


China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa

Howard W. French

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"Extraordinary. . . French delves into the lives of some of the one million-plus Chinese migrants he says are now building careers in Africa. . . and the stories he tells are fascinating."—*The New York Times Book Review*



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Howard W. French : China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Excellent writing and interviews By M.B. "China's Second Continent" is an extremely well-written and easy to read book. It is a collection of anecdotes and data that comes together to

create the complicated and very nuanced story of China's understandable overseas expansion. French's style is pleasing to read. Traveling in different parts of Africa, he conducts interviews with a multitude of interested parties, including government ministers, small-time Chinese traders, prostitutes, heads of state-run Chinese companies, union organizers, and workers for Chinese companies. French never backs away from his own personal thoughts and opinions of the people he meets, which is quite refreshing. Throughout his travels, he keeps a running commentary of his thesis, that China's long-term relationship with Africa extends far beyond quid-pro-qua mineral extraction and is headed towards a relationship whereby African countries will contribute to China's bread basket. French believes that this is a new and different form of imperialism. There are two relationships dealt with in this book: that of individual Chinese entrepreneurs who migrate to Africa, and that of state-run Chinese companies who seem to fly by night in order to build infrastructure in exchange for natural resource or transportation concessions. The entrepreneurs are all colorful characters, well-described by French. The state-run company managers and workers are all tight-lipped, giving the reader the impression that there are nefarious plans at work. While many Africans, Europeans, and Americans complain that China's infrastructure projects in Africa are ramshackle and poor quality, leaving Africans with white elephants that they must manage, they are at least helping to build infrastructure, something the managers and high-level government workers say. Without direct Chinese investment, projects would drag on and never materialize, or only materialize in the form of hard-to-see investments in education, property management, and so forth. Is China's investment, both large and small, in the country helpful? There is no solid conclusion here, but the evidence French presents seems to suggest that because there is no "capacity development" to maintain the large infrastructure contracts, the large, official investment is unhelpful. Beyond the academic and economic conclusions, French is an excellent writer. The chapters in "China's Second Continent" are good-sized chunks that give a good picture of each country he visits, concentrating on the theme of meeting Chinese migrants.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great glimpse into the Africa of today
By O P Jackie
The reason it doesn't get 5 stars is because it is repetitive. Having said that, the repetitiveness brings home a point that it is the same and different all over the developing countries in Africa. Howard French is an amazing writer. His vocabulary and use of it were enjoyable to read. He is a multi-linguist and really knows how to make contact, even with people who don't really want to talk with him in the first place. I learned a lot from the book and trust his knowledge of what's going on because he has spent so many years as a foreign correspondent, many of them in Africa. Pretty amazing guy. It's a book well worth reading. Not a hard read, it goes pretty fast.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Learn what a million Chinese are doing in Africa!!
By Peter J. Harrison
The premise of this book "What are a million Chinese migrants (within the last decade) doing in Africa, what took them there and how are they making out? The specific survey taken by writer/professor Howard French and beautifully written is most interesting. He is fluent in Chinese and some of the African dialects, so he does have the capability and previous African knowledge to move around and gather the info. The results are extremely well written and very readable. The migrant Chinese are individually motivated to make the life-changing moves and their stories are fascinating. Also, unquestionably, they are helping to create a huge current and future trading partner for their homeland. A MUST READ!

New York Times
Notable Book
Chinese immigrants of the recent past and unfolding twenty-first century are in search of the African dream. So explains indefatigable traveler Howard W. French, prize-winning investigative journalist and former New York Times bureau chief in Africa and China, in the definitive account of this seismic geopolitical development. China's burgeoning presence in Africa is already shaping, and reshaping, the future of millions of people. From Liberia to Senegal to Mozambique, in creaky trucks and by back roads, French introduces us to the characters who make up China's dogged emigrant population: entrepreneurs singlehandedly reshaping African infrastructure, and less-lucky migrants barely scraping by but still convinced of Africa's opportunities. French's acute observations offer illuminating insight into the most pressing unknowns of modern Sino-African relations: Why China is making these cultural and economic incursions into the continent; what Africa's role is in this equation; and what the ramifications for both parties and their people—and the watching world—will be in the foreseeable future.

