

Exploration of Multifaceted Cooperation and Engagement Between Eritrea and China:

Camel and Dragon

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By

Fikresus Amahazion

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For Mom, Siham, and Zara – the apples of my eye.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Anno Domini
AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
BC	Before Christ
BCE	Before Common Era
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
C	Celsius
CARI	China Africa Research Initiative
CATTF	China Africa Think Tanks Forum
CCECC	Chinese Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
CE	Common Era
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COL	Colonel
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CPC	Communist Party of China
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DC	District of Columbia
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEBC	Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission
EEC	Eritrean Electricity Corporation
ELF	Eritrean Liberation Front
ENAMCO	Eritrean National Mining Corporation
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FM	Foreign Minister
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEN.	General
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GNI	Gross National Income

GWh	Gigawatt Hours
IFI	International Financial Institution
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KMS	Kilometers
kV	Kilovolt
LDC	Least-Developed Country
LT	Lieutenant
LTD	Limited
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEM	Ministry of Energy and Mines
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MW	Megawatt
MWh	Megawatt Hours
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPC	Ordinary Portland Cement
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PM	Prime Minister
PRC	People's Republic of China
PV	Photovoltaic
PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride
ROC	Republic of China
SAIS	School of Advanced International Studies (at John Hopkins)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEMG	Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group
SFECO	Shanghai Corporation for Foreign Economic and Technological Cooperation
SRBG	Sichuan Road and Bridge Group
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TSZ	Temporary Security Zone
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization
WW II	World War Two

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, the People's Republic of China's (PRC, hereafter China) engagement with African nations has grown exponentially, emerging as “arguably the most momentous development on the continent since the end of the Cold War” (Taylor 2009: 1). China has become Africa's largest single bilateral trading partner, and its investments in and lending to African countries have also expanded rapidly. In terms of trade, investment, infrastructure financing, and aid, no other individual country matches the depth and breadth of China's engagement across the continent (Dollar 2016; Moses et al. 2023; 2024; State Council 2021; Stein and Uddhammar 2021; Sun, Jayaram, and Kassiri 2017). Steadily, the contours of the relationship between China and the African continent have also broadened to encompass an array of other areas and domains, including agriculture, culture, digital infrastructure and technology, military and security cooperations, and health initiatives (Benabdallah 2016; China Foresight 2021; King 2019; State Council 2021; Tugendhat and Voo 2021).

A multitude of factors has driven and shaped the intensification of China-Africa engagement. For China, African nations have, as is probably known by most, helped it to fulfill its strategic need for various natural resources. Beyond that, given their young populations and growing urbanized, middle classes, African countries present China with new potential markets and provide it with a valuable opportunity to assist the restructuring of its own rapidly evolving economy (which is steadily ascending on global value chains). Furthermore, the countries of the continent also represent a key, sizeable support bloc for its “One China Principle” and broader foreign policy aims and agendas within international organizations.¹ Conversely,

¹The “One China Principle”, which can be traced back to 1949 and the end of the long Chinese civil war between the victorious Communists and defeated Nationalists (also known as the Kuomintang), is a principle asserted by the Chinese government declaring that, “there is only one China in the world, Taiwan is a part of China and the government of the PRC is the sole legal government representing the whole of China” (State Council 2000; Wei 1999).

for many African countries – a large proportion of which remain economically weak, relatively underdeveloped, and marginalized within the world of trade and finance – China offers the tremendous benefit of unconditional loans and access to capital. As well, greater Chinese engagement has often been associated with better economic performance and growth, helped address critical infrastructure bottlenecks and development gaps, and presented important other economic opportunities (Calabrese and Tang 2020; Cooke et al. 2015; Dreher et al. 2018; 2021; Sun 2014; Sun et al. 2017; Tull 2006). Not to be forgotten or downplayed, China’s general approach toward the continent, which represents a stark contrast to the West, powerfully resonates with many African governments, while it is also regarded as having a strong grasp of, if not genuine respect for, African countries’ own contexts, cultures, and histories.

