AFRICAN STUDIES IN CHINA IN GLOBAL CONTEXT (1950-2020)

Li Anshan

Introduction: China-African Relations, History and Present

China-Africa relations began in ancient times. A “Silk Road” already existed in the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.). In 1993, Austrian archaeologists discovered the fiber of worm-silk in the hair of a female corpse of the 21st Dynasty (1070-945 B.C.) in Egypt. Since only China had the technology for silk production at the time, the product was most probably made in China and transferred to Egypt. According to Sun, there is a North Way and a South Way to connect China and the “West”. The “North Way”, from Chang’an to Sogdiana, through the border between Sabbath and Rome, by water to Syria, Damascus, and Gaza, finally reached Alexandria in Egypt. This is the main trade route from China to Egypt. The “South Way”, from Loulan to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, and then southward to the upper reaches of the Sindhu River, then to the port of Karachi, and finally reached the Western and Indian Ocean countries. There are other connections between China and Africa as well (Xu, Y. 2019; Li, A. 2019).

Besides the land route, there is a Maritime Silk Road. Historically, various ports along the East African coast by the West Indian Ocean were important destinations for maritime traffic between China and Africa, or a middle station for the Chinese travel boats to continue further to Europe. According to historical records, the names of Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, and other countries all appeared in various

1 School of International Studies, Peking University, Beijing, China and University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, Sichuan, China. E-mail: anshanli@pku.edu.cn
2 “Egypt used Chinese silk 3000 years ago”, April 2, 1993, People’s Daily.
3 “West” in ancient China indicates the foreign land west of China, including Mid-Asia and West Asia, North Africa and further westwards (Sun 1979).
travel notes and in the official history of ancient China. China’s maritime contact with Africa, especially East Africa, took place long before Da Gama’s voyage around the Cape of Good Hope to East Africa. Cities in Africa did act as ports, supply depots, settlements, and protection areas in China’s maritime endeavors in ancient times.

At the present, the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) tries to link the world with capital, trade, and personnel. Africa can play an even more important role. It is found that the BRI is constantly making African countries gradually involved. At first, the proposed 65 countries in the BRI included Egypt as the only African country. Later, a Chinese official mentioned African countries as the “natural extension” of One Belt One Road (OBOR). During his visit to Madagascar, Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed that “both countries seize the two major opportunities for international cooperation respectively brought about by the implementation of the outcome of the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Johannesburg and the promotion of international cooperation under Belt and Road Initiative”.4 This invitation was confirmed when President Xi Jinping met Madagascar’s President Hery Rajaonarimampianina and both countries signed the “Maritime Road Memorandum of Understanding”.5 Until now, 37 African countries have signed the MOU or other BRI agreements with China in the past two years.6

Yet what is the role that Africa can play in the BRI? In general, ports on the East coast of Africa are a key part of the Maritime Silk Road. African islands in the West Indian Ocean constitute an expressive fulcrum of maritime traffic. Maritime safety in the Gulf of Aden is an important guarantee for the international sea route, and Africa is becoming an important investment and trade partner of Asian countries. Africa is an important hub and transshipment point for maritime exchanges between Asia and Europe. The BRI is supposed to bring mutual benefits to both China and its partners. China has gained a great deal from Africa, such as political support and economic benefits, which go both ways. There are examples of bilateral cooperation in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, etc., such as the Chinese Light Rail in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the first batch of Kenyan female drivers in Mombasa-Nairobi Railway, the Chinese-built Dar es Salaam University Library, among others. All symbolize the concrete results of cooperation related to the BRI in Africa.

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4 “Chinese FM meets Madagascar’s president on cooperation under Belt-Road Initiative”, January 8, 2017, Xinhua.net.
5 “Xi meets Madagascar’s president”, September 5, 2018, China Daily.
In addition, there is a great deal of similarity between Chinese and African civilizations and many aspects that both can learn from each other (Li, A. 2014). That is why mutual understanding/learning is very important for both sides. Thus, African studies become a vital factor in promoting bilateral relations and facilitating the implementation of the BRI.

**African Studies in China: Four Generations**

China’s African studies have gone through the efforts of four generations. My two articles have explored China’s African studies in the 20th and 21st century (Li, A. 2005; 2016a). Here is a brief survey of the achievements of the four generations.7

China’s African studies began with a focus on Egypt. Duanfang (1861-1911), an epigraphist in the late Qing Dynasty, collected Egyptian antiquities. Huang Junsheng and Li Dongfang studied Egyptian characters in the early 20th century (刘文鹏 2002). Xia Nai, the “father of Chinese Egyptology”, mastered hieroglyphs and participated in the archaeological excavation in Egypt while studying in London (颜海英 2008). At the beginning of the 20th Century, Chinese scholars began to study the early Sino-African exchanges. The understanding and systematic study of Africa itself began with the establishment of new China. The first generation (1950s-1970s) includes Zhang Tiesheng, Yang Renpian, Na Zhong, and Zhang Tongzhu. Zhang Tiesheng (1904-1979) was the first leader of the Institute of West Asian and African Studies (hereafter IWAAS) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (hereafter CASS), formerly under the Section of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and he published a book on China-Africa relations (张铁生 1973). Yang Renpian (1903-1973), of Peking University, graduated from Oxford University majoring in French history, changed his field to African history in 1958 and cultivated younger scholars (俞莉琪 2014). His work was later collated and published by his students (杨人楩 1984). Na Zhong (1909-2008), of Beijing Foreign Studies University, graduated from Azhar University in Egypt in 1940. He studied the Egyptian and Arabic history all his life (纳忠 1963; 1998). He was president of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies (张惠文 1983; 杨孝柏、马为公 1986; 1987; 朱威廉 2004).8 Zhang Tongzhu (1915-2008), of Nanjing University, established

