



Conference Description:

Railways, ports, airports, highways: transport infrastructure has been and continues to be a key sector in China- Africa relations connecting the manufacturing hubs on the continent with outlets via sea and air. Academic and policy discourses have long recognized China as a major infrastructure player. The One Road, One Belt initiative, as well as the newly founded Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) have further underlined China's global dominance in this sector. China's approach to infrastructure and financing is unique in its speed, and scale, providing an attractive alternative source of financing for many African governments. At the same time, transport infrastructures are products of economic governance and particular political situations connecting people both spatially and temporally. This one-day conference is an effort to engage critically with the political, economic, sociological and anthropological questions regarding central motivations, organizing principles, modes of operation and imagined futures in the planning, construction and implementation of Chinese-built transport infrastructure across the continent.

Programme: subject to change

10.00 – 10.40: Registration

10.45 – 11.15: Opening Remarks

11.15 – 12.45: Panel 1 – Transport for whom by whom? The global political economy of trade and manufacturing

Speakers: Elisa Gambino (University of Edinburgh), Dr. Jing Du (IDS/Sussex), Dr. Adaora Osondu-Oti (Afe Babalola University)

Chair: Prof. Ricardo Soares de Oliveira

Sino-African trade and investment has captured major academic and public interest as China, through its heterogeneous private and public actors, has become the leading exporter and investor into manufacturing and infrastructure on the continent. While the increased trade and investment can potentially provide positive spillovers to African countries, the impact on local industry, especially the infant manufacturing, can be adverse. What are

these new African manufacturing hubs producing? Are these newly-built transport corridors simply facilitating Chinese export of raw materials? How have Chinese corporations created long-term supply chains? This panel deals with the larger political economy questions regarding Chinese-sponsored transport infrastructure in Africa.

12.45 – 13.45: Lunch

13.45 – 15.15: Beyond state to state: Local dynamics, imagined futures and the anthropology of infrastructure in the Sino- African context

Speakers: Dr. Folashade Soule (University of Oxford), Dr. Di Wu (SOAS), Yinglin Huan (UCL)

Chair: Dr. Miriam Driessen

Popular representations of the infrastructure of the Global South often imagine these steel structures to be grand projects of modernity, with little attention paid to the people who actually interact and are affected by this infrastructure. A vast volume of literature deals with the role of the state when it comes to Chinese infrastructure investments in Africa, but hardly anything is written about how this infrastructure is imagined. How have Chinese workers interacted with local populations? How have these mega-projects connected local residents both spatially and temporally to imagined futures? How are the Chinese perceived from below? This panel engages with the complexities embedded in local imaginations of infrastructure and how they shape the realities of those who live in its shadows.

15.15 – 15.45: Coffee break

15.45 – 17.15: Panel 3 – Transport infrastructure, conflict, migration and the Sino-African security apparatus

Speakers: Dr. Zhengli Huang (Sheffield), Yilak Akloweg (TUT-POL, Boston), Youyi Zhang (Cornell University)

Chair: Prof. Harry Verhoeven

Recent developments have highlighted China's increasing presence in the global security arena. China is now an active member of peacekeeping missions in Mali and South Sudan, as well as counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. Part of the underlying motivation for this growing military presence is to secure its own investments, which raises a host of other questions related to China's mega infrastructure investments. How are Chinese-built roads and railways facilitating 'illegal migration'? How does increased physical connectivity between countries affect border disputes and political relations? This panel seeks to explore China's growing willingness to secure its political and economic interests in Africa through the lens of transport infrastructure and to understand its wider implications for the Sino-African security apparatus.

17.15 – 17.30: Closing Remarks

18.30 – 21.00: Reception & Dinner for Speakers, Chairs + OUCAN Team at Rewley House