



# China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa

*Howard W. French*

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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.

We meet a broad spectrum of China's dogged emigrant population, from those singlehandedly reshaping African infrastructure, commerce, and even environment (a self-made tycoon who harnessed Zambia's now-booming copper trade; a timber entrepreneur determined to harvest the entirety of Liberia's old-growth redwoods), to those just barely scraping by (a sibling pair running small businesses despite total illiteracy; a karaoke bar owner-cum-brothel madam), still convinced that Africa affords them better opportunities than their homeland. And we encounter an equally panoramic array of African responses: a citizens' backlash in Senegal against a "Trojan horse" Chinese construction project (a tower complex to be built over a beloved soccer field, which locals thought would lead to overbearing Chinese pressure on their economy); a Zambian political candidate who, having protested China's intrusiveness during the previous election and lost, now turns accommodating; the ascendant middle class of an industrial boomtown; African mine workers bitterly condemning their foreign employers, citing inadequate safety precautions and wages a fraction of their immigrant counterparts'.

French's nuanced portraits reveal the paradigms forming around this new world order, from the all-too-familiar echoes of colonial ambition—exploitation of resources and labor; cut-rate infrastructure projects; dubious treaties—to new frontiers of cultural and economic exchange, where dichotomies of suspicion and trust, assimilation and isolation, idealism and disillusionment are in dynamic flux.

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.

## China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa Details

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## From Reader Review China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa for online ebook

### Salvatore says

Fascinating, story-based look at the lives and effects of the Chinese immigrants who have moved to Africa to start a life, have more breathing space, create new/exploitative industries. This is a look at colonisation from an Other's point of view (the coloniser this time being someone non-European or -American, so the bit of distance allows for more condemnation).

It also points out, as an aside or indirectly, that there are dangers in overpopulation for both the coloniser and the colonised, and there are dangers in dependence on outsiders. We knew this, but to see it in action is scary. There is of course the danger in bad governance. But that's a day to day problem for every country.

Some overarching themes from the Chinese who live in Africa: there is no trust in the Africans (they seem to think the Africans are lazy and will not do what you tell them to do if you're not watching over them); all Chinese live like this in Africa...alone; China is making up for imperial lost time. Perhaps this is *nouveau-colonialism*: peaceful, individual, diaspora-based - yet isn't that how 16th and 17th century imperialism also started?

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### Heidi says

We think of China as an exporting powerhouse, but many of us have forgotten about its most powerful export--the millions of Chinese people who have ventured to Africa for a better living. Howard French writes a fascinating account as he travels and interviews. He writes of both the African locals and officials, and their Chinese foils of public employees and private citizens. In the passage, French dabs at the tensions across the continent with shrewd insights and a tint of humor. This book itself is an ambitious project and an inspiring attempt at unraveling the tangled strands behind the contentions and collusions between the Africans and the Chinese: we hear tales of corruption of African governance on the local and national level; we witness the aspirations and perseverance of the Chinese diaspora, who were crushed by and consequently fled the recent developments back home; we are not spared from a reminder of the flaws to the West's aid projects, and are left with a taste of the not-so-remote colonial past. This book opened up my eyes--wide-- to the real-time struggles of emigrants, neglected by their own government and who continue to move and shake up the conventions and populations on another much ignored, oppressed, continent.

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### Richard Jr. says

A must read book! Listen up, all you former African Missionaries, AID workers, Peace Corps Volunteers and Diplomatic corps!

Time to read about the new kid on the African playing field who is picking up the ball that we-all seem to have fumbled during the last 40 years. That kid's name is China! Author French has given us an eye-opener of a book and we need to read it and talk about what to do for the future of the planetary game.

In the same way that sixteenth century Europe financed explorers, trappers, traders and entrepreneurs to



## Mikey B. says

Page 157-58 my book

*“Chinese people are just about everywhere,” Shuai Yuhua said, again erupting in laughter. “You should never go anywhere where there are no Chinese.”*

*“Is that because such places are too dangerous?” I asked.*

*“Wrong. It’s because those are places where it is impossible to make money.”*

This is a fascinating account of China’s impact on Africa. It is a recent phenomenon and I do feel the full repercussions will be upon us sooner than we think. China is not just the future world power, in many ways it is currently the most dynamic power of our time – at least economically. They are now exporting their remarkable “can do” to Africa.

