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China-Kenya Relations

In the last two decades, China's increased engagement with the Global South has created fear and excitement all over the world. From claims of neo-colonialism to development hero, this engagement has been no more contentious than in Africa. In the context of China's strategic goals - Belt and Road Initiative connectivity, locking down natural resources, and addressing domestic construction overcapacity - Kenya has emerged as a primary target for analysis.

This curated reading list provides the beginning researcher a deep look into China-Kenya relations. It is broken down by issue and sector in order to best orient the researcher. It begins with a brief section on Kenya-China historical relations. It next gives some general sources that are both broad China-Africa tools, such as the SAIS-CARI database and the FOCAC website, and general overviews of China-Kenya affairs. It then lists, by topic, the literature that addresses the areas of engagement with the most promise: primarily, Chinese-funded and constructed infrastructure projects and knowledge and skills transfer. It then lists the resources that address the primary areas of concern: labor disputes and Kenyan debt. Finally, it includes those sources that address China-Kenya relations from the perspective of Kenyan nationals, looking at Kenyan agency and cultural exchanges.

As several resources are relevant to more than one topic or issue area, they were placed into the category to which they were most pertinent, and the other issues which they address are noted in the annotation of the source. Within each sector category, the sources are further organized chronologically. The literature on China-Africa affairs is growing exponentially with each passing year, and as the situation on the ground continues to evolve, topical relevance is incredibly important. Publication years must thus be taken into consideration when reading these sources.

There are several China-Africa scholars that are notable for their leadership in the field, but country-specific researchers remain rarer and harder to identify. In the context of China-Kenya affairs, Dr. Joseph Onjala has emerged as a specialist on bilateral engagement, especially on issues of economic development and Kenyan debt. He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Development Studies and has published several papers on bilateral affairs.

Though this bibliography is quite comprehensive, it is important to remember that this is a constantly-evolving topic, and realities on the ground in Kenya can change drastically from one year to the next. It will thus likely require updating in a few years. In the meantime, it should

serve as a helpful guide for anyone interested in learning about the main issues and areas of engagement and concern in China-Kenya relations.

History:

Shinn, David H. and Joshua Eisenman. “China’s Relations with East Africa, the Horn, and the Indian Ocean Islands.” in: Shinn, David H., Joshua Eisenman. *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement*, 249-283. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

In this book chapter, Shinn and Eisenman provide an overview of China’s engagement with East Africa. Their broad summary of the region’s history with China provides a helpful East African context for understanding China-Kenya relations. This chapter also includes brief but specific sections detailing each country’s relationship with China, including that of Kenya, which highlights the many aspects of their relationship and can serve as a springboard from which to launch into China-Kenya affairs.

Sun, Jodie Yuzhou. “‘Now the Cry Was Communism’: The Cold War and Kenya’s Relations with China, 1964–70.” *Cold War History*, June 6, 2019, 1–20.

This article analyzes Kenya’s relationship with the PRC between 1964 and 1970 and explores the interaction between domestic politics, foreign policy, and the Cold War in Kenya. By examining factional political struggles within the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the article makes a case for the significance of local forces in how the “local” Cold War unfolded. With Sun paying close attention to African agency and broader geopolitical pressures in the Kenya-PRC relationship, this article is a valuable starting place for scholars researching contemporary Kenya-PRC relations.

Sun, Jodie Yuzhou. “Historicizing African Socialisms: Kenyan African Socialism, Zambian Humanism, and Communist China’s Entanglements.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 52, no. 3 (2019): 349–74.

This article draws on materials in Kenyan and Zambian archives and newspapers, as well as diplomatic sources, to construct a historiography of African socialisms. Its analysis triangulates between the influence of the global Cold War, the political culture of individual African states (in this case Kenya and Zambia), and their bilateral relations with Communist countries.

General:

Sanghi, Apurva and Dylan Johnson, 2016. “Deal or No Deal: Strictly Business for China in Kenya?” World Bank: Policy Research Working Paper 7614.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/24159>

This working paper addresses common myths surrounding Chinese economic activity in Kenya, complicating the claim that Chinese companies do not employ local workers and scrutinizing the potential for increased Kenyan exports to China. It argues that Kenyan policy makers should be

more concerned with Kenya's overall trade balance than with specific bilateral trade imbalances, and calls for increased transparency in infrastructure projects. By touching on several hot-button topics, it serves as a good starting place for the researcher interested in China-Kenya economic relations.

