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African Studies Review, Volume 48, Number 1, April 2005, pp. 59-87  
(Article)

Published by Cambridge University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2005.0002>



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# African Studies in China in the Twentieth Century: A Historiographical Survey

Li Anshan

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**Abstract:** This article surveys African studies in China during the twentieth century. It is divided into five parts: “Sensing Africa” (1900–1949), “Supporting Africa” (1949–65), “Understanding Africa” (1966–76), and “Studying Africa” (1977–2000). From a Chinese perspective, the author tells how, when, and why Chinese scholars have conducted their research on Africa according to paradigms that evolved during the last century. In conclusion, the author points out the achievements as well as the problems in African studies in China today.

**Résumé:** Cet article propose un aperçu des études africaines menées en Chine au cours du vingtième siècle. Il est divisé en cinq parties: «Approcher l’Afrique» (1900-1949), «Soutenir l’Afrique» (1949-65), «Comprendre l’Afrique» (1966-76) et «Étudier l’Afrique» (1977-2000). A partir d’une perspective chinoise, l’auteur examine comment, quand, et pourquoi les chercheurs chinois ont mené leur recherche sur l’Afrique, selon des paradigmes qui ont évolué au cours du siècle. En conclusion, l’auteur souligne les succès et les difficultés rencontrés par les études africaines en Chine aujourd’hui.

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## Introduction

African studies in China have been more or less a mystery to Africanists in other parts of the world. In 1981, George T. Yu, an American expert on China’s policy toward Africa, visited China, and a delegation of American

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*African Studies Review*, Volume 48, Number 1 (April 2005), pp. 59–87

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Africanists visited China in 1984. These visits were the start of a Sino–U.S. African Studies Exchange Program.<sup>1</sup> However, Africanists outside China are still unfamiliar with African studies in China owing to the language barrier and lack of involvement in international academia by Chinese scholars.<sup>2</sup> This article tries to give a general survey of African studies in China in the twentieth century. Divided into four parts chronologically, it looks at history, politics, cultural studies, and other related fields, with an analysis of the factors contributing to African studies in China.

### Sensing Africa (1900–1949)

China has a long history of contact with Africa. There was cultural exchange between China and Egypt as early as the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 220).<sup>3</sup> Du Huan, a Chinese in the Tang Dynasty (C.E. 618–907), visited Africa in the eighth century and is probably the first Chinese to have left a written record about Africa (Du Huan, C.E. 762?).<sup>4</sup> The great African traveler of the Yuan Dynasty (C.E. 1271–1368), Ibn Battuta, visited China in the fourteenth century and left a vivid description of metropolitan life.<sup>5</sup> A Chinese fleet led by Zhen Ho visited the East African coast several times during the fifteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, two African animals, the zebra and the giraffe, appear in Chinese classics of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644, C.E.),<sup>7</sup> and archeological discoveries have also suggested early contact between China and Africa. Chinese archeologists found a terracotta black figure in the tomb of “Madame Pei” of the Tang Dynasty, Chinese porcelains produced from the Tang to the Ming dynasties have been found in many parts of East Africa, and five pieces of Tang currency were discovered in Africa as well (Ma Wenkuan & Meng Fanren 1987).<sup>8</sup> From the eighteenth century on, more and more contact existed between China and Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Although the contact began long ago, the study of Africa in China did not start until modern times. With the coming of the Europeans, especially the missionaries who brought their knowledge of geography, Chinese intellectuals and court officials began to hear more about the outside world.<sup>10</sup> This contact increased during the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911), though on humiliating terms for the Chinese. While the partition of Africa was taking place in the late nineteenth century, there was also an effort on the part of the European powers to establish their “spheres of influence” in China. A wave of alarm swept across China, especially among the intellectuals, the most prominent of whom was Lin Zexu, the official who led the opium burning in Canton that triggered the Opium War between China and Great Britain in 1840. Lin collected whatever information he could about the West, and his efforts produced the important *Si Zhou Zhi* (Gazetteer of the Four Continents). Illustrating African geography and ethnology, the book mentioned places, states, cities, leaders, and ethnic

groups in Africa (Lin Zexu 1841).<sup>11</sup> A scapegoat of the Qing government under pressure from the European invaders, he was exiled to the northwest region, but he left his materials to Wei Yuan, another reformer, who compiled the book and added new materials and his own comments.<sup>12</sup> Labeled “a landmark in China’s relations with the West,” this book “represent[ed] the first systematic attempt to provide educated men with a realistic picture of the outside world” (De Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan, & Chester Tan 1960:10). Wei Yuan also mentioned Africa in his own book (Wei Yuan 1842), and another scholar of the time, Xu Jiyu, wrote in detail about North, West, Central, East, and southern Africa and the islands located in the West Indian Ocean (see Ai Zhouchang 1989:167–88).

In general, most early publications on Africa were of three sorts: translations or editions of world geography covering some parts of the continent, travel notes, and books about Egypt (Zhang Qiwei 1904; Ren Baoluo 1907). It is understandable that books about Egypt were written or translated, since Chinese Muslims went there on pilgrimages every year and Chinese were more familiar with Egypt than with other places in Africa. Chinese who traveled to Europe usually crossed Africa by land, or they did so by sea after the opening of the Suez Canal. Aside from the translations of Egyptian works, the earliest translation on the African continent was probably *Feizhou Youqi* (Travel in Africa) by a British writer, published by Zhong-Xi Publishing Company in 1900.