Importantly, however, the rising prominence of China’s relationship with Africa has not unfolded completely free of criticism or without controversy. In fact, criticisms and concerns have persistently been raised regarding an impending debt crisis and China’s alleged utilization of “debt trap diplomacy,” an insidious plot to entrap the continent with massive, unsustainable loans it cannot hope to repay in order to seize state assets as collateral when the borrower inevitably defaults. Moreover, China’s engagement across the African continent has frequently been disparaged and condemned as being exploitative or neocolonial and recurrently criticized for a supposed lack of openness and transparency, an alleged failure to promote good governance or human rights, and the application of poor labor and environmental practices (Alden 2007: 66; Al-Fadhat and Prasetyo 2022; Bräutigam et al. 2017; Chellaney 2017a; 2017b; Dollar 2016; Kinyondo 2019; Raine 2009).

These concerns, while undeniably serious and now longstanding, have also received intense push back and been regarded as oversimplified or lacking crucial nuance by a range of scholars and leading voices (Bräutigam 2019a; 2019b; Bräutigam and Rithmire 2021; Eom, Bräutigam, and Benabdallah 2018; Fall 2022; Jin 2023; Jones and Hameiri 2020; Murphy 2022; Ryder and Fu 2021; Shaomin and Jiang 2020; Singh 2020).

At the same time, even as many Western portrayals and narratives of China’s ascendance across the continent tend to be extremely negative, highly cynical, and exceedingly critical, as well as often being characterized by “misinformation” (Bräutigam 2009) or “shrill alarmist views” (Tull 2008a: 2), the story on the ground in Africa is quite different. Findings from

a large number of empirical studies and independent public opinion surveys conducted over many years suggest that the reality is much more nuanced. Indeed, as has become clear, Africans' views and opinions about China are variegated, complex, and often actually quite positive and approving (Asada 2024; Awoonor and Forson 2020; Cannon, Nakayama, and Pkalya 2022; CMS 2021; Dollar 2016; Gallup 2024; Lekorwe, Chingwete, Okuru, and Samson 2016; Rebol 2010; Sanny and Selormey 2021; Sautman and Hairong 2009; Silver, Devlin, and Huang 2019; Silver, Huang, and Clancy 2023; Silver, Huang, Clancy, and Prozorovsky 2024; Wang and Elliot 2014; Wike, Stokes, Poushter, and Oates 2014; Wike, Stokes, and Poushter 2015).

In Eritrea, a young and developing country in Northeast Africa, Chinese involvement and cooperation have also intensified considerably in recent years. However, despite this growing bilateral relationship, and even though there has been extensive study and wide coverage of China's variegated activities across much of the rest of the continent (Bräutigam 2009; Calabrese and Tang 2020; Jinyuan 1984; Taylor 2009), there has been a dearth of attention devoted to China-Eritrea engagement. To date, relatively little is known or understood about the dynamics of their relationship. What is the general history, current nature, and overall scale of interaction between the two nations? What has driven the relationship and what have been some of the impacts and outcomes of this engagement on Eritrean society? What are locals' overall perceptions about the relationship or about China more broadly?

Accordingly, this book tackles these fundamental questions and hopes to help fill the existing lacuna. As the first book dedicated exclusively to the history of engagement between China and Eritrea, the present work adds to the already voluminous – and still rapidly growing – body of literature on China-Africa ties and it sheds valuable and complementary light on this oft-overlooked relationship. Eritrea's engagement with China is particularly fascinating because it highlights the ways in which smaller, developing countries on the African continent have navigated China's rise. Furthermore, its status as a young, developing nation makes it a valuable case study in understanding how Chinese trade, investments, and diplomatic relations have impacted local economies and societies.

What is more, the present book expands the discussion and diversifies the canon of referenced literature on Eritrea more broadly. As is all too common in many developing countries, and particularly those within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), knowledge, empirical research, and scholarship generated on

Eritrea has been quite limited in scope, largely constrained to only a small number of issues or topic areas, and for the most part been dominated and driven by non-Eritreans.

Unfortunately, the indelible fact is that Eritrean writers, researchers, and voices (and there are certainly many) generally tend to be excluded, underrepresented, and marginalized within scholarship and conversations about the country, with the voices of and work conducted by Eritreans paid relatively scant attention. One of the most powerful reflections of this is the historic – and continued – low acceptance rate of scholarship by Eritrean writers and researchers in leading and influential journals, magazines, or other outlets, despite the production of robust research and quality work. Problematically, this general history and the continued homogeneity within work and research focused on Eritrea serves to severely restrict the possibilities for a nuanced, contextual perspective about the country and creates an incomplete understanding of its role within broader geopolitical dynamics.

