



## **The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa**

*Deborah Brautigam*

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Is China a rogue donor, as some media pundits suggest? Or is China helping the developing world pave a pathway out of poverty, as the Chinese claim? In the last few years, China's aid program has leapt out of the shadows. Media reports about huge aid packages, support for pariah regimes, regiments of Chinese labor, and the ruthless exploitation of workers and natural resources in some of the poorest countries in the world sparked fierce debates. These debates, however, took place with very few hard facts. China's tradition of secrecy about its aid fueled rumors and speculation, making it difficult to gauge the risks and opportunities provided by China's growing embrace.

This well-timed book, by one of the world's leading experts, provides the first comprehensive account of China's aid and economic cooperation overseas. Deborah Brautigam tackles the myths and realities, explaining what the Chinese are doing, how they do it, how much aid they give, and how it all fits into their "going global" strategy. Drawing on three decades of experience in China and Africa, and hundreds of interviews in Africa, China, Europe and the U.S., Brautigam shines new light on a topic of great interest.

China has ended poverty for hundreds of millions of its own citizens. Will Chinese engagement benefit Africa? Using hard data and a series of vivid stories ranging across agriculture, industry, natural resources, and governance, Brautigam's fascinating book provides an answer. It is essential reading for anyone concerned with China's rise, and what it might mean for the challenge of ending poverty in Africa.

## **The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa Details**

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## From Reader Review The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa for online ebook

### **Stefan Fergus says**

The book's opening chapters can feel muddled and contradictory. There is a defensive tone to more of the discussion and analysis than is necessary, which stunts both. That being said, the book also boasts a wealth of case study data and examples that is impressive (that's why it gets 4\* instead of 3\*).

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### **Katie says**

I thought this book was extremely useful in confronting the rampant rumors and misinformation about China's involvement in Africa. Most of what they are doing there is commercial investment, not aid, and their levels of investment remain much lower than those of the US, EU, etc. Furthermore, they are investing in everything, not just resource extraction, but also manufacturing, agriculture, etc. I have two critiques about the book though. 1) The first half of the book was pretty dense, and I really felt that the meat and potatoes of the book was the last five chapters. The first half was useful in explaining how China's aid/investment strategy developed, but its desnity discouraged others in our book club (all nerd economists) from getting farther. 2) I felt like she approached the topic from the point of view of a "China apologist." Even in the instances where she acknowledged China was doing something bad, there was always a follow-up of, "Someone else did it first," or, "They have learned from their mistake and they are trying harder not to mess up now." China's current posture with respect to Syria, Iran, etc. suggest otherwise. Worth a read, but I'm still a little skeptical.

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### **AJ P says**

This book gives a more optimistic view of Chinese involvement in Africa than is typically found in the West. Brautigam thinks that, for the many faults, the Chinese progam of economic investment in Africa is good - and likely even better than what the West is doing there.

I used this book for my capstone paper at school and found it very helpful.

I recommend it for a different view of China and Africa!

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### **Anna says**

What a complete look at this subject. Explores every angle. Very academic book.

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### **Anna says**

I couldn't finish it, because Brautigam's mischaracterizations of Chinese history under Mao suggest such a deep bias it suggests the book is unlikely to be accurate in any meaningful way. Not only did she cut in half the scholarly estimates of how many people died of starvation during the 'Great Leap Forward' (she gave 20 Million, when the most accurate estimate is likely to be 40 Million at least) she followed this but stating 'between these two extremes a more pragmatic road prevailed'. I am sorry, I fail to understand how economic policy which starves 40 Million people to death could in any sense be considered 'pragmatic'. She also fails to mention that Chinese Aid under Mao was actually pioneered during the famine, as he ordered tons of grain sent as gifts to communist countries to bolster his image while his people starved. (Read Mao's Great Famine if you are curious.)

Her basic thesis - that Chinese Aid is primarily economic investment focused on mutual benefit - is an interesting one. Unfortunately, it belies every example of Chinese development that I have seen with my own eyes. I have travelled extensively in countries which receive 'The Dragons Gift' and seen in person the empty, ghostly hospitals and irrationally placed abandoned airports it produces. If there is any 'mutual benefit' here, it is solely for the autocratic leaders in these countries. In addition one need not go far to learn about not just useless but literally poisonous forms of Chinese aid - look up the sales of counterfeit and useless medicine to people in rural Papua New Guinea if you need an example of this. In this case Chinese 'aid' is literally killing people with no other access to health resources.

Despite my background knowledge of the problems with Chinese Aid I was still interested in her thesis and wanted to hear her out. Unfortunately Brautigam's unwillingness to engage with the difficult facts on the ground, and willingness to twist them to fit her story, make me highly doubtful of her scholarship. I don't think this book is worth the time to read it.

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### **!Tæmbu?u says**

KOBOBOOKS

Reviewed by The Independent

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### **Meihan Liu says**

A little outdated since it was written and published before 2010 and during the Hu-Wen Administration. But, wow, thank you, Ms. Brautigam, for the conclusion part.

