



## THE PORTRAYAL OF NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTS IN CHINESE PEOPLE IN AFRICA

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the television documentary *Chinese People in Africa* (2016), as part of the official Chinese efforts to enhance China's image in media and communication, for both the domestic and the international audiences. The determined, hard-working, self-relying individuals engaged in wild life conservation, peace-keeping, non-governmental organization service etc., offer typical neoliberal subject figures that reform-era China up till the 2010s tries to make of Chinese citizens. To the extent that the show's value orientation fails to register the leftward ideological turn ensued by an actual leadership power transfer well before the show's production, the documentary is also a good example of ideological tenacity in the field of cultural production.

**KEYWORDS:** Africa, China, ideology, media, neoliberal subjectivity



## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the People's Republic of China (PRC) entered the epoch of Reform and Opening-up, television documentary has grown into an important way of communication. China watchers outside the country tend to dismiss the genre as "communist Party-state propaganda". Such simplistic interpretation reflects an inadequate understanding of both the nature of the reform and that of the media in China, and therefore misses the rich potential of studying reform China through cultural production. In fact, the trajectory of the Chinese reform has been largely in the neoliberal vein. When the PRC under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) embarked on reform at the end of the 1970s with the ultimate goal of "redressing the country to the status of great power", the "world mainstream" China joined was a neoliberal capitalism going global. The Chinese system, far from being a sclerosis, proves to be highly flexible and adaptive. It weathered a crisis of "color revolution" *avant la lettre* in 1989, to continue the reform for the next two decades. With the access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the country in the new millennium engaged full throttle in neoliberal-style developmentalism. After the top power transfer in 2012 at the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the Chinese government tried to rein in what were considered neoliberal excesses, and in 2017 at the 19th National Congress of the CPC, it was declared the country entered a "new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics".

It is undeniable that in terms of ideology, for the Chinese population from top Party leadership down to the masses, the reform and opening-up premised on a shift from revolutionary radicalism to a doctrine of modernization modeled on the Western world (Latham, 2000). In the "cultural ecosystem" dominating meaning production in the reform era (Zhong, 2010), the academic, media, and industrial elites have been, from the very start, more unanimously liberal than the political elite split into factions. Those who verdict that media in China are "throat and tongue of the state" would be less wrong if they recognized at the same time that the Chinese state, although not necessarily a "neoliberal state", is unmistakably a "market state" whose forging articulates with neoliberal development in an era of globalization and information technology-driven accumulation (Zhao, 2008). In China the media are actually often in tension vis-à-vis an orthodox-sounding official rhetoric, sometimes walking a tightrope between established guidelines and personal tendencies. It should be kept in mind that, it was the Chinese Central Television Station (CCTV), the country's biggest public TV and part of the state media apparatus par excellence, that aired in 1988 *River Elegy*, a "documentary of political commentary" as the piece called itself, whose radical negation of the Chinese socialist experience played a role of catalyst in the regime crisis aforementioned. After the Tian'anmen incident in 1989, a campaign of condemnation of the show was organized nationwide, but no "purge" of the personnel happened. Xia Jun, the documentary's twenty-seven-year-old director, continued to work at the CCTV, contrary to what many expected. The television network went through more liberal-leaning reform in the 1990s to become in the early 2000s a bastion of neoliberalism. In 2010, when the world was still suffering the ramifications of the 2008 financial tsunami, the CCTV produced and broadcast two documentaries, *Wall Street* and *Story of the Company*, singing praise for the financial sector. In 2011, the CCTV-9, a channel for documentaries exclusively, was launched. The following year, the channel's star show *A Bite of China* became a domestic hit with some international success, boosting the media elite's ambition of "going out" for a world audience. But as I argued elsewhere, *A Bite of China* marks the apogee of neoliberal value orientation in that the "cultural China" it constructs excludes all the major geographic



regions which had been bases of the communist revolution leading to the establishment of the PRC (Meng, 2020). Such mindset of the media elite as represented in the show could explain why, right after the leadership change with Xi Jinping elected secretary general of the CPC at the end of 2012, then President of the PRC at the beginning of 2013, an exodus took place in the media and communication milieu especially in major outlets like the Xinhua Agency and the CCTV. Many journalists, anchors and media practitioners, unable or unwilling to follow what they considered an abrupt leftward turn in ideology, quitted their job. Those who chose to stay had a hard time mastering the newest version of national revival rhetoric.