At the end of the Qing dynasty, revolutionary leaders and intellectuals like Chen Tianhua, Liang Qichao, Sun Yat-sen, and others tried to mobilize the Chinese people by means of the African example.<sup>13</sup> Both Chen Tianhua and Liang Qichao praised the Boers for their bravery in their fight against the British, with Chen calling the Boers “hero[es] of indomitable spirit.” “Transvaal can do this, are we not as good as Transvaal?” he said. Liang Qichao also stressed the connection between the Anglo-Boer War and the Chinese issue, and Sun Yat-sen used the example of the partition of Morocco, trying to show the rationale of “reform or perish” (Ai Zhouchang 1989: 192–95, 201–2). All of these leaders, in other words, attempted to wake up the Chinese people by means of both positive and negative lessons from Africa. Several newspapers in China also played a role in transmitting information about Africa, such as *Waijiao Bao* (Newspaper of Diplomacy) and *Qing Yi Bao*.

After Sun Yat-sen established Republican China in 1911, very few works on Africa were published. *Oriental Miscellany*, an important journal that was started in 1904 and lasted for more than forty years, published various articles about Africa on subjects such as relations between Africa and European countries, the partition, and African peoples and customs. Scholars also analyzed the political situation there, especially important contemporary issues such as the Morocco crisis or the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Cen Zhongmian wrote an article in 1935 on the contact between China and Africa in the Tang dynasty, illustrating the sea route between the Per-

sian Gulf and East Africa (Cen Zhongmian 1935). The first book on Africa written by Chinese scholars was a survey of the history, geography, ethnic groups, politics, economy, religion, and culture of Ethiopia published in 1936. Though the book was a general survey of Ethiopian history and culture, the authors' point of view was quite clear. At the very beginning they list four similarities between China and Ethiopia: both were ancient civilizations, both had a political organization undergoing a transformation from a feudal to a modern system, both suffered from capitalist invasion and the decline of handicraft industries, and both were victims of imperialism. The authors showed great sympathy toward the Ethiopian people in their struggle against the Italian invasion by stating, "The cruel threat towards them is an indirect threat towards us" (Wu Zuncun & Xie Defeng 1936). Another book on Ethiopia written by a Soviet scholar was translated into Chinese in 1935. In the early 1940s, two books on Egypt were published; one was a history of Egypt (Huang Zengyue 1940) and the other was a book about the Suez Canal (Ren Mei'e & Yan Qinshang 1941). However, for the most Africa was rarely studied during China's Republican period. Most parts of Africa were under colonial rule and Africa had no political status in international affairs. China itself was in chaos, with one war after another, and thus few people were interested in Africa. There were, however, occasional reports about Chinese overseas or laborers in Africa.

### **Supporting Africa (1949–1965)**

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 has been regarded as an important part of the national liberation movements after World War II. Beginning in the late 1950s, African studies in China concentrated on the nationalist independence movements, especially those in North Africa (Wu Xiu 1956; Luo Ke 1956; Fan Yong 1957; Yan Jin 1958; Chen Li 1959). Several academic journals published articles on the struggles against colonial rule in different countries (Na Zhong 1957; Zheng Daochuan 1957; Ma Tong 1959; Wang Junyi 1959; Wang Zhen 1959) or the nationalist movements in Africa as a whole. Two universities were pioneers in African studies. Scholars at Nankai University in northern China focused particularly on North Africa, while the South China Normal University began to study Central Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Leaders of the Chinese Communist Party encouraged African studies. On April 27, 1961, Chairman Mao Zedong admitted to a group of African and Asian friends visiting China that he did not have a clear understanding of Africa.

An institute of Africa should be established, studying African history, geography and the socio-economic situation. We don't have a clear understanding of African history, geography and the present situation, so a con-

cise book is badly needed. It doesn't need to be big, about one hundred to two hundred pages are enough. We can invite African friends to help and get it published in one or two years. It should include the content of how imperialism came, how it suppressed the people, how it met people's resistance, why the resistance failed and how it is now rising. (In Mao Zedong 1994: 463, 465)<sup>15</sup>

On July 4, 1961, the Institute of Asian-African Studies under the Central Party External Ministry and the Chinese Academy of Sciences was founded. Zhang Tiesheng, an expert on Sino-African relations, was appointed as the first director of the institute.

On December 30, 1963, the Group of Foreign Affairs of the Central Committee of the CCP issued a report on strengthening the study of foreign countries. Accordingly, three institutes in three universities were set up specifically for this purpose. Peking University, with its solid foundation in the humanities and social sciences as well as its Department of Oriental Studies, which taught various languages spoken in Afro-Asian countries, was chosen as the site for the Institute of Afro-Asian Studies.<sup>16</sup> Ji Xianlin, a scholar who had received his Ph.D. in Germany during the 1940s, was appointed as the director of the institute. Yang Ren-pian of the Department of History, who had received his degree in France, switched from French history to African history and began to train graduate students of African history.

Various institutions were also involved in African studies, the most prominent of which was the Institute of Asian-African Studies under the dual leadership of the International Liaison Department of the Central Committee of the CCP and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (which became an institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, hereafter CASS, in 1981). *African Introduction* (1962), prepared especially for the purpose of Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to Africa, was published by the institute and circulated internally among government cells. The institute also had two *Neibu Kanwu* (internal circulated journals), *Yafei Yicong* (Translations on Asia and Africa), beginning in 1959, and *Yafei Ziliao* (Data on Asia-Africa), beginning in 1963. All of these developments introduced Chinese intellectuals to international scholarship in African studies, including publications and conferences, and gave Chinese scholars numerous opportunities to pursue African studies abroad.<sup>17</sup>

This time also saw the translation into Chinese of many books in the field of African studies. These generally were of four types: works by African nationalist leaders, academic works by Western or Russian scholars, government reports, and popular works of nonfiction. The first type included works by Jamal Abd al Nasser (1954), Kwame Nkrumah (1957, 1965) Ben Bella (1965), and the Senegalese political leader Majhemout Diop (1958). Works by academicians were also translated (Suret-Canale 1958; Woddis 1960, 1961; Fitzgerald 1955; Davidson 1955, 1961; McKay

1963). Some books were chosen specifically for their understanding of the contemporary situation, such as *The African Awakening* (Davidson 1955) and *Les Trusts au Congo* (Joye & Lewin 1961). Many books by Soviet scholars were translated, the best known of which was *African Nations* (Moscow, 1954), a large volume on ethnic groups in Africa written by two leading Soviet Africanists. A work by the American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, *Africa: An Essay Towards a History of the Continent* (1961), was translated from Russian.<sup>18</sup> Governmental reports included *United States Foreign Policy: Africa* (1959) prepared by Program of African Studies at Northwestern University. Some popular books were also translated, such as John Gunther's *Inside Africa* (1955).