One of the Best Books of the Year at
The Economist
The Guardian
Foreign Affairs

From Booklist
Starred Although several recent books have discussed, in variously alarmist fashion, China's recent incursions into Africa in pursuit of resources and profit, former New York Times journalist French (*A Continent for the Taking*, 2004) has the advantage of significant personal experience in both Africa and China. He also speaks Mandarin, so he can converse directly with some of the million or so members of the Chinese diaspora in Africa. They are a diverse lot—doctors, engineers, farmers, entrepreneurs, lobbyists, laborers, and prostitutes, among others—and accounts of their experience are often absent from analyses of Chinese-African relations, which typically focus on infrastructure building and resource grabbing. Interacting with Chinese and Africans in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and elsewhere, French capably illustrates that although the Chinese omnipresence in Africa may be a form of soft imperialism, it is also a result of the crushing pressures—lack of

space, merciless business competition, pollution—of modern Chinese society. For many Chinese, he suggests, Africa means opportunity and relative freedom that cannot be had at home. If French is sympathetic to the plight of many Chinese immigrants, however, he remains critical of their casual racism and general callousness about their African hosts. And as he laments the seeming inevitability of corruption and environmental degradation, French's disappointment in his cherished continent is palpable. --Brendan Driscoll A 2014 New York Times Notable Book

French delves into the lives of some of the one million-plus Chinese migrants he says are now building careers in Africa; and the stories [he] tells are fascinating. —The New York Times Book Review

As a massive transactional process, China's entry into Africa has been a dramatic success...but as an ideological and cultural undertaking, Mr. French's masterly account suggests that it is getting nowhere. —The Economist

Howard French lets the Africans and Chinese speak for themselves as he travels through fifteen countries. The result is a rich, complex, and satisfying look at this strange marriage. —The New York Times

In his important new book, French weaves a rich tapestry of anecdotes, interspersed with numerous interviews with Chinese migrants and Africans alike, offering readers an eminently fair, occasionally humorous and sympathetic, but always engaging account. A searing, trenchant, and entertaining study of how China, in both an individual and collective sense, is shrewdly and opportunistically maximizing its relationships with African nations in an effort to extend its economic influence across the world. —The Christian Science Monitor

China's trade with Africa has grown dramatically. But China's investments are less significant for this rapidly evolving relationship, according to this 15-country survey by veteran African correspondent French, than the significant flow of new Chinese immigrants—often pushed out by the pressure and oppression back home as much as lured by opportunity. In vivid first-person reportage, French explores this momentous phenomenon, while challenging assumptions about China and Chinese immigrants. The book will appeal to students of China and Africa, and anyone interested in the shifting contours of the global economy and its geopolitical consequences. —Publishers Weekly

Although several recent books have discussed China's recent incursions into Africa in pursuit of resources and profit, French has the advantage of significant personal experience in both Africa and China. Interacting with Chinese and Africans in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and elsewhere, French capably illustrates that although Chinese omnipresence in Africa may be a form of soft imperialism, it is also a result of the crushing pressures—lack of space, merciless business competition, pollution—of modern Chinese society. —Booklist

Accounts of China's foray into African markets are often made with numbers; French goes beyond the statistics and illuminates the accelerating involvement of Chinese migrants. These candid moments are arresting, delivered via seasoned and sensitive reporting. —Democracy

The huge and growing ties between China and the African continent will be one of the most crucial relationships of the 21st century, and you simply could not invent a better guide to it than Howard French. Superbly written, rich in anecdote, insight, and a sense of the immense scale of what is happening, China's Second Continent should be mandatory reading for anyone wanting to understand how our world is being reshaped. —Adam Hochschild, author, King Leopold's Ghost