Moreover, although dominant narratives and monolithic frameworks have emerged about China's relationship with and activities across the African continent, overwhelmingly led and framed by non-Africans, a large proportion of these have been extremely narrow or woefully simplified and not particularly useful or especially helpful in understanding the intricate realities and critical dimensions of surging China-Africa engagement. To a large extent, African actors, across all levels, have been “spoken of or spoken for” (Mohan 2013: 1257), and as was rightly observed by Zainab Usman, senior fellow and inaugural director of the Africa Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, located in Washington, DC,

“There is a conspicuous absence of African scholars’ analyses from a global debate that can only be enriched by their voices and lived experiences... More African scholarship and narratives are needed to contextualize this important debate playing out on the continent” (Usman 2021).

Against this wider backdrop, the present book is thus significant and positively distinguished by centering local, African perspectives and offering a window into their diverse views, while in the process also dissecting and dispelling several prevalent myths and assumptions through a thorough, balanced appraisal that is grounded in a rigorous methodological approach and rich, varied data.

Also important here is that by studying local views and perceptions, relevant stakeholders in both Eritrea and China can better understand the dynamics that underlie their bilateral relationship, which can ultimately inform more effective diplomacy and cooperation moving forward. Local opinion is also an essential element in evaluating the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of China's engagement in Eritrea – especially when considering the historic, sociocultural, political, and economic sensitivities that may shape the relationship.

Finally, as it is the first detailed, far-ranging examination of China's deepening engagement with Eritrea, this book may serve as a useful, robust foundation for future research, as well as represent a lucid, accessible guide and indispensable resource for students, scholars, analysts, policymakers, strategists, and others who may be interested in learning more about global or regional issues and developments, China-Eritrea relations, and the complex and dynamic phenomenon of "China in Africa," more broadly.

Book Outline

The structure of the book is as follows. In the rest of this introductory chapter, a short discussion of the data and methods that guide and underlie this book is presented. This is followed by two chapters that provide essential background on China-Africa engagement, tackling some of the predominant myths, and detail the realities. This helps to better situate and contextualize the relationship between Eritrea and China. Chapter 2 first offers a brief overview of China, before tracing its extended history of interaction with Africa. In Chapter 3, some of the main issues and general criticisms raised in response to the rapidly growing engagement between China and Africa are discussed, with important context and supporting evidence also being marshalled. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, the focus shifts to providing a panoramic look at Eritrea, while a detailed, comprehensive account of the country's engagement with China is presented in Chapter 5. Following that, Chapter 6 shines a critical light on some of the different views and perspectives held by locals toward China and its general engagement with the country over the years. Importantly, these views are set alongside those from across the continent, offering deeper clarity and greater understanding. Last, Chapter 7, the final chapter, concludes with reflections and then notes a number of potential avenues for future work and research.

Data and Methods

This book relies on a combination of several different research methods. Across 2023 and early 2024, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals and key informants from various regions of Eritrea. These participants were selected through the use of convenience and snowball sampling techniques,² which are commonly employed sampling methods in qualitative research and utilized in various social sciences (ranging from sociology, political science, and anthropology to human geography, among others) (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Jager, Putnick, and Bornstein 2017; Marshall 1996). Respondents included individuals affiliated with several national institutions, government ministries, and the private sector. Overall, they possessed extensive experience, first-hand knowledge, deep understanding, and key insights about the history, background, developments, and various dynamics or intricacies of the China-Eritrea relationship. Importantly, the use of or interaction with a wide array of sources also helps to promote multiple and different views and perspectives, ultimately broadening and enriching understanding of the topic of study (Flick 2018).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews, which remain an extremely popular research technique within various fields and disciplines, are effective in providing rich, detailed data and particularly useful since the research retained many exploratory features and aimed, “to develop an in-depth [and contextualised] exploration” (Cresswell 2005: 203). Furthermore, the use of

