

Although it is a shame that there are still gaps in the book that remain to be filled, it is also a pleasure to see an able scholar reflecting thoughtfully on the shift of China's Taiwan policy to one of selective engagement. As Xin Qiang laments,

Beijing's engagement effort was offset by security tension and the political impasse...the mainland's confrontational approaches in security, political, and diplomatic frontiers would undermine the credibility and sincerity of Beijing's conciliatory gestures in economic, social, and cultural areas. The strained cross-Strait relations will inevitably exacerbate the hostility and drive common Taiwanese to turn their backs on mainland China, which will consequently make it harder ... to charm the public into favoring Beijing's ultimate goal of peacefully unifying the two sides (p. 67).

Given the escalation of cross-Strait tensions, readers of Xin's book will wonder: can the "1992 Consensus" still be a panacea for the cross-Strait deadlock? Can a more assertive China under Xi Jinping restore the "peaceful development" policy toward Taiwan? What can Beijing do if the majority of the Taiwanese people continue to refuse the "1992 Consensus"? Perhaps no one can be sure. However, more important than rehashing the decades-old "1992 Consensus" is to focus on how Beijing's "one China" principle should be adapted to meet the new and pressing challenges presented by the vastly changing geopolitical environment. Simply assuming that China's Taiwan policy of "peaceful development" would resume, should Taipei follow Beijing's demands, rings hollow to the Taiwanese public as well as to any honest observer of cross-Strait relations.

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Ugandan Agency within China–Africa Relations: President Museveni and China's Foreign Policy in East Africa

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In recent years, the notion of African agency has become a productive avenue for analysis within the China–Africa field. A growing body of scholarly literature reveals that a wide range of African actors – from presidents and political factions to bureaucrats, local governments and local entrepreneurs – are not merely passive agents to be acted upon but active players. Their various calculated actions, as much as those of their Chinese counterparts, co-constitute and co-shape the often-uncertain China–Africa realities on the ground.

Barney Walsh's *Ugandan Agency within China–Africa Relations* represents another welcome addition to this line of inquiry. By resorting to a "case within a case study" (p. 146) approach – that is, centring on two security issues, terrorism and oil investment, in East Africa's Uganda, Walsh unpacks how the Ugandan President has strategically exploited the Chinese presence in Uganda and the broader East African region to skilfully consolidate his domestic power position and deliberately drive a more militarized regional security and integration agenda that also

primarily serves the interest of his power politics at home. Indeed, as one of the longest-serving presidents in Africa, Museveni has a proven track record of carving out space within Western partners' changing interests for his political survival even prior to the re-emergence of southern partners like China on the stage.

While Museveni's machinations amid the "Global Mix" (p. 35) diplomatic framework and the new geographies of international development might not come as a surprise, Walsh's investigation fills an important gap, both empirically and analytically, in the existing China–Africa literature, that is, the regional nature and implications of Chinese engagement in Africa. He shows, rather convincingly, that given the "naturally regional nature" (p. 151) of African politics, the Chinese presence is inevitably "sucked" (p. 151) into (intra-)regional dynamics and conditions both within regional institutions and among neighbouring countries. The interactions between Chinese engagement and the politics of regionalism in Africa as well as the attendant intended and unintended consequences for individual states, regional organization and integration remains a much neglected yet highly productive area of China–Africa enquiry; and Walsh's book marks a valuable scholarly attempt to explore it.

The book consists of five chapters. After the introduction, chapter one explores China's direct and indirect interactions with a wide range of key actors in Uganda's political economy and how Museveni exploits these dynamics for his own regime consolidation. Chapter two offers both a historical and contemporary account of China's role in East Africa and the development of the East African Community (EAC). It argues that this engagement, particularly in terrorism and oil, provides "operating space" (p. 61) for Museveni to position himself and his country as central to the EAC's regional security dynamics and development ambitions. Chapter three takes a step forward to empirically detail how the Ugandan President strategizes the Chinese linkages with the two security issues to advocate "a militarised response" (p. 105) domestically and regionally that helps maintain and further his hegemonic standing. The concluding chapter offers some relevant reflections on the implications of this monograph for the study of African agency.