There are many aspects the author examines. And he is quite capable - speaking in English, French and Mandarin.

One aspect is that all kinds of businesses are being set-up by the Chinese – from small by the side of the road stalls (similar to what we see in China-towns across North America) to vast enterprises like soccer stadiums, hydro-electric plants and the like.

There are many candid conversations with both Africans and Chinese. Many Africans appreciate the level of expertise and technology that the Chinese are bringing. They do not appreciate that the Chinese are bringing their own labour, they do not disclose the work to be done with its environmental effects, the wages the Africans receive are often below the minimum wage set by the government, and often no health regulations are followed, in mine-work for example.

The Chinese appreciate the opportunities they are presented with in Africa. Competition, stress, overcrowding is fierce in China – so, many, find in Africa, a land of opportunity. I could not help but feel, just as there is corruption in business deals in China; these same practises were easily transplanted to Africa.

The author points out that in African countries where the natural resources are abundant, is where greater disparity exists between rich and poor. The Chinese entrepreneurs simply give huge bribes to those in power to get their business established. The wealth does not trickle down, it stays and accumulates at the top.

The author discusses how the Chinese are similar and dissimilar to former colonial powers. The Chinese are now intent on hard structural development. Western powers are geared more towards soft development such as containment of AIDS. Obviously, as the author acknowledges, this is an over-generalization.

There are suppose to be at least one million Chinese now in Africa, and this is a conservative estimate. And more are coming. Think of that – a European country, or even the U.S., could not come close to having a million people who would choose to emigrate to Africa. China could easily find another one million to go. The Chinese currently in Africa are urging their family and friends to come over. Many of the Chinese the author interviewed are in Africa for keeps.

The significance of this will continue to grow for years to come. This is an engrossing book on a topic that we in the West are barely aware of.

## Daniel Simmons says

It's clear that Mr. French is incredibly well situated to chart China's growing influence in Africa, since he must be one of the few people on earth who has the chops -- the language skills, the patience, and the personal history (having lived in both China and Africa for many years) -- to do so in a balanced and informed way. I was excited to read this book, mostly because it promised to investigate the lives and effects of Chinese migrants operating outside of any official state-sponsored master plan. In Liberia, for example, Chinese hotelier Li Jiong tells the author he should forget about meeting with a group of official Chinese agricultural trainers: "What the hell do you want to visit those people in Gbarnga for? You realize they're different from people like us, don't you? They are government people. They haven't come here on their own. The reason they are willing to meet you and show you around their school is to make propaganda." These kinds of candid conversations are the best parts of the book, but the rest of it often reads like a shaggy dog travelogue, too rambling and impressionistic for my tastes. French wraps up his account with an epilogue whose trim elegance I wish had been more present in the previous two hundred fifty pages. Overall: a fascinating topic, but a somewhat disappointing read.

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## L.A. Starks says

Superb--this book gives a completely new and informed perspective on Africa and its Chinese immigrants.

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## Marks54 says

I did not expect this book to be so informative or entertaining and was pleasantly surprised. The author is a photographer and journalist who may also be a journalism faculty member at Columbia, He has long experience in Africa and is a wonderful writer. The book recounts trips around sub Saharan Africa that focus on the growing Chinese population there and the business activities associated with this population. The book is mostly driven by interviews and travel accounts, supported by background information along the way. The general punchline is that there are likely over a million Chinese in Africa and they are transforming business where they put down roots in sectors ranging from large scale big infrastructure projects to the daily small scale trade and service businesses that are seen in even small towns.

French's account has considerable admiration for the skills and character of the people who have come from China and established themselves in what are often difficult conditions. This is combined with sharp skepticism that probes into less admirable habits and traits including often barely concealed racism and corruption. The account of interviews is refreshing and shows real and often frank exchanges between different people and perspectives. The style is that of an informed travel account which made me think of the work of Ryszard Kapuscinski.

The global story on offer is one of a new Chinese imperialism -- different in some ways of course from European and American versions but very much an imperialism that is not necessarily aligned with the interests of their African partners. This is not a simple attack, however, and multiple sides are duly raised for the reader to consider. The author's position is very clear, however, throughout the book and is summed up nicely in a short concluding chapter.