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7 For a history of China’s African studies, see 李安山 2006; 张宏明 2011; 《中国非洲史研究会三十年》编委会 2011; 舒运国 2012.
8 “Professor Na Zhong”, September 15, 2011.
the African Geography Research Office in 1965 and coordinated the national project “Strategic Study on African Economic and Social Development” and the research on African economic development (张同铸 1992). Although Professor Zhou Yiliang didn’t specialize in African history, he discussed the history of China-Africa relations early on in a Ghanaian journal (Chou 1972).

The second generation was from the 1980s to the end of the 20th century. Since the reform and opening up, scholars have gained unprecedented opportunities. This generation includes university professors and researchers from different institutions. In the CASS for example, scholars of the IWAAS such as Ge Ji, Zhao Guozhong, Tu Erkang, Chen Gongyuan, Wu Bingzhen, Yang Lihua, Xu Jiming, Gao Jinyuan, Wu Qiyang, Tang Dadun, and others., Yang Haocheng and Peng Kunyuan of the Institute of World History, Ge Gongshang of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Xia Jisheng, Zheng Jiaxin, Lu Ting’ en, He Fangchuan, and Ning Sao of Peking University, Zhang Wenchun of Beijing Normal University, Zeng Zungu, Su Shirong, and Jiang Zhongjin of Nanjing University, AI Zhouchang of East China Normal University, Gu Zhangyi of Minzu University of China, Li Guangyi of Xiangtan University, Zhao Shuhui of Renmin University, Shen Fuwei of Suzhou University, Xu Yongzhang of Zhengzhou University, Zhang Xiang of Nankai University. Liu Wenpeng of Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities has trained a number of scholars for Chinese Egyptology (王海利 2008; 郭子林 2008; 李长林 2009; 田明、王泰 2010). Gao Jinyuan, He Fangchuan, Ge Ji, Yang Lihua, and other scholars published articles in English (Gao 1984; He, F. 1987; Ge 1997; Yang, L. 2006; 2015). The achievements of this generation include three aspects: Institutional Construction, organizational work, and academic achievements. Institutional Construction: the Chinese Association of African Studies was established in 1979, and the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies in 1980. Organizational work: they organized various meetings of African scholars from different institutions and universities, and coordinated debates and research on various issues. Academic achievements: they published research works, especially the publication of the “African Studies” series and other reference books, as well as the translation of various African books and the UNESCO General History of Africa (1-8 volumes). Some of them continue to work in the 21st century.

9 Wu Nan, “Academicians memorized the hundred anniversary of Mr. Zhang Tongzhu”, December 1, 2015.
The establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) ushered in a new era of African studies in China. The cooperation between China and Africa needs the support of academia, which must also meet the requirements of the government, the business community, and the public. The third generation of scholars has received formal training and academic background. They have more opportunities to visit Africa than their predecessors, either receive education or training abroad, and gradually engage with international academia. The national emphasis on academic research has provided various funds and favorable conditions, thus promoting the academic community to pay attention to research topics related to Africa. Shu Yunguo, Yang Guang, Zhang Hongming, Li Xinfeng, Liu Qijian, Liu Hongwu, Yan Haiying, Jin Shoufu, Mu Tao, Zhang Zhongxiang, and Zhu Zhenwu, among others, have successively undertaken or participated in major national research projects on African history, China’s African strategy, EU’s aid to Africa, history of China-Africa relations, China-Africa cooperation, and African literature. They are deepening their research on Africa. Take the project “African Economic History” as an example. On the one hand, it is recognized that China’s research level on African economic history is not high compared with that of foreign countries, “so it is difficult for China’s version of African economic history to catch up with the world’s cutting-edge level in the overall research level”; on the other hand, “China’s version of African economic history still has its own characteristics, such as making full use of Chinese ancient books and materials, comprehensively and in-depth elaboration of China-Africa economic and trade relations and unique historical stages of African Economic History” (舒运国 2019, 126-133; 2019a, 133-147). African languages are taught in many universities. The publication of various works and translations has opened up readers’ horizons, and the construction of African country studies and think-tanks are a good attempt. African research institutions have various publications, thus contributing to the popularization and deepening of African research. They have strengthened closer ties with relevant national ministries and commissions.

The new era brings new requirements. A group of young African researchers constitutes the fourth generation. These scholars have received strict academic training, have good foreign language communication skills with field work experience. At the same time, they are closely connected with the international academic network and highly sensitive to new research trends. Wang Haili (2010; 2013; 2014) of Beijing Normal University and Guo Dantong (2005; 2011; 2015) of Shanghai University have studied the history of ancient Egypt for a long time and published many monographs, in addition to promoting exchanges with the international academic community. Young
scholars of the CASS’ IWAAS have achieved fruitful results in the past three years, such as Zhu Weidong, specialized in African Law (2018), Yang Baorong, committed to African economy and China-Africa relations (2018), Wang Jinyan, exploring the tribal issues in Libya (2016), Xu Guoqing, evaluating India’s African Policy (2017), Zhi Yuchen, studying the role of China’s central enterprises in China-Africa relations and the basic elements in African economic development (2016 and 2018), Zhao Yating, focusing on the EU’s assistance to Africa (2019), and others who have their own research focus.

