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China's Second Continent: How A Million Migrants Are Building A New Empire In Africa

Howard W.
French

China's
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Continent

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Synopsis

An exciting, hugely revealing account of China's burgeoning presence in Africa - a developing empire already shaping - and reshaping - the future of millions of people. A prizewinning foreign correspondent and former New York Times bureau chief in Shanghai and in West and Central Africa, Howard French is uniquely positioned to tell the story of China in Africa. Through meticulous on-the-ground reporting - conducted in Mandarin, French, and Portuguese, among other languages - French crafts a layered investigation of astonishing depth and breadth as he engages not only with policy-shaping moguls and diplomats, but also with the ordinary men and women navigating the street-level realities of cooperation, prejudice, corruption, and opportunity forged by this seismic geopolitical development. With incisiveness and empathy, French reveals the human face of China's economic, political, and human presence across the African continent - and in doing so reveals what is at stake for everyone involved. Part intrepid travelogue, part cultural census, part industrial and political exposé, French's keenly observed account ultimately offers a fresh perspective on the most pressing unknowns of modern Sino-African relations: Why China is making the incursions it is, just how extensive its cultural and economic inroads are, what Africa's role in the equation is, and just what the ramifications for both parties - and the watching world - will be in the foreseeable future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"China's Second Continent" is an extremely well-written and easy to read book. It is a collection of anecdotes and data that comes together to create the complicated and very nuanced story of China's understandable overseas expansion. French's style is pleasing to read. Traveling in different parts of Africa, he conducts interviews with a multitude of interested parties, including government ministers, small-time Chinese traders, prostitutes, heads of state-run Chinese companies, union organizers, and workers for Chinese companies. French never backs away from his own personal thoughts and opinions of the people he meets, which is quite refreshing. Throughout his travels, he keeps a running commentary of his thesis, that China's long-term relationship with Africa extends far beyond quid-pro-qua mineral extraction and is headed towards a relationship whereby African countries will contribute to China's bread basket. French believes that this is a new and different form of imperialism. There are two relationships dealt with in this book: that of individual Chinese entrepreneurs who migrate to Africa, and that of state-run Chinese companies who seem to fly by night in order to build infrastructure in exchange for natural resource or transportation concessions. The entrepreneurs are all colorful characters, well-described by French. The state-run company managers and workers are all tight-lipped, giving the reader the impression that there are nefarious plans at work. While many Africans, Europeans, and Americans complain that China's infrastructure projects in Africa are ramshackle and poor quality, leaving Africans with white elephants that they must manage, they are at least helping to build infrastructure, something the managers and high-level government workers say. Without direct Chinese investment, projects would drag on and never materialize, or only materialize in the form of hard-to-see investments in education, property management, and so forth. Is China's investment, both large and small, in the country helpful? There is no solid conclusion here, but the evidence French presents seems to suggest that because there is no "capacity development" to maintain the large infrastructure contracts, the large, official investment is unhelpful. Beyond the academic and economic conclusions, French is an excellent writer. The chapters in "China's Second Continent" are good-sized chunks that give a good picture of each country he visits, concentrating on the theme of meeting Chinese migrants.

The reason it doesn't get 5 stars is because it is repetitive. Having said that, the repetitiveness brings home a point that it is the same and different all over the developing countries in Africa. Howard French is an amazing writer. His vocabulary and use of it were enjoyable to read. He is a multi-linguist and really knows how to make contact, even with people who don't really want to talk with him in the first place. I learned a lot from the book and trust his knowledge of what's going on because he has spent so many years as a foreign correspondent, many of them in Africa. Pretty

amazing guy. It's a book well worth reading. Not a hard read, it goes pretty fast.

The premise of this book "What are a million Chinese migrants (within the last decade) doing in Africa, what took them there and how are they making out? The specific survey taken by writer/professor Howard French and beautifully written is most interesting. He is fluent in Chinese and some of the African dialects, so he does have the capability and previous African knowledge to move around and gather the info. The results are extremely well written and very readable. The migrant Chinese are individually motivated to make the life-changing moves and their stories are fascinating. Also, unquestionably, they are helping to create a huge current and future trading partner for their homeland. A MUST READ!

A real pleasure and enlightenment to read. The author's prose flows easily, making the book a real page turner. I come out of the reading with an exasperation that the people of Africa do not have anything like a sufficiently creative and forceful leadership with a moral sense of their responsibility to advantage their own people. Stupidity and cupidity! While China is investing tremendous amounts of money in African countries, they are basically bullying and tricking the local people with the connivance of the local leaders, treating the former as children. It is still another case of the rape of Africa. I just finished reading Re-imagining India by the McKinsey Company. It is not a case there of another country coming in to rape them, but of endemic corruption, lack of useful goals and a vastly diffuse government which keeps impoverished the main masses of people. I am struck by the enormous richness of resources in the Indian and African nations, but disastrously few strong-enough, ethical leaders to leaven the lives of their people with the richness of their nations' great natural resources. It is bad living for most of the people in all of those countries now. It is hard to imagine how awful it will be in 50 years or so when the populations have grown greatly and the resources have been depleted. Very sad. But the book is a "must-read."

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