In this paper I analyze *Chinese People in Africa*, a CCTV documentary broadcast in 2016, to illustrate that, three years into the Xi Jinping administration, ideological orientation of official media products remain tenaciously neoliberal. The six-episode program, which presents Chinese nationals involved in a variety of activities in African countries, can be seen as part of the strategic efforts of enhancing China's image in media and communication for both domestic and international audiences. I categorize the characters featured in the documentary, positive and praiseworthy for the platform of the CCTV, obviously, into three types of neoliberal subjects, each type incorporating a certain set of neoliberal values. In part one, I argue that figures working in wildlife protection, non-governmental organization, and education, domains usually less associated with Chinese people, are valued as brave individuals who followed their heart to lead a life of their choice. However, the show obscures the mimetic nature of these idealized engagements. In part two, I summarize the qualities the show puts forward as keys to success in business, such as self-reliance, risk-taking and acute entrepreneurship, and point out that some practice and behavior reported in the show are in fact on the edge of the law. In part three, I analyze the ways in which the Chinese expats appear as professionals engaged in management of war, disease, poverty as well as in manufacture. Such representation inscribes the Chinese intervention into the Western rhetoric of humanitarian aid, glossing over local labor disputes caused by neoliberal policies. The paper draws the conclusion that the documentary *Chinese People in Africa* is very much in the spirit of the previous era when neoliberalism reigned supreme in cultural and intellectual spheres in mainland China.

## DREAMERS: DIY FASHIONING

*Chinese People in Africa* features prominently characters in activities usually not associated with Chinese, in order to emphasize on the “newness” of their presence in Africa. The opening episode focuses on two figures in Kenya: Zhuo Qiang, aka Simba, who works in wild life conservation, and Huang Hongxiang, a young man founder of China House, an NGO in consulting. Episode five tells the story of Wang Lihong, a Beijing-born woman married to a Uganda man. The documentary sets them up as exemplary neoliberal subjects into which the reform China strives to turn its citizens. During the neoliberal transformation, people are expected to rely on themselves in their life-building process, and the individual lives through a do-it-yourself biographical process, a self-reflexive and unscripted way of life (Beck, 1992: 135-137). He or she need to learn about, calculate, and cope with the new possibilities, uncertainties, risks, and consequences brought about by the new neoliberal conditions of living (Ren, 2012: 18-19). Zhuo, Huang, and Wang illustrate this DIY fashioning in the sense that they made voluntary choices concerning their life. All three left behind predictable career path and home comfort, to go out of routine. They are meant to



impress the audience as strong-willed, daring individuals who pursue their dream adamantly till its fulfillment.

However, a closer look reveals fissures on the portrayal of these figures. They conform no doubt to the individualization process in which the new forms of the Chinese self are empowered to take on affects, desires, and activisms (Yan, 2010: 509). But radical atomization of the self is not without problems, so much so that the characters end up being ambivalent about their life choice. At the beginning of episode one, the wild life conservation guy, forty-one-year-old Simba tells the audience: “the first time I saw all this, I was like electrified. I had seen this in my dream. More than once. Exactly the same scene. Lions, giraffes, trees.” But further into the episode, Simba confesses that he missed out on his duty of spouse and father. When he first told his wife his plan for Africa, she wondered about his mental health. Simba departed anyway, leaving behind his wife and baby daughter. Looking back, he expresses regret for being too absent while his daughter grows up. Huang Hongxiang and Wang Lihong neglected their filial piety if judged in traditional Chinese values. With a master’s degree from Columbia University, Huang, as he says himself, “could have gone working on Wall Street”, but chose the non-governmental sector instead, far away from home. Wang followed her husband despite her mother’s disagreement. The characters’ self-realization is accomplished at the expense of their family’s interests, and their happiness demands the latter’s sacrifice. The gratification of these atomized existences is therefore tainted by remorse or even a sense of guilt, and the DIY fashioning becomes less attractive, consequently.

Furthermore, the very content of the characters’ “African dreams” turns out to be not as original as they first appear, but part of an “international mainstream” that reform China aimed to join. The activities in which Simba, Huang and Wang engage themselves tout environmental consciousness, biodiversity, non-governmental aid, pursuit of personal happiness etc., that is, typical Western liberal values. The characters thus incarnate the “catching up mentality” of the reform, for which success means “to be like the West”. Simba recounts how, in a meeting, his attendance surprised those present, and his speech “received far less applause than others”, experience that motivated him, as he says, to continue his cause and “prove that we Chinese can also do well in a monopoly of Euro-American whites”. Huang risks his personal security to conduct undercover investigation on ivory smuggling, in order to let know that although some Chinese did the wrong thing, there are indeed “good Chinese guys” fighting illegal ivory trade in Africa. To the extent that the characters insist on breaking into previously exclusive clubs to become peers of Westerners, they walk in some else’s footsteps; despite their sincerity and heroic gesture, their behavior is fundamentally mimetic, their “innovative” enterprise would be conventional, even banal, in the “advanced world” that China emulates. Unconscious of the ideological dimension of their cause, the neoliberal subjects in the show tend to be blind of the limitations of their engagement, and stumble into pitfalls thereof easily. For instance, Simba patrolling the national park once has to deal with a family who poisoned lions under protection. The father argues that lions attacked and ate his oxen, a major income source for the family, which makes it difficult to pay for his children’s schooling. Simba’s insensitivity to the plight of the family chief illustrates the way in which Western liberal environmentalism often affects local people’s livelihood negatively, but both Simba the character and the show’s producers seem to be unaware of the hypocrisy of such rhetoric.



