

Africa-East Asia International Relations

Seifudein Adem

Africa's Quest for Modernity

Lessons from Japan and China



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Africa-East Asia International Relations

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This book is an accumulation of experience—a record of a participant-observer of Africa (for nearly twenty-five years), Japan (for twenty years), the USA (for ten years), and China (for one year or so). I am indebted for this reason to more individuals (especially students) and institutions than I can adequately acknowledge in writing. But, above all, I am very grateful to Professor Ali A. Mazrui (or, as we called him, Mwalimu). In 2005, Mwalimu invited me to his Institute of Global Cultural Studies at Binghamton University, New York, and effectively mentored me for about a decade. He also infused stimulation and excitement into the later part of my intellectual life as a whole. I can therefore say I acquired my most concentrated intellectual nourishment from him at Binghamton University, where I also served as a teacher, a researcher, and an academic administrator. As in some of my other books, Mwalimu’s strong influence is thus discernable in this one too. I must also pay a special tribute to Mwalimu’s extended family, his friends, and his colleagues in Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, South Asia, Europe, and North America for the support I received.

I was distinctly privileged to interact and learn additionally from several individuals. Some of these encounters—especially the most humbling for me—were also possible due to my work with Mwalimu Mazrui. They include my interactions with about half a dozen (past and future) African heads of state and government as well as several dignitaries. I came to know the others as my colleagues, professors, and friends. I owe a debt of gratitude to them all for their support and inspiration.

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I completed writing this manuscript in Washington, DC, in the summer of 2022, when I was a visiting faculty member at Howard University.

Dr. Sabella Abidde, the Book Series Editor, undertook the manuscript review process most efficiently; Ms. Lorraine Klimowich, the Senior Editor at Springer, oversaw the book project; Ms. Kirthika Selvaraju monitored the production process; and Ms. Kala Palanisamy handled the production of the book. I thank them all.

And finally, this. The idea of writing this book was conceived and brought to fruition at Doshisha University, Japan. I am profoundly grateful, and will always remain so, to my Doshisha colleagues and its staff at all levels. To paraphrase a Ghanaian friend, Kwateng Amaning Frimpong

Our association will soon be a matter of history ...

My gratitude to Doshisha will forever remain on my lips

A place of unassuming people...small but thinking big

A place where love and sympathy prevail in a scenic atmosphere of peace and tranquility ...

I am solely responsible for any factual and interpretive errors in this book.

Washington, DC, August 2022

Seifudein Adem

Reviews

Africa's Quest for Prosperity: Lessons from Japan and China is a giant leap forward in our understanding of the relationship between Africa and Asia, especially the Chinese and Japanese models. Demonstrating through complex cultural analysis and critical reviews of data on how Africa could re-imagine itself, Seifudein Adem has opened an entirely new field of research.

Molefi Kete Asante
Author of *The History of Africa* and Professor
Temple University, USA

This is an important intervention on comparative strategies of development. If Africa has, for decades, looked in the direction of its colonizers and the West, the eminent Pan-Africanist, Seifudein Adem, makes a strong case for Africa's pivot to Asia, powerfully arguing that there is considerable merit in understanding China and Japan. More than just a gaze, the accessible book provides serious and far-reaching policy recommendations.

Toyin Falola
Frances and Jacob Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities
The University of Texas at Austin, USA

This book by Seifudein Adem focuses on three wide-ranging and important issue areas: the Sino-African relationship, China as a partner in Africa's development, and lessons that Africa can draw from Japan's development. The book is an expression of an African scholar's longing for a more creative socio-economic change in Africa—for a new Africa that will, ideally, also strike a balance in the relationships between the human being and mother nature; between one human being and another; and between the human body and human mind. God bless Africa!

Li Anshan
Professor Emeritus
Peking University, China

Seifudein Adem's book takes the unusual approach of comparing two non-Western development models—China and Japan—for Africa. While he gives the nod to China, he warns that China wants to create a world order centered around itself. In other words, Africa beware. This provocative book offers a refreshing new analysis among the extensive offerings on China-Africa relations.

