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Mapping International Student Mobility Between Africa and China

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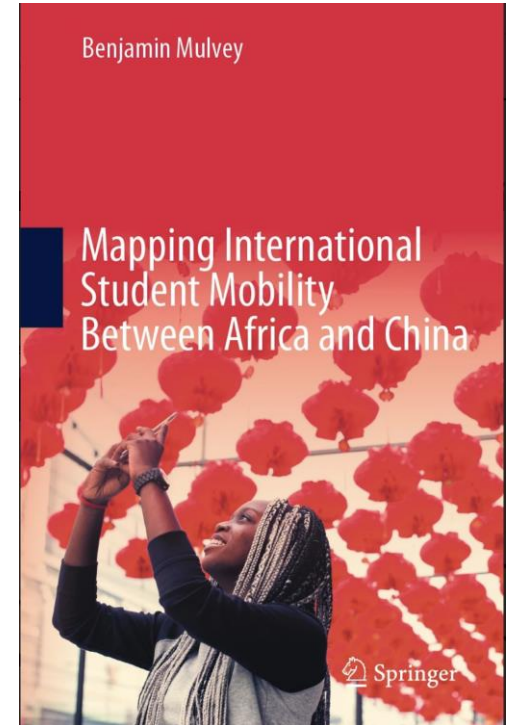
Centre for Global Higher Education, 3rd September
2024

**WORLD
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WELCOME**



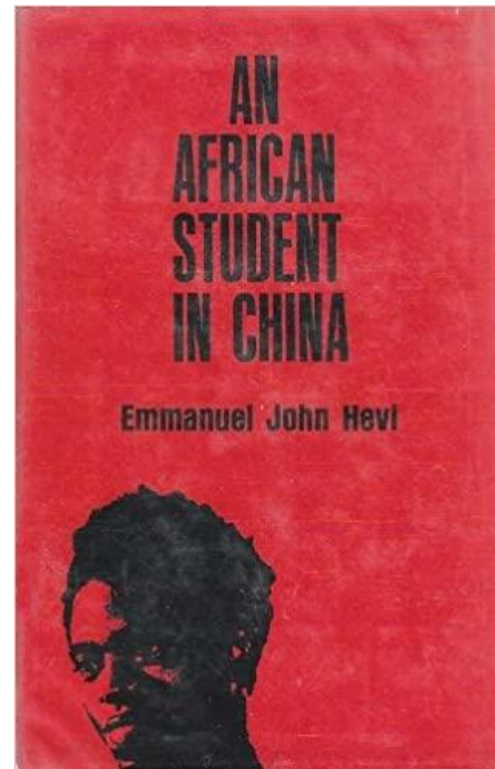
A brief summary

- China is among the most popular destination countries for African students, yet there has been little research to-date into this emergent mobility pattern.
- Drawing on data from a series of interviews, the book focuses on the specific modalities of integration into the global economy of both the sending region and the host country
- Challenges many of the axioms around international student mobility
- A focus on Africa as a whole



