in the room. A quick search of best-seller lists, bookstore shelves and Internet searches provides dozens of theses on the economic growth and military modernization of a rising power juxtaposed against literature featuring the decline (or not) of American influence. This book, *The Dragon's Gift*, is a welcome addition for general readers on why some fears are overblown and others are exaggerations of inaccuracies.

Professor Brautigam's book on China's involvement in Africa offers a clear, well-reasoned call for a harder look at the information we see as fact. The book starts by tracing the historical roots of Chinese involvement in Africa. Instead of confirming the idea of a revolutionary or sinister interest on the part of China, she shows how Chinese involvement stretches back decades, a partnership founded on mutual gain rather than exploitation. Although the focus of this historical account is the interaction of China and the African states, the book juxtaposes this to the West's relationship with Africa.

She also offers a comprehensive look at aid in Africa and how no one can claim clean hands or soap box status in their involvement on the continent. She argues that China conceptualizes "aid" differently than in the West, as one prong of various tools of international engagement, with very little of their involvement in Africa actually fitting the international definition of aid. As well as offering a comprehensive overview of aid in Africa, she demonstrates how Chinese involvement often complements the types of aid given by the West. Finally, Professor Brautigam links many of the most hostile and damaging reports in the media to misunderstandings of motivations or difficulty of translation. Her last chapter presents and then thoroughly dismantles the myths surrounding Chinese involvement in the region.

This book offers many new insights into what Africa may truly want or need and how China sees itself. One point especially stressed by the author is that China is a developing state, rather than a developed state. Many of the alarmist articles written about China focus on the meteoric rise of its economy, forgetting that China is also dealing with

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its own insecurities and in many ways is uniquely posed to aid Africa as the country has recently passed through Africa's current stage of development.

One of the best arguments proposed in this book is that China's motivations are different than the West traditionally ascribes. Rather than a Western bogeyman, Chinese focus is fixed firmly on a diplomatic tug-of-war with Taiwan for influence. As the balance of power shifts, so does Beijing's outlook. Though this is not an explicit connection made, I think it could be drawn based on the examples given. As a whole, the book is extremely articulate, describing how so many, including the World Bank and IMF, consistently misjudge China's motivations. The author focuses not on single incidents, but on illustrations from many different countries.

This book is an outstanding addition to resources easily readable by the general public; with a wide-range of cross application whether the reader is interested in China, economics, Africa or the humanitarian aspects of aid.

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**ISSN** 1662-1387