


taught African language in American universities along with Arabic. Swahili thereby became — as the title of this fine book affirms — a language not just for Tanzania and East Africa, but a language for the whole world.

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The Past and Present of Chinese Migration to Africa

The Social and Economic History of the Chinese Overseas in Africa, Volumes I, II, and III

By Anshan Li. Nanjing, China: Jiangsu People's Press, 2019. Pp. 1457. ¥348.00, paperback (ISBN: 9787214212511).

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Given the rapid growth of works written about Chinese migration to Africa over the last twenty years, it is increasingly difficult to keep track of all strands of information contained within this literature. Published in Chinese, Anshan Li's three-volume book, *The Social and Economic History of the Chinese Overseas in Africa*, is a timely and significant contribution because it provides a much needed comprehensive and longitudinal perspective on the history of Chinese migrants to Africa.¹ Li is arguably the most prolific and internationally renowned Chinese Africanist, whose expertise on the subject is unparalleled. An emeritus professor at Peking University in Beijing, Li once acted as President of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies — the equivalent of the US's or UK's African Studies Association — and served as Vice President of the International Scientific Committee of the *UNESCO General History of Africa (Vols. IX–XI)*. Throughout his distinguished career, Li has published extensively on topics related to West African history, China-Africa relations, the Chinese diaspora in Africa, and the historiography of African Studies in China. This extensive work represents the culmination of more than twenty years of his academic research in the China-Africa field.

Intended as a general history of the Chinese in Africa, Li's study covers a time frame that stretches from the ancient China-Africa exchanges in the eighth century BCE to the first decades of the twenty-first century. However, the Chinese only started migrating to Africa in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), so the lion's share of the book's narrative focuses on the period between the seventeenth century and the present. It comprises 28 chapters that are structured both chronologically and thematically. The book begins with an extended discussion of the current state of the field in Chapter One, which can serve as a comprehensive review of the historiography and an

¹This book is a substantial expansion of his earlier book on the topic, see A. Li, *A History of Chinese Overseas in Africa* (Beijing, 1999). There have been a few monographs that examine the history of the Chinese in individual African countries or regions. Notable examples include H. Ly-Tio-Fane Pineo, *Chinese Diaspora in Western Indian Ocean* (Port Louis, Mauritius, 1985); M. Yap and D. Leong Man, *Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa* (Hong Kong, 1996); E. Wong Hee-Kam, *La Diaspora Chinoise aux Mascareignes: Le Cas de la Réunion* (Paris, 1996); and S. Liu, *The History of Chinese Presence in Nigeria (1950s–2010s): Factories, Commodities, and Entrepreneurs* (London, 2022).



introduction to the existing historical sources and archives available to researchers. This is followed by an overview in Chapter Two of the indirect and direct contacts between China and Africa prior to the Qing dynasty. Chapters Three to Ten examine the origins of the Chinese in Africa, the establishment of Chinese communities in coastal regions in East Africa and later as recruited labor during colonial times, and various aspects of their socioeconomic life on the continent from the early Qing dynasty to its demise in 1911. Chapters Eleven to Seventeen then focus on the period between 1911 and 1949, with a thorough analysis of the economic survival and cultural adaptation of the Chinese. Important themes include their demographic changes, economic activities, education and schools, hometown as well as professional associations, racial discrimination and resistance, and their interaction with the Chinese Nationalist government at the time. Chapters Eighteen to Twenty-eight investigate the post-1949 era (1949–2016) and trace major changes in different Chinese communities on the continent. For instance, Li shows how the Chinese civil war and the Nationalist government's subsequent retreat to Taiwan affected Chinese settlement, education, associations, and political loyalties in Africa. More importantly, Li documents in detail the rise of Chinese merchants and businesses in Africa during this period, including both African-born Chinese and the numerous industrialists and entrepreneurs from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. The author concludes with an insightful reflection on key concepts such as 'Chinese new immigrants' and the prospects of Chinese migrants' sociocultural adaptations in Africa.