Young scholars either study a particular country or a certain topic, such as Liu Weicai, interested in the history of Southern Africa, African integration and China-Africa relations, with a few publications (2018), Guan Peifeng’s analysis of African border disputes and settlement model (2017), Niu Changshong’s study on Zimbabwe’s Higher Education (2017), Shen Xipeng’s probe on China’s assistance in the construction of Tanzania Zambia Railway (2018), Zhou Yuyuan’s assessment of African autonomy (2017), Song Wei’s analysis of the U.S. policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa after the Cold War (2018), Cheng Cheng’s focus on China-Africa Financial Cooperation (2018), Li Pengtao’s analysis of issues related to colonialism and social change in British Africa (2019), and Wang Congyue’s interpretation of the security policies of US and EU in North Africa (2019). The youngsters are either proficient in academic research or extensive in scope. Some are concerned about one certain country, such as Li Wengang (Nigeria), Jiang Hengkun (the Sudan), Xiao Yuhua (Ethiopia), Shen Xiaolei (Zimbabwe), etc. Some are interested in specific theme, such as Li Weijian’s research on Islam in Africa, Zhang Yonghong’s emphasis on local knowledge, He Jian’s study on African ocean issues, Jiang Huajie’s focus on China’s assistance to Africa, Liang Yijian’s probe on Peer Review System, Wang Tao’s interest on anti-terrorism, and Zhang Jin’s exploration on the water environment in Africa. Zhang Yong is the first scholar to study African film and, with African scholar Dr. Hodan, has made a film that has become well-known in China and Africa. In recent years, the young scholars have obtained funding for research projects either from the National Fund or the Ministry of Education. In 2019, for example, Zhou Yuyuan, Huang Yupei, Jiang Hui, Li Beilei, Zheng Xiaoxia and others won National Social Science Fund support for projects on African countries’ relations, debt issues, African literature, Afro-American literature, African women’s studies, etc.

In recent years, young scholars who studied abroad have come back and have demonstrated their full strength. For example, Ha Wei, a PhD in public policy from Harvard University, returned to work at the Graduate School of Education in Peking University after working in the World Bank and
in United Nations agencies. Tang Xiaoyang once worked in foreign research institutions and universities after receiving his PhD from the New School for Social Research in New York and now works in the Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University. After graduating from Georgetown University, Wen Shuang, who once taught at New York University (Abu Dhabi), now teaches history at Beijing Foreign Studies University. Qiu Yu received her PhD from the University of Cambridge and currently teaches in the School of Ethnicology and Sociology of Minzu University of China. Yuan Ding of Shanghai Normal University received two PhDs from Yunnan University and Leuven University at the same time. Lu Lingyu of Yunnan University received his PhD in Political Science from the University of Missouri. After graduating from Westminster University, Dr. Xiang Yu teaches in the School of Journalism and Communication of Shanghai University. Dr. Zhou Yang, of Nanjing Agricultural University, graduated from the University of Cologne, Germany. Chen Liang, of the School of Sociology and Anthropology of Sun Yat-sen University, received his PhD from the Australian National University, specializing in urbanization and African studies. Yang Beibei, of the School of Health Care Management of Shandong University, obtained her PhD of medical anthropology from Southern Methodist University. Tsinghua University’s Development Program has sent out many students abroad and Dr. Gao Liangmin from the Department of Sociology is among the first to complete the degree. Liu Shaonan of the School of History, Beijing Normal University, received his PhD from Michigan State University, the best in African studies in the United States. Lian Chaoqun and Cheng Ying both obtained MA degrees from Peking University, completed their doctoral studies at University of Cambridge and University of London respectively. With his PhD in law from Peking University, Xu Liang obtained his PhD in history from Harvard University. Currently, the three have become the backbone of the Center for African Studies of Peking University.

Some scholars hold graduate degrees directly in Africa. For example, Dr. Sun Xiaomeng, of Beijing Foreign Studies University, received her MA in Hausa language in Nigeria. Zhang Qiaowen, of China Africa International Business School of Zhejiang Normal University, received her PhD in business management from Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Dr. Ma Xiujie of the School of Asian and African Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, studied at Rhodes University for seven years. She is proficient in English, Xhosa and Zulu, and can communicate with Ndebele and Swazi. Ma Jie, of the China Institute of International Studies, received her MA degree from Addis Ababa University. In addition, many students are currently studying
for degrees abroad. What’s more, Chinese scholars are increasingly confident in international academia.

**Chinese Scholars’ Engagement in International Community**

There is no doubt that China’s African study is not as advanced as expected, yet the situation is changing. Chinese scholars have actively participated in academic exchanges around the world and gradually gained recognition from international academia. In addition to the participation of many Chinese scholars in international seminars and cooperation projects, and African research institutions in China frequently organizing academic seminars with international academic circles, especially African scholars, their engagement is reflected in three aspects: showing their own characteristics in some research fields, getting more attention in the international community, and increasing international publications.

