

REVIEW ARTICLE

## China and Taiwan in Africa: The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition and Hegemony, ed. Sabella O. Abidde, Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2022, pp. 301.

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### Taiwan Politics

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China and Taiwan in Africa: The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition and Hegemony is a 301-page book, edited by Sabella O. Abidde, a professor of Political Science from Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama. It is a collection of chapters, written by an assemblage of scholars, drawn from diverse academic fields, plying their trades at different universities. In all, it comprises fourteen chapters, organized into three broad parts, and includes a well-crafted introduction where the editor lays bare the *raison d'être* for the book, as well as the core arguments of the various chapters.

In the last few years, China (PRC) and Taiwan (ROC) have stepped up their contestation for diplomatic visibility across various regions of the world. This has been all the more so in Africa, where the two rivals have deployed all manner of tactics and strategies to court African countries to induce them to join their respective sides. Normally, perhaps, the imperative to engage issues involved with the two international actors' contestation for recognition in Africa, in recent times, should herald a proliferation of books on the subject. The book under review is one such.

*China and Taiwan in Africa: The Struggle for Diplomatic Recognition and Hegemony* is a 301-page book, edited by Sabella O. Abidde, a professor of Political Science from Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama. It is a collection of chapters, written by an assemblage of scholars, drawn from diverse academic fields, plying their trades at different universities. In all, it comprises fourteen chapters, organized into three broad parts, and includes a well-crafted introduction where the editor lays bare the *raison d'être* for the book, as well as the core arguments of the various chapters.

The first part (pp. 3–84) contains five chapters. In the opening chapter, Mercy Kathambi Kaburu and Alex Njenga Kabia lay the conceptual foundation for the book. Relying on extant theoretical literature on the concepts of sovereignty and international recognition, the authors attempt to bring to light the challenges that Taiwan, unlike China, has faced in its quest to achieve diplomatic recognition, most especially in Africa. Next, while

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Raffaele Cazzola Hofmann explores the historical trajectories of Beijing's forays in Africa from 1949 to 1970, Hsuan Yu Shane Lin, Charles K.S. Wu, and Yao Yuan Yeh frame cross-strait relations, within the context of ideological cum strategic brinkmanship between Washington and Beijing, during the Cold War. Interestingly, a similar trajectory of arguments appears to dominate Shan-Son Kung's fourth chapter. Specifically, his contention is that the ideological politics of the Cold War shaped the character of cross-strait relations. Even though slightly different in terms of cases, issues of strategic interest calculations are equally the focus of the concluding chapter of Part One, authored by Tony Tai-Ting Liu. Focusing on Japan-China-Taiwan relations, the author contends that Tokyo's policies towards Taiwan and China have been shaped by its strategic interests at a particular point in time.

Part Two of the book (pp. 87–157) contains four chapters. It opens with Athina Moraiti's Chapter Six, which dwells on China's foreign policy engagements with Africa from 1949 to 1971. Specifically, Moraiti contends that Mao Zedong, the revolutionary leader of China, deployed anti-colonial sentiments and the platform of the non-alignment movement to woo African countries to the side of Beijing. As Moraiti puts it on p. 93, "Chinese officials recognized that, with its *[sic]* numerical advantage in the UN General Assembly and anti-colonial perspective, independent African states held the key to removing the Republic of China from its status as the occupant of the coveted permanent seat on the UN Security Council." To be sure, the connecting thread of the arguments of the authors in Part Two would appear to be that Taiwan, since losing its seat at the UN in 1971, has adopted various strategies, including para-diplomacy, to gain recognition. Yet, minimal results would seem to have been achieved, courtesy of Beijing's ascendancy in Africa and in global relations generally. For instance, as regards the World Health Organization (WHO), Chun-Yi Lee and Jinpeng Ma, in Chapter Eight, p. 141, write, "under the influence of political preferences and core interests, Beijing's top priority is to ensure that its position in the WHO is not challenged by Taipei."

Part Three (pp. 161–272), titled "Pragmatic Diplomacy and Shifting Allegiances," has five chapters. While Cassandra R. Veney's Chapter Ten, drawing from the experiences of Senegal and Nigeria, attempts to explain the switching of sides of African countries in response to China-Taiwan diplomatic contestation in Africa, Charmaine Pretorius' Chapter Eleven discusses the dilemma faced by Dr. Nelson Mandela and his party, the African National Congress (ANC), in dealing with China and Taiwan in post-apartheid South Africa. Most certainly, what can be gleaned from those two chapters and the following Chapter Twelve, authored by Maria Adele Carrai, is that prior to China's ascendancy in the global power equation, Taiwan, courtesy of "checkbook diplomacy," enjoyed the diplomatic support of many African countries; however, with the increasing economic penetration of

China into Africa, Taipei's diplomatic influence waned. In the words of Carrai on p. 206, "The new wave of African recognition of the One-China policy was due to the PRC's increased economic importance." From a slightly different perspective, Bhaso Ndzendze, in the thirteenth chapter, frames China-Taiwan diplomatic contestation in Africa through the lens of democracy and electoral competitiveness. Drawing from seven country case studies, the author submits that democratization and electoral competitiveness in African states, in recent times, have led to the recognition of China. In the last chapter of the book, the editor, Sabella Abidde, discusses US-China-Taiwan relations through the lens of military capabilities and alliances. He submits that despite the verbal brinkmanship among the leaders of the US, China, and Taiwan, in recent times, there is unlikely to be a military confrontation between Beijing and Taipei.

Overall, there is no doubt that the book under review is a worthy contribution to the burgeoning literature on China-Taiwan-Africa relations. Each of the chapters, organically arranged, chronicles and examines core issues in the two actors' quest for diplomatic visibility in Africa. Another beauty of the book can be discerned in the manner in which the contributors deploy historical evidence to support their arguments. Few of the contributors would appear to have forgotten the imperative of anchoring the vast historical evidence within broader theoretical contexts, but the occasional such oversight robs a few of the chapters of the necessary theoretical arsenal that would have further enriched the discourses in the book. Also, since the thrust of the book is fundamentally Africa, all the chapters ought to have captured African cases. Off scope, Chapters Five, Eight, and Fourteen of the book dwelt on issues not related to Africa. This is a major methodological issue that should be addressed in the revised edition of the book. In sum, the book is a historically -grounded masterpiece that should be a pocket companion to students of History, Political Science, International Relations, and African Studies generally, as well as those particularly interested in China-Taiwan-Africa relations.

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