International students from African countries in China – historical context

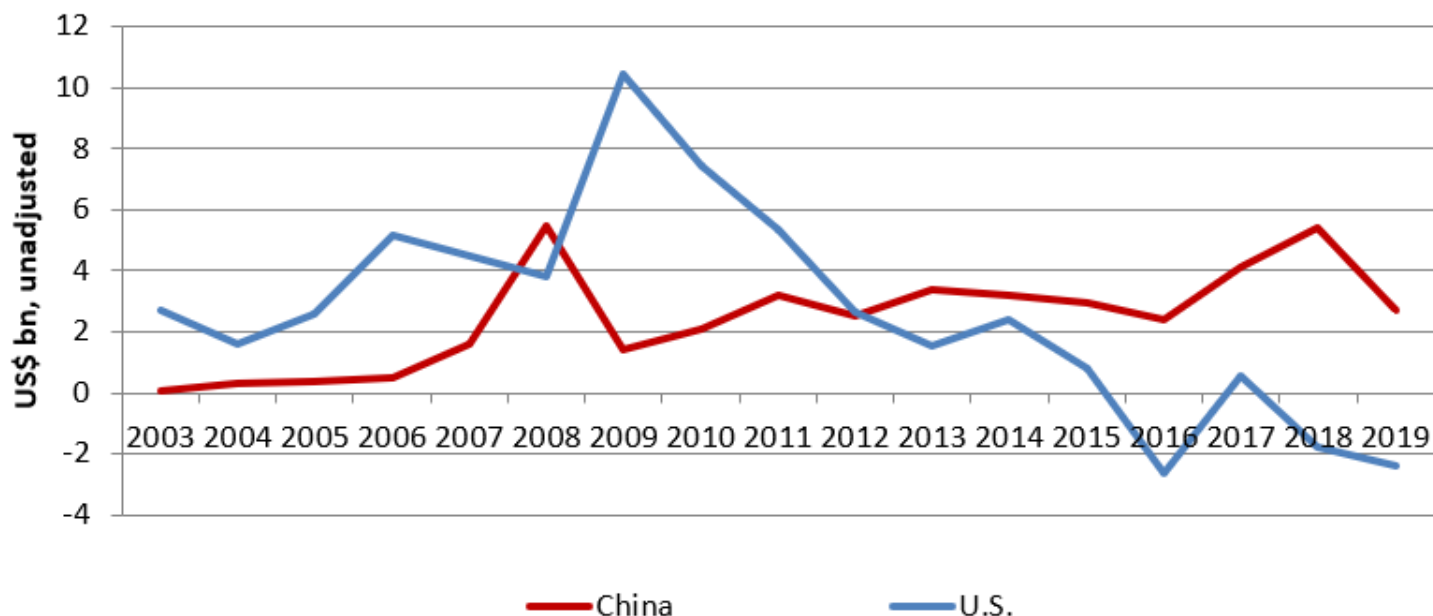
- First batch of 95 African students arrived in China in 1960
- “If half of these 100 students dedicate themselves to revolution after their return to Africa, it will have significant impact to (*sic*) [our] revolutionary career in Africa” (PRC Foreign Ministry 1960, cited in Liu, 2013).
- Emmanuel John Hevi (1963) wrote of his disastrous experience, leaves in protest along with majority of other Africans after several months



Changing global political economy, changing global migration patterns

- Increased global influence particularly felt in Africa, where China is:
 - Largest trading partner
 - Source of foreign direct investment
 - Foreign job creator for the continent as a whole (Brigety, 2018)
- Focus on FDI, trade, and development finance over development aid
- Africa-China student mobility must be seen within the context of China's overall engagement with Africa:
 - A 'spatial fix' for problems of capital overaccumulation in Chinese economy (e.g. Taylor and Zajontz, 2018)

Chinese FDI vs. US FDI to Africa, Flow



Jan 2021

Source: The Statistical Bulletin of China's
Outward Foreign Direct Investment,
U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

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African students in China

- Africans represent the second largest regional grouping in China
 - Nearly 60,000 in China on degree bearing courses (MOE, 2019)
- Recruitment underpinned by strong “para-diplomat” rationale:
 - Availability of scholarships (approx. 64,000 in total in 2018)
 - Approx. 12,500 to African students
 - But future provision in doubt? (FOCAC, 2021)
- Studying across a range of subject areas, but concentrated in STEM and Chinese language.

How are African students depicted in policy discourse?

- Two contradictory messages:
 - An ethical policy of engagement: ‘two-way exchange’ and ‘win–win’ cooperation. This construction implies that African students are part of an equal exchange.
 - The second constructs African students and by extension their governments, as grateful recipients of help and assistance from a relatively socio-economically ‘advanced’ China
 - Reflecting China’s dual positioning as hegemon and ‘counter-hegemon’

Chapter 3: Pre-mobility

- Chapter summarises wide range of students with varying rationales for overseas study:
 - Students from less wealthy, even highly disadvantaged backgrounds
 - ‘Non-global’ members of middle-classes
 - difficulties in defining ‘middle-class’ in context of Africa (Lentz, 2018)
 - Political and business elites receiving scholarships
 - Students sent by home country government (not always willingly)
 - Traders who just want a visa (Haugen, 2013; Ho, 2017)

Chapter 4: Strategising and Spontaneity in Mobility Decision-Making

- Chapter focuses on the decision-making processes that led this group of students to enrol in Chinese universities.
 - Disadvantaged students: ‘It Is Always Difficult for Us to Realistically Think that We Can Go and Study Abroad’
 - Emphasis on spontaneity and chance opportunities related to language learning
 - Eritrean scholarship holders: involuntary mobility