Chinese scholars began to show their own characteristics, which made them outstanding in some international research fields. Justin Yifu Lin and Celestin Monga, a Cameroonian scholar, edited *The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics* (Monga and Lin, J. Y. 2015). Works on China-Africa cooperation were jointly edited by Chinese and international, especially African, scholars (Li, A. and F.Y. April 2013; Shelton, April, and Li, A. 2015; Berhe and Liu 2013; Monga and Lin, J.Y. 2015; Alden et al. 2018). Some scholars have been invited to write relevant chapters in different encyclopedias or handbooks of various disciplines published by internationally renowned publishers, such as Ge Ji, Li Anshan, Xu Liang, Zhang Chun, Sun Xiaomeng, Tang Xiaoyang, and Cheng Ying who have put forward their viewpoints on different subjects such as China’s African studies, China’s African policy and Chinese immigration in Africa, contemporary China-Africa relations, re-conceptualizing China-Africa engagement, China’s African language research, Africa’s China economic and trade cooperation zone, Africa-China drama exchange (Ge 1997; Li, A. 2013c; Akyeampong and Xu 2015; Zhang, C. 2017; Sun, X. 2019; Tang, X. 2019; Cheng 2019). Some have become editorial board members or peer reviewers of international journals. Governmental organizations from developed nations such as the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, and Japan have held seminars on China-Africa relations and invited Chinese scholars, or are frequently sending personnel to visit China’s African research institutions. The Foreign Ministry of other governments also invited Chinese scholars to
explain the current situation of China-Africa cooperation. All indicates the influence and competitiveness of Chinese scholars in the world.

The international community is increasing its attention to scholars of African studies in China. Professor Na Zhong, Honorary President of the Chinese Society of African Historical Studies, was awarded the first International Prize of the Arabic Language Sharjah by UNESCO in Paris on October 25, 2001. In 2002, Yan Haiying was invited to attend the research database project of ancient Greek Olympic Games hosted by Willy Clarisse, academician of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Belgium and professor of Department of Classics of the KU Leuven. In 1998, Jin Shoufu, a PhD student in Egyptology of Heidelberg University, participated in the excavation of the Tomb of Thebes Amenhotep III by the archaeology team of Waseda University from Japan. In 2000, he also participated in the excavation of the official Tomb of Luxor in Egypt by Heidelberg University. On May 24, 2013, Yang Lihua and Li Anshan, at the invitation of the African Diplomatic Corps in China, gave keynote speeches at the seminar “Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance” held at Kempinski Hotel to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU on September 9, 2013. Zhu Weidong was appointed to the International Commercial Panel by the Arbitration Foundation of Southern Africa (AFSA). On September 19, 2013, Li Anshan was invited to participate in the “symposium to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Africa” and delivered a speech at the launch of the new book edited by himself and by South African scholar F.Y. April in the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Africa (Li, A. and April 2013). On November 3, 2013, Li Anshan was invited by the Director General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, to participate in the International

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11 For example, on June 13, 2014, Li Anshan and two Norwegian scholars in Ch. Michelsen Institute were invited to meet with officials of the Africa Department at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to exchange ideas on China-Africa relations. On November 10, 2016, after meeting with Ms. U. Dwarka-Canabady of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mauritius, Li Anshan gave a lecture on “Development cooperation between China and Africa: Concept and Practice” in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mauritius, and exchanged ideas with more than 50 diplomats, including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Professor Li Anshan, an expert on African issues, comes to Mauritius for academic exchanges”.
12 “African Diplomatic Mission in China held the Golden Jubilee of the OAU/AU Seminar in Beijing”.
13 “Zhu Weidong of Center for African Law was appointed to the International Commercial Panel by the Arbitration Foundation of Southern Africa”, Xiangtan University Law School, November 4, 2013.
14 “China-South African held seminar to celebrate the 15th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations”, Chinanet, September 20, 2013.
Scientific Committee of UNESCO General History of Africa (volume 9, later expanded to 9-11 volumes), and was elected Vice Chairman of the Committee at the first meeting held in Brazil.15 The McMillan Center of Yale University invited Li Anshan and Ibrahim Gambari, former Foreign Minister of Nigeria and former Under Secretary General of the United Nations, to co-chair the international seminar on “Africa-China Relations: Balance, Growth and Sustainable Future” held in Nigeria from March 15-18, 2016, and the seminar held at Beijing Forum of Peking University in November 2017.16 In 2018, Liu Haifang was appointed member of the Executive Board of the CA/AC Research Network. It is encouraging that some young scholars’ capability has been recognized by international academia. For example, Cheng Ying’s doctoral thesis won the Best Doctoral Thesis Award of the Lagos Studies Association, the first among Chinese scholars. Dr. Liu Shaonan was the first Asian scholar to receive the Graduate Student Paper Prize Winner at the 2018 annual meeting of the U.S. African Studies Association.17 Dr. Zhou Yang’s thesis on cross-cultural marriage between China and Africa was awarded the “sehr gut: 1.0 (excellent)” level.