David H. Shinn

Former US Ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso and Adjunct Professor
George Washington University, USA

Africa needs to examine Asian approaches to Africa in order to formulate African strategies for engagement with Asia. Seifudein Adem's book demonstrates one way this can be done. It also focuses on how Africa may digest China's and Japan's experiences and chart its own effective path to development.

Takuo Iwata

Professor

Ritsumeikan University, Japan

In this book, Seifudein Adem combines his deep knowledge of Africa with his more than two decades of studying, working, and living in East Asia (in Japan and China) to formulate and discuss original and thought-provoking hypotheses about what and how Africa can learn from the dynamism in the two Asian countries. This is groundbreaking work that should provoke thought in Africa and beyond.

Adams Bodomo

Professor

University of Vienna, Austria

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The author (sitting in the middle) and his students, Doshisha University, November 10, 2022

Acronyms

AAGC	Asia-Africa Growth Corridor
ADLI	Agricultural Development Led Industrialization
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
AU	Africa Union
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARI	China-Africa Research Initiative
CGC	China Geo-Engineering Corporation
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
DIA	Defense Installations Agreement
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
GNI	Gross National Income
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
IMF	International Monetary Fund
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JOCA	Japan Overseas Cooperation Agency
IR	International Relations
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party (of Japan)
MDAA	Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement
NCER	National Council on Educational Reform
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NLM	National Liberation Movement
OAU	Organization of African Unity
ODA	Official Development Assistance

OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Corporation
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OVL	ONGC Videsh Ltd
SIPIRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
SRF	Silk Road Fund
TAZARA	Tanzania-Zambia Railway
TICAD	Tokyo International Conference on African Development
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USTR	United States Trade Representative
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II
WB	World Bank

Part I

General Overview

Chapter 1

Introduction



Africa's great conceptualizer Ali Mazrui once observed: "Allegiance to clan and tribe is less modern than allegiance to the nation; allegiance to the nation is less modern than allegiance to the continent; allegiance to the continent is less modern than sensitivity to the needs of the human race" (see Mazrui and Adem 2013: 309). And if so, who is modern, ultimately? The answer, in my judgment, would have to be no one, despite claims otherwise, unless we could simultaneously be committed to our tribe and the human race.

Less metaphysically, Mazrui (1990: 7–8) defined modernization as "a change in a direction that is compatible with the present stage of human knowledge and which does justice to the potentialities of the human person both as a social and as an innovative being." In this sense, some societies have indeed excelled in modernization more than others. The questions which thus arise include: Why did modernization or modernity, thus defined, elude Africa? How can Africa achieve it? This book will try to penetrate some of the inner postulates of these questions in light of East Asia's developmental experience.

The broader ambitions of the book are threefold. It is, first, to introduce and assess the divergent perspectives on the Sino-African relationship. These perspectives can be classified into, on the one hand, *Sino-pessimism*, which views China as exploitative, relentlessly sucking Africa's resources to fuel its own rapid industrialization and is bound to destroy Africa's development potential in the process, and, on the other, *Sino-optimism* which perceives China as the ultimate savior, capable of or willing to "develop" Africa. And between the two perspectives is *Sino-pragmatism*, for which it is just too early to judge China's impact.

Second, the book makes the case that China can be seen as a partner in Africa's quest for modernity so long as the convergence of interest between the two continues. It will be noted that by positively transforming its economy within less than four decades, China effectively challenged the idea that developing countries cannot narrow and eventually close the gap between themselves and the industrialized West.

The third objective is to present a set of lessons Africa can draw from the developmental experience of Japan, the country that called into question, before anyone else, the validity of the view that one must Westernize culturally in order to modernize economically. But the scholarly attention paid to Japan as a possible model for Africa (as well as for other regions) so far is rather scanty (for the few exceptions, see, for instance, Adem 2005, 2006, 2020; Nafziger 2006; Ohno 2019). This book is, therefore, partly an attempt to fill this gap by arguing that Meiji Japan can offer one such model, which is based on the principles of diversification, domestication, and indigenization.