Onjala, Joseph. "A Scoping Study on China-Africa Economic Relations: The Case of Kenya." African Economic Research Consortium, (2008).

<https://aercafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/1Kenya.pdf>.

Onjala provides an overview of economic engagement between China and Kenya up to the early 2000s. His article dives into the bilateral cooperation agreements between the two countries and the scope of Chinese investment, loans, and aid. As understanding the bilateral economic relationship is key to analyzing the modern day relationship, this article is quite helpful for the study of China-Kenya affairs. For data regarding economic engagement in the last two decades, see the databases from the *China-Africa Research Initiative*.

"The 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,"

<https://focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/>

This website is the source of official coverage of the 2018 FOCAC Summit by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It includes broad summaries of events, attendees, and analyses. Though providing a good overview of the most recent summit on China-Africa affairs, it is important to keep in mind that this is a website sponsored by the Chinese government and will thus likely exclude any negative coverage or analyses. It does, however, provide a helpful, broad overview of the promises and forecasts made during FOCAC 2018.

"Data." China Africa Research Initiative. <http://www.sais-cari.org/data/>.

The China Africa Research Initiative, based out of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, is the most thorough database of economic and investment data in China-Africa affairs. Its data include Chinese loans, investments, trade, agricultural investments, contracts, workers, and aid to Africa. In addition to thorough data, however, CARI also frequently publishes policy briefs and working papers on China-Africa affairs that cover specific aspects of engagements and China's relations with particular countries. Some of these papers relevant to Kenya will be covered in this bibliography.

Landry, David G. "Comparing the Determinants of Western and Chinese Development Finance Flows to Africa". CARI Working Paper 21 (2018).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/5f468cce44e60e395d0dcd80/1598459087764/WP-21-Development-Finance-David-G-Landry.pdf>

Landry addresses the Western concern that Chinese development finance in Africa is undermining attempts to improve governance, exploring the institutional indicators that determine the destination for China's development finance. He finds that China has a higher tolerance than the West for countries with weaker institutions, and that bilateral trade relations

and UN voting alignment play a stronger role. Landry's working paper is helpful for contrasting China and the West's practice of financing developing countries and regions, and places into context China's prioritizing its commercial and political interests.

Infrastructure:

Bénazéraf, David and Will Thornely. "The Construction by Chinese Players of Roads and Housing in Nairobi: The transfer of town planning practices between China and Kenya," *China Perspectives* 1. 97 (2014): 51-59.

Bénazéraf and Thornely detail the increasing number of urban development projects by Chinese firms in Nairobi, looking specifically at the construction of roads and housing for the middle class, and how these projects are influencing urban planning practices. Their article analyzes Chinese engagement with Kenya through a perspective of urban planning, contributing a unique lens to the literature that generally takes a broader view of Chinese state-owned enterprises or President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative. It places Chinese-funded and operated road and housing projects into the broader context of development projects carried out by other international actors and evaluates the Chinese projects for their impact.

Wissenbach, Uwe and Yuan Wang. "African politics meets Chinese engineers: The Chinese-built Standard Gauge Railway Project in Kenya and East Africa". CARI Working Paper 13. 2017 (See also related CARI Policy Brief 16).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/594d739f3e00bed37482d4fe/1498248096443/SGR+v4.pdf>

In the extended analysis of the Standard Gauge Railway project in Kenya, Wissenbach and Wang detail the context in which the project was developed and its relation to broader concerns over Chinese financed projects in Africa, social and environmental externalities, skills and technology transfer, and labor issues. They conduct a series of interviews with stakeholders, concluding that, contrary to widespread assumptions, many of the problems that have arisen fall on the shoulders of Kenyan actors, especially politicians, and not Chinese actors. This paper highlights the need to consider Kenyan agency in evaluating the impact of any aspect of Chinese engagement, contributing an important lens to the broader study of Kenya-China affairs.

Yu, Hong. "Motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiatives and Establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank." *Journal of Contemporary China* 26.105 (2017): 353-368.

Though this article does not directly address Kenya, Yu's analysis of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are essential to understanding China's push towards global infrastructure engagement. It is important to place Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Kenya into the broader context of Kenya's central role in the Belt and Road Initiative, and Yu's article provides exactly that. Understanding the domestic Chinese conditions and

economic challenges that have led to the Going Global policy and the internationalization of Chinese construction firms thus frames the importance of the sector most central to Chinese engagement in Kenya: infrastructure projects.