The international publication of Chinese scholars is also increasing. In the 1990s, Chinese scholars published few articles in international academia. In 1995, Yan Haiying, of Peking University, presented a paper at the 7th International Egyptologist Conference held in Cambridge, which attracted the attention of the international academic community (Yan, H. 1998). After graduating from the University of Toronto and working at Peking University in 1994, Li Anshan put forward his own views on Ghana’s history (Li, A. 1994; 1995). Since the end of the 20th century, the research on Africa or China-Africa relations has been strengthened, and scholars have published more and more in international academia, presenting their opinions in the form of monographs, anthologies or papers. For example, Jin Shoufu, of Fudan University, studies ancient Egyptian papyrus documents and theoc-
Li Anshan’s monographs probe the colonial rule and rural protest in Ghana and the history of China in Africa (Li, A. 2002a; 2012a). Yan Haiying states her own view on Ptolemy’s Stele (Yan, H. 2007). They have also introduced the research status of China to international circles, such as Yan Haiying’s research on ancient Egyptian cultural relics collected in China (Yan, H. 2006a; 2006b), Wang Haili’s analysis on Chinese research methods of Egyptian hieroglyphs with the introduction of Professor Liu Wenpeng (Wang, H. 2013; 2015), Wen Shuang’s introduction to Chinese Arabic research (Wen, S. 2015), Li Anshan’s review of African studies in China in different periods (2005; 2007c; 2008a; 2010b; 2019; 2019a).


and French), newly published by China-Africa Institute, will provide a new platform for the international exchange of China’s African studies.

**African Research Institutions in China**

There are three pioneers institutions in African research: the West Asia Africa Research Group, of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, set up in 1956 and the Institute of West Asia and African Studies established in 1961; the African History Research Office, of Peking University, set up in 1958 and the Institute of Afro-Asian Studies established in 1965; the African Geography Research Office, of Nanjing University, set up in 1964 and the Institute of African Studies established in 1992. After the reform and opening up, many universities have established teaching and research institutions related to Africa, including Xiangtan University (1978), East China Normal University (1985), Shanghai Normal University (1998), Yunnan University (1998), among others. With the establishment of FOCAC and the rapid development of China-Africa relations, African research institutions have sprung up, such as the Center for African Studies of Peking University (2000), the Center for African Education Studies of Zhejiang Normal University (2003), renamed as the Institute of African Studies in 2007, the Center for African Vocational Education Studies of Tianjin University of Technology and Education (2005), renamed as Center of African Union Studies in 2012, the Center for African Agricultural Studies of Nanjing Agricultural University (2006), the Center for African Studies of Yunnan University (2007), the Center for African Studies of East China Normal University (2010), renamed as Institute of African Studies in 2011, etc. African language teaching started early in China, mainly focusing on Swahili and Hausa. Beijing Foreign Studies University, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Communication University of China, Peking University, Shanghai International Studies University, and others now begin to attach importance to African languages. Some students are sent to Africa to learn Swahili, Amharic, Hausa, Yoruba, Zulu, Xhosa, and other African languages. In addition to government ministries and subordinate institutions (such as the Development Research Center of the State Council and the Party School of the Central Committee of CP), more than 30 African research institutions have been established, with journals, weekly reports, annual reports, websites, and various publications.

Among the African research institutions, the IWAAS of the CASS has an irreplaceable position. In addition to its outstanding institutions, personnel, conditions, and project funding, it has published the *Annual Report*
on Development in the Middle East and Africa or the Yellow Book of Middle East and Africa since 1998, covering the current situation and characteristics of African affairs every year. In 2012, the Yellow Book of Africa and the Annual Report on Development of Africa were separated into publications of their own, thus becoming important references for African studies and the forecast of African affairs. In recent years, its journal West Asia and Africa (created in 1980) has gained great influence under the editorship of An Chunying and Zhan Shiming, greatly promoting the study of African issues and China-Africa relations. In 2019, 10 articles of the journal were reprinted by Chinese Social Science Abstracts and Periodical Materials Photocopied by Renmin University of China. The China-Africa Institute, founded on the basis of the IWAAS in 2019, has made its African research more focused and interacted frequently with African academic institutions. The Institute has launched two batches of cooperative research projects with the African scholars (4 in the first batch and 14 in the second), covering political, economic, social, cultural, and other aspects. The newly founded flagship Journal of China-Africa Studies will adhere to “the principles of academic quality, innovation, and openness, the journal will publish high-quality academic papers on Africa studies, China studies, and China-Africa relations by scholars from all over the world”, being “dedicated to promoting outstanding academic works, facilitating academic exchanges, reflecting new academic trends”, which is believed to provide a platform for China-Africa cooperation. 19

The Center for African Studies of Peking University was established in 2000. Prior to the establishment of FOCAC, it was arranged to hold an “International Forum on China Africa Cooperation”, and has carried out long-term academic cooperation with key African countries such as Egypt, South Africa, and Nigeria. In addition to the Annual Review of African Studies in China, PKU African Tele-Info as a weekly journal has operated for nearly 10 years and published more than 400 issues in electronic form with more than 6000 users, having a great impact at home and abroad. The Institute of African Studies of Nanjing University has achieved fruitful works on African economic geography. It began to publish an annual report, the African Development Studies, in 2017, and also published the compilation of research materials on African economic geography and regional development in 2019 (6 volumes) including the papers and reports on African issues that were not made public during 1964-1986, which have important academic value and

