

INTRODUCTION

The Wits China-Africa Reporting Project was conceived in 2009 because of a realisation that despite the growing economic, social and political links between China and Africa, journalism did not seem to be adequately keeping pace. While research into China-Africa relations was burgeoning, it became apparent that both the quantity and depth of media reporting fell way short of the magnitude of the engagements.

Reporting was also often polarised, depicting China as either a malicious predator to be mistrusted or a generous friend and partner brimming with win-win rhetoric. African media particularly is at the forefront of two competing ideological factions, wedged between the Western media's often fear-based narrative of neo-colonialism and exploitation, and China's sanitised official propaganda machine.

We wanted to help journalists cut through the rhetoric, stereotypes and generalisations and find a way to access the real stories defining China-Africa relations on the ground. Crucially, the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project was not looking to promote a specific agenda, focusing on either positive or negative stories about China's influence in Africa. Our key objective was to try to improve the capacity of journalists to understand and reflect the rapidly changing dynamics – to promote good journalism.

So rather than merely focusing on academic research, the Journalism Department at the University of the Witwatersrand set up the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project as a practical response, linking directly with journalists from both Africa and China with the goal of enhancing evidence-based journalistic endeavours.

Recognising that journalists are the prism through which the broader public comes to understand issues, we asked the journalists to suggest stories that they thought needed telling, or indeed further investigation, and offered reporting grants to help with research expenses.

With the generous support of the Open Society Foundation, the project has been able to offer reporting grants to more than 50 journalists. For five consecutive years from 2010 the project has hosted a group of Chinese journalists at Wits Journalism's annual Power Reporting African Investigative Journalism Conference in Johannesburg, and provided logistical and financial assistance for each journalist to travel to an African country of their choice to investigate a story for their audiences in China.

The young Chinese journalists have visited more than a dozen African capitals and headed far off the beaten track, interviewing fishermen in Turkana, gold miners in Ghana and farm workers on Chinese-owned farms.

African journalists too have been supported in their efforts to find out the truth behind 'the Chinese' in their local areas. While they often started out expecting to unearth evidence of exploitation and blatant opportunism, it soon becomes apparent that this topic is always more complicated than it at first seems; the stories often did not turn out as expected and there are rarely simple conclusions. But it always proves an interesting and useful exercise; by accessing the voices of the Chinese and African actors on the ground, we unearth the nuance and insights that offer a better understanding of the potential and pitfalls of the China-Africa relationship.

Aside from the reporting grants scheme, the project has also supported an in-depth Wits student project focused on 'Chinese Joburg', and forged collaborative investigative ventures with the Forum of African Investigative Reporters (FAIR) and the Oxpickers Centre for Environmental Investigative Journalism, where we hosted two Chinese environmental journalists in South Africa for three months to probe Chinese links to the wildlife trafficking saga.

This first volume features some of the best articles produced by Chinese and African journalists with China-Africa Reporting Project grants from 2009 to 2014. In four sections, the 17 articles range over and between the two regions, from new players in South Sudan to veteran traders in Soweto; from migrants and marriages in Guangzhou to gold miners in Ghana.

The first section, *Opportunities in Development*, sets the scene by looking at how China is having a fundamental economic impact in four African countries. After travelling to South Sudan in 2012, South African journalists Kevin Bloom and Richard Poplak describe life in Juba, Africa's newest capital city, and note the presence and key role played by China. Next, after visiting Angola in 2014, Namibian journalist John Grobler explores discrete deals between Chinese and local companies to gain control of Angolan railways and to access natural resources in the DRC's Katanga province.

In March 2014 Ugandan journalist Frederick Mugira documented the high hopes among locals in south western Uganda for Chinese investment to revive copper mines that have not been active since 1982. Lastly, Hu Jianlong is a Chinese journalist who participated in the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project tour to Africa in 2013 during which he investigated Chinese investments in Zambia. His article included in this volume explores the continuity and change inherent in Chinese companies' arrival and expanding operations in Zambia.