Two important books written by Chinese scholars at this time are worth mentioning: *History of Sino-African Relations: A Primary Research* (Zhang Tiesheng 1963) and *A Concise History of Modern Egypt* (Na Zhong 1963). Zhang Tiesheng's work is a compilation of five articles on Sino-African relations from the Han Dynasty to the Ming Dynasty, covering China's contact with East and North Africa and the contact through the sea route. Na Zhong graduated from the University of Alazhar in Egypt in the 1940s. The first chapter of his book is on ancient history, while the rest deals with the period from Napoleon's invasion to the nationalist movement in Egypt after the World War II. Besides these two works, a general introduction to the individual countries, colonies, or areas of Africa was also published (Anonymous 1957).

Chinese African studies of this period were largely pragmatic and politically motivated rather than purely academic. China strongly supported the national liberation movements and wanted to win new friends from African nations.<sup>19</sup> History departments at universities took the lead primarily because both anthropology and political science were regarded as "capitalist" in China at the time. Studies were generally carried out collectively, and they concentrated on national independence movements or the anticolonialist struggle.<sup>20</sup>

### Understanding Africa (1966–1976)

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), China suffered a setback in intellectual life. Universities closed for several years and later enrolled students according to their "political performance." There were few studies of foreign issues. All cultural life, including drama, film, and the ballet, was motivated or controlled by political need and used for political purposes. Higher education was used "to consolidate the proletarian dictatorship." The study of the social sciences and humanities was almost stopped except for the indoctrination of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought.

Interestingly enough, however, African studies continued to be pursued in China. The International Liaison Department of the Central Com-

mittee of the CCP had its own section to study the situation in Africa and provide support to African liberation movements, and various studies of the Institute of Asian-African Studies contributed a great deal to decision making at the central level. Nevertheless, the institute concentrated more on information collection or data analysis than on academic research.

The year 1971 witnessed two important events that indicated that China was ending its political isolation and returning to the international community: the beginning of the normalization of Sino-American relations marked by Henry Kissinger's secret mission and the entry of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations. In view of the longtime neglect of cultural issues, the Central Committee of the CCP realized the serious problems that existed in the academic fields. A nationwide meeting of publishing companies was held in 1971, organized by the State Council, which decided to publish some important books of history, such as twenty-four classic histories and the history of Republican China.

In order for leaders at different levels to understand foreign affairs, histories, general surveys, and works on the geography of different countries were chosen for translation. This huge project covered almost all the countries of the world and was carried on right into the 1980s. Histories of different areas of Africa were translated, as well as histories of individual countries (including Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Central Africa, Nigeria, Niger, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Gambia, Dahomey, Togo, Congo, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritius, and Malawi) and general surveys (of Southwest Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, Djibouti, Horn of Africa, Republic of Central Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, Mali, Upper Volta, Angola, Rhodesia, Libya, and Congo). Works by African scholars that were chosen for translation included *The Independent Sudan: The History of a Nation* (Shibeika 1959), *A History of Tanzania* (Kimambo & Temu 1969), *South West Africa* (First 1963), and *Rhodesia: Background to Conflict* (Mtshali 1967). Some are classics in African studies, such as *Old Africa Rediscovered* (Davidson 1960) and *An Introduction to the History of West Africa* (Fage 1969). Others were chosen for their documents and archival material, including *A History of Sierra Leone* (Fyfe 1962) and Cornevin's *Histoire du Togo*, *Histoire du Dahomey* and *Histoire du Congo* (1959; 1962; 1970). Many works by Soviet scholars were also translated, including two important general histories of Africa compiled by the Institute of African Studies, Soviet Union Academy of Sciences, and a four-volume *History of Black Africa* (Sik 1966) written by a Hungarian historian.

Since the original purpose of the State Council project was not academic, the translations were originally intended for circulation within government cells only. With the general opening-up, however, it was inevitable that all the books would be sold publicly. As a holdover from the Cultural Revolution, every translation had a preface written by the translator that was critical of the content from a political perspective, a measure that was intended not only to protect the translator but also to warn the reader. In



addition, translations were generally done by a group, rather than by an individual, so that in case anything went wrong, the responsibility would be taken collectively.<sup>21</sup> Most of the books were chosen neither for their content, nor for their academic quality, but for their titles. In every case, they were general histories rather than monographs, and their quality was uneven. Some had no academic value whatsoever, because those who chose them had little knowledge of Africa or of African studies abroad, and libraries in China had few books on Africa that could serve as models.

Nevertheless, the importance of these translations should not be underestimated. According to the statistics, in the period of 1967–78, 117 books on Africa were published; 111 were translations, five were popular readers, and one was a reference book. In other words, 95 percent of the books were translated from other languages (Zhang Yuxi 1997: 272–73). Although their quality varied, Chinese students at least began to acquire some knowledge about a continent far away from China and to come across the names of some leading scholars of the field. They gradually became familiar with the topics, interests, and trends in African studies, and this laid a foundation for later studies after the Cultural Revolution.