19 The institutions involved in the first and second batches of joint-research projects are those of South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Cameroon, Mauritius, Morocco, etc. China-Africa Institute issued the notice of the third batch of joint-research projects in December 2019.
practical significance. In Xiangtan University, after the establishment of the Center for African Legal and Social Studies on the basis of its African studies, the Center has published *African Law Review*, focusing on legal research in Africa, with rich achievements. The Center for African Studies of Shanghai Normal University has achieved great progress in recent years. In addition to holding regular African Economic seminars, it has also published *African Economic Review* (created in 2012) and *African Economic Development Report* (created in 2014). The African Institute of East China Normal University has its focus on East Africa, mainly in Tanzania, Uganda, and other countries. The research team has translated four volumes of Julius Nyerere’s works and holds seminars on African art. As a new force, the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University has made great achievements. It publishes *African Studies, Annual Report on the Development of Africa*, and *African Studies Series*, it has established an African Museum and many research centers for education, film, anthropology, etc. The School of Asian and African Studies of Beijing Foreign Studies University (now the independent School of African Studies) has long had the characteristics of African language teaching and scientific research. It publishes *Asian and African Studies* (created in 2007) and has sent teachers and students to study local languages in Africa. The Center for African Media Studies of Communication University of China was founded in 2012 and has trained a lot of professionals for China-Africa news communication and exchange.

Newly established African research institutions put emphasis on strengthening their own characteristics, some of them make full use of the advantages of setting up Confucius Institutes in African countries. The Center of African Union Studies of Tianjin University of Technology and Education makes full use of the Confucius Institute in Ethiopia. On the one hand, it promotes the development of African educational cooperation. On the other hand, it is committed to carrying out research on African Union organizations in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects to provide intellectual support for national strategy. Yangzhou University established the Center for Sudanese Studies in 2012 and recruited two Sudanese researchers to cooperate with Sudanese universities. Its research focuses on the history of Sudan in the colonial period, Islamic movement, foreign relations, higher education, the dilemma after the political mutation, the production of an annual report and the manual of the religious situation, etc. The *Centre de Recherche Sur Madagascar* of Jiangxi Normal University employs two Malagasy researchers
to conduct a follow-up study on Madagascar based on the ten-year experience and achievements of the Confucius Institute in Madagascar. Its website has its own characteristics, especially the relevant laws and regulations of Madagascar. The School of Sociology and Anthropology of Sun Yat-sen University, making full use of its own advantages, has held two successive seminars on “Ancient and Modern China-Africa Relations” focusing on “field research methodology of African anthropology”. It has also conducted anthropological field research in Ethiopia and archaeological excavations with international scholars in Kenya.20 Founded in 2016, the Institute for African Studies of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies pays great attention to social practice and has carried out a variety of activities at home and abroad in recent years. The Center for African Studies of Jinan University and the Center for African Studies of Wuhan University mainly rely on foreign language research and teaching talents, having their studies focused on African French speaking countries. The Center for African Coastal States Studies of Zhejiang Ocean University focuses on nine coastal States, including Senegal. Research institutions of China Foreign Affairs University, Hunan Normal University, and others are also following suit.21

The African study in the School of Social and Anthropology of Xiamen University has been fruitful due to the invitation of Professor Augustin Holl (who uses the Chinese name Gao Chang) to join the team. Professor Gao Chang is a Cameroonian scholar and a famous archaeologist. He once served as Professor/Curator of the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Michigan (2000-2008) and Vice President of Université Paris X (2012-2014). At the invitation of Xiamen University, he resigned from the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) in 2017 and went to teach at the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology of Xiamen University. Later, he donated his archaeological and cultural collections to Xiamen University for teaching and research purposes and established an archaeological anthropology laboratory. He led Chinese students to Senegal for archaeological excavation in the summer of 2018 and published a large number of papers and research reports in international academic journals (Holl 2017; 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; Holl and Bocoum 2017; Silva Santos, Symanski and Holl 2019).22 In 2017, the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China established the

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21 For details, please refer to “Notes on the chronicle of African studies in China since 1949: Taking the research institutions and academic journals as the main line”.

22 “Featured Interview: Professor Augustin F. C. Holl”, Office of International Cooperation and Exchange/Office of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao Affairs, November 1, 2019.
Center for West African Studies (CWAS) together with five universities in Ghana: University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), University of Education at Winneba (UEW), University for Development Studies (UDS). The two sides have jointly held a seminar to promote cooperation in education and scientific research. Currently, the CWAS regularly issues annual reports in Chinese and English. One of CWAS’s innovative ways is for African and Chinese scholars to publish articles together. This joint research has achieved good results (Ameyaw and Li 2018; Asare and Shao 2018; Asare-Kyire et al. 2018; Boadi et al. 2018; Boadi et al. 2018a; Larney and Li 2018; Dumor and Li 2019; Zhao, S. et al. 2018). In 2020, two works on China-Africa relations were published (Tang, X. 2020; Li, A. 2020).

New trends of African research in China

The most important factor in the study of liberal arts and social sciences is its relevance to human society. In terms of regional and country studies, survival, development, and the environment (including nature, society, and the international community) are important concerns. I have studied the current situation and new interests of China’s African Studies, such as China-Africa relations, country studies, African history, political economy, international relations, and legal studies (Li, A. 2016a). This paper will briefly introduce the new trends of fields and topics for research.