The book also surveys the modern diplomatic history of Japan and China in Africa from *an African perspective*. In this, two distinct features set it apart from several fine books that deal with various aspects of the same or related themes (such as Ampiah 1997; Morikawa 1997; Adem 2005, 2013; Alden 2007; Taylor 2009; Lumumba-Kasongo 2010; Lehman 2010; Modi 2011; Raphael-Hernandez and Steen 2006; Park 2013; Graf and Hashim 2017; Mine 2018; Cornelissen and Mine 2018; Mine 2022; Carvalho 2018; Achenbach et al. 2020; Anthony and Ruppert 2020; Iwata 2020). The first distinguishing feature is its explicitly comparative and integrative approach. Second, and unrelated to the books mentioned above, mainstream theories about international relations reflect the European experience; they look at the world from a European perspective. As a result, they favor European ideas over non-European ideas, great powers over new states, the core over the periphery, and the Global North over the Global South. They have other blind spots, too, which are broader in scope, such as the excessive focus on states at the expense of non-state actors and on military power rather than non-military issues. It will probably take a long time before the paradigmatic balance is restored (Adem 2005, 2021). But it is neither impossible nor unprofitable to adapt and re-interpret these theories as they currently stand for sharpening our understanding of issues other than those for which they were initially designed. In this spirit, this book will seek to tear some mainstream theories of international relations out of their historical and cultural context and apply them to examine the nature and outcome of Sino-African relations. The goal is to supplement concepts and theories indigenous to the Global South.

The political relationship in the “modern” period between Africa and Asia—the two largest and most populous continents of planet earth, or Afrasia for short—began in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. And from there, we shall start.

The evolution of Afrasian solidarities. At the root of the spirit of cooperation between Africans and Asians—“the Bandung Spirit”—that evolved over the last seven decades following the 1955 Bandung Conference was a set of overlapping solidarities: pigmentational solidarity (the bond of being fellow victims of European racial prejudice), cultural solidarity (the bond of being fellow victims of European civilizational prejudice), anti-imperial solidarity (the bond of being direct or indirect victims of colonialism and imperialism), and the solidarity of the Global South (the bond of attempted disengagement from the Cold War).

In the middle of the twentieth century, there was thus considerable optimism about the possibility of long-term cooperation between Africans and Asians and the probability that they would rise together in the post-colonial era. But it did not turn out that way. And no sooner had the Cold War ended than Afrasian cooperation was superseded by competition between the two for markets, investment, and, in some cases, even economic aid. Moreover, Afrasian solidarity has been diluted by the growing economic disparities between Africa and Asia.

In Bandung, the criteria for participation in the conference was not shared colonial experience but shared experience of being non-white. Many of the countries at the conference, but not all, were indeed former colonies. Subsequently, other shared aspects of the Afrasian experience began to be emphasized, particularly the bonds of shared poverty, thereby expanding the boundaries of empathy and allegiance to include the whole of the Global South.

Apart from the cooperative and competitive dimensions, the historical ties between Africa and Asia had a conflictual feature too. The issues that brought Africa and Asia into conflict from the long-range perspective were the centuries-old Arab slave trade and Idi Amin's expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in the 1970s.

In comparative terms, four grand paradoxes emerged from the dynamic Afrasian experience. First, although Europeans colonized almost the entire continent of Africa, colonialism lasted in Africa for a relatively shorter time; in places like Indonesia and India, colonialism lasted hundreds of years longer than in Africa, although, comparatively, a smaller portion of Asia was colonized. This is the space–time paradox. Second, there is the time–change paradox: although Asia was colonized longer than Africa, Asia seems to have been culturally less Westernized than Africa in terms of languages, values, and tastes. Third, the culture–economy paradox signifies that Africa's seemingly faster cultural Westernization was not translated into economic modernization. In Asia, the reverse seems to have taken place. And, finally, we have the paradox of divisive peace and prosperity—Africans and Asians were closer when they had common enemies in the form of colonialism and poverty or when they were united around a common purpose in their attempt to disengage from the Cold War (Diagram 1.1).