²In brief, a sample is a subset of a population or universe, and sampling refers to the process of selection of a subset of the population of interest in a research study. There are two primary types of sampling techniques: probability and non-probability. Probability sampling involves random selection, with the researcher able to specify the probability of an element’s (participant’s) being included in the sample and each member of the target population has an equal probability of being selected as a study participant. Through probability sampling, the researcher is able to make strong statistical inferences and generalize back to the broader population. In contrast, non-probability sampling, which allows one to easily collect data, involves non-random selection based on convenience or other criteria, and there is no way of estimating the probability of an element’s being included in a sample (Palys and Atchison 2014). Convenience sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling method, involves the selection of participants according to their availability and accessibility. Snowball sampling, which is also a non-probability sampling method, relies on obtaining referrals and recommendations from initially sampled respondents to recruit other potential participants (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Jager, Putnick, and Bornstein 2017; Marshall 1996).

open-ended questions offered respondents an opportunity to organize responses within their own framework, thus potentially increasing the validity of responses and promoting greater understanding. While the interviews and questions were semi-structured, they also involved many common follow-up queries and creative locutions (such as, “may you elaborate,” “what do you mean, exactly,” “why,” and “what else”) in order to further probe issues of merit or pursue clarity (Hammer and Wildavsky 1989; Morris 2015; Patton 2002).

All interviews were conducted in person and begun after obtaining informed verbal consent, thus ensuring ethical standards in data collection. Not surprisingly, the conversations varied in their duration, sometimes lasting about 30 minutes and at other times stretching to run between one and two hours. Regardless of their duration, interviews were always conducted in either Tigrinya or English (or a combination of the two), which are two of Eritrea’s three national working languages. Handwritten notes were taken during all interviews, with transcription conducted shortly afterward, either on the exact same day or several days after. This approach was applied in order to minimize the risk of errors and ensure the highest possible degree of accuracy and detail (Newing 2011).

Utilizing anonymous survey questionnaires, which are commonly used to measure the attitudes and behaviours of people (Cannon et al. 2022; Halperin and Heath 2016), additional data was collected from a total of 371 individuals from different parts of Eritrea. The respondents were again selected through the use of convenience and snowball sampling techniques, with informed verbal consent being obtained from all respondents prior to the distribution of surveys. As with the rest of the process of data collection, no incentives, benefits, prizes, or awards – financial, material, or other – were provided or offered to potential respondents for their participation. This helped to ensure that responses were driven by genuine opinion, rather than external motivations, which could have skewed the book’s findings.

The development of the cross-sectional questionnaire was guided by prior empirical work and a series of past public surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center and Afrobarometer. Based in the United States (US), the Pew Research Center, an independent research center and fact tank, has conducted a huge amount of global public opinion polling on an array of issues, including views about China (Silver et al. 2019; 2023; 2024; Wike et al. 2014; 2015), while Afrobarometer is a non-partisan, pan-African research institution that has carried out numerous public attitude surveys on a range of topics in many

African countries, including local perceptions about China (Lekorwe et al. 2016; Sanny and Selormey 2021).³ Guiding and aligning the current survey with past public surveys helped to ensure that the data collected in Eritrea could be contextualized within broader regional trends, enabling meaningful comparisons and drawing out both commonalities and divergences in opinion.

Inter alia, the current questionnaire covered a range of demographic items, as well as explored respondents' general perceptions about China and its engagement across different sectors and domains in the country. In order to ensure high levels of clarity and comfort for respondents, it was translated into the three national working languages of Eritrea – Tigrinya, English, and Arabic – and respondents were offered questionnaires to complete in the language of their choice. This allowed for a more inclusive approach that accommodated linguistic diversity and minimized barriers to participation.

Interviews and surveys were complemented by numerous informal conversations and small focus group discussions with various locals. Notably, focus groups are practical and effective as they can reveal “how several people work out a common view, or the range of views, about some topic” (Fielding 1993: 141). Moreover, the utilization of focus groups helps to stimulate fruitful discussion and bring to the surface locals' responses and perspectives about China that otherwise might lay dormant or uninvestigated. For example, participants, on the basis of engaging with others, may be able to articulate more clearly their thoughts, views, and experiences than they otherwise might if interviewed alone (Babbie 2007: 308). On several occasions during small group conversations and discussions, the ideas and points raised by one participant served to spur others to share their own views and observations.