Chen, Yunnan. “Silk Road to the Sahel: African Ambitions in China’s Belt and Road Initiative”. CARI Policy Brief 23 (2018).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/5bf3460a1ae6cf1cf9f19750/1542669839253/PB+23+-+Belt+and+Road+-+Yunnan+Chen.pdf>

In this policy brief, Chen provides an incredibly concise overview of President Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative and the way it ties into African plans for development and regional integration. Chen explores the Initiative’s potential to improve infrastructure and stimulate growth, but also to present significant challenges to project sustainability and debt burden. As Kenya features as a prominent African actor in the Initiative, this brief provides a helpful and up-to-date overview of Africa’s current role in Xi’s landmark development project.

Skills transfer:

Tsui, Benjamin. “Do Huawei's Training Programs and Centers Transfer Skills to Africa?”. CARI Policy Brief 14 (2016).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/578e94e83e00be65954feb3f/1468962026573/Tsui+brief+v.5.pdf>

In this short policy brief, Tsui explores the training programs and centers Huawei has opened in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Egypt. Skills transfer remains an extremely important topic of Chinese engagement in Kenya and in Africa more broadly. Huawei is the central case study in this brief, and Tsui concludes with several unanswered questions. Despite the obvious impact of the new training programs and centers on future-hire Huawei employees, the questions of how effective these centers have been and how much they have impacted the local context remain an interesting field of inquiry.

Sun, Irene Yuan and Qi Lin. “Creating a market for skills transfer: A case study of AVIC International’s skills transfer programs in Kenya”. CARI Working Paper 14.2017 (See also related Policy Brief 17).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/59c16bdd32601e607092429a/1505848312981/irene+v2.pdf>

This working paper by Sun and Lin provides a further in-depth analysis of AVIC International’s skills transfer programs. The researchers analyze the two primary characteristics of the program; First, that the company is truly invested for both profit and social reasons, and second, that its cooperation with the Kenyan government follows a new, flexible development approach called “bootstrapping development.” It supplements the policy brief in several ways, adding much needed analysis to the issue of skills transfer from Chinese engagement in Kenya. Moreover,

taking the analysis from the perspective and motivations of the Chinese company offers insight into the logic that guides and incentivizes skills transfer programs and can likely inform future engagement.

Manufacturing and Consumer Goods:

Patroba, Hilary. “China in Kenya: Addressing Counterfeit Goods and Construction Sector Imbalances”. SAIIA Occasional Paper 110 (2012).

<https://www.africaportal.org/publications/china-in-kenya-addressing-counterfeit-goods-and-construction-sector-imbbalances/>

Patroba explores China’s impact on the construction and manufacturing sectors in Kenya, finding that, in the former, they have maintained a positive reputation for the efficiency with which they complete projects while, in the latter, they have received condemnation for low quality products and unfair practices. Patroba also provides helpful contextual data, summarizing the three stages of China-Kenya engagement and the extent of trade and investment. Though this report is also quite relevant to Chinese infrastructure projects, it addresses the issues with Chinese consumer goods in the Kenyan market quite thoroughly, analyzing what measures the Kenyan government can implement to help mitigate their negative effects.

Wang, Weiyi, Jinghao Lu, and Wilmot Allen. “The East Africa Shift in Textile and Apparel Manufacturing: China-Africa Strategies and AGOA’s Influence”. CARI Policy Brief 25 (2018).

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3722756

Wang, Lu, and Allen explore the shift in the cotton-textile-apparel value chain from China to East Africa, providing a policy brief on the opportunities this shift can provide to integrate African value chains and spur trade and economic growth. Their analysis concludes that Chinese apparel firms have targeted East Africa for its less stringent quality requirements and greater domestic demand, but that much more work needs to be done to integrate the value chain in the region. Though the manufacturing and textiles industries are not the most frequently mentioned issue in Kenya-China affairs, they are important in the context of China-East Africa relations, as concerns about competing with China have arisen all across the region.

Labor issues:

Baah, Anthony Yaw and Herbert Jauch. “Chinese Investments in Africa: A Labour Perspective”. *African Labor Research Network* (2009): 384-419.

