

BOOK REVIEW

Seifudein Adem. *Africa's Quest for Modernity: Lessons from China and Japan*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Link, 2023. 269 pp. £99.99. Paper. ISBN: 978-3031236563.

Seifudein Adem provides an insightful and informative analysis of Africa's quest for modernization with valuable lessons from China and Japan. The author's views are influenced by Ali Mazrui's analysis of African modernization. Central research questions of this book include: Why did modernization or modernity elude Africa? How can Africa achieve modernization? It is important to examine these questions as Africa is home to more than one-eighth of the world's population and more than one-fourth of the total number of states.

The book is divided into six parts. Part One is an overview of key arguments. Part Two examines China as a partner for African development. Part Three studies Japan as a model for African development. Part Four compares China and Japan's relations with Africa. Part Five draws lessons for Africa from Southeast Asia. Part Six offers a case study of China and Ethiopia.

There are three perspectives on China's relations with Africa: Sino-optimism, Sino-pragmatism, and Sino-pessimism. Sino-optimism, Adem argues, is the dominant perspective in Africa today. It refers to the conviction or expectation that China is a force for good on the African continent. The sense of solidarity with Africa in China's diplomatic thought is quite deep—intrinsic interest underlies China's approach to Africa today. About two-thirds of China's loans to Africa are for infrastructure. China made possible the end of the steady marginalization of Africa in the global political economy by enabling the revival of or even rise in the world demand for (and price of) primary commodities such as agricultural products and minerals. The Sino-optimists believe that African modernization and China's rise are mutually beneficial and close cooperation between the two sides can be a win-win game.

Sino-pragmatism points out both the strengths and weaknesses in China's relations with Africa. Many African leaders admire China's rapid development since the 1970s. Due to the vast differences in culture, politics, and economic structures, it is impossible for African countries to simply copy the "China model." On one hand, there are common interests between China and its African partners. On the other hand, some African leaders are concerned about the unbalanced nature of their trade and financial relationships. Sino-pessimism compares China with the former European colonial powers. People who hold this view tend to believe that China is more motivated by gaining access to Africa's vast natural resources than helping Africa to modernize. They criticize China for getting some African countries into deep debts and creating a pattern of African dependency on China for technological and financial support.

The next part of the book examines Japan as a model for African modernization. Japan is the first non-Western country that has successfully achieved modernization. One key factor of Japan's success is its cultural tradition and strong emphasis on education. Japan's modern education system is firmly anchored in indigenous values. Despite the "modernity" of contemporary education in Japan, it is not hard to see the resilient Japanese "traditional" values in it. Even the quintessential modern agents of socialization, such as schools, seem to be enforcing the Japanese culture. This means tradition and modernity are not as incompatible as they appear to be. Modernity can be indigenized, and tradition can be modernized. Whatever the Japanese borrowed from abroad, they often skillfully integrated it into their own culture and made it fit their specific social needs. African countries should appreciate their rich cultural heritages and preserve their deep tradition in their quest for modernity. Japan's "developmental state" can also provide valuable lessons for African countries to strengthen their governance as they confront the growing political and socio-economic challenge of modernization.

It is interesting that there is intense competition between China and Japan in Africa. In the last three decades, China has contributed more to Africa's infrastructural development than any other countries. China is the largest trading partner with most African countries. African countries could potentially benefit from Sino-Japanese competition to develop close economic ties with them.

Adem concludes that Africa can learn from the experiences of both China and Japan. Africa can use China's rise as a historic opportunity to change its position for the better in the international system. Africa could improve its position in the global society while there is still a convergence of interest between its own and that of a rising China. Learning about what to learn, and how to learn from China and Japan should be a major consideration in Africa's quest for prosperity in the twenty-first century. This book could be further strengthened if the author provided more critical comparative analysis on how Japan and China succeeded in their quest for modernity. More empirical evidence and detailed data on China and Japan's economic relations with African countries would be helpful for readers.

In sum, this is a thought-provoking comparative study of Africa's quest for modernity, drawing valuable lessons from China and Japan. Anyone who cares about African development in comparative perspectives can benefit from reading this book.

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