

## The ‘Perplexing African in China’: A Reading of *Black Ghosts* by Ken Kamoche

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### Abstract

African countries and China have had contact since the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century. These ties have been strengthened with more studies interrogating what both sides stand to gain. At the center of these ties lie misconceptions, intrigues, and full-blown propaganda, all aimed at some end. This essay looks at how fiction intervenes in examining these ties more closely by focusing on the people-to-people relationships without sidelining the ongoing politico-economic debate. The paper interrogates how the novel digs into the history of the Africa-China engagement and weighs in on the mystery and cover-ups that have clouded it. We concluded that while China is often seen as positioning itself as Africa’s strongest political ally or even a sly colonial power, there is more going on from the exchange of perplexing cultures and secret political and personal deals that may undermine the interests of the ordinary citizens.

**Keywords:** Sino-Africa Relations; Africa; China; Cultural Encounters; China in Africa

### Introductory Remarks on the African in China/Chinese in Africa

China-Africa relations date back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century with Zheng He’s voyages to East Africa. Strauss (2009), however, reminds us that China’s official bilateral relations with Africa started in the 1950s with Egypt before other African countries in supporting China’s efforts at joining the United Nations. She notes that by the 1970s, 44 of the 50 African states that had attained independence had recognized or established some ties with the Republic of China

(Strauss, 2009). With numerous political, economic, and cultural exchanges between China and Africa, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has witnessed even stronger relations, with China positioning itself as Africa's key partner in development (Qobo & le Pere, 2018). These exchanges range from scholarships for African and Chinese students to megaprojects across Africa. China's non-interference policy in African politics in relation to its financial support has often raised questions about the country's real intentions in the continent, especially as it concerns its exploitation of natural resources in countries perceived to have undemocratic governments such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe among others.

There is more to the China-Africa relations, and literary and cultural texts have attempted to interrogate what lies beneath these ties. Such texts offer a deeper understanding of the ties, focusing on the personal relationships between Africans and the Chinese, both in Africa and China. These are the concerns in Ken Kamoche's *Black Ghosts* (2015). The novel unravels the intrigues, racial tensions, Western propaganda, as well as the economic and political underhand deals that come with these ties.

Ken Kamoche is a Kenyan academic and fiction writer whose short stories have appeared in collections such as *A Fragile Hope* (2007), the Hong Kong ID, *Dreams, Miracles and Jazz*, *One World*, and *New Writing from Africa* (2009). His latest novels include *True Warriors* and *Black Ghosts* (2015). In *Black Ghosts*, Ken Kamoche unearths the surprises, intrigues, and products of Africa's newfound love with China. Dan Chiponda, the protagonist, earns a scholarship to study in China. He is reluctant to leave the sleepy Ndamba village in Zimbabwe to go to a land that he had not even seen in pictures. His mother shares his reluctance and even seeks the intervention of a fortune teller to predict his son's fate when he goes to China. When Dan leaves for China, he is burdened with the expectations of an entire family, which has been living as squatters in Ndamba village. His father expects him to pursue a career in agriculture to help solve the land problems they are grappling with. When he eventually arrives in China, he does not follow his father's counsel of studying an agricultural course. Despite the country's development, Dan and the other the African students get the impression that China is not able to produce enough food to feed their growing population and that the rate of poverty could be higher than in some parts of Africa. Dan's life in China is more of an adventure. He learns the Putonghua dialect and finds it easier to interact and even forge relationships with the Chinese. The most notable Chinese he relates with are Lai Ying, with whom he is involved romantically and eventually marries, and Wang, who is a merchant. While Wang represents the Chinese interests in Africa, Kabinga, a Rwandese student also on a scholarship, represents the African businessman trying to explore the opportunities that the connection with China comes with. He goes into the "White Card" business full-throttle and abandons his studies to seal deals with Chinese tycoons. Their relationship, however, turns sour when it is rumored that it is Wang who masterminded the circumstances that led to his losing about \$ 80,000. They reunite later to complete deals in Africa whereby Kabinga, besides his self-interest in making money, also wants to take his revenge on Wang. They deal in arms and minerals, but one day Wang and his Chinese colleagues are arrested by the police in what seems to be a tip-off from Kabinga. The novel thus peeks into the China-African relationship from the 1980s, seeking to problematize the impact of Africa's contact with China from a period when the Cold War had just ended, and China was growing its dalliance with a continent that western countries had left partially exploited and divided.

