

Subnational Relations between Africa and China: A Constructivist Perspective

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Chair: Nyamadzawo Sibanda

Format: Hybrid at SG2

In the broad scheme of what has come to be known as the “China in Africa” discourse, analysis mainly centres on the agency on state actors, a bias that Patrick Chabal called “Big Men” analysis of African politics. This leaves out two important developments; the first is that Africa-China relations are no longer the preserve of state actors. China’s presence in Africa has become more complex and varied, thereby necessitating analysis of what is meant by ‘China’ in Africa. Secondly, in countries where electoral democracy has been appreciably entrenched, African governments and their opposition are likely to heed or entertain the views of their citizens on their respective countries’ relations with China. Using constructivism as a theoretical prism, this presentation analyses the increasingly salient relations between African and Chinese subnational actors. The case studies sampled are South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, three countries with different histories with China, and different political profiles from democracy to authoritarianism.