The second section, *Learning and Adapting*, explores adaptations, experiments and new directions in the China-Africa relationship. For his article on China's 'dragon head companies' in East Africa, Kenyan journalist, scholar and former Wits China-Africa Reporting Project research associate Bob Wekesa interviewed diplomats, scholars, corporate executives, and managers of aid projects in China and Africa, revealing how the operations of Chinese companies in the region have expanded and evolved. Next, Chinese journalist Liu Hongqiao explores the novel and ongoing project aiming to rewild endangered South China tigers in South Africa's Free State province. In 2013 Liu was awarded an environmental journalism fellowship with the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project in collaboration with the Oxpeckers Centre for Investigative Environmental Journalists, based in Nelspruit on the border of the Kruger National Park. This article was produced by Liu during her three-month stay in South Africa for the fellowship.

In 2014 Ugandan journalist Haggai Matsiko used a Wits China-Africa Reporting Project grant to travel to South Sudan and the DRC to report on China's growing interest to expand its role in peace and security operations in the region and on the continent as a whole. Lastly, as a member of the 2013 Wits Journalism Honours class that undertook an in-depth project on the Chinese community in Johannesburg, Shandukani Mulaudzi investigates the growth of Chinese-owned malls in Johannesburg and how their retail model is adapting in the local environment.

The third section, *Issues of Contention*, deals with more controversial and problematic aspects of the China-Africa relationship. Huang Hongxiang is another Chinese journalist who was awarded an environmental journalism fellowship with the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project in 2013, and his article included here investigates Chinese nationals and local officials involved in ivory smuggling in Mozambique. Then Yang Meng, a well-known Chinese investigative journalist based in Beijing, reports at length on the Chinese gold miners that left poor prospects behind in China and moved to Ghana, where they have a complicated relationship with local officials and competitors, who accuse the Chinese of bringing environmental problems in their wake.

With a Wits China-Africa Reporting Project grant, *South China Morning Post* journalist Jenni Marsh visited Guangzhou in 2014 to research Afro-Chinese marriages, illustrating the controversy still surrounding them and the challenges faced by African migrants in the city. Lastly, awarded a Wits China-Africa Reporting Project grant in 2014 to examine the role of Chinese medicine in Uganda, James Wan produced an in-depth account of a multi-level pyramid scheme associated with Chinese traditional medicine operated by a Chinese company in Uganda.

The fourth and last section, *Migrating and Engaging*, explores how individuals have been drawn between the two regions by new opportunities to learn and make a living. Chinese journalist Chen Xiaochen participated in the Wits China-Africa Reporting Project tour to Africa in 2011, and travelled to Tanzania to report on the intrepid Chinese farmers who set up a sisal farm there. Then, after travelling to Beijing in 2013 to investigate China's scholarship programme for African students, South African journalist Simon Allison reports on the Chinese scholarship programme for African students and the latter's views on living and studying in China.

Next, two articles produced by members of Wits Journalism's 2013 Honours project on the Chinese community in Johannesburg: Dineo Bendile profiles professional Chinese expats in South Africa and look at how their business, leisure and sometimes family have developed in the local context; and Ray Mahlaka documents the Chinese community in

Soweto, including old settlers as well as new arrivals. Lastly, after travelling to Guangzhou in 2013 with a Wits China-Africa Reporting Project grant as part of a migration project looking at trading communities in China, journalist Sam Piranty meets the ‘economic nomads’, i.e. highly mobile African businessmen operating in and passing through the city.

By exploring real stories at ground level and navigating polarised debates, we feel the journalism in this volume is able to enhance our understanding of what is a complex and dynamic China-Africa relationship. This volume does not aim to be a definitive account of all the issues but should rather be considered a snapshot of a period of immense change in China-Africa dynamics, and a reflection of journalists’ attempts to understand and make sense of these changes.

I would like to thank my colleagues for assisting me in producing this volume, notably Bob Wekesa, Barry van Wyk, Raymond Mpubani and Anton Harber, Caxton Professor of Journalism and head of the Wits Journalism department.

BRIGITTE READ

Project Coordinator (2009-2015)

Wits China-Africa Reporting Project

Wits Journalism

For updates on grants and opportunities visit www.journalism.co.za/chinaafrica or follow the project blog at china-africa-reporting.co.za and on Twitter @witschinaafrica.