### **Studying Africa (1977–2000)**

After the smashing of the Gang of Four, university teaching and research resumed in China.<sup>22</sup> The period from 1977 to 2000 was the most productive period for African studies in universities, in other academic institutions, and in institutions attached to ministries of government. Two nationwide organizations were also founded: the Chinese Association of African Studies (1979) and the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies (1980). While the former concentrates on the study of current issues, the latter focuses on African history, although there is a lot of overlap between the two associations, with membership open to everyone interested in the field. With the coordination of the two associations, African studies in China has made great progress. The Institute of West Asian and African Studies of CASS set up a Center for South African Studies in 1995, and in 1998 the Institute of Afro-Asian Studies at Peking University established a Center for African Studies. Also in 1998 Xiangtan University in Hunan set up a Center for African Law Studies (Hong Yonghong & Xia Xinghua 2000). The Department of Geography at Nanjing University has a research group that specializes in African economic geography, Yunnan University has a group specializing in African studies, and Zhejiang Normal University recently established a Center for the Study of African Education.

From the end of the 1970s, articles in academic journals generally have covered four topics: (1) the resistance movements during the colonial period such as the Mahdi movement in Sudan, the Ethiopian war against Italian invasion, the Maji Maji uprising in Tanganyika, and the Mau Mau in

TABLE 1: African Studies Publications in China

Monograph	Translation	Popular	Reader	Reference	Total
Before 1949		14	5		19
1949–1966	10	60	35	6	111
1967–1978		111	5	1	117
1979–1994	41	68	48	9	166

Kenya (Pen Kunyuan et al. 1978; Jiang Xuecheng 1979; Mao Tianyou 1979; Luo Hongzhang 1979; Chen Gongyuan 1980; Lu Ting-en 1981b; Ding Bangying 1981); (2) African nationalist movements since World War I such as the pan-African movement; (3) nationalist movements in general (Li Qingyu 1979; Hu You'e 1980; Tang Tongming 1981a; Zhu Gang 1981; Tang Dadun 1981) or in particular countries (Tang Tongming & Xiang Qun 1979; Zhao Jianping 1980; Wang Shaokui 1981; Tang Tongming 1981b; Qin Xiaoying 1981); and (4) important figures, either the first generation of nationalists (Houphouet-Boigny, Nkrumah, Gnassingbe Eyadema, Robert Mugabe, Kenneth David Kaunda, Quett K. J. Masire, Leopald Sedar Senghor, Omar Mouammar Gaddafi, Ahmed Sukou Toure, Habbib Bourguiba) or influential figures who contributed to the liberation movement in Africa such as Garvey, Du Bois, Padmore, and Fanon. This list expanded in the 1980s and later.

In 1981 the first graduate student in African studies since the Cultural Revolution was enrolled in the graduate school of CASS, followed in later years by increased enrollment at Peking University.<sup>23</sup> During the 1980s, Chinese scholars began to turn their interests to specific topics. Lu Ting-en used archival data to show David Livingston's contradictory roles in the exploration of Africa, as a fighter against slave trade and as a tool for colonial expansion (Lu Ting-en 1981a). Wu Bingzhen, Xu Jiming, and others studied the slave trade, especially its linkage to the early capitalist development in Africa (Wu Bingzhen 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Xu Jiming 1983a, 1983b; Li Jidong 1983; Luo Jianguo 1984). Using Kenya as an example, Qin Xiaoying touched the politically sensitive subject of the national bourgeoisie's positive role in the anticolonialist struggle, a topic also explored by Wang Chunliang in his study of the nationalist movement in Zaire (Qin Xiaoying 1980; Wang Chunliang 1981). Li Anshan analyzed the formation, characteristics, and role of the modern intellectuals in West Africa (Li Anshan 1985; 1986).

In 1982, the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies published an important collection of papers (Chinese Society of African Historical Studies 1982). He Fangchuan's paper studied the politics, economy, and culture of the ancient kingdom of Axum. Zheng Jiaying probed the early period of South African socioeconomic structure. Gu Zhangyi explored the origin

and development of the African nations. Nin Sao discussed the issue of the "Hamitic hypothesis," argued that the African people were the creator of African civilization, and criticized the racist connotations of the hypothesis. Lu Ting-en probed the periodization of modern African history. Ai Zhouchang studied several important issues such as the origin of the Portuguese invasion of Africa, the slave trade, and the occupation of Africa. Qin Xiaoying studied the role of reform in the independence movements in Africa.

Several important books or monographs also were published in the 1980s, such as *A Concise History of Africa* (Yang Renpian 1984), *A General History of Africa* (Chinese Society of African Historical Studies 1984), *Africa and Imperialism* (Lu Ting-en 1987), *Study on the Strategy of Economic Development in Africa South of Sahara* (Chen Zhongde & Wu Zhaoji 1987), *African Socialism: History, Theory and Practice* (Tang Dadun 1988), and *Origin of the Disturbance in Southern Africa* (Ge Jie 1989). Histories of individual countries were also published, such as *The Modern History of Egypt* (Yang Haocheng 1985), *Concise History of Niger* (Xun Xingqiang 1983), and *Concise History of Zaire* (Zhao Shuhui 1981). Chen Gongyuan studied the history of the contact between China and Africa (Chen Gongyuan 1985). There were two important books on African geography (Su Shirong et al. 1984; Zeng Zungu et al. 1984), both published by scholars from the Department of Geography, Nanjing University. *Atlas of Africa* (1985), the largest of all the atlases printed in China, includes a comprehensive picture of Africa, its history, ethnic groups, economy, and geography. Overall, Chinese scholars in the 1980s began to produce more systematic studies of the African anti-colonial struggle as well as articles touching on related issues such as nationalist ideology, anticolonial religious movements, ethnic problems, economy and development, culture, and international relations. There also was an increasing interest in African arts (Zhang Rongsheng 1986, 1988; Li Miao 1988), literature (Gao Changrong 1983a; 1983b), and music (Nketia 1982).