### What are ‘black ghosts’ doing in China?

Between 1980 and 2020, the movement of Africans to China has seen China’s interests in Africa grow exponentially. Castillo (2020) refers to this as the honeymoon period in Sino-Africa relations. To augment these ties, China has provided opportunities for Africans to study in China and initiated cultural exchanges between China and Africa. The earliest recorded presence of Africans in China remains a mystery. However, most scholars agree that the 1980s, during Mao’s reign, was when the Chinese’s interest in having bilateral relations with Africa began and thus the movement of African students and professionals to China (Sullivan, 1994). Van Dijk (2009) observes that in 2008, China replaced the European Union and the United States as Africa’s major trading partner and rapidly increased its Foreign Direct Investments and development aid in the continent.

China’s interest has been driven by several factors, key among them the need for raw materials for its industrial production. Edoho (2011) observes that China’s interests in Africa as a development partner began after the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War in 1991. He further argues that the Chinese do not have any conditionality attached to their investment and infrastructural development projects in Africa. This explains why most African heads of state have been increasingly embracing the Chinese aid and slowly moving away from the West.

Even though China continues to offer goodies to Africa, its close ties with the continent have been viewed by some scholars as a carrot and stick affair. Such claims see the Chinese are only after their economic development. Rich & Recker (2013) argue that Africa’s relationship with China heralds a new beginning of a more enduring economic relationship since the continent has abundant and easy to access natural resources and that China has emerged as an economic superpower. The country, therefore, needs Africa’s resources for its growth. In their argument, they sound a warning that resonates with Edoho’s that if China is indeed interested in pursuing ties with Africa with long-term interests, they need to have long-term development strategies and make efforts toward promoting the continent’s financial stability. Yet it appears that this is an issue that the Chinese investors do not seem to mind, as their investments are always aimed at short-term benefits that do not promise any signs of sustainability.

Therefore, the real intentions of the Chinese in Sino-African relations continue to raise questions among scholars. *Black Ghosts* is an attempt at using fiction as a window to reality and reexamining the puzzle of these intentions. It is one of the few literary texts that touch on the ties between Africa and China. Kamoche’s attempt to explore this relationship through fiction leaves the reader with a more nuanced understanding of the encounters between China and Africa, primarily based on the experiences of Africans who live, study, or work in China.

The novel’s presentation of events reflects Sautman’s (1994) argument in his examination of the Chinese-African student clashes of the first decade of China’s reforms. He attempts to explain the scholarship program that takes Dan Chiponda and the other African students, such as Kabinga and Diallo in the novel, to China. He argues that in 1960, the Chinese government started a program of “fully-paid university education for the nationals of friendly countries” (Sautman, 1994, p. 413). He adds that these were attempts to win the hearts and minds of these governments and hopefully bolster China’s credentials in the Third World, especially after China’s split with the Soviets due to differences in political ideologies in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1961 and 1962, 118 African students, mostly from elite backgrounds, went to study in China. Even

though Dan, the protagonist of *Black Ghosts*, is from a humble background, he, and the other African students in China encounter what Sautman describes as “a spartan, puritanical and politicized environment in their host country (p. 413).”

### **Africa and the Orient: A Perplexing Encounter**

The novel reveals the culture shock that the Chinese and Africans undergo as they come to terms with their differences. Dan is baffled by Chinese culture when he sets foot in China. However, his initial perception of China from Zimbabwe plays a prominent role in his attitude towards the country's ways. This reflects Sautman & Hairong's (2009) argument that Africans' views of China are not entirely as negative as the Western media make it seem but could be even more complex, varying from country to country and informed by demographic factors such as age, education, and gender. Moreover, these perspectives are also products of how politicians in these countries present China as a problem. Dan Chiponda's low views and expectations of China arise because the Chinese have been present in southern Africa for a more extended period than the other parts of Africa, and a negative narrative about their cultures has been formed.