³Pew describes itself as, “a non-partisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world.” It conducts public opinion polling, demographic research, media content analysis, and other empirical social science research (Pew Research Center 2024). Afrobarometer, which has its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, is a pan-African, independent, non-partisan research network that measures public attitudes on economic, political, and social matters in Africa through conducting regular face-to-face interviews. Encompassing more than 30 national partners responsible for data collection, analysis, and in-country dissemination of findings, Afrobarometer is widely regarded as the world's leading source of high-quality, reliable data on what Africans are thinking (Afrobarometer 2024).

Alongside all of the above, the book is also informed by a comprehensive review of the general literature and a close examination of numerous materials collected from an assortment of sources (e.g., regional or global institutions, non-governmental organizations, government offices and ministries, local libraries, etc.), public open access databases, various secondary data sources, and digital archives (Boslaugh 2007; Snyder 2019; Vartanian 2011). Some of the documents and materials examined, both in English and other relevant languages (such as Tigrinya), include books, datasets, general reports and reviews (such as from the China Business Council in Eritrea), websites, newsletters and newspapers, government press releases or statements, government planning documents and publications, and countless research articles in leading peer-reviewed academic journals available from electronic academic databases (e.g., EBSCO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Lexis-Nexis, ScienceDirect, Scopus, etc.) or general online searches (which helps to promote breadth and ensure the inclusion of relevant information, resources, and knowledge that are not always indexed within academic databases).

In order to better understand their shared interests, common foreign policy preferences, and general views, particularly within the international system and on a range of key global issues, China and Eritrea's voting records for resolutions adopted by vote within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) were reviewed through accessing the United Nations (UN) Dag Hammarskjöld Library.⁴ Comprising all UN member states – 193 in total – the UNGA is the only universally representative body of the UN and is its main policymaking organ.⁵ The UNGA convenes frequently to provide a unique multilateral platform to discuss, debate, and attempt to resolve a range of issues of significant importance to the international community, ranging from development and disarmament to human rights, international law, international peace, and security. Each of the organization's member states holds equal status with a single, equivalent vote. Unlike other UN organs and bodies, or various different international organizations, there are no vetoes or weighted representation.

⁴Founded in 1946, the library offers access to UN documents and publications, materials related to the organization's programs and activities, voting data, speeches, maps, countless open access publications, and a plethora of other items and resources.

⁵The other prominent bodies within the UN include the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice.

Through a careful, methodical process, original data was gathered from the UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library and then compiled to construct a novel dataset that records the votes of China and Eritrea on a total of 2230 UNGA resolutions adopted between the years 1993 and 2024.⁶ For the individual resolutions, each vote cast is recorded into one of the following categories: yea, abstain, nay, and absent. Subsequently, their respective voting records can be compared and contrasted to provide a deeper, more comprehensive understanding about the two countries' foreign policy proximity and shared preferences.

A review paper published by the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, based at the University of Denver, explains that the UNGA has,

“...taken on a role as an outlet for all states to indicate their preferences relating to global events and issues. Unlike the smaller and objectively more powerful United Nations Security Council, the UNGA’s rules stipulate that each state has one vote, with none possessing veto powers or weighted representation. As such, the votes of states in this organ of the United Nations have become a useful metric for study as a measurement of their international alignment in geo-politics” (UD 2019: 2).

The US Department of State, which leads the nation on foreign policy issues, has also recognized the valuable insights provided by exploring UNGA voting patterns, reporting that,

“Annual review of UN voting patterns and practices provide the Congress with a reliable, systematic basis for assessing the attitudes, the policies and the decisions of UN members on the questions that come before the UN General Assembly and Security Council. They provide reliable evidence of what has happened on issues of importance to us. From this evidence, it is possible to make judgments about whose values and views are harmonious with our own, whose policies are consistently opposed to ours, and whose practices fall in between. Beyond views and values lie interests – often vital interests. So it is important that the Congress take due note of actions which are consistent with, or are opposed to, vital US interests” (US Department of State 1985: 2).

⁶There was a total of 2535 UNGA resolutions adopted by vote during the period. Following review, 2230 were included in the dataset for analysis. The period, of course, extends from when Eritrea was first formally admitted into the UN as a member until present (or when the book went to press).