Chapter 4: Strategising and Spontaneity in Mobility Decision-Making

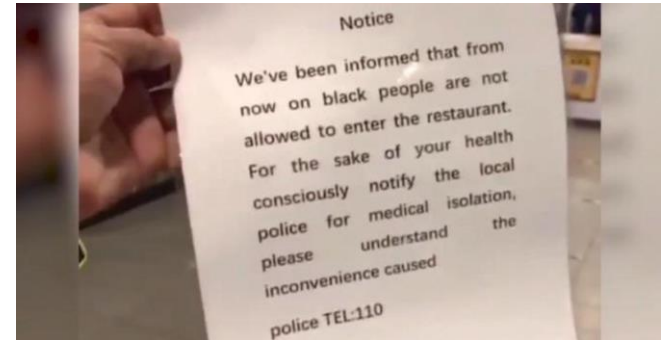
- Members of an insecure, precarious middle class leveraging Africa-China power asymmetries
 - Perceived studying in China not as a ticket to a prestigious career but as a means of gaining skills (such as fluency in Chinese) which would merely enable them to avoid continued precarity.
 - China's 'spatial fix', characterised by the relocation of investment and labour-intensive industries to the global periphery, drives student mobility. Scholarships are part of this.
- Social elites: taking advantage of Chinese public diplomacy efforts

Chapter 5: Experiences in China: Getting on, Getting out?

- Chapter focus on how the idiosyncrasies of China's political system, as well as the history of immigration to the country and cultural norms, shape the experiences of migrants in the country.
- Academic experiences:
 - Social inequalities are mitigated by relative precarity of middle class and availability of scholarships
 - Detrimental effects of segregation, majority of students found this to be disadvantageous

Chapter 5: Experiences in China: Getting on, Getting out?

- Social as well as academic ‘silo-ing’
 - Pursuit of friendship with locals often ended in frustration, despite best efforts of students who came with curiosity and perception that some level of ‘integration’ would be beneficial as a learning experience
- Centrality of experiences of racialisation and discrimination in students’ accounts, similar to other accounts (Gillespie, 2001; Lan, 2016; Xu and Stahl, 2023)



Source: CBS News, 2020

Chapter 6: Post-graduation Plans: Navigating Global Regimes of Mobility

- This chapter highlights three broad post-study trajectories, while also stressing their nuances.
- How students navigate ‘global regimes of mobility’, global structures of capitalism and racialisation (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013, Kelly and Lusic, 2006)
 - Returnees, either deterred by structural barriers to staying in China or with obligations related, for example, to their families or a sense of duty to contribute to national development.
 - Visas
 - Discrimination
 - Obligations at home (family, sense of duty)
 - Relative value of skills in home country

Chapter 6: Post-graduation Plans: Navigating Global Regimes of Mobility

- Those who open businesses with plans to return later
 - Came with the intention to study but developed businesses at the same time
 - Structural barriers in China's mobility regime closed off other options, and long-term settlement
- Those who see China as part of a 'stepwise' migration plan
 - Further study
 - Locations associated with more accessible pathways from study work, higher salaries, fewer restrictions on international students

Concluding thoughts

- One contribution of this book is an account of the ‘practice stories’ of internationally mobile students from wider range of background. A focus throughout has been on the heterogeneity of those captured in the selection criteria for the study in terms of their pre-mobility backgrounds and the decision-making processes associated with their mobility (e.g. disadvantaged, precarious middle-class, social elites)
- Uncertainty around the future of Africa-China student mobility
 - Lowered scholarship commitments
 - COVID and racism
- ‘Soft power’ – positive attitudes cannot be taken for granted

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Concluding thoughts

- Future research directions:
 - How are rapidly changing patterns of global migration transforming what it means to be a migrant and an international student?
 - More granular studies of emergent patterns of student mobility (e.g. to China, Turkey, UAE)
 - International students as agents of change (social, political, economic)
 - The creation of 'epistemic communities', to which China graduates are centrally important with the goal of shifting global discourses on ideological issues (e.g. human rights)

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Thank you



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