China’s engagement with Africa during the last decade has generated media attention that generally portrays China as either Africa’s economic saviour or as its new imperial overlord. Many academic analysts have also characterised this relationship in monolithic terms. This lecture will both survey these analyses but also suggest that the China-Africa phenomenon needs to be understood as a series of engagements – economic, political, but also social and cultural – between a range of Chinese and African actors that have both potential benefits and costs for all those involved.

Without offering a comprehensive analysis, the lecture will explore the history of China’s relationship with Africa and the continuities and breaks in this relationship. It will analyse economic relations in the form of mineral extraction, the extent and form of China’s engagement with political change on the continent, and the ways in which Chinese migrants have interacted with African societies. It will also explore how Africans are seeking to shape their unequal relationship with Chinese influences and to negotiate advantages for themselves in both Chinese-influenced Africa and in China itself. The lecture will seek to locate China’s recent engagement with Africa in the context of the continent’s many centuries of interaction with global flows of goods, peoples and ideas.

**Essay questions**

1. To what extent is China-Africa partnership best understood as ‘win-win cooperation’?

2. Are the relations between Chinese and Africans shaped mainly by states or individuals?

3. Africans have little or no agency when it comes to their relationship with China. Discuss.

**Core reading**


**Further reading**

**General overview**


Sautman, Barry and Yan, Hairong. *East Mountain Tiger West Mountain Tiger: China the West and ‘Colonialism’ in Africa*. University of Maryland School of Law, 2006.

**History and historiography**


**Investments, trade, and aid**


**Multifaceted engagements**


**Labour relations**


**Chinese migrants in Africa**


**Culture, literature and education**


**Online sources:**


The China Africa Project: http://www.chinaafricaproject.com/