Dan's surprise begins with something as personal as his name, Chiponda, which he learns from his Putonghua classes means 'egg.' The egg becomes part of his identity as his friends, including the Chinese, call him 'Eggman.' His girlfriend, Lai Ying even makes it more personal and romantic and refers to him as 'my African egg.' It could be argued that the name and its Chinese translation into an egg are symbolic of how delicate China's relations with Africa are. Since it is a continent with a bad history of colonialism and western domination, China, a country that remained neutral during the cold war, appears to demand nothing from African countries. The Western nations have often dictated stiff terms for their aid, such as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, which many African states found difficult to comply with. China, therefore, wants to handle its relationship with Africa as cautiously as possible to get whatever they want from the continent without showing any signs of imperialism and domination over the vulnerable and fragile African economies.

Dan and the other African students find it hard to accustom themselves to the Chinese meals. They must rely on a single diet that they are familiar with as they discover various foodstuffs. Then there is the dog meat, which the Africans realize the Chinese value but are told it can only be bought at certain secret places (Kamoche, 2015). By inquiring about where to get the dog meat, the African students seem to be mapping out the areas where they can buy meat and would be confident that it is not from a dog.

The perplexity of this encounter is further revealed by the treatment that Dan and his friends get at the barber's when they go for their first shave since arriving in China. The toughness of Dan's African hair becomes a topic throughout the session. The students make fun of their African hair by informing the barber that one can get a wife if they can collect a sack full of human hair in Africa. This baffles the Chinese, and they suggest to the Africans that they should get value for their hair and not let it go to waste. The barber also laments that the African hair is difficult to handle, such that Dan must teach him how to cut it and therefore must pay more. Even though this is a made-up story by the African students, its reception by the Chinese reveals their shock at meeting Africans and learning the strangeness of their cultures.

The Chinese not only seem surprised by the Africans' hair. They are even more astonished by their skin color and that their presence in China is a rare spectacle. When Dan and his friends walk in the streets, some Chinese follow them with curiosity. Dan thinks that their followers seem to relish the rare phenomenon of black ghosts. He recounts an incident when a group of guys follows them, chanting 'Kunta Kinte!' and waving their arms like monkeys. The hate sends fits of anger into him and his friends; in fact, Kabinga even contemplates leaving Nanjing, arguing that it is messed up (Kamoche, 2015). These instances of undisputable racial hostility reflect Sautman's (1994) argument that before the Chinese-African student tensions, the Chinese often saw their African colleagues as uncultured. The Chinese students viewed their international counterparts, especially Africans, as "peasants because the Chinese media only showed Africans as poor recipients of aid from China" (Sautman, 1994, p. 417).

The Chinese also seem to be fascinated with other strangers in their country other than the blacks. However, their fascination with foreigners from other countries is different. For instance, Cristina, a white student from the United States, expresses her disgust at being followed. Kabinga reminds her that her case is different from that of Africans. On the one hand, she is followed "with loving eyes as they salivate at the sight of a white goddess with blond hair and long legs." On the other hand, the African black ghosts are followed "to see if they will swing onto a tree" (Kamoche 2015). While this would mean that the Chinese are baffled by every stranger in their country and that being followed is not unique to Africans, Kabinga's statement points to the racial hostility and tension slowly brewing between the Chinese and African students.

In the last decade, Castillo (2020) tells us that the Sino-Africa relations have evolved from a period of honeymoon into a more complex stage characterized by "global controversies about 'race,' and 'racism' and racial hierarchies" (2020, p. 311). Racism in China is a concern that has raised debates on various popular platforms and in academia recently. Some scholars have argued that some of the racial stereotypes that the Chinese have against blackness or Africans, especially on the internet, mirror what happens in America (Pfafman et al., 2015). Castillo, however, argues that even though what can be considered 'Chinese' racism in popular media is problematic, it is not culturally rooted. He considers racism as multilayered and context-based and that there is no "single (a historical) way of perceiving or thinking about blackness in China or Chineseness in Africa is inaccurate" (Castillo, 2020, p. 320). While he notes plenty of racial prejudices and other forms of discrimination in China, he fails to demarcate precisely where these prejudices and discrimination part ways with racism. For instance, the Nanjing clashes between African and Chinese students as portrayed in *Black Ghosts* are not common prejudices that any stranger visiting China is likely to face; they are targeted at black students.