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### **Kimfu says**

I hesitate to say that I actually read this book. I barely understood what the author was talking about. Part of the problem was I was listening to it on my Kindle, and a computer voice is always more difficult to understand. But the real problem was that she wrote her book in such a dense, technical way -- so caught up in the intricacies of international finance -- that I believe I would have to take at least two college courses in international finance before I could really get the gist of her meaning. It's a pity because the topic is so useful for today's world.

"The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa" was Book No. 9 for 2014!  
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### **Ed says**

The People's Republic of China do a lot right in their dealing with the developing states of Africa. When investing in a country or granting aid the Chinese don't make political demands; they don't insist the recipient nation reform its economy to better pay bondholders; they stay for as long as necessary to get a project running and hand it over to the Africans, always ready to return if necessary. The Chinese build what African nations want--a railroad, a stadium, an office building for the Foreign Ministry--these are they types of "wasteful" projects that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank won't even consider. And commercial banks won't fund a project without the imprimatur of those transnational financial giants.

Technicians and executives from China work alongside their African counterparts. They live simply and frugally, often in barracks that they construct upon arrival. Managers and workers from the global North generally live in separate compounds, luxurious by African (or Chinese) standards and tend to supervise from afar--or at least as far as possible.

The Chinese are trusted because they aren't a former colonial power--indeed they can claim to be "post-colonial" themselves. They listen to what Africans want, even if those they are listening to are autocratic dictators. The Chinese drive hard bargains but do so in a businesslike fashion.

The future of Africa may well be in the East--the efforts of the United States and Western Europe have done little even after pouring billions of dollars in aid, debt cancellation and low interest loans into the same area.

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### **Dash Williams says**

Interesting through out, The Dragon's Gift challenged my notion about what constitutes aid and China's engagement in Africa, which is described by Deborah Brautigam as strategic, practical, and experimental. Brautigam cautions the reader to not give you much credence to sensational headlines surrounding Chinese business in Africa. She also chides officials and journalists from The West who do not do their due diligence and are altogether too comfortable reporting hyperbole as fact. This book is a nuanced explanation of a complicated subject that I would recommend to anyone interested in Development Economics, China, and/or Africa.

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### **Chandler says**

If you only read one book on the subject of China's engagement with Africa, this should be it. Brautigam does an excellent job of parsing out fact from fiction and giving readers a clear-eyed view of the reality on the ground. It could probably use an updated edition by this point, but not too badly.

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## Mike says

An interesting book, though not one I would recommend to many. It's long and academic, so you have to be interested in the subject. I was certainly interested in the subject myself, though. China's engagement with Africa is something I have seen first hand in Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda -- and many of the myths which the author debunks are myths which I have heard here first hand.

She has a few main points about China's engagement with Africa:

1. The numbers quoted are almost always inflated, double counted, or just plain incorrect. China is a major donor (and investor) in Africa, but the Western countries still represent a much larger figure.
2. China's engagement in Africa is not a new thing, it is a long standing thing -- the West just wasn't paying attention in the past.
3. China's engagement is not purely for the purposes of extracting resources for their own markets, as they are often accused of. They invest in many countries and sectors, and generally focus not on resources but on profits, businesses, international brands, and exports. These things often do concern resources, but China's engagement is not purely aimed towards oil, copper, etc.
4. Many of the practices of which China is accused of (tied aid, resource backed loans, export and import credits, etc.) are things that China learned from the West. Western countries still practiced these things until very recently (and in some cases still do). So China cannot be accused of wrong doing without some finger pointing at the West as well.
5. Much of China's aid and investment is channeled to infrastructure and manufacturing, which have been neglected by the West.
6. And China attempts to make their aid and investment win-win.

I found the book to be very interesting. She debunks many of the myths and shows the upside to much of what China does. Often China is simply misunderstood -- though they bear much of the blame for that, since it is often a result of a lack of transparency. She definitely added depth to my own analysis of China in Africa.

That being said I do have a few gripes. For one thing the book is rather short on conclusions. The author spends a lot of time looking at China's engagement in Africa, and trying to tease out the facts from the myths, but in the end she never seems to conclusively answer her own questions (in particular about whether China's aid and investment is truly win-win). That is probably because it is a difficult (if not impossible) question to answer, but she keeps saying she'll get to that in a later chapter and by the end of the book I felt a bit let down. For another thing she often lets China off the hook because other people do the same thing or did the same thing in the past. It's certainly true that we can't excoriate China for doing things that we ourselves may still do, but we also shouldn't accept the argument "...but HE did it to ME..." China's engagement in Africa *does* represent concerns around labour practices, environmental damage, corruption, poor governance, unfair subsidies, and cut-price competition. The fact that the West represents similar concerns at times does not change that.