In addition, the translation of important works continued. The authoritative work on African borders written by the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros-Ghali, was translated (1979), as was the important *Sundiata* (1983). Seligman's *Races of Africa* (1930) had been translated in 1966 by his student Fei Xiaotong, but owing to the Cultural Revolution it was not published until 1982.<sup>24</sup> Among the translations were books on the slave trade, including one by a Soviet scholar (Abromova 1983). Basil Davidson's book (1978) and biographies and autobiographies were also translated. Another large project was the translation of UNESCO's now completed eight-volume *General History of Africa*; in 1984, volumes 1 and 2 were published, with the rest appearing in the following years.

*Overview of Africa*, a comprehensive introduction to African studies in Chinese, was published in 1981, covering topics in geography, history, ethnic groups, political systems, economic development, and Sino-African

relations. Fang Jigen's work (1986) anthologizes reports, articles, and chapters of monographs about Chinese in Africa. *Contemporary African Celebrities* (1987) profiles more than one thousand important figures. Several bibliographies were compiled and printed with the help of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies (Chinese Society of African Historical Studies 1982; Zhang Yuxi 1990, 1997). During the period 1982–89, 105 articles were published in China that were concerned with African studies in other parts of the world (Zhang Yuxi 1990, 131–41) and several books on African nationalities were translated or compiled (Ge Gongshang & Chao Feng 1980, 1982, 1984; Ge Gongshang & Li Yifu 1981; Ge Gongshang & Song Limei 1987). Although the latter were not formally published, they contributed a great deal to African studies in China.

During the 1990s, publications on African studies in China increased enormously. East China Normal University Press published six monographs in their African Studies Series (Shu Yunguo 1996; Ai Zhouchang & Mu Tao 1996; Luo Jian-guo 1996; Xia Jisheng 1996; Lu Ting-en & Liu Jing 1997; Liu Hongwu 1997). Three compilations of historical materials (Ai Zhouchang 1989; Pan Guang & Zhu Weilie, 1992; Tang Dadun 1995), including *Selection of Materials on Sino-African Relations* (Ai Zhouchang 1989) were the best, with travel notes, contemporary newspaper articles, letters, and reminiscences. Other series included works relevant to African studies. For example, the “Study of British Commonwealth Series” includes South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana (Chen Zhongdan 2000). In the “Series of History of Colonialism,” the volume on Africa deals with the origin, development, and decline of colonialism in Africa (Zheng Jiaying 2000).

A general history of Africa was published in 1995 as a collective work by the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies. Divided into three volumes, it covers the ancient, modern, and contemporary history of Africa (He Fangchuan & Nin Sao 1996; Ai Zhouchang & Zheng Jiaying, 1996; Lu Ting-en & Peng Kunyuan, 1996) and summarizes recent scholarly work on Africa (Li Anshan 1996b). *A Concise History of African National Independence* (Wu Bingzheng & Gao Jinyuan 1993) was the first systematic study of the nationalist movements in Africa. Li Anshan's *British Rule and Rural Protest in Southern Ghana*, based on research carried out in the Public Records Office in London and the Ghanaian National Archives in Accra, argues that colonialism was a situation of paradox in which protest played an important role and in most cases caused changes in colonial policy. The English version was published in 2002 (Li Anshan 1998a, 2002).

During the 1990s, African studies in China focused on several subjects, such as socialism, ethnic issues, international relations, South Africa, cultural studies, economic studies, and Sino-African relations. One of the most extensive debates, which continues to this day, concerned the process of African democratization and the future, if any, of African socialism. There have been two major viewpoints on the wave of democracy in Africa. One considers the internal demand for a more democratic society as the

major impetus for the process (Xu Jiming & Tan Shizhong 1998; Zhang Hongming 1999), with disturbances during or after democratization understood as either the natural consequence of longtime oppression and malgovernance or as new conflict generated from the process itself. The other perspective understands democratization in Africa as the result of both the decline of the Soviet block and pressure from Western countries. According to this viewpoint, most of the disturbances have come about because of a mismatch between Western systems of democracy and African reality (Cui Qinglian 1995; Lu Ting-en 1995). On the subject of African socialism, a collective project begun in 1989, *New Analysis of African Socialism* (Tang Dadung et al. 1994), has involved sixteen scholars from different universities and institutions. The book discusses the origin, development, and typology of African socialism, analyzes different types of socialism, and compares socialism and capitalism in Africa. The authors argue that African socialism contributed a great deal to the consolidation of national independence, the building of national culture, and the control of national economies and also raised the status of African countries in the world political arena. However, socialism in Africa has not been successful, with the decline of the movement attributable to several causes: internal factors (the forces of production, internal policies), the decline of socialist bloc of Soviet and Eastern Europe, and pressure from Western countries. According to the authors, the rise of democratic socialism in Africa is inevitable.

Chinese Africanists have also been paying a great deal of attention to issues of ethnicity in Africa. One particularly heated debate among Chinese scholars involves the use of the terms *tribe* and *tribalism* (Wu Zengting 1996; Li Anshan 1998b). Some think that *tribe* is an appropriate term and a useful concept (Nin Sao 1983; Ge Gongshang 1995; Zhang Hongming 1995), while others consider it derogatory and prefer to think in terms of “local nationalism” (Gu Zhangyi 1997; Yuan Xihu 1998; Li Anshan 1998b). Although opinions differ on this question, most Chinese scholars agree that ethnic conflict has been the greatest obstacle to nation-building in Africa. Li Jidong (1997), Zhang Hongming (1999), and Xu Jiming (Xu Jiming & Tan Shizhong 1998) argue that it has challenged the legitimacy of the nation-state and threatened its political stability and unity. Li Anshan has analyzed the origins of “local nationalism” and its relation to nationalism and international politics, arguing that local nationalism has its origin in the precolonial social base and was greatly influenced by colonial rule (especially “indirect rule”), while internal factors such as malgovernance and external interference have strengthened ethnic conflict (Li Anshan 2001a, 2001b, 2004).