The study of Africa in China began with the study of Egyptian history. Egyptology rose with the slave trade and with European colonial expansion. The colonial rule made Egypt seem separate from Africa and an extension of Europe. With the efforts of African scholars, including Egyptian scholars, the UNESCO General History of Africa Collection (Volumes 1-8) has brought Egypt back to Africa from the perspective of academic history. Starting from Xia Nai, the “father of Egyptology in China”, being further developed by Na Zhong, Liu Wenpeng, Yang Haocheng, and other older generations, it has been carried forward under the inheritance of Yan Haiying, Jin Shoufu, Bi Jiankang, and others. Lin Zhichun, Professor of Northeast Normal University, has made outstanding contributions to Egyptology in China, and has cultivated a backbone of scholars such as Lingfu Ruoming, Yan Haiying, Jin
Shoufu, Li Dongxiao, Li Mo, etc. (Lingfu 2003; Guo 2016). A new generation is emerging, as shown by Guo Dandong’s concerns on economic history, Wang Haili’s emphasis on social history, and Guo Zilin’s interest on autocratic monarchy. In the modern and contemporary history of Egypt, Bi Jiankang analyzed the political stability of Egyptian society and Wang Tai paid attention to the interaction among the three basic forces on the Egyptian political stage: state, society, and political Islam. The research team in Egyptian studies is relatively neat, and the subjects are diversified.

Anthropological/ethnological and sociological research on Africa is increasingly active. Shi Lin and Zhuang Chenyan, of Minzu University of China, have probed the ethnological methodology and African ethnic/national issues. Li Zhigang and Niu Dong have analyzed the way of existence of Africans in China. Xu Wei has probed African anthropology, the ethnicity issue, and ethnic relations, especially in Botswana through his field work. More importantly, in recent years, a number of anthropology/ethnology doctors have returned to China, such as Qiu Yu, Yuan Ding, Chen Liang, Yang Beibei, Zhou Yang, etc. These young scholars discussed the social interaction of two-way immigrants, the survival track of Africans in Guangzhou, African ethnography and urbanization, the health challenges and medical strategies of new Chinese immigrants in Africa, and the two-way cultural adaptation of Chinese/African families. Dr. Lei Wen transferred from development studies to anthropology research. From 2015 to 2018, Gao Liangmin, of Tsinghua University, conducted ethnographic research in Tanzania, Kenya, and surrounding areas. These scholars have brought a new horizon to the study of Africa and China-Africa relations. Ethnography, ethnic relations, environmental adaptation, conflict mediation, and so on have entered the research field. Zhejiang Normal University has established the Center for African Anthropology Studies and has held various academic activities. Minzu University of China, Sun Yat-sen University, and Xiamen University all have held lectures, forums, and seminars on African anthropology/ethnology/sociology. The cross-border ethnic mobility, conflict, adaptation and mediation, interaction between nomads and settlers, the complementarity

23 The Institute for the History of Ancient Civilizations of Northeast Normal University set up a special experiment class for young scholars, which became the backbone of the study of ancient world history in China. It also runs an English journal, Journal of Ancient Civilizations (JAC) to provide a platform for the study of Egyptology, Assyriology, and Hittist studies, etc., which has greatly promoted the study of Egyptology in China.

24 For Egyptology in China, refer to “Entry into Egyptology in China”.

25 “Xu Wei: I and African anthropology——Era, subject, platform and individual”.

between urbanization and urban and rural areas, the local wisdom to solve the contradictions between man and nature and between man and man, and the role of African immigrant groups should be gradually included in the research scope.

One of the main characteristics of China’s African studies is its close connection with African reality. The interaction between politics and economy has always been the research focus, including various topics, such as African leaders and political governance, party politics and development strategies, democracy and corruption, NGOs, power inheritance and political stability, national issues and national construction, non-traditional security and counter-terrorism, etc. With the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, the topic of African integration is becoming increasingly important, which is reflected in the relations between the AU and the UN and other international organizations, the AU and the International Criminal Court, the AU and its member states, and the AU and African regional organizations. African law research is also one of the important areas in recent years. With the strengthening of China-Africa relations, more and more Chinese enterprises and immigrants are entering Africa, hoping to understand the laws of African countries, thus arousing scholars’ attention to this issue. The “African Law” series, edited by Hong Yonghong, provides a platform for the dissemination of African legal knowledge and discussion. Zhu Weidong, Xia Xinhua, Li Bojun, and others have not only translated African laws or legal systems, but also published many articles on international arbitration and dispute settlement. Chinese scholars should gradually strengthen the research on the legal settlement of international disputes, such as the issue of the Chagos Islands.

