

## When China Met Africa

Directed by Marc and Nick Francis. 2010. 75 minutes & 60 minutes (for classrooms). In English and Chinese, with English subtitles and SDH captions



## SUBVERSES China In Mozambique

Directed by Ella Raidel. 2011. 45 minutes.  
In English, Portuguese and Chinese, with English subtitles.



*Study areas: Africa and Asia, International Studies, Globalization, Colonialism, Anthropology, Economics and Business*

When Hillary Clinton criticized China for its "new colonialism in Africa" last summer, was she indicating the U.S. government's hitherto ignorance of China's "foreign assistance" that exported rice and railways, along with communism, to "liberate" the continent early in Mao's era (1949-1976)? Or was she simply expressing her frustration

## In This Section:

- Newsletters
- Lesson Plans
- List of K-12 Resources
- Online Film Reviews
- > Light Up Nippon
- > The Fruit of Our Labor: Afghan Perspectives in Film
- > When China Met Africa
- > SUBVERSES China in Mozambique
- > Beijing Besieged By Waste
- > Shielding the Mountains
- > Lessons of the Loess Plateau
- > Can't Go Native; Conversations In Mizusawa; More About Mizusawa
- > Bored In Heaven
- > Though I Am Gone
- > Children of Hangzhou
- > The Water Cries
- > Shugendō Now
- > The Fall of Womenland
- > The Sweetest Embrace: Return to Afghanistan
- > Laos: So You Think The War Is Over
- > Dishonored
- > China: Empire of Art?
- > From Jean-Paul Sartre to Teresa Teng
- > Last Train Home
- > Mongolia: Thirty Years Later
- > Burma VJ
- > Japanland
- > Song Of Tibet
- > The Search
- > Summer Pasture
- > Unmistaken Child
- > 1428
- > Shipbreakers
- > Journey of a Red Fridge
- > To Tell the Truth: The Liu Binyan Story
- > Essay: Teaching Chinese History in the Women of Chinese Cinema
- > The Trash Trade
- > Citizen Dog

over the railings of the African Growth and Opportunity Act in trading American goods for Africa oil? Competing with American post-Cold War hegemony, China's expanding footprint in Africa is both a twenty-first century continuation of the European-model of colonialism as well as a modern revival of the imperial Chinese tributary system—be it the Han, Tang or Qing empire—as exemplified in its present-day international hunt for energy and natural resources.

The U.S. Secretary of State's castigation of China was made during a pan-African television interview in Zambia, a landlocked republic in southern Africa and the story setting of *When China Met Africa*. Winner of the best filmmaker award at the Margaret Mead Film Festival, the British documentary puts together three stories: a Chinese office worker's dream of becoming a landlord planning to buy his fourth farm; a Chinese project manager's unfulfilled mission (due to the Zambian government's funding problem) to resurface the Tuta road; and the Zambian trade minister's trip to China to solicit investments in mining, real estate and tourism.

The film begins with a scene of the 2006 China-Africa summit in Beijing interpolated with the filmmakers' statement: "Despite decades of Western influence and aid, Africa still remains the poorest continent in the world. In recent years Africa governments have been welcoming billions of dollars of loans and investment from China...." Does this statement naively assume that colonialism was actually for the benefit of colonies? What seems hoped for is that China will have the alchemies to transform Zambia's poverty into prosperity, and that this will somehow arise from the sights and sounds, seen and heard throughout the film, of hoes scraping, sprinklers spraying, drills whirring, phones and trucks beeping, brakes and machines hissing, engines roaring and rumbling, tools buzzing and clanking.

After high-level negotiations are over, is the Sino-Zambian "cooperation" truly a "win-win development"? For instance, it seems that those who really care about the oil spilt from a worksite are the African employees who attempt to collect and reuse it with various containers and even with their hands, but not their Chinese bosses who only want to cover it up with soil. Ironically, although China is the emerging colonizer, and with Mao's cursive calligraphy of a Tang-dynasty poem dominating the Minister's Lusaka office, English remains the metropolitan language spoken by both the former British subjects and the Chinese to communicate with each other. It is in the master code of English that the Zambian farm laborers complain about the arrears with salary, that the road workers grumble about the lunch provided and the lack of respect and trust by the Chinese, and that the Chinese employers, with a heavy accent and numerous grammatical mistakes, command them to work as hard as—in the word of a Zambian—"bulldozers."

More concrete complaints about Chinese exploitations in Africa are found in *SUBVERSES China in Mozambique* through the subversive voices of construction workers, slam poets, and the Chinese diaspora living in a neighboring country southeast of Zambia. While the workers reveal their hardships and low income, the poets enrich the film with a poetic hue, turning the documentary into the blues of modern Mozambicans. As the Zimpeto National Football Stadium and the new airport in Maputo are built with funds from the Chinese government, not only is corruption built into the routine of the Mozambican bureaucrats and society, but a new segregation of blacks and yellows is also established. The local workers are treated unequally by the Chinese companies (one of which is the infamous China Henan International, also featured in the aforementioned film), paid only 30-40 Euro (\$39-52) per month, dismissed arbitrarily, and even killed by the police during a strike.

Beginning with the music of the *huqin*, a traditional Chinese two-stringed bowed instrument, and the voice of a young Chinese working in the ex-colony of Portugal, Ella Raidel's independent film is beautifully made. The silent stills of individual Mozambican and Chinese workers cutting into the former's grievances are quietly powerful; the poems performed in the alley and graveyard are, to quote the poet Pha Teca-Teca's own lines, "touching, as if they would be the last rose leaf." Finally, "the stadium there

is already finished," says a spokesman of the National Workers Association, "but it left a lot of pain." So the documentary ends in the disturbing, provocative verse by Raimundo, who describes his people "dead and frozen," defines globalization as "some kind of mental colonization," and declares: "And in the struggle about ungovernability / we die—but we stand up again / we never stay dead." The documentary is artistically

> Out of the Poison Tree  
> Transnational Tradeswomen  
> Eating the Scorpion  
> Gone to Pat/Surviving Chau  
Website Reviews  
Notes From the Classroom  
Interviews

the air – but he stands up again, he never lets go. The documentary is graciously presented with passion and solicitude.

Pedagogically speaking, both films are highly recommended for area studies of Africa and Asia, international studies, globalization, colonialism, anthropology, economics and business, while *SUBVERSES* can also be used in a classroom to teach about contemporary African literature.

After Asia, Africa—"the last market in the world" as reported in a Chinese newspaper—is inhabited by the last people still to be "sustainably" enslaved.

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**When China Met Africa** is distributed by Bullfrog Films.

DVD Purchase:\$295.00; Rental:\$95.00

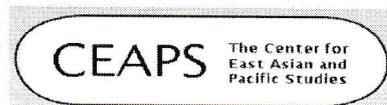
Includes institutional public performance rights where no admission is being charged.

The official website: <http://whenchinametafrica.com>

**SUBVERSES China in Mozambique** is distributed by Sixpack Film.

DVD Purchase: 160 EUR

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