In the field of international relations, Liang Gencheng’s work is perhaps the most impressive. Divided into eight chapters chronologically, his *United States and Africa* (1991) explores American policy toward Africa from World War II until the 1980s. From 1990 to 1996, more than a dozen articles have been written by Chinese scholars on the subject of French policy

toward Africa. In recent years the on-going “African renaissance” has become of intense interest to Chinese scholars, as have developments in South Africa, especially after the normalization of Sino–South African diplomatic relations (see Yang Lihua et al. 1994; Ge Jie 1994; Chen Yifei 1994; Zhu Chonggui et al. 1994; Xia Jisheng 1996; Xia Jisheng et al. 1998; Zhang Xiang 1998; Ai Zhouchang et al. 2000). Even before the normalization of relations, both sides had set up research centers in the other’s capital which played semidiplomatic roles but also promoted academic exchanges between China and South Africa.<sup>25</sup> Biographies and autobiographies of Nelson Mandela and Winnie Mandela have been written or translated by Chinese scholars (Yang Lihua 1995; Wen Xian 1995). In June 1996 the Institute of West Asian and African Studies of CASS held an international seminar, “Prospects of Political and Economic Development in South Africa,” sponsored by the Ford Foundation. The last of a series of seminars organized by the Sino–U.S. African Studies Exchange Program, this also served as a celebration and summary of the fifteen years of Ford Foundation–sponsored cooperation between Chinese and American African studies research institutions. The seminar had a special significance, since it was held after President Jian Zemin’s first visit to Africa and before the normalization of Sino–South African diplomatic relations. The papers presented focused on three topics: South Africa’s political transition and its prospects, South Africa’s reconstruction and development, and foreign affairs in the New South Africa’s (Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS 1996). Another symposium titled “Africa Beyond 2000” was held in 1998 (Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS 1998).

Nin Sao is the first Chinese scholar to have written on African cultural life. His book is a study of social norm and festivals, worship and religion, technology and ideology, and the pursuit of beauty in art, literature, and the performing arts (Nin Sao 1993). Li Baoping and Liu Hongwu have written works analyzing the linkage between tradition and modernity in historical perspective (Li Baoping 1993, 1997; Liu Hongwu 1997). As a part of the “Series of World Civilizations,” Ai Zhouchang’s work covers a wide range of topics. Part 1, “Formation of African Black Civilization,” studies different cultures, such as the Upper Nile (Nubia, Kush, Aksum), iron culture in West Africa, Bantu migration, Islam, Swahili, and Hausa cultures. Part 2, “Manifestation of African Black Civilization,” looks at different forms and expressions of African civilization, including arts and literature, religion and customs, and ideologies and technology. Part 3, “African Black Civilization to the Future,” links Africa with the outside world and considers the connections and conflicts between tradition with modernity (Ai Zhouchang 1999).

Feng Jianwei’s work is unique because the author, as a news reporter, went to the African interior for his study. He spent a half-year traveling to four West African countries and visited 150 towns, villages, and schools. He explored social organization, economic patterns, class structure, political

systems, and historical stages. Opposing the negative view among Chinese scholars regarding the cash crop system, he argued that the system had some positive aspects (Feng Jianwei 1994). The study of modernization has been popular in China since the late 1980s. Li Jidong's book analyzes the causes of the delayed modernization in Africa and considers malgovernance and tribalism as significant negative factors (Li Jidong 1997). He Li-er's work on Zimbabwe was the first study of this newly independent country (He Li-er 1995). Chinese scholars have also produced works on the African economy, including a book on the market economy (Yang Dezhen & Su Zeyu, 1994; Chen Muo 1995) and one on the relation between reform and economic or structural adjustment (Tan Shizhong 1998; Shu Yunguo 2004). For the "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Ministerial Conference" held in Beijing in 2000, the Ministry of Agriculture organized scholars to compile the four-volume "Series of Investment Guide for the Development of African Agriculture" (Lu Ting-en 2000; Wen Yunchao 2000; He Xiurong, Wang Xiuqing & Li Ping 2000; Chen Zhongde, Yao Guimei & Fan Yushu 2000).

On the subject of Sino-African foreign relations, one of the two collections published by the Center for African Studies of Peking University (Center for African Studies, Peking University, 2000, 2002) considers the history of Sino-African relations from ancient times to the present. Until recently, most scholars believed that relations between China and Egypt have a long history but that China's contact with sub-Saharan Africa started much later. This misconception is now being corrected by works such as the above and by the scholarship of Shen Fuwei, who argues that direct contact between China and sub-Saharan Africa actually began in the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–C.E. 220) when, in addition to various commercial activities between both sides, the first emissary from black Africa to China was sent from Adulis, a port city of Ethiopia (in present Eritrea) and arrived at Luoyang in C.E. 100. Thus Ethiopia became the first African country to establish diplomatic relations with China (Sheng Fuwei 1990). Ai Zhouchang and Mu Tao also argue that as early as 200 B.C.E.–C.E. 600, the Sino-Africa relations existed in the form of the "Silk Road" (Ai Zhouchang & Mu Tao 1996). Another commonly held notion is that Sino-African relations were cut off from the mid-1400s until the 1950s and thus were interrupted for five hundred years (Hutchison 1975:2). Ai Zhouchang criticizes this viewpoint and shows that the relations between China and Africa were still going on during this period, supported by data in Chinese (Ai Zhouchang 1989). On the subject of the Chinese in Africa, three books have been published. As early as 1984, Chen Hansheng published data from government archives, documents, letters, and various original materials concerning Chinese laborers in Africa, mainly in South Africa ("Chinese Labor in Africa," part of the *Compilation of Data of Chinese Labor Abroad*, 1984). Fang Jigen also compiled material on the Chinese in Africa, most of it translations of secondary sources (Fang Jigen, 1986). A comprehensive

work on the subject, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* (Li Anshan 2000) looks at the origin, adaptation, and integration of the Chinese in Africa.