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## Peter Mcloughlin says

A little remarked story is that there are probably a million Chinese in Africa right now. They are investing huge sums of money in African countries building stadiums and bridges and electrical grids and extracting resources from mineral rich Africa. Where the west looks upon Africa as a problem and a burden the Chinese see an opportunity to make money and secure resources. Millions of Chinese have also come to Africa seeking opportunities and replacing other outside traders like the Lebanese and Indians. So far the influence has been a kind of barter with the Chinese providing infrastructure goodies and a hands off policy in terms of human rights and in return gets great deals on resource. This is not to say that there isn't friction. The Chinese have negative attitudes towards the local population and there is exploitation of local African workers. The Africans are on their part replacing the idea of the ugly American with the Ugly Chinese. So far the relationship only involves economics but make no mistake China is in Africa for the long term.

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

While the writing style and info given here are superb (+5 stars!), the thinking style is very biased. The author should try and be less critical of the people less fortunate than himself, in terms of life line, of education, languages and everything else.

Yes, callousness to Mr Hao docks a star (-1 star).

And what is it with the West and building empires? Yes, not only West is allowed to build empires. China is allowed to do as well, especially considering that they are not doing what was being done to African population by the slave traders. Somehow, the Western businesses are not crowding to hand back their profits made by slave trade and related endeavours, which allowed them to build their capitals and promote the industrialization to get where they are today. China is funding a lot more in Africa than any of them... and in gets villainized for the effort. A double whammy, if there ever is one!

Yes, for the empire scare I dock another star (-1 star!).

Another thing is I disliked how biased the author was on rioting in Africa. Basically, I happened to be reading this book in parallel with another one on a similar topic, a more well-rounded one, in my opinion, AND the 2 authors were describing one and the same riot. In this book, the Chinese obviously were very guilty that they were attacked and shot several attackers, in another book, we see an uncolored version of these same events. While I don't blame any of the sides of this particular situation, I would have liked the author to be thinking not in terms 'Chinese - bad or very bad?' It diminishes this book's value. A lot.

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## Caroline says

French traveled thousands of miles and spoke to dozens, if not hundreds, of individuals across sub-Saharan Africa as background for this book. It opens with several conversations with Chinese individuals who have immigrated to Africa and are making their own way in farming, trade, and other pursuits. As the work progresses he adds many conversations with indigenous Africans, in government and NGO roles. He also tries to speak with representatives of large Chinese companies and Chinese embassies, with spotty success.

China and the Chinese do not come off well, but neither do many of Africa's government leaders. French, however, does acknowledge that the Chinese are delivering much-needed capital and capital investment, in contrast to American talk. On the other hand, China tends to dictate what will be built and to ensure it will be

built by Chinese firms with Chinese workers. French also points out that much of the work is shoddy.

French covers a broad range of investments structured in a variety of ways. In a few cases the African governments have managed agreements thoughtfully, but many of the middle class technocrats with whom he speaks lament that the deals are packages designed to export Chinese workers, put its capital to work, and to import African natural resources such as coal and timber. Few Africans find work in these projects. Government oversight is lax, so that many Chinese firms flout laws that protect the environment and employees. In some African countries the Chinese money is being used to benefit the citizens, in others it lines the pockets of those in charge. French repeatedly points out that Africa's burgeoning population is pacing the depletion of its resources, and that if Chinese payment for the resources is not put into developing the labor force, there will be nothing to support the economy when the natural resources run out. Some countries rich farmland will remain, but one theme of the book is that even farmland is being bought up by the Chinese.

French is most interested in the scope and rapidity of Chinese immigration to Africa, which now stands at over 1 million people. These immigrants repeatedly cite the stress, competition and crowding of China as reasons for emigrating. Virtually all of them describe early privation and physical duress in their early days in Africa (Chinese 'eating bitter' or getting through hard times); some have made it to successful entrepreneurial status fairly rapidly, others not.

I thought that the work was very balanced, a work of real journalistic merit. Understanding what is going on in Africa is of real importance.

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## **Hadrian says**

Series of excellent journalistic studies on the role of Chinese investment and political intervention in Africa, as it learns to compete with other powers for business deals and political patronage.

Though now the last segment on Chinese economic power seems more suspect now that the Shanghai Composite Index is imploding as I write this (8th July).