Concerning the prospect of modernity in the post-colonial period, as indicated above, Asia has lived up to that optimistic expectation, unleashing what may be called its second wave of industrialization in the 1970s and 1980s. Japan had launched the first wave decades earlier. The second wave occurred when the East Asian tigers, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, registered a spectacular economic performance. At the same time, Africa had not fared well.

Asia's third wave of industrialization, led by China, is now underway. What is different about this wave is that Afrasian solidarity seems weaker than what was the case during the first two waves. However, that this was indeed so is less surprising since the conditions that had given rise to Afrasian solidarity and cooperation in the second half of the twentieth century have either ceased to exist today or changed significantly. Nevertheless, there is also some optimism that dynamic Asian powers, particularly China, will trigger Africa's economic renaissance. But for this to happen, Africa will have to be able to conscript China and Japan—as well as the other

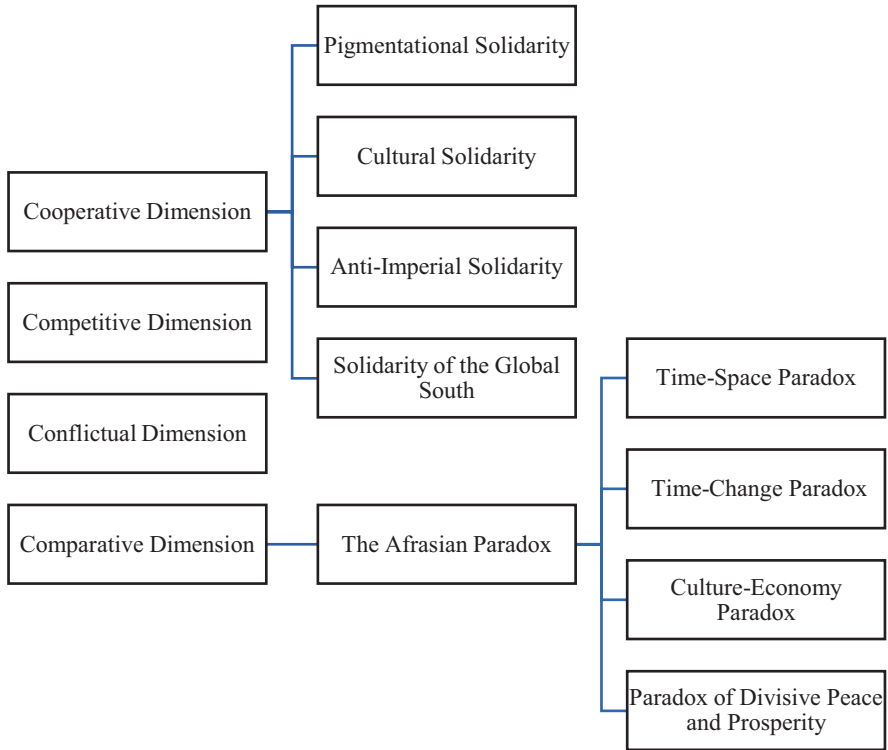


Diagram 1.1 The complexity of Afrasian experience. (Source: Author’s construction based on Mazrui and Adem (2013: 1–17))

exemplary East Asian countries—as its key allies. Africa can partner with China and learn from Japan. But a critical lesson from East Asia is that different societies can achieve economic modernization differently.

Another significant distinction between the second and third waves of Asia’s industrialization is that, unlike the former, the latter has potentially broader goals and wider consequences. China’s aspiration is not just to become “a trading state,” as important as that is, or merely build “a rich nation, a strong army.” Instead, China wants to create a world order centered around itself.

Outline of the Book

This book has seven sections.

- I. General Overview. Introduction.
- II. China as a Partner for African Development. This section focuses on the divergent perspectives on China–Africa relations. It interrogates why they are

divergent. It also critically examines the dominant perspective in Africa today and how to go beyond it.