Three reference books are important, all compiled by the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS. *The Yellow Book of the International Situation: The Report of the Development of Middle East and Africa* (Zhao Guozhong et al. 1998–2001), published annually since 1998, provides regular updates on the political, economic, and diplomatic situation in Africa. The publication of the *Concise Encyclopedia of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Ge Jie 2000) and the *Concise Encyclopedia of West Asia and North Africa* (Zhao Guozhong 2000) were other important achievements in China. Most of the authors are experts on their subjects and the materials are relatively new.

## Conclusion

The achievement of African studies in China during the twentieth century was quite impressive, and the contributions continue on into the twenty-first century. The Chinese academy's attitude toward Africa is more sympathetic than it is toward many other places, perhaps because of political and cultural similarities between the two (the experiences of colonialism and imperialism, the emphasis on collectivism, and their status as the cradles of civilization). The field of African studies in China has gradually moved away from its original political orientation to become a wide-ranging academic discipline, suggesting that Chinese scholars will make even more contributions in the future. Ph.D. dissertations have been increasing steadily since the late 1990s (Oh Il-hwan 1998; Wang Suolao 2000; Sun Hongqi 2000; Liu Naiya, 2000; Liu Lan 2001), and both new and established scholars are working in the fields of history, geography, economics, literature, ethnic studies, cultural studies, and others. At the same time, there continues to be a balance in Chinese academia between practical work and academic research, since the government needs information, analysis, and assessment, while academia needs funding, stimulus, and feedback.<sup>26</sup> Academic exchanges are going on between China and the world, gradually bringing China into international academia. With the opening-up of China and increasing contact between Chinese individuals (or companies) and African people, Africa is no longer a mystery to the Chinese. In a globalized world there is increasing need to know about Africa, and this need will certainly stimulate African studies in China.

Nevertheless, problems exist as well. African studies are concentrated in big cities, especially Beijing and Shanghai. As this review of the literature indicates, few original studies have been done. Most of the books written by Chinese scholars are based on secondary materials from English sources. Few scholars have been to Africa to teach or conduct research. Not a single anthropologist has been to Africa specifically for study, and thus no serious ethnographic study of African people, or any study on the oral tra-



dition, has been produced. Chinese archeologists so far have been preoccupied with the ruins and relics in China, not with archeological exploration or research in Africa. There is no African language study in China except for training purposes.<sup>27</sup> Neither the Chinese Association of African Studies nor the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies has its own journal, although *Xiya Feizhou* (West Asia and Africa) has made a great contribution to African studies.<sup>28</sup> There was an internally circulated journal of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies, but it was irregular and short-lived. The studies are still too general, with few country studies (though a series of country studies has recently started in CASS) or case studies. There are very few exchanges between China and the rest of the world, and while some progress is being made, it has not been enough. Moreover, Chinese scholars seldom have their research published in the English-speaking world.

African studies in China is a promising field, but there is room for more effort, hard work, and collaboration.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Richard Robertson and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza for inviting me in 2002 to give a lecture on this subject at the Center for African Studies at Stanford University and the Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, respectively, which made me think about writing this survey. I also thank George Yu of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, George Brooks of Indiana University, Zhang Xiang of Nankai University in China, and Wu Yu-gui of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for providing me with information, and four anonymous reviewers who provided me with critical and valuable comments on an earlier version of this essay.

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## Notes

1. In 1983, the Ford Foundation provided funding for a Chinese delegation of Africanists to visit the U.S. In 1985, it funded the U.S.–China African Studies Exchange Committee, chaired by George Yu in the U.S. and Ge Jie as in China. In 1986, at the suggestion of George Brooks in his report on African teaching and research in Asian countries, the African Studies Association invited Zhang Xiang of Nankai University in China, together with Hideo Yamada from Japan and Professor Har from South Korea, to attend the ASA annual meeting and visit African studies programs in the U.S.
2. So far, few Chinese Africanists have published formal articles or books in English in the West (Gao Jinyuan 1984; He Fanchuan 1987; Ge Jie 1997; Li Anshan, 1994; 1995; 1996a; 2002). Zhang Hongming, a senior researcher at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS, has published articles in French