Castillo (2020) further notes that some of the common justifications advanced by Chinese scholars and the elite are naivety and ignorance. He writes that ordinary Chinese rely on what Hollywood offers about African and global histories. Thus, criticisms of clearly racist rhetoric are blamed on ignorance and cultural misunderstandings. To a great extent, the events in Kamoche's *Black Ghosts* reflect this ignorance. For instance, when some Chinese, in awe, follow black students. It could be argued that they are just fascinated by the difference and strangeness of Africans' skin color; however, when they begin to hurl stones at the black students and make monkey signs, they are clearly racist and conscious about it. The novel's portrayal of Nanjing and the tension building up between students of various cultures suggest that both the black students and the locals harbor racist thoughts. Dan, for instance, constructs in his mind what an old Chinese

woman could be thinking of his skin color. Thus, naivety and ignorance, as advanced by Castillo, are illegitimate excuses meant to maintain racial sentiments and acts of superiority.

The local students' beliefs also escalate racial tension in Nanjing that the foreigners and the strangers get preferential treatment. They live in conditions that are far much better than their local counterparts. For instance, the locals have to make friends with foreigners to get a hot shower. The kind of friendship forged here is loose and does not mutually benefit both parties. In fact, it is called 'shower comrades' to reflect its emptiness. Dan recounts an incident when he helped one of his Chinese friends get access to the international students' hostels to shower and was later forced out by the watchman when he was about to undress for the shower.

The treatment of the Chinese students alongside the racial undertones culminated in an ugly incident in Nanjing whereby the local students rose in arms against their African counterparts and led to a confrontation between the two groups (Kamoche, 2015). The novel reflects an actual event in the 1980s, where only international students of African descent were attacked. Kamoche's portrayal of the incident paints it as racially driven. On the precursors to the Nanjing incident, Sautman cites African students' dissatisfaction with the low living standards in China despite their stipends being several times that of the Chinese students (Sautman, 1994). This is contrary to what we see in *Black Ghosts*, where the African students' hostels were the envy of the locals; they lived in better conditions, and it is only in their hostels that there were hot showers. Another reason for the hostility identified by Sautman (1994) is the strikes that were triggered by the assault of a Zambian student by attendants of a Beijing hotel. He recounts that most African students were angered by the situation and returned home.

We also witness such levels of disappointment, especially when Kabinga says Nanjing is messed up and wishes to leave and return home. On the accounts of Sautman, the dissatisfaction of the African students with the living standards led them to burn the portraits of Mao Zedong so that they could be reported and deported to their home countries. From the accounts of some of the African students, we learn that the unrest had even much more profound causes. Sautman states as follows:

A hostile account by a former African student makes clear that among the factors that caused them to react adversely to their life in Maoist China (including pervasive politics, low living standards and a dearth of social opportunities), racial hostility was the least important. At the same time, China backed anti-colonial and revolutionary movements in Africa and anti-racism featured in Mao's pronouncements on Africa and the Black Diaspora. Red Guards held rallies to support oppressed peoples, including blacks, and no one would have openly expressed hostility to students from developing countries. (p. 415)

While the authorities appeared to protect the African students, there is no doubt that their response to the attacks was slow and probably deliberate. Sautman argues that the authorities arrived too late after the attacks began, just like in *Black Ghosts*, where we only see them acting at the railway station when African students rush to catch a train out of Nanjing. They let the attacks continue at the station and do nothing much to stop them and instead block the black students from taking the train. From the concrete walls around the international students' hostels—which were meant to keep local girls from visiting them—to the railway station incident, the authorities wanted the Africans to learn a lesson. However, they want to appear to be protecting

them simultaneously. As argued by Sautman and reflected by *Black Ghosts*, the Chinese-African students' faceoff was not only a matter of dissatisfaction with living conditions or more favors to the Africans but was also a result of envy and hatred of the Chinese nationals' yearning for reforms.

