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## The China-Africa debate in context

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This is an excellent overview of the China-Africa debate: a short and accessible book that covers most of the key dimensions. It opens with a description of the landmark China-Africa Summit of November 2006, when the streets of Beijing were festooned with huge posters of elephants and giraffes, and Africans in traditional dress. Amidst the colourful images, Alden tells us, one poster depicted feathered tribesmen from Papua New Guinea. His eye for such small details, which can complicate simplistic narratives of friendship or exploitation, is one of the strengths of this book.

Alden sets out to explore three differing views of China's expanding relationship with Africa. Is China a new development partner for Africa, an economic competitor or a new coloniser? The 'development partner' argument concentrates on China as a source of aid, investment, and strategic alliances, the 'economic competitor' view emphasises predatory exploitation of African natural resources (such as forests, oil and minerals) to fuel China's economic growth, while the 'new coloniser' perspective suggests that China is challenging the dominance of G8 nations in Africa and ultimately establishing a new form of control.

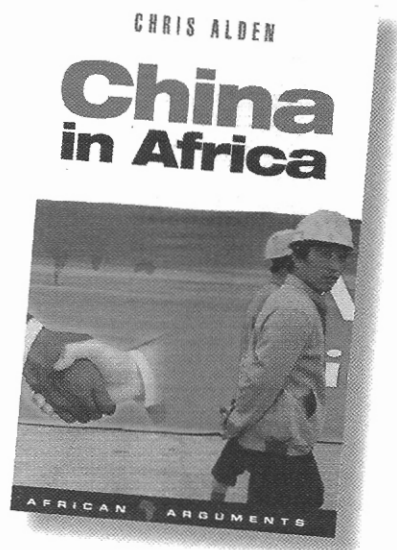
*China in Africa* sets China's Africa policy in historical context and provides an overview of the range of Chinese actors engaging with Africa: the relevant ministries, the key state-backed Chinese multinational corporations,

as well as smaller firms, migrants and entrepreneurs. Alden also usefully differentiates between diverse African states. China's relationship with Angola is not the same as with Zambia, for example, and China impacts on each in different ways.

The author does not give a clear-cut answer to the question of whether China is a partner, competitor, or colonialist. Each view contains element of the truth, he claims. The western world, he says, needs to face up to its own hypocrisy when it criticises China – and, for its part, China needs to respond to the call to be a responsible global stakeholder.

For anyone wanting to get up to speed quickly on the China-Africa debate, this book is a good place to start.

*Reviewed by James Keeley*



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① Chris Alden, *China in Africa*, Zed Books African Arguments series, London, 2007, 157pp. Paperback: ISBN: 9781842778647, £12.99. Hardback: ISBN: 9781842778630, £45. Available from Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK. [www.zedbooks.co.uk](http://www.zedbooks.co.uk)