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## **Yves Gounin says**

Depuis quelques années, la Chine a fait son entrée fracassante dans les études africaines. Dans les années 2000, l'Occident, mi-admiratif mi-craintif, diagnostiquait l'émergence d'une « Chinafrique », pour reprendre le titre de l'ouvrage fondateur de Michel Beuret et Serge Michel (Grasset, 2008). Les Africains, séduits par la coopération gagnant-gagnant que leur faisaient miroiter leurs nouveaux partenaires chinois, se déclaraient ravis de sortir du face-à-face inégal dans lequel ils se considéraient enfermés avec leurs anciens colonisateurs depuis les indépendances. Les chiffres parlaient d'eux-mêmes : le commerce sino-africain décuplait en dix ans faisant de la Chine le premier partenaire commercial de l'Afrique subsaharienne.

Les choses ont évolué. Les perceptions ont changé. À l'enthousiasme un peu naïf des premières rencontres a succédé la prise de conscience lucide des motivations égoïstes de la Chine. L'enquête de Howard French participe de cette évolution. Le succès qu'il a eu – il figurait dans la liste des meilleurs ouvrages 2014 de The Economist – témoigne de l'intérêt porté au sujet tandis que la manière dont il le traite constitue une pierre dans le jardin de la Chine.

Howard French est un journaliste expérimenté qui a accompli l'essentiel de sa carrière au New York Times. Il en fut le correspondant à Shanghai avant de rejoindre l'École de journalisme de l'université de Columbia. Son livre est un récit de voyage rédigé à la première personne du singulier dans lequel il n'hésite pas à se mettre en scène, narrant, avec une impudeur toute américaine, les détails les plus intimes de ses tribulations. Qu'on s'en félicite ou qu'on le déplore, il ne s'agit donc pas d'une synthèse universitaire ni même d'une enquête de terrain, comparable à l'excellent ouvrage collectif de Jean-Jacques Gabas et Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière (*Le temps de la Chine en Afrique*, GEMDEV-Karthala, 2012) mais plutôt d'une collection de témoignages donnant des Chinois en Afrique une image kaléidoscopique. La démarche n'est guère différente de l'enquête menée par les journalistes espagnols Heriberto Araujo et Juan Pablo Cardinal (*La silenciosa conquista china*, 2011 ; trad. fr. *Le siècle de la Chine*, Flammarion, 2013)

Ce tableau impressionniste contredit deux idées préconçues.

La première serait que la Chine aurait un « plan » en Afrique, qu'elle y déploierait une stratégie impérialiste, mûrement réfléchi. Sans doute cette idée n'est-elle pas totalement dénuée de fondement : la Chine mène une politique africaine qui articule trois composantes diplomatique (avec les tournées régulières de ses dirigeants), financière (avec le soutien des banques publiques) et culturelle (avec la multiplication des centres Confucius, l'accès gratuit aux dépêches de l'agence Xinhua et la diffusion de CCTV dans tout le continent). Howard French aurait pu la documenter s'il était allé enquêter à Pékin. Mais, les témoignages qu'il recueille auprès des migrants chinois et même des ambassades révèlent, au contraire, une étonnante improvisation. Les Chinois qui émigrent en Afrique n'y ont pas été missionnés par leur gouvernement pour mettre en œuvre quelque sombre entreprise impériale concoctée dans une salle secrète de Zhongnanhai. Ce sont, plus trivialement, des migrants ordinaires, qui ont quitté leur pays car ils ne s'y épanouissaient pas et qui disposent du capital financier et humain suffisant pour tenter l'aventure. Avides de réussite, ils sont prêts à *chi ku*, littéralement à « manger amer », pour s'enrichir. D'où leur capacité à travailler dans les coins les plus retirés de l'Afrique où aucun Occidental ne s'aventurerait.

La seconde idée reçue est celle d'une coopération gagnant-gagnant entre la Chine et l'Afrique. Les Chinois que rencontre Howard French ne sont pas des philanthropes. Ils n'ont qu'une obsession : la réussite matérielle. Ils manifestent à l'égard des Africains qu'ils côtoient une indifférence voire un racisme particulièrement choquants pour nous autres, Occidentaux conditionnés par un demi-siècle de culpabilité post-coloniale et d'idéologie antiraciste. Du Mozambique au Sénégal, en passant par la Zambie, la Namibie et le Ghana, les Chinois que l'auteur a rencontrés se ressemblent beaucoup. Ils cherchent un retour sur investissement lucratif, sans se soucier des effets collatéraux sur les populations locales et leur environnement. Ils se plaignent de la main d'œuvre africaine qu'ils trouvent mal formée, paresseuse, voleuse ... Pas étonnant qu'en réaction leur présence ait, au fil du temps, suscité des réactions hostiles, en Zambie dans les mines de cuivre où leurs employés sous-payés travaillent au mépris des règles de sécurité, ou au Sénégal où les petits commerçants chinois pratiquent le dumping et évincent les marchands locaux.