The racial hostilities in the late 1970s and early 1980s was due to cultural conflicts between African students arriving in China and the Chinese nationals. Sullivan (1994) writes that the African students' efforts to build relationships with Chinese women was resisted by the ordinary and official Chinese. He adds that the African students' behavior was considered "immoral and, thus, culturally inferior to the Chinese" (Sullivan, 1994, p. 441). Thus, even though they were allowed to organize social functions, no Chinese could show up. Nevertheless, the Chinese girls who were spirited enough could go out with the Africans, but these actions had them questioned by the police. The punishment after the investigations could range from deportation for the Africans to the Chinese girls being treated as traitors and prostitutes and looked down upon when opportunities such as jobs arose. Indeed, the Nanjing student protests were a response by African students to repressive measures introduced by the university regarding visitors, which were seen as a way of limiting contact between African students and the Chinese women (Sullivan, 1994). Such is the case in *Black Ghosts*, where although Dan escapes deportation, puts Lai Ying into problems with the authorities. She is locked up in dingy police cells for days for having an abortion and because the pregnancy was by an African. This shows the hostility of the authorities towards the blacks. The Chinese do not seem happy with the authorities' intervention and turn the heat on them, accusing the government of undermining them in their own country. Chants calling for reforms are heard among students, reflecting their disapproval of the communist regime (Kamoche, 2015).

Even though the Nanjing incident was the last major incident of an altercation between the Chinese and the African students, Sautman argues that the hostility against blackness has not stopped. He cites the experiences of Africans in China interviewed in 1992, who revealed that they still faced racial hostilities daily. Sautman states as follows:

Africans spoke of continuing isolation from Chinese students and fear of violence to which some of them have been exposed when venturing off campus on their own. Their overall impression was that they remained the objects of scorn and that neither the Chinese regime nor their governments were willing to take steps to mitigate the situation. (p. 417)

This reflects the situation in China when Dan and his friends were there and after; the African governments were too busy receiving goodies from the Chinese to complain about a small section of their population who, if anything, had benefitted from the Chinese scholarships. Even though the novel portrays racism as rife in China, it is also worth pointing out that it paints China as a land of opportunities for African foreigners to grow socially and professionally. Take Dan, the narrator, for instance; despite his low opinion of the country and the various problems he gets himself into, he still manages to complete his studies and even marries his Chinese girlfriend, Lai Ying. Furthermore, he gets his career going and does business mostly with Chinese citizens. It is his fault when he engages in gambling that wipes away all his money and puts his young family in danger. Lai Ying must leave with their daughter to protect her from Dan and his gambling friends. Despite her reservations about visiting Africa with her husband, Lai Ying consistently shows him kindness and tolerance from the time they meet. Through her, Dan learns more about

China's composition and the history of its regimes. She opens his eyes to the country's other attractive side and reveals things that no other Chinese would dare say about the country.

Despite China being considered a large unitary state characterized by an unusual degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity, the novel reveals the diversity amongst its people. Indeed, Dan and his friends discover that China is not one large group of individuals who speak one 'people's language,' but some minority tribes such as the Bai have different cultures. Strauss & Saavedra (2009) argue that it is the Chinese government's insistence on representing itself in strict post-Westphalian terms "as a sovereign, unitary and rational state" that makes it appear like it is a nation with similar cultural beliefs (p. 553).

More perplexing to the African students in the novel is that China, with its level of modernity and large tracts of fertile land, the impression is that it does not seem to produce enough food for its citizens. To them, China is supposed to be where poverty is unheard of. The communist policies that they find in China are almost like those imposed on the Zimbabweans by the colonial settlers because, in both cases, there is the production of food by the people, but they have little to call their own. As a more urbane nation, Dan and his friends expected a better sense of modernity, especially in the way it handles the affairs of its people regarding food production. Letting its people languish in poverty despite its massive wealth implies little difference between the country's communist regime and post-colonial African states, where most people are still landless, notwithstanding their attainment of independence.

Besides the high levels of poverty, *Black Ghosts* portrays the Chinese communist regime as one where individual rights are suppressed to the extent that one cannot access foreign newspapers from countries that they consider capitalistic and allow freedom of expression. Dan, for instance, feels like he is in prison on his first days in China because he and the other African students cannot get news from home or around the world (Kamoche, 2015). This reflects what Zeleza (2008) sees as the genesis of China-Africa relations. To him, China's courtship started in the 1970s when the country took advantage of the Cold War and targeted anti-western and anti-Russian nations, where it emerged as the leader of the non-aligned world. This, therefore, implies that the Chinese regime treats the western media with the suspicion that they could curtail their advancement into Africa through negative news about its policies on the continent.

