

## *Research Africa Reviews* Vol. 3 No. 3, December 2019

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Ngonlardje Kabra Mbaidjol, *African Countries and the Global Scramble for China*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2018. 208 pp. ISBN-10: 9004348069.

Reviewed by: Bourouayah Mohamed /Former Vice-rector of Emir Abdelkader University. Constantine, Algeria.

Ngonlardje Kabra Mbaidjol essentially reflects upon Africa-China relations. Herein Mbaidjol powerfully engages with the intense debates regarding cooperation between the African continent and China. He divides the book into different chapters. The first three chapters (pp.1-35) zoom in on “A Call to Action for Africa” that is tied to “The Founding Principles of South-South Cooperation” as well as the “The Shift Toward Multipolarity: Multipolarity and the Non-Aligned Movement”.

These three then set the stage for Mbaidjol to examine in the three chapters (pp. 36-67) thereafter “BRICS(’ position): (that offers) New Dimensions of China’s International Cooperation”, “China and its Neighbors: (that provides plenty of) Lessons for Africa”, and “Asian regional Institutions, and (their) implications for Africa.” He then shifts by “Examining China’s Foreign Aid” before he takes “A Closer look at Sino-Africa Trade” and prior to questioning “China’s Neo-colonialism: Fact or Fiction?” in the three that follows (pp.68-105). Before he concludes the book, he scrutinizes the “Gaps and Opportunities in Sino-Africa cooperation”, and comments on “Harmonizing Legal and Administrative Infrastructure in Africa”. And as “A Way Forward.”

The book contains rich material that provides information of great importance and gives attention to China's historical presence in the African arena. It shows the special relations that China has with the non-aligned countries. This was particularly the case after the Bandung Conference; a historical event that gave impetus to the African-Chinese relations. The book consists of a focused historical vision of Chinese-African relationship; and as indicated, Mbaidjol identifies the Bandung Conference as a pivotal event that made China Africa’s key ally and partner. This is so in view of China’s remarkable technological progress that caused China to achieve economic and other levels within a short period. And today, China remains a fierce competitor.

Mbaidjol argues that non-interference and human rights are common policy visions between China and Africa. These have encouraged the rapprochement between the two and particularly so among the non-aligned countries. Amidst the period of politico-economic blocks, China seems to prefer pursuing these policies in order for her to secure its economic interests. China, or the “Sleeping Giant” as described by some economists, appears to court the African market. This sector used to be monopolized by its erstwhile European colonizers; a group of powers that controlled swatches of regions across the continent. France, for example, took control of North Africa and the British colonized parts of West Africa. These two as well as others colonized many African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and the Congo causing them to suffer. These countries and their communities were not only marginalized, but they were also deprived of their natural resources and wealth.

Mbaidjol highlighted the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation's establishment after the First Ministerial Conference on China-Africa Cooperation was held in Beijing from October 10 to 12, 2000. He points out that many political leaders from China and Africa attended it; from among them were: President Jiang Zemin, Vice President Hu Jintao, Prime Minister Zu Rongji, as well as the presidents of four African countries - Algeria, Togo, Zambia, Tanzania, the General secretary of the African Union. In addition, 80 foreign and trade ministers representing China and 44 African countries' representatives of the 17 African and regional international organizations and Chinese and African businesspersons.

The first ministerial conference of the Forum focused on two main points:

- How to contribute to the establishment of a new international political and economic order for the twenty-first century?
- How to promote economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa within the new context?

I go along with Mbaidjol that the conference participants agreed on the need to establish a new type of partnership among member states based on stability, equality and mutual benefits. The conference adopted two official documents; the one is the Beijing Declaration and the other is the China-Africa Cooperation Program for Economic and Social Development document. I confess that Mbaidjol offered a convincing analysis of the issues as well as the topics that have been mentioned. This may be attributed to the richness of Mbaidjol's personal culture in the field of international relations. Mbaidjol gives one an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of the Sino-African rapprochement. I wish to argue that this is one of the positive points of this book; and, in fact, I would personally recommend that it be a reference for researchers interested in Sino-African relations or South-South relations.

Mbaidjol then discusses the damage that foreign powers caused in some African countries such as Angola; countries that have suffered devastating civil wars; these foreign powers caused countries such as Angola and the Central African Republic to collapse politically and economically. Despite these set-backs and the long-term effects of these tragic events, Angola and others like her were able to overcome these civil wars because of their governments' policies. On top of that, they were also given assistance from the African Union to deal with the aftermath of these civil wars. Angola strengthened its economic partnership with China and, as a result, the foreign powers have faced a critical challenge. Though Mbaidjol's choice of the Angolan model was a successful one, I am of the opinion that he should have extended the search to other African countries that have known similar social and economic sufferings.

Mbaidjol does not overlook the important issue of the United Nations' strong role; in spite of this, it was not adequately discussed. He failed in subtracting available alternatives for African countries in order to rehabilitate their positions within the United Nations. I think that this goal may be achieved by strengthening the system of international alliances between Africa and some economic powers such as China. It is my view that having overlooked the alternatives is one of the main weaknesses of this book.

Mbaidjol discourses about the notion of multipolarity; a phenomenon that emerged after the end of the Cold War. Added to this, he reflects on the position of African countries within this multi-polarization. He does so to demonstrate the non-aligned countries' inability to make of Africa an effective stakeholder in these trade ties. Mbaidjol adds that one of the reasons for not achieving this goal is the deep social gap among these countries. Despite Mbaidjol's brave attempts to illustrate this issue, he was not successful because of his limited research. These efforts can be

avoided in the future if he considers collaborating with other researchers in the same area of interests.

Nonetheless, it is my opinion that the non-aligned countries that include many African countries failed in making African economics a strong and an attractive pole. This issue can, however, be achieved by approaching China with the idea of benefiting from its economic experience. And with this, I conclude saying that the issues that Mbaidjol have engaged with have a long and a paradoxical heritage. Although Mbaidjol has done an excellent job by bringing a challenging view to the fore when he explored China-Africa rapprochement, it is an issue that is still rather foggy and that should be addressed.

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**ISSN 2575-6990**