- journals. At Peking University I have met with delegations from Great Britain (1996) and France (1997) and with some American scholars. They all wanted to know about African studies in China.
3. In 1993 Austrian archeologists found a piece of natural silk in a female mummy of the twenty-first Dynasty of Egypt (1070–945 B.C.); only China could produce natural silk at that time (*Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], April 2, 1993). For a detailed study of the contact between China and Egypt, see Sun Yutang (1979).
  4. Du Huan was captured in the Talas Battle (751 A.D.) by the Arab army. He returned to China by sea after about ten years. In his work he mentions a place in which black people live called "Molin." Opinions differ as to the present location of "Molin," with various scholars suggesting Maghrib, Malindi, Mendi, Meroe, Aksum, and others (Li Anshan 2000:49–50).
  5. Ibn Battuta went to China in 1346 and left notes on various aspects of life there, such as its architecture, customs and habits, economic life and currency system, transportation, local products, legal system, and politics, especially the political struggle within the court in Beijing (1929:282–300).
  6. From 1405 to 1433, a Chinese eunuch-official named Zeng Ho led seven fleets across Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean and arrived several times on the East African coast. Three people from the expeditions left writings that mention places in East Africa (Li Anshan 2000:65–75); two of them, Ma Huan (1433) and Fei Xin (1436), describe places in detail.
  7. The zebra appeared in *Yi Wu Tu Zhi* (Pictures and Records of Alien Things), a book of the Ming dynasty, and the giraffe in a painting by Shen Du of the Ming Dynasty, now in the Philadelphia Art Museum.
  8. *Wenwu* (Cultural Relics) (1979, no. 2: 88). For the ancient records, see Du Huan (A.D. 762[?]); Duan Chengshi (A.D. 850); Ma Huan (1433); Fei Xin (1436); Ibn Battuta (1929). For studies of Sino-African relations in English, see Duyvendak (1947); Filesi (1972); Snow (1988). For studies by Chinese scholars, see Cen Zhongmian (1935); Zhang Xinglang (1940); Zhang Tiesheng (1963); Zhang Junyan (1986); Ma Wenkuan and Meng Fanren (1987); Shen Fuwei (1990); Ai Zhouchang and Mu Tao (1996); Li Anshan (2000).
  9. Fan Shou-yi (1682–1753), a Chinese official who accompanied a missionary to Italy, passed the Cape Coast and left some notes; he was probably the first free Chinese to visit Africa. Some Chinese in Southeast Asia were sent into exile in South Africa by Dutch colonists as early as the 1700s and early 1800s (Melanie Yap & Dianne Leong Man 1996; Li Anshan 2000).
  10. It may be surprising to note that Zhu Siben, a Chinese scholar of the Yuan Dynasty, drew a map of Africa in 1311–20 that showed a clearer understanding of the shape of the African continent than scholars in other parts of the world had (Needham 1959).
  11. It mentioned places such as the Niger River, Lake Chad, Dahomey, Tukolor, Zaria, Sokoto, Accra, Lagos, Ouidah, and Cabinda and people such as Uthman dan Fodia, Ahmadu Bari, and Mowlay Ahmad al-Mansur.
  12. The first edition comprised fifty volumes, and the edition of 1852 increased to one hundred volumes. Ironically, the Japanese government made great use of this book but it was neglected by the Chinese imperial court.
  13. Chen Tianhua (1875–1905), an early democratic revolutionary, went to Japan to study and organized anti-Qing activities there. He wrote several influential

books. In 1905 he founded Tongmen Hui (Alliance) and later committed suicide in order to protest the Japanese policy toward Chinese students. Liang Qichao (1873–1929), an early reformist, was exiled to Japan after the conservative coup of 1898. He used his writing to raise support for the reformers' cause among the overseas Chinese and foreign governments. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the father of the Chinese republican revolution, led the anti-Qing activities and became the leader of Tongmen Hui and later Guomindang (Nationalist Party).

14. In the late 1950s, the Department of History at Nankai University published several articles on the national independent movements in Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria in *Lishi Jiaoxue* (Teaching History). The Department of History at South China Normal University published articles on Congo and Cameroon in *Zhongxue Lishi Jiaoxue* (Teaching History in Middle School).
15. The group he was addressing included leaders of political parties and members of delegations from Guinea, Jordan, South Africa, Senegal, North Rhodesia, Uganda, and Kenya. Mao met them at Hangzhou. For the names of the participants, see Mao Zedong 1996:478, n.1).
16. People's University in Beijing was chosen for the study of socialist countries, while Fudan University in Shanghai was chosen for the study of capitalist countries.
17. Their activities were recorded in the two journals mentioned above. See, for example, articles in *Yafei Yicong* on international Africanist conferences (1963, nos. 2, 3, & 4) and on Africanist conferences in the U.S. (1963, no. 3; 1965, no. 3; 1965, no. 5), Spain (1963, no. 7), Italy (1963, no. 8), India (1963, no. 9), Scotland (1964, no. 2), Japan (1964, no. 4), France (1964, no. 11), Holland (1964, no. 12), England (1965, no. 8), West Germany (1963, no. 4), and the USSR (1963, no. 6).
18. About sixty books were translated during this period; among them, twenty-nine were from the USSR and East European countries. In other words, almost half were translated from Russian or related languages (Zhang Yuxi 1997: 260).
19. The relationship between China and Africa during the 1960s is a very important topic. Besides the works mentioned below, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Qian Qichen recently published a memoir that includes an entire chapter on Africa. See Qian Qichen (2003: 243–87).
20. In 1965, the Institute of Asian-African Studies (later the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS) decided that study should be concentrated in five fields: the development and characteristics of contemporary national liberation movements; the contemporary socioeconomic situation, with a focus on the structure of social classes; the bourgeois ideology of nationalism; the revisionists' incorrect viewpoints about national liberation movements; and the policies of imperialist countries toward national liberation movements.
21. Examples are the Shandong University Translation Group and the Shanghai Foreign Language School Translation Group.
22. The so-called Gang of Four was a political clique during the Cultural Revolution composed of Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan. They were regarded as ultraleftists and were very unpopular in China. Their downfall represented the end of the Cultural Revolution.
23. The first graduate student in African studies after the Cultural Revolution is the author of this article.

24. The translator Fei Xiaotong is a 1930s graduate of the London School of Economics and is now a famous sociologist at Peking University. He regarded this work as a “standard reader,” which shows how poorly Chinese at the time understood the international scholarship in African studies owing to their longtime academic isolation.
25. For example, Ken Smith, the chairman of the Department of History at UNISA, visited Peking University at the invitation of Leslie Labuschagne, the Director of the South African Center for Chinese Studies in Beijing at the time.
26. In October 1997, the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies held its conference in Beidaihe. Li Anshan and Liu Hongwu were asked by the society to draft a letter to President Jiang Zemin emphasizing the importance of African studies. The president commented on the issue, “In recent years, I have stressed many times that the work on Africa should be taken very seriously. This issue should be paid great attention to, not only in politics, but also in the development of economic cooperation. The Central Committee and the related units of the State Council should all support this work” (Chen Gong Yuan 2000:244).
27. Hausa and Swahili are taught in two universities in Beijing, mainly for the training of personnel for Xinhua News Agency and other media.
28. *Xiya Feizhou* is a journal run by the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, CASS. Started in 1980 as an internal circulated journal, it became published openly within China in 1981. It became available to readers both at home and abroad in August 1982. *Xiya Feizhou* has since served as the major academic journal for African studies in China.