We owe tremendous thanks to Howard French for this fascinating and deeply reported book. He is an audacious writer who takes his readers to the far-flung factories, farms and living rooms of the Chinese entrepreneurs who are flooding into countries like Mozambique, Zambia and Senegal. French intrepidly explores the other side of the global coin, giving voice to an array of Africans reacting warily to the new imperialists in their midst. This is an essential book for understanding not just China and Africa but our changing world. —Peter Maass, author, Crude World

Almost no other writer would have dared the reportorial and story-telling challenge Howard French has set for himself in China's Second Continent, and absolutely none could have pulled it off as well. This is foreign reportage and analysis presented as compelling human drama. —James Fallows, author, China Airborne

In Howard French's wonderfully engaging new book, he draws on his journalistic experience covering both China and Africa to weave together a series of vivid portraits which limn the country's global rise in this remote and unlikely part of the world. What is so surprising about the stories he tells is that they chronicle everything from the construction of massive stadiums, hospitals, universities, highways and mineral and energy extraction operations to small-scale shops, farms and family businesses. China's Second Continent is a grand tale of the world's newest diaspora, one that promises to change a previously largely forgotten continent. —Orville Schell, Director, The Center on US-China Relations, Asia Society

Howard French has given us the most lush, fair, and expansive look yet at China's role in Africa. This is a tale not strictly about China or Africa; it is about the encounter of civilizations and the energy produced in the collision. Infused with thought and sympathy, this is a book with no agenda other than fidelity to facts that were so difficult to gather on the ground. —Evan Osnos, staff writer, The New Yorker

Is China's burgeoning empire in Africa a 'win-win' for both parties? For the most comprehensive, closely-reported answer to this question, read this book. It's full of surprises, from hard-driving frontiersmen looking for (and finding) countries with less corruption than they faced at home in China to healthy democracies constraining the more rapacious practices of extractive industry. I cannot

imagine a better, more-qualified guide to this vast, fascinating subject than Howard French. — William Finnegan, author, *A Complicated War: The Harrowing of Mozambique*

Howard French magisterially holds up both ends of his transcontinental bargain: fluent in the idioms of the two worlds, China and Africa, he reveals the variegated diaspora of the one million or so Chinese in Africa yet also drives home that Africa is awakening in turn. His pages are teeming with human beings of flesh and blood, and often outlandish characters, at the new frontier explored in this fascinating book. — Stephen W. Smith, former Africa editor of *Le Monde* and professor at Duke University

An important contribution to a critical debate on China's rapidly changing relationship with Africa. Howard French goes beyond official statistics to weave stories of new wave Chinese immigrants and the Africans whose lives they impact. Unlike ideologues who focus on motives, French seeks to discern the impact of this relationship on all drawn into its vortex. — Mahmood Mamdani, Executive Director, Makerere Institute of Social Research, Kampala, Uganda and Herbert Lehman Professor of Government, Columbia University

Howard French is one of the most insightful American journalists to have covered Africa in the past twenty years. In this riveting and rich new book, he powerfully juxtaposes two worlds he is uniquely positioned to observe, namely China and Africa. Anyone who has recently spent time in Africa knows how important China is becoming on the continent. Yet French tells a nuanced story about the Chinese few will have previously understood. His storytelling is sharp and wise, the characters we meet are vivid and unforgettable, and the implications are profound and at times disturbing. Anyone interested in Africa and China, or more generally in migration and globalization, will find a wealth of material in this terrific book. — Scott Straus, professor of political science at University of Wisconsin, Madison

About the Author Since 2008, Howard French has taught at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. For 23 years prior to joining the Columbia faculty, he was a reporter for *The New York Times*, where he worked as a foreign correspondent for two decades. During this time, French was the paper's bureau chief in Shanghai, Tokyo, Abidjan and Miami (covering Central America and the Caribbean).