It is hard to reduce such an empirically rich work into a singular overarching argument. Nor is it wise to do so. Nevertheless, four important findings or contributions can be discerned. First, this study provides an evidence-based calculation of Chinese labor recruited to Africa by Europeans from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Using Chinese and colonial historical documents, Li concludes that the total number of Chinese indentured laborers in Africa between 1700 and 1910 reached 172,000 (350–9). They toiled on plantations, mining compounds, and railway and road construction sites across the continent, with key destinations in Mauritius, South Africa, Madagascar, Réunion, German East Africa, and French West Africa. While it has been widely accepted that African slaves and coerced labor 'financed' industrialization in England, it is less well-recognized that Chinese indentured labor was once critical for European colonial expansion and capitalist extraction in Africa. Second, Li stresses that the Chinese diaspora in Africa contributed enormously to the Chinese war of resistance against Japanese aggression during the Second World War, a historical fact that had been overlooked in other studies of the diaspora. Through concrete examples from Southern and East Africa (625–7), Li contends that, given the small Chinese population in the region, their relative contribution was the highest among all overseas Chinese communities in the world (1281).

Third, the study emphasizes Chinese traders' and entrepreneurs' socioeconomic contribution to African local communities. For instance, Li demonstrates how Chinese shops had historically offered affordable goods and flexible services in Black townships and served as a 'social nerve center' (521) for Black workers' afterwork leisure and daily consumption. He also analyzes how industrialists from Hong Kong and Taiwan, from the 1960s to the 1980s, participated in and contributed to various postindependence industrialization efforts (928–40) in West, East, and Southern African countries. Aware of the potential controversies surrounding the economic activities of the more recent Chinese traders from mainland China, Li attempts to provide a balanced portrayal of their interaction with the local society. While highlighting their successes and contributions — for instance the provision of affordable products and job creation — Li does not ignore issues such as 'Fong Kong' (poor quality or copycat products, 1237–9), vicious competition, labor abuses, and lack of social integration (1035–8). Last but not least, Li describes in lengths the social, cultural, and religious life of Chinese migrants in Africa. In so doing, Li refutes the stereotypical image of Chinese migrants in Africa as purely *homo economicus*. Discussions about Chinatowns, Chinese newspapers and schools, Buddhism and Christianity showcase both the rich cultural traditions of the Chinese diaspora and their creative and resilient adaptation to Africa's sociopolitical environments.

This authoritative and comprehensive work will be an invaluable resource for researchers of African history, China-Africa relations, and Chinese overseas studies. The most impressive strength of the book is the author's consultation of remarkably diverse sources (see 31–50) — British and French colonial archives, African national archives, Chinese historical records, government and company archives from mainland China and Taiwan, journalistic reports from Africa and China as well as newspapers operated by Chinese migrants in Africa, and personal memoirs of Chinese migrants and diplomats. Some country or regional experts may want more coherent details about the Chinese diaspora in a particular country, and readers will find certain discussions slightly repetitive (for instance, Taiwan's Operation Vanguard in the 1960s and the problems and challenges faced by Chinese businesses in Africa). Yet this three-volume work is informative and compelling on the whole. Of course, it will be much more beneficial for international scholars if an English translation can be available in the near future.²

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Archives and Late Nineteenth Century Ethiopia

Colonial Powers and Ethiopian Frontiers 1880–1884: Acta Aethiopica volume IV

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Acta Aethiopica has established a well-deserved reputation as an indispensable resource for any serious student of nineteenth-century Ethiopian history. Among historians of Africa more widely, this extraordinary and accessible collection of sources remains insufficiently known. It would be to the detriment of our profession if the publication of this fourth volume in the series did not attract a much wider readership. The book not only offers compelling insights into African responses to the establishment of European colonial rule in the late nineteenth century, but also provides rich materials for any historians teaching on the subject.

The *Acta Aethiopica* series was brought into being through the painstaking editorial work of Sven Rubenson and Amsalu Aklilu, who over decades sought out and collected original documents from nineteenth-century Ethiopia in the archives of almost a dozen countries. Each volume in the series reproduces many of these sources, wherever possible through high-quality copies of the original, which are presented alongside first-rate translations and brief contextualising annotations. The primary focus remains on the correspondence of Ethiopian rulers and notables, but the

²A group of Chinese scholars led by Professor Tian Ze at Hohai University are currently applying for a grant for the publication of an English version of the book.