Even though Dan and the other African students had left inept post-colonial regimes back in their countries, they are surprised by the system they get in China. The regime treats its citizens with suspicion, and nearly every corner has a government agent trying to identify dissenting voices for punishment. For instance, there are dreaded spies planted among the students who are referred to as the campus youth league of the Communist Party; their role is to ensure that any dissent to the leader is reported and punished (Kamoche, 2015). They are also supposed to survey the students and the lecturers and determine if anybody is going against the regime's requirements. Professor Sheng, for instance, is harassed and bundled out of his office for being "hard to the local students and lenient on the foreign ones" (Kamoche, 2015, p. 61). This, as Lai Ying tells the narrator, has cultivated a culture of silence among the Chinese as they are always afraid of being punished.

When Lai Ying gets pregnant for the first time, she is locked up at the Women's Detention Centre, where Dan is not allowed to see her. She understands her predicament as soon as she gets pregnant and secures an abortion, but unlike her, Dan is not prepared for the consequences of her



action. When he visits Lai Ying at the detention center, he is baffled by the condition in which women are subjected to what the authorities consider petty crimes, but which should be part of fundamental rights. Such crimes include getting a second child against the country's One-Child Policy or getting pregnant when still unmarried. In Lai Ying's case, it is worse because she is dating an Africa. For Dan, even though he had a low opinion of China compared to Western countries like Canada before arriving in Nanjing, he did not expect to find such mistreatments by the regime on its people. For a country that is much more modern than Africa in all aspects, the situation baffles him.

To better relate the availability of land and poverty among the Chinese, the country's projects in Africa and their views on land ownership need a keen observation. For instance, Strauss and Saavedra point out that the Chinese ventures in Africa have often been met with opposition with complaints from countries such as Sierra Leone that "the Chinese think that the government is the owner of land all over the country" (Strauss & Saavedra, 2009, p. 155). They argue that this reflects the Chinese understanding of land ownership in their country, where the government manages all the land.

In *Black Ghosts*, Wang and his brigade are busy looking for property to buy and build their projects but do not worry about the retreating whites from Zimbabwe. Kamoche makes the attacks, and the eventual retreat of the whites coincides with the arrival of Wang, who begins to purchase large tracts of land. This could represent a new era regarding Africa's relations with foreign countries. The British had the Zimbabweans as squatters on their farms while the Chinese chose to buy the land. The sellers of the tracts of land are government agents, which brings to question the regime's commitment to giving its people land as it promised. With Wang's arrival and purchase of land, one can only guess that the arrival of more Chinese who are ready to acquire land could lead to a situation that is far much worse than being squatters. The locals risk remaining landless as their land is sold to the Chinese, who will be putting up projects and are not interested in having squatters on the farms.

China's continued arrival and investments in Africa mean we have to interrogate this encounter and China's real intentions. Edoho (2011) argues that in the age of globalization, China has emerged as one of the leading beneficiaries because it has become a dominant global economic player from the shadows of its ideologically inspired closed economy. He adds that Africa, which has been a key player in world trade for a long time, has always been left behind regarding development because there is nothing much for them in the global trade since the deals benefit the visitors. The question that scholars from various fields continue to ponder is China's real intention in Africa. Edoho, for instance, points out that most people do not know whether China is Africa's development partner, voracious competitor, new colonizer, or coming in to fill a vacuum.

Taylor & Taylor (2007) argue that China is neither interested in exporting its revolutionary and development model nor the superiority of Maoism to Africa. They observe that China moved to Africa to fill in the vacuum left by the retreating western colonial powers in competition with the Soviet Union which was gaining the trust of many African countries after the Cold War. He also notes a second vacuum that bolstered China's interests in Africa when the Soviet Union intervened in Czechoslovakia and was vulnerable to accusations of social imperialism, a situation that China tried to exploit.

Taylor further opines that the real intentions of the Chinese were not to fill any vacuum *per se* but to prevent the development of any alternative threat to Chinese interests (Taylor 2007). But French (2015) observes that China's interests in Africa will not have consistent results for all the countries on the continent. He argues that with the expected rise in the African population, most cities will be too crowded, and "instability and state failure will become chronic among many of them, while their underground wealth is being thoroughly depleted and environments destroyed" (p. 7). With this as a basis of his argument, he adds that China's rediscovery of Africa will mirror the lucky timing of China itself when it began its historic opening. He observes that the country's hunger for investments and new demands will fuel growth and expand opportunities for some parts of Africa. At the same time, the rest that might be less fortunate will fall into the trap of China's voracious appetite, thus fastening their foreseeable demise. This is reflected in *Black Ghosts* in how it portrays globalization and Sino-Africa relations as a relationship of self-interest.