- III. Japan as a Model for African Development. The dominant discourse about modernization had assumed, sometimes explicitly but often implicitly, that Japan was able to modernize successfully despite its culture. This assumption was based on the premise that non-Western cultures do not simply have what it takes to modernize. While this view has been widely discredited, primarily because of the rise of Asia, it continues to inform a segment of the discourse on Africa. Some broad hypotheses are formulated in this section about how Japan modernized because—and not despite—its culture and the lessons Africa could draw from the experience.
- IV. Japan and China in Africa. Africa's knowledge of China is deeper than that of Japan. The variable reasons for this must be many but should certainly include the fact that Chinese diplomacy in Africa has been more focused and long-standing. The divergent diplomatic approaches of Japan and China in Africa also reflect the different levels of significance each country attaches to Africa. Furthermore, Japan's activities in Africa are the function of its national interest and of its being an integral part of the Western bloc. But China's external behavior in Africa is less constrained. Indeed, China pursues goals in Africa often in disregard and, at times, opposition to other major powers. After a closer look at the foreign policies of Japan and China in Africa from a historical and comparative perspective, this section analyzes the seeming rivalry between the two countries in the continent.

China's potential rise as a global hegemonic power in a Euro-centric world is, of course, a relatively new phenomenon, and, as such, it poses new questions in the context of the Afrasian relationship. In this context, the questions explored in this section include: How qualitatively different will the outcome of China's new engagement with Africa be if we compare both their previous engagements, on the one hand, and, on the other, Africa's engagements with past hegemonic powers? Can we take the discourse on China as a benign or even benevolent power in Africa at its face value?

- V. Lessons for Africa from Southeast Asia. China's engagements with Southeast Asia have been deepening recently. And, for the time being, both sides seem to benefit from the interactions—more or less. The purpose of this section is to share a few general observations about what Africa could learn from the diplomacy of the Southeast Asian countries toward China. In addition, this chapter closely examines the three elements of a successful development strategy in Southeast Asia, which were identified by David Henley (2015), namely—outreach (alleviating poverty on a massive scale); urgency (do so with great speed); and expediency (do so with a pragmatic but ruthless eye on simplicity).
- VI. China and Ethiopia. This case study section reviews the relationship between China and Ethiopia in the last 100 years. It begins by underscoring how Ethiopia's relations with China (and at times, lack thereof) during Emperor Haile Selassie's rule came to be a reflection of (and a reaction to) Ethiopia's

relations with the United States. Haile Selassie's reign began in 1930 and ended in 1974. It was replaced by a military-Marxist regime that lasted until 1991, which the EPRDF, in turn, superseded under Meles Zenawi. The Sino-Ethiopian relationship flourished under Meles's rule and after his sudden death in 2012. The section attempts to document the continuity and change in a century of Sino-Ethiopian relations until Abiy Ahmed became Ethiopia's prime minister in April 2018; it is about how Ethiopia's domestic politics and foreign relations, as well as its changing geostrategic value in the eyes of the major powers, influenced Ethiopia's relations with China. It is about how a small, weak, peripheral state sought to leverage its relationship with major powers, sometimes successfully, while also being used by them.

- VII. Appendix. A collection of relevant book reviews and op-ed articles, only minimally modified or updated, as well as a special acknowledgment.

Each chapter in this book, totaling 15, can be read as a distinct "unit" of analysis in its own right.

Conclusion

Africa today faces several challenges in its pursuit of modernity. They often operate simultaneously, depriving the continent of the vitality required for rapid and meaningful progress. More specifically, many African states remain what Georg Sorensen (1997: 253–269) called the "multi-ethnic" *post-colonial state*, a state with (a) a personal or strongman rule, (b) a dependent economy, and (c) a military capacity of the state that is turned inward, rather than outward against external aggression.