Baah and Jauch explore the labor issues that have arisen as a result of Chinese investment in Africa. While their report broadly covers the context and causes of the current disputes, it also includes in-depth analyses of labor perspectives in each African country. The section on Kenya

contains a detailed history of engagement, the presence of Chinese nationals in Kenya, the extent and causes of cooperation and investment, and finally, the issues of employment, labor relations, and working conditions. The case studies of two Chinese companies provide a look into the primary concerns that have arisen from increased Chinese engagement.

Kamoche, Ken and Lisa Qixun Siebers. “Chinese Management Practices in Kenya: Towards a Post-Colonial Critique,” *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 26.21 (2015): 2718–2743.

Kamoche and Siebers provide a much-needed analysis of Chinese management practices in Kenya, finding that four specific themes characterize Chinese engagement: diverse investor motivations, challenges in cross-cultural differences, impactful low-cost strategies, and challenges in recruiting local managers. Each of these themes receives a detailed analysis and thus provides a helpful look into the labor tensions at Chinese firms in Kenya. Their article also contributes significant empirical data to the literature on the issue and is thus helpful for researchers hoping to understand Chinese employment and management controversies in Kenya.

Rounds, Zander and Hongxiang Huang. “We are not so different: A comparative study of employment relations at Chinese and American firms in Kenya”. CARI Working Paper 10 (2017).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/58da9416e4fcb5845eb6da4a/1490719767135/zander+v1.pdf>

In opposition to the Baah and Jauch report, Rounds and Huang find that the issues of employment relations in Kenya are not unique to Chinese firms. Instead of being based on the nationality of a given foreign firm in Kenya, the oft-critiqued “informality” in employment practices in fact depends on variations in certain firm characteristics, such as industry, size, and time spent operating abroad. Resolving the issue thus requires that researchers analyze the variation within Chinese companies and not between Chinese and other Western firms. In understanding where to place the onus of the labor burden, it is thus useful to contrast these two resources.

Debt:

Brautigam, Deborah and Jyhjong Hwang. “Eastern Promises: New Data on Chinese Loans in Africa, 2000 to 2014”. CARI Working Paper 4.2016 (See also related CARI policy brief 11).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/58ac91ede6f2e1f64a20d11a/1487704559189/eastern+promises+v4.pdf>

Hwang, Brautigam and Eom cover the China-Africa Research Initiative’s analysis of Chinese loans to Africa, the difference between their data and that of other databases, and the destination of these loans (country and sector). The paper provides an enormously helpful and brief

overview of Chinese money in Africa and addresses some of the most common myths. It also explores China's use of resource-backed loans to mitigate risk and the increasingly threatening levels of African debt. It is a good resource with which to begin understanding the issue of Kenyan debt.

Onjala, Joseph. "China's development loans and the threat of debt crisis in Kenya." *Development Policy Review* 36.S2 (2017):710-728.

This very current paper by Onjala is the best source for understanding the extent and details of government debt in Kenya. Onjala analyzes the expansion of Sino-African cooperation and the resultant threat of debt crisis in the East African countries. He breaks down the main sectors to which Chinese financing is destined and its structure, impact and returns, including the fact that it generally lacks transparency. He then explains how Kenya's debt is increasingly unsustainable, and that policy reforms are necessary if the country is to ensure repayment and continued financial support. It is a great article to read, especially in the context of the more general articles on African debt and Chinese financing listed in this section.

Siringi, Elijah M. "Kenya-China Trade Relations: A Nexus of "Trade not Aid" Investment Opportunities for Sustainable Development." *Journal of Economics and Development Studies*, 6.2 (2018):24-35.

In this article, Siringi explores the development concept of "trade not aid" by China in Kenya, finding that Chinese trade investments in Kenya have grown significantly, along with China's share of Kenya's external debt. Siringi discusses the debate surrounding the "trade not aid" model and analyzes the resulting opportunities and challenges that have emerged out of China's trade relationship with Kenya, including the flooding of Kenya's domestic market with cheap manufactured products from China. It is a worthwhile article for understanding in more detail the state and implications of bilateral economic engagement, and offers thought-provoking policy recommendations for Kenya to better determine this relationship.

Were, Anzette. "Debt Trap? Africa's Development Options". SAIIA Policy Insights 66 (2018).

https://media.africaportal.org/documents/sai_spi_66_were_20190910.pdf

In this paper, Were explores the rising external debt levels of African countries, tracking how in the last decade, African countries shifted away from concessional financing to market-based domestic debt. Were analyzes the role of Chinese loans and the Belt and Road Initiative in adding to growing debt, especially Kenyan debt, and the concerns of unsustainable debt levels. Though general, this paper contributes quite centrally to the understanding of African debt financing and delves in a little more detail into the state of Kenya's debt.