The most interesting thing about this book, though, was looking at Chinese ideas about aid and investment. China is unique (or almost unique) in the fact that it is a *developing* country which offers aid and investment to other developing countries (as opposed to an already developed country). And that definitely changes their view and approach. This is seen in the way they have changed aid giving based on their own experience, and it is certainly seen in their disdain for Western paternalism (conditionality and structural adjustment being the primary examples). The book definitely got me thinking.

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## ?Misericordia? ~ The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?????? ✨\*♥? says

Have you ever considered that the efforts of China may constitute a lifeline for the African nations? I, for one, never considered it in those terms! Here goes some brainfood.

Hands down 5 stars for a very fair endeavour to excercise critical thinking and to see both sides of the equation. A lot of in-depth information to muse over.

More review to follow!

Q:

The Chinese are many things in Africa: touring presidents delivering grand promises for partnership, provincial companies with very long names, huge global corporations, resource-hungry and profit-motivated. They are factory managers demanding long hours of work, tough businesswomen, scrap metal buyers, traders. They offer frank deals that they expect to work well for China, but also for Africa: roads, broadband, land lines, high-tech seeds. They bring aid workers: vocational teachers, agricultural specialists, water engineers, youth volunteers, and others who have come, as so many from the West have done, out of curiosity, a sense of adventure, or a desire to help the poor. And they have not just arrived on the scene. (c)

Q:

Their long history in post-independence Africa gives China legitimacy and credibility among many Africans. Arriving after independence, they never really left. The West simply did not notice the Chinese teams laboring upcountry building small hydropower stations and bridges, repairing irrigation systems, managing state-owned factories, all usually without the kind of billboards other donors favored to advertise their presence. Today, Africa fits into the strategy of “going global,” not simply for its natural resources, but for opportunities in trade, construction, industry: business. The Chinese are linking business and aid in innovative ways. Aid subsidizes Chinese companies to set up agro-technical demonstration stations, or economic cooperation and development centers. The Chinese are experimenting, hoping that the profit motive will make these efforts sustainable, releasing the Chinese government from having to return again and again to resuscitate its aid projects. They will continue to change, and grow, and learn from these experiments, and we would do well to follow this progress and learn from it too.

By Western standards, China is secretive about its aid and export credits. This lack of transparency understandably raises suspicion and concern. Beijing could easily address this by using reporting standards adopted long ago by the OECD. But, on the other hand, private banks and corporations in the West have long maintained secrecy about their deals with African leaders. Transparency is good, but the West should lead the way. It would be unrealistic to expect Chinese corporations to be the first to publish their own business contracts.

China is now a powerful force in Africa, and the Chinese are not going

away. Their embrace of the continent is strategic, planned, long-term, and still unfolding.

Ultimately, it is up to African governments to shape this encounter in ways that will benefit their people. Many will not grasp this opportunity, but some will. The West can help by gaining a more realistic picture of China's engagement, avoiding sensationalism and paranoia, admitting our own shortcomings, and perhaps exploring the notion that China's model of consistent non-intervention may be preferable to a China that regularly intervenes in other countries' domestic affairs, or uses military force to foster political change.

At the end of the day, we should remember this: China's own experiments have raised hundreds of millions of Chinese out of poverty, largely without foreign aid. They believe in investment, trade, and technology as levers for development, and they are applying these same tools in their African engagement, not out of altruism but because of what they learned at home. They learned that their own natural resources could be assets for modernization and prosperity. They learned that a central government commitment to capitalist business development could rapidly reduce poverty. They learned that special zones could attract clusters of mature industries from the West and Japan, providing jobs and technologies. These lessons emphasize not aid, but experiments; not paternalism, but the "creative destruction" of competition and the green shoots of new opportunities.

This may be the dragon's ultimate, ambiguous gift. (c)

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### **Velvetink says**

pdf.Bookfinder

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### **Alec says**

For the most part, this book accomplished what it set out to do: dispel a lot of rumors and myths. In that regard, it is insightful and worth reading. Brautigam lucidly explains how Chinese involvement in Africa is not entirely new, though its scale has increased as China has grown economically. Also, she points out that many of the lessons China learned during its own development have had a major impact on its aid and investment policies. Further, she does well to articulate the goals (mostly based on official statements) of Chinese aid and business in Africa. Most important is the fact that a lot of what goes on is not aid, but instead business and investment. Too often we confuse the two, leading to unfair criticism.

Despite its strengths, I felt the book, as a whole, had some glaring flaws. First, Brautigam fails to adequately answer the question of just how much positive impact Chinese involvement in Africa is having on ordinary Africans. She tries a little when discussing China's agricultural investments and aid packages, but the analysis falls short. Additionally, she quotes her interview subjects and newspaper reports that refer to African workers and managers involved in different Chinese projects as lazy and incompetent. After

reproducing them, she never addresses the utterances at all (with maybe one exception). Failing to follow up on statements like these is evasive: she's not saying anyone's lazy, but she's not saying the quotes are wrong, either. These kinds of tacit agreement and lazy explanation are ubiquitous in the book.

Still, I think this book is worth reading. It sheds light on an important topic, challenges myths, and raises further questions.

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