Methodologically, Walsh develops his analysis primarily through fieldwork interviews with a broad array of key local informants in Uganda's political assemblage, ranging from politicians, diplomats and bureaucrats to journalists and local citizens. Compared to this impressive access to Ugandan and other East African sources, interview materials with Chinese interlocutors appear relatively limited. While this might be understandable given Walsh's primary goal of an "Africa-centric analysis" (p. 3), some of the most intriguing discussions on the entanglements of Chinese presence with local patronage dynamics indeed draw on his occasional access to crucial Chinese informants, for instance, private business players (pp. 37–41).

Walsh's book also complicates our understanding of China's foreign policy in Africa, which continues to be framed within non-interference despite its globalizing outreach. Historically, this principle was not espoused in East Africa as strictly as Beijing nowadays persistently portrays it (pp. 62–68). Beijing's non-interference is also often accompanied by its self-claimed commitment to support regional organizations. The China–EAC realities, nevertheless, illustrate that this commitment, if not entirely tokenistic, remains largely selective because of Beijing's continued preference for "pro-sovereignty nation-state engagement" and "practical reality that power currently remains at the national state level in the African context" (p. 151).

While Walsh attends to various Chinese players' activities in Uganda and East Africa, the heterogeneity involved appears to be relegated to a secondary consideration so that they could be lumped into a single category of "Chinese overarching presence" (p. 28) that constitutes a "structural context" in which African leaders operate. However, this analytical abstraction sometimes tends to produce a reified characterization that something quintessentially "Chinese" exists in these activities. A comparative sensitivity is therefore desired in the book or future research to further complement and nuance Walsh's scrutiny – for instance, to what degree do Indian, Arab

or Western business players interact differently with Uganda's patron–client system from their Chinese counterparts, and with what kind of different consequences?

That said, *Ugandan Agency within China–Africa Relations* remains a fascinating study of African elites' political manoeuvres in an increasingly diversified landscape of international development. It is suitable for undergraduate and graduate courses on South–South cooperation, China–Africa, Chinese foreign policy and African politics, among others. Its jargon-light writing style also renders it accessible to anyone curious about the ever-shifting field of China–Africa relations.

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Study Gods: How the New Chinese Elite Prepare for Global Competition

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Yi-Lin Chiang's *Study Gods* is an insightful ethnography of elite Beijing high-school students, focusing on their aspirations to become members of the “global elite.” The book examines the status hierarchy within Beijing high schools and shows how students, parents and teachers reproduce it. Innovatively, Chiang's study contains a longitudinal dimension: after conducting ethnographic fieldwork in schools for 15 months from 2012 to 2014, she carried out follow-up research on her 28 core research subjects, most of whom pursued graduate school or careers in the US and UK. This approach enables her to show how the strategies her subjects learned in high school facilitate their pursuit of transnational elite status later in life. She argues that “elite Chinese youths are systematically successful in the competition for global elite status by becoming ‘study gods’ (*xue-shen*), a term they use to describe exceptionally high-performing students” (p. 4).

Highly readable, *Study Gods* promises to have broad appeal. It would be appropriate for introductory as well as advanced courses and will appeal to scholars of education beyond Chiang's native discipline of sociology – including anthropologists and comparative educationists – as well as anyone interested in looking inside the black box of elite Chinese education.

A distinguishing characteristic of Chiang's study, which joins several other recent ethnographies of high school life in China, lies in its focus on elite students in Beijing, arguably some of the most privileged youth in China. Chiang's methodology combines ethnography and interviews. She shadowed students in two elite high schools, including home stays with several subjects, followed by in-depth interviews. For a broader perspective, she interviewed her subjects' teachers and parents as well as speaking with students at other elite Beijing high schools. Her follow-up research, carried out transnationally over subsequent years, included visiting subjects in their later places of study and work.

Her central arguments are well supported by her ethnographic data. As elsewhere in China, status hierarchy revolves around test performance. Students in the so-called domestic departments of these schools focus on the national college entrance examination, or *gaokao*, whereas students in the international departments take an American-style curriculum and prepare for the “American