While it is true that China attaches no strings to its aid, their economic interests could be at the forefront. They pay little attention to the implications of their trade with Africa on the environment and human rights, as portrayed by Kamoche. He introduces the idea of globalization in *Black Ghosts* from a wall in Wang's Den, where African students frequent for drinks. The wall has photographs from all parts of the world, earning the title the "international window to the world" (Kamoche, 2015, p. 16). It is from here that Wang's business aspirations are laid bare. He considers his first noodle shop as the first seedling of his investments worldwide. He dreams of seeing the world and doing business with every country, and he is ready to go to any length to achieve his dream. Through his schemes, Kabinga loses \$ 80,000 from his 'White Card' business. After this incident and the subsequent attack on his den, he disappears only to reappear later in the novel, much more prosperous and having attained the stature of a global business mogul even though it emerges that he is already working with Kabinga and Dan to penetrate Africa to get minerals and invest in Zimbabwe.

Wang's approach to his African business deals reflects the arguments of Taylor and Edoho about China's non-interventionist approach to African economies, which Taylor argues is only suitable for the African autocrats and not the ordinary citizens (Taylor & Taylor, 2007). Wang does not seem to care how he seals his deals or whom he works with. He does not question the integrity of the people he works with and their sources if they bring whatever he wants. For instance, their contact in Zimbabwe leads them to deals with wanted war criminals and autocrats like ZANU-PF's Josh Chuma, who is accused of killing hundreds of thousands and is now afraid that an impending regime change could see him locked behind bars. He is also worried that he could face arrest from the western authorities. Therefore, a business opportunity with the Chinese looks like a way out for him to amass more wealth.

Zezeza observes that even though there had been earlier contact between African countries and China, the recent resurgence of Chinese penetration is driven by a "voracious appetite for raw materials and search for market and investment outlets" (Zezeza, 2008, p. 179). He views these intentions as imperialistic. Even though Wang and his friends are after minerals and business deals, Kamoche does not portray their interaction with the Africans as imperialistic in nature. Indeed, there is no instant that Wang shows signs of dominance over his African friends, whether in China or Africa.

Zeleza's argument is context-based and does not seem to apply in a case like *Black Ghosts*, where the Sino-African interactions are person to person and not between governments. Howard French, however, brings a twist to how the Chinese businesspeople deal with individuals alongside their direct dealings with governments. In Conakry, for instance, they could buy influence from the then Junta by purchasing generators and buses, which were never in the government books and were considered as constituting bribes (French, 2015). Kabinga in *Black Ghosts* represents the African strongmen and autocrats who go to lengths to exhaust the resources in their countries to benefit from their foreign ties. For him, it is about money and power, and he does not seem to worry about his country, Rwanda. By acquiring more weapons, he is getting ready for a possible outbreak of civil war, a phenomenon that has severely hurt the continent's economic growth. It makes one question whether China and Africa care about each other's welfare in their desire to do business with each other.

### Conclusion

China-Africa relations have for a long time been captured only by literature that takes the perspective of political economy. Few literary texts have come up to reflect this relationship, whose intentions continue to raise questions. Kamoche's *Black Ghosts* gives the readers a window through which they can view the encounter between Africans and the Chinese, both while in China and Africa. The novel introduces the intrigues and cover-ups that cloud these ties, which political economists only mention in passing. The ineptness of both the authoritative Chinese regime and the African autocrats is at the center of this encounter, with the interests of the ordinary African citizens seemingly kicked to the periphery. Even though the intentions of the Chinese remain a mystery regarding the long-term development of Africa, the African leaders who benefit unfairly from this relationship are to blame for Africa's sluggish growth despite the abundance of natural resources. Kamoche also brings out the hollowness of Africa's clamor for and attainment of independence. By sending away the white landowners, a new and more dangerous mafia takes control, reappropriating the land to the Chinese to cement the newfound ties. In the end, the Africans are left even more hopeless and violent towards their fellow Africans.

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