Africa also remains the misunderstood continent, with negative images about it dominating the media, concealing the important fact that Africa is a miracle of diversity with more than four dozen countries and over 1000 languages; that, with its majestic size of more than 30 million square kilometers, it can incorporate the entire landmasses of the United States, China, Japan, India, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, as well as Eastern Europe; that it has a larger population than the EU and the United States combined; and that it is incredibly blessed with natural resources with, for example, the Democratic Republic of Congo alone possessing 90% of the world's cobalt reserve (*The Economist*, 3 April 2021) while the West African state of Guinea sitting on the world's largest reserve of bauxite (*Foreign Policy*, September 17, 2021)—only to mention the two metals that are critical inputs in, among other things, the manufacturing of electric cars and iPhones, respectively. But Africa lacks the capacity to use its resources. Indeed, the African continent spectacularly stands out in the lack of economic strength measured in terms of GDP (Mine 2022: 46–47).

Mazrui (1979: 6) observed decades ago.

The ambitions of most African countries are [great], encompassing the desire to forge numerous communities into cohesive nations within a lifetime and transforming the borderline of poverty into a foundation for affluence in a generation...Although the ambitions of newly independent African countries are great, their institutions and capacity for realizing these ambitions are weak.

African states still lack institutional capacity, and the reason for this must be obvious to any discerning eye. Those who capture the state in Africa tend to be invariably captured by it.

This book will examine some of the deeper challenges of economic modernization in Africa. It will attempt to demonstrate how they can be overcome. This had been done in East Asia. As Izumi Ohno and Keiichi Ohno (2012: 221–222) put it quite succinctly.

[East Asians] strategically mobilized under strong leadership their national and social concerns and senses of pride and humiliation to serve as driving forces of catch-up industrialization.

Another major issue addressed in this book pertains to the possible outcome of sustained interactions between Africa and Asia's two major powers, China and Japan. Is it some form of Afrasian commonwealth in which all sides will be better off, or a neo-dependency, dependent relationship in the new century? The answer, in my view, depends on Africa. Indeed, rising China offers the best opportunity in decades for Africa to launch its modernity if Africa can first put its house in order and create a conducive policy environment. China seems willing and able to assist Africa in its effort to succeed in modernity because a prosperous Africa is in China's interest too. China does not have a special motivation to stop Africa from raising its status to a higher level; Africa must be unwilling to accept its underprivileged economic status in which the hierarchical division of labor continues. The alternative scenario would deepen and freeze the prevailing international status quo (of the unequal division of labor) and make Africa's economic modernization more difficult than it already is.

As for how to put Africa's house in order, which basically refers to Africa's own capacity to craft a system that produces technological innovators rather than sycophants or rebels, the place to look to for inspiration and practical lessons, this book argues, is not primarily China, but Japan and Southeast Asia. I say this, partly, because my own most concentrated experience outside my country of birth was acquired in Japan.

Relatedly, the book asks: Would it be a good thing, from Africa's viewpoint, if Japan and China engage in a contest for influence in Africa? Despite some indications otherwise, China and Japan are unlikely to compete vigorously for influence in Africa in the long term. This is so simply because of China's uncontestable and growing comparative advantage in the continent. However, this does not mean that Sino-Japanese rivalry in Asia will not sometimes spill over into Africa. And when it does, it is likely to be asymmetrical (Adem 2014: 69–86, 2015: 92–102; Hirono 2019: 831–862), with a growing divergence between the interests of the two Asian powers.

It will therefore be easier for China and Japan to cooperate on Africa-related issues with extra-Asian powers such as the EU (in the case of China) and with the United States and the EU (in the case of Japan) than with one another.

This book concludes that Africa could use China's rise as a historic opportunity to change its position for the better in the international system, a system which Mazrui (1977: 3–4) aptly defined in terms of the distribution of power and wealth, combining the rigidity of the caste system (like that of India) with the ethics of the capitalist system (like that of the West).

Africa could improve its position in the global society while there is still a convergence of interest between its own and that of the rising Asian power—China. However, there can be little doubt that this is a steadily narrowing window of opportunity. Learning about what to learn, how to learn, and how to learn fast from Japan should also be a major consideration in Africa's quest for prosperity in the twenty-first century.

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Part II
China as a Partner for African
Development