The study of African economy involves such issues as industry, agriculture, marine fishery, water environment, small enterprises, poverty reduction, technology transfer, food security, population dividend, debt sustainability, international cooperation and assistance, etc. Lin Yifu’s new structural economics shows Chinese scholars’ view on the world economy, especially African economy, from a unique perspective (2012). Li Xiaoyun’s team made efforts to explore the issue of aid effectiveness through the practice of increasing food production in Tanzania (2019). We should strengthen the research on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and its effects. The free trade zone will cover a market with a population of 1.2 billion and a GDP of 2.5 trillion US dollars. The Secretariat of the free trade zone is located in Ghana, and its spillover effect cannot be ignored. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organization with rather quick integration, and its 2019 Ministerial Conference reaffirmed that it would
speed up the process of monetary integration and launch a single currency in 2020. Its role and trend need to be explored. The study of countries and regions (such as the Horn of Africa, the Mediterranean coast, the Great Lakes region, the Sahel region, the Congo River Basin, the Gulf of Guinea, the West Indian Ocean Islands) is of great importance. With a general understanding of the continent, we should put emphasis on its characteristics, such as the relationship between countries using the African Franc and France, the economic diversification of resources in countries such as Nigeria and Angola and the marine resource development of coastal countries, the intermediary role of Mauritius (development model, capital, goods, finance, etc.), the biodiversity and social development of Madagascar, the governance model of Rwanda, the immigration economy of South Africa, the role of African diaspora, especially those in the US and Europe, etc.

African literature is a new field. Except for the introduction of a few works at the end of the 19th century and the few published in *The Eastern Miscellany* in the early 20th century, the study of African literature in China began in the 1960s, and systematic research only after the 1980s. From 1986 to 2016 important African writers were explored and about 990 papers on African literature covering 16 African countries were published in Chinese journals. The translation and introduction of African works focuses on the works of protest against colonialism or for national independence, African tradition or local culture, and Nobel Prize winners, with the characteristics of having more English works than French works, more male works than female works, more novels than dramas, etc., and there are various projects to translate or study Africa including African-Americans (汪琳 2015; 黄晖 2016; 陈凤姣 2017; 邓耘 2018). For example, 445 articles were published about Nobel Prize Winner J. M. Coetzee from January 1986 to June 2016 (黄晖 2016) and research works are also concentrated on Coetzee (高文惠 2008; 王敬慧 2010; 蔡圣勤 2011; 2011; 2017; 段枫; 2011; 2017; 钟再强 2015; 邵凌 2016; 罗晓燕 2017; 史菊鸿 2017). Very few take notice of African black authors (俞灏东, 杨秀琴, and 刘清河 2012). The two works edited by Zhu Zhenwu reflect the general situation of China’s research on African English Literature (朱振武 2019a; 2019b). In recent years, African literature research has expanded from Nobel laureates to popular writers, from literature research to critical theory, from general to specific. Yao Feng, Sun Xiaomeng, Wang Lin, etc., translated *African Literature - An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, the first collection to comprehensively introduce African literary theory and criticism, emphasizing the uniqueness of African philology and highlighting the local characteristics of Africa.
There has been a discussion about the possibility of Africa making full use of its advantages to develop. If the answer is yes, what are the advantages? How to use these advantages? Political science should be deeply explored in the aspects of the balance of African political tradition and its rationality, the advantages and disadvantages of the contemporary introduction of Western democratic elections, the enthusiasm of people to participate in politics, and the operation of different power groups. African countries have encountered various problems, but they have resisted external interference and hope to overcome the difficulties with their own efforts. This growing sense of self-consciousness, with Ethiopia and Rwanda as models, reflects Africa’s exploration of a development path that suits its national conditions. African localization and autonomy is another important issue, including the African perspective in international development cooperation. Why can all forms of African culture survive in the economic backwardness and spread and flourish all over the world? Cultural studies should not only recognize the diversity and particularity of African cultures, but also evaluate its appeal, adaptability, penetration, and influence, including the boundaries of African philosophy, religion, and tradition. International politics and international relations should strengthen the discussion of Africa’s role in the international arena, including the role of Africa in the United Nations and the balanced relationship between Africa and major powers. The Franc area in Africa is extremely dependent on France in all aspects, which is a dependence imposed by the former suzerain. All these should be explored with care.

**Conclusion**

China’s African studies have gained new momentum. It must be acknowledged that African studies are still rather weak in China, and the study of China-Africa relations tends to be too inclined and lacks depth. Policy oriented research must be objective and based on profound academic research. We look forward to conducting comprehensive academic cooperation with African counterparts and international academicians, paying more attention to countries or topics, as well as to solid field work and interdisciplinary research. China’s African studies should deal with the following relations: academic discussion and social practice, knowledge popularization and in-depth research, case study and theoretical generalization, microanal-
ysis and macro meaning, country, region and global research, etc. I am full of confidence for China’s Africa research27.

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**ABSTRACT**

China’s systematic understanding and research of Africa began in New China, which can be roughly divided into three stages. Supporting Africa (1950-1965). Political emphasis decided that the contact with and study on Africa should be based on support for national independence movements. Understanding Africa (1966-1976). Some institutions translated a large number of works in the “Cultural Revolution” to
enhance understanding of Africa. Studying Africa (1977-). The reform and opening up prompted the academic community to become familiar with Africa and start preliminary research. The development of China Africa relations has promoted all-round research on Africa (Li, A. 2005). This article attempts to further explore China’s African studies, which are divided into five parts, e.g., a historical background of relationship between China and Africa, a brief illustration of the achievements of four generations (especially young people), the participation and contribution of Chinese scholars in the international academia; the development of research institutions, and an analysis of the new trend of African studies in China.

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