Le défaut de l'approche de Howard French est qu'elle interdit les généralisations. On ne peut définitivement inférer des témoignages qu'il a recueillis que les Chinois en Afrique soient tous des desperados sans foi ni loi, âpres au gain et racistes. Sans doute, les services de communication du gouvernement chinois, s'ils font bien leur travail, produiront-ils des témoignages contraires, démontrant la bénévolence des commerçants chinois et l'impact positif de leurs investissements. Pour autant, ce livre donne froid dans le dos sur leur comportement et devrait donner à réfléchir aux pays hôtes.

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## Sigrid-marianella says

I had been looking forward to this book since i meet the author in Shanghai a few years back, perhaps my high expectations and preconceived ideas of what this book would look like is the cause of my disappointment. I had the perception that the intention was to write an account of the Chinese migrants

experiences, instead the book is a personal travelogue attempting to provide analysis on the theme based on a string of analogies.

No doubt the author has enjoyed quite an adventure writing this book and there are interesting experiences being told. However, the book is a story of the author' travels and encounters with Chinese people as opposed to telling the stories of Chinese who moved to Africa. "

Other parts of the book consists of analysis on the subject of Chinese migration to Africa, but anecdotal stories nearly always provide a poor source of information to draw wider observations from, which some factual errors in the book confirm. I understand the need to tie the various stories together by making some general observations and providing a contextual backdrop for the stories, however the book stretches beyond its capacity.

Overall I felt as if the book didn't really know what chair to sit on: a collection of personal stories of the struggles and successes of Chinese migrants would make for a fascinating read on its own and provide insights on an individual level; while a book stretching further into deeper observations require a more systematic research approach which is beyond the scope of this book. This book falls somewhere in between these two, not fully achieving either.

The author does nonetheless collect a bunch of highly interesting encounters which makes the book worth a read, but I often found myself skipping passages to get to these parts.

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## **ferrigno says**

Né carne ne pesce.

Qui si parla di cinesi che fanno affari in Africa. Ho inquadrato un paio di situazioni: 1) commercianti cinesi che vendono prodotti cinesi sottocosto uccidendo l'impresa locale; 2) industriali o agricoltori cinesi che assumono africani, ma solo per lavori umili e per una frazione del minimo previsto dalla legge -e qui occorre precisare che il minimo previsto dalla legge è tipo 90 centesimi di dollaro, i cinesi ne sganciano 20 per un'ora di lavoro.

Tutto ciò avviene in barba alle leggi e agli interessi degli stessi africani grazie alle regalie ai politici e alle spettacolari e inutili opere di infrastruttura sponsorizzate dalla Cina. Stadi dove non si giocheranno mai finali di prestigio, ospedali dove nessun chirurgo farà trapianti, centri commerciali dove nessun africano potrà mai comprare un accidente.

I cinesi vendono sottocosto (agli africani) stoffe africane di cui copiano il disegno. I cinesi vendono smartphone agli africani a 7-10 dollari (gli stessi smartphone, immagino, che fanno schiumare di rabbia Salvini).

Se è un saggio scientifico, gli manca un'analisi rigorosa dei dati -ma evidentemente non vuole esserlo. Questo è un reportage e un diario di viaggio e di incontri. L'argomento era nuovo, per cui l'ho letto con interesse, ma annoia perché fa sembrare le storie tutte uguali quando evidentemente NON possono esserlo. Il problema è che a Howard French manca la capacità di entrare in empatia con i personaggi (vedi Leslie Chang in *Factory Girls*) o di porsi in feroce antitesi con essi, che è un modo come un altro per conoscerli (vedi Oriana Fallaci) o di farli aprire senza giudicarli (vedi Studs Terkel in *The Good War. An oral history of WW2*). Insomma, un ampio servizio per un settimanale, stiracchiato all'inverosimile. Ma interessante.