Cultural engagement and African agency:

King, Kenneth. "China's cooperation in education and training with Kenya: A different model?" *International Journal of Educational Development* 30.5 (2010): 488-496.

King explores China's investment in and cooperation with Kenya's human resources sector, looking at the increasing number of Chinese education- and enterprise-training programs targeted at Kenyans and the birth of many new Chinese language learning centers. He places this involvement with education and training into the broader context of increased Chinese investment in the Kenyan infrastructure and growing economic cooperation. This paper is a great introduction into the history and ongoing evolution of cultural and people-to-people engagement between China and Kenya.

Wu, Yu-Shan. "The Rise of China's State-Led Media Dynasty in Africa". SAIIA Occasional Paper 117 (2012).

<https://saiia.org.za/research/the-rise-of-chinas-state-led-media-dynasty-in-africa/>

Wu provides a detailed analysis of the entrance and proliferation of Chinese state-led media in the African market, exploring the varied ways in which it is challenging dominant Western narratives. Wu frames this rise in the context of Beijing's new focus on soft power, a technique that has been added to its more traditional arsenal of outward trade, aid, and diplomacy, and its still-heavily debated impact. Special attention is paid to the development of a new African news hub for China Central Television in Nairobi, which is part of a broader Chinese drive to engage in African media and provide an outlet for their own self-directed narrative. This article is key to understanding some of the more people-to-people, or cultural, aspects of engagement in which Kenya plays a central role.

Lefkowitz, Melissa. "Chinese Media, Kenyan Lives: An Ethnographic Inquiry into CCTV Africa's Head Offices". CARI Working Paper 9 (2017).

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/5890c864ebbd1a33c539387d/1485883493360/kenya+v4.pdf>

Five years after the publication of the above SAIIA research, Lefkowitz published this working paper which explores the everyday work dynamics between Kenyans, Chinese, and other nationals at the CCTV office in Nairobi. It provides a history of Chinese engagement in the Kenyan communications sector and presents interviews conducted with many current employees at CCTV. This paper thus looks into the specific experiences that have come about as a result of increasing Chinese cultural engagement, and contributes a bottom-up lens to the understanding of China-Kenya affairs.

Alden, Chris, Cobus van Staden and Yu-Shan Wu. "In the driver's seat? African agency and Chinese power". SAIIA Occasional Paper 286 (2018).

<https://saiia.org.za/research/in-the-drivers-seat-african-agency-and-chinese-power/>

In this paper, Alden, van Staden and Wu provide a crucial overview of African agency in the Sino-African relationship, delving into African decision-making processes and the inherent inequality prevalent in the relationship. They argue that Africa needs to improve its bargaining position in this relationship, and look at African agency through the lens of China-AU relations

and Africa-BRI relations. This paper is a helpful introduction into the question of African agency, especially in the context of a historical tendency to undervalue and under-represent African agency. Though it does not directly address Kenya, Kenya does receive special mention for its centrality to the Belt and Road Initiative and its current precarious debt situation.

Procopio, Maddalena. “Kenyan agency in Kenya–China relations: Contestation, cooperation and passivity.” in: Alden, Chris, David Large. *New Directions in Africa–China Studies*, 173-188. London: Routledge, 2018.

In a chapter of this recently published book on Africa-China relations, Procopio explores Kenyan agency in Kenya-China affairs and whether Kenyans have the willingness and ability to protect their interests within the relationship. She looks at the interaction between state and non-state actors and combines “elites” and social groups” to present a new model of agency that is an inter-relational decision-making process. Procopio highlights governance processes as the central site for power distribution and agency and explores whether Kenyan actors mobilize and negotiate in their interests. In so doing, she contributes a unique and contemporary perspective to the study of Kenyan agency in Kenya-China affairs.

Wasserman, H., & Madrid-Morales, D. (2018). “How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa.” *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 2212–2231

This paper takes up the question of how African audiences decode Chinese media aimed at strengthening Chinese soft power, by analyzing data from focus groups with media and communication university students in Kenya and South Africa. The authors find that Chinese media appears to have little impact on student habits, and that attitudes toward China are predominantly negative. However, the authors conclude that there is some overlap between Chinese, Kenyan, and South African news values, indicating the potential for future long-term impact of Chinese media engagement in these countries.