Over the years, as a result of the prominent global stature of the UNGA, alongside the importance of votes and the availability of clear, updated records, a vast and rich body of scholarly work has emerged examining the voting patterns and congruence among countries within the UNGA to assess the similarity or general alignment of their preferences, views, and interests. Generally, countries exhibiting similar voting records are considered to have greater alignment on foreign policy preferences (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2017; Dreher and Jensen 2013; Gartzke 1998; Hanania 2018; Kegley and Hoock 1991; Khan 2020; Kim and Russett 1996; Palmer, Wohlander, and Morgan 2002; Potrafke 2009; Thacker 1999; UD 2019; Voeten 2000; 2013; Zimmermann 1993).

Last, my own years of extensive research and analytical work focused on China's engagement with Eritrea, and interactions with Africa more broadly, have served to strengthen and inform this book. This research and investigative work include conducting and authoring a number of empirical studies published in international peer-reviewed journals, as well as commentaries, analyses, opinion pieces, and interviews featured within global public facing outlets and media within both China and Eritrea.

Additionally, in the process of preparing and drafting the book, I participated in round tables, attended policy seminars and briefings, and delivered presentations at a number of international conferences and fora focused on different dimensions of China-Africa relations,⁷ as well as traveled to several cities and provinces, businesses, historic sites, and museums in China. Collectively, these provided special access to a wealth of

⁷These include: the 13th China-Africa Think Tanks Forum (CATTF), organized by the Institute of African Affairs of Zhejiang Normal University and convened in Dar es Salaam in March 2024; the 7th China-Africa People's Forum, held in Changsha in July 2024 and organized jointly by the International Department of the CPC Central Committee and the CPC Hunan Provincial Committee; the China-Africa Media and Think Tank Exchanges Forum, held in Changsha in July 2024 and jointly organized by the China Economic Information Service, the International Department of the CPC Central Committee, and the CPC Hunan Provincial Committee; the China-Africa Green Development and Environmental Protection Forum, held in Chenzhou in July 2024 and organized by the Chenzhou Environmental Protection Bureau, the Chenzhou Municipal Party Committee of the CPC, the China Association for NGO Cooperation, and the Peaceland Foundation; and the China-Africa Belt and Road Initiative Status Quo and Prospects Conference, held in Beijing in July 2024 and jointly organized by the China Center for Contemporary World Studies and the International Department of the CPC Central Committee.

information.⁸ They also offered unique and extremely valuable opportunities to exchange ideas and constructively engage with respected scholars and academicians, government officials, strategists, and policymakers, professionals and experts, journalists and members of the media, and individuals from the private sector, among others, from China and dozens of African countries. In addition to refining my understanding of China-Africa history and engagement, these opportunities allowed me to gain new awareness, accrue rich, deep insights about various dynamics of the relationship, and dispel lingering misconceptions.

Data analysis is based on data triangulation, which is an approach for obtaining, comparing, and contrasting evidence and data collected through multiple methods and from a wide range of data sources (Carter et al. 2014; Creswell and Miller 2000; Denzin 1978; Fusch, Fusch, and Ness 2018; Yin 2003). While triangulation can prove to be both time-consuming and quite complex, it also retains many significant benefits and advantages. Specifically, relying on multiple sources of data allows for the convergence of various lines of inquiry, strengthens validity and credibility, can help to address blind spots and obviate biases, and is important in gaining cumulative insights and acquiring a broader, richer, and more comprehensive perspective and understanding of China-Eritrea engagement (Bryman 1988; Creswell and Miller 2000; Jick 1979; Noble and Heale 2019; Yin 2003).⁹ Ultimately, the use of triangulation increases the interpretative potential of a study and, in the words of Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh, it is an effective means to achieve, “a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation” (1996: 117).

⁸One especially valuable resource was the CPC Museum, based in Beijing, which provided rich historical information and context.

⁹An increasingly popular and widely-accepted approach within a number of field and disciplines, triangulation, as a general concept, may be traced back to the ancient civilizations in Egypt and Greece, with longtime applications also apparent in navigation and land surveying. Notably, there are several different types of triangulation that researchers may utilize (Carter et al. 2014; Denzin 1978).