Thirdly, it may be understandable that a television program like *Chinese People in Africa*, for the desired effect of communication, shows on screen rather positive and upward trajectories of the neoliberal DIY biographical process, but, by obscuring the characters' economic conditions essential to sustain their non-conventional dreams, the documentary offers only an incomplete picture. The environmentalist Simba, the NGO founder Huang Hongxiang and the housewife-turned-school principal Wang Lihong are living examples of neoliberal subjects who "hold their destiny in their own hands", overcome obstacles before gaining autonomy. All three assume middle-class careers par excellence, making them representatives of the emerging Chinese middle class, social group with rising economic power as well as political and cultural significance. What the show does not tell the audience, is that passion and hard work alone are insufficient; not everyone can afford the characters' way of life because the latter are more or less endowed to begin with. Simba's foundation receives generous financial support from charities. Wang met her Ugandan husband, Suma, when he was a foreign student at Tsinghua University back in the 1990s, at that time African students in China were almost always children of high government officials of their country of origin. Later in the show Suma's father appears as a tribal patriarch, whose status may have helped his daughter-in-law's career advancement. Without denying the importance of personal agency, one has to admit that the outcome of DIY fashioning is largely conditioned by and contingent of socioeconomic backgrounds.

### **BOSSSES: ENTERPRENEURSHIP**

Business people constitute an important group of figures in the documentary. The decade following China's adhesion to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, which corresponds to Hu Jintao's presidency from 2002 to 2012, witnessed China's becoming the number one trade partner of many African countries as the Sino-African trade leaped forward greatly. *Chinese People in Africa* pays individual-centered attention to those who made their fortune in the continent of opportunity. The representation of the unapologetic pursuit of money in the show is very much in line with the priority given to economic development and the promotion of entrepreneur spirit during the time period in China. The bosses in the show come from a variety of business fields such as retailing, e-commerce, banking, media and communication, etc. Viewers see them enjoy material comfort and high social status. You Jingshu, for instance, a banker in Uganda, lives with his wife in an 8000-square-meters mansion among eight local servants. Success gives these people a sense of belonging to Africa, just as Li Xinfeng, director of a local chamber of commerce in Zimbabwe, says to the camera: "many [Chinese] came here initially with the idea that they would just make money and leave, but instead they ended up falling in love with this land to become true members of their communities".

In the documentary, these entrepreneurial subjects who followed the neoliberal norm of economic rationalism (Ren, 2012: 99) serve as examples to illustrate recipes for business success in the age of globalization. Entrepreneurship means above all an acute business flair which drives one to find the right thing to invest in at the right time. Episode six tells the story of Pang Xinxing, founder of Star Times, a media company. As early as 2002, Pang turned to Africa for business expansion, a market he believed to have great potential for television and broadcasting. Star Times did grow into a media kingdom, covering the entire continent with digital television at low cost. Liao Xuhui and Fu Ruiqiang, business partners



in e-commerce, launched their online platform, Amanbo, in 2015, which allowed them to take a front seat in a sector that was going to thrive in Africa. When it comes to seizing opportunity, alertness of the mind values more than education. The banker You Jingshu, originally from Fujian province, had not even finished middle school. When a friend borrowed money from him and paid back with an interest rate of 20%, You, who had gone through quite some hardship in his overseas adventure, “finally seized his opportunity”, as the show’s narrator says. In addition, compared to perseverance, the neoliberal logic calls for flexibility, that is, the ability to adapt to fast changing conditions and shift strategy in case of failure. A figure in episode five, Li Zhaoming in Zimbabwe, has tried his chance in construction then auto repair with mediocre results. At the end of the interview Li claims to have thought of a new business plan that he slyly refuses to disclose: “I can’t tell you now. It has to be a secret. I’m the only one to see it, no other people do. That’s what makes it a good idea.” Although the show takes for granted neoliberal subjects’ desire for success in the highly competitive business world, the struggling Li family could leave the audience wondering about adverse consequences that the pressure to achieve at any cost may have on people’s ultimate well-being.

To the extent that *Chinese People in Africa* espouses the rationale of neoliberal functioning, a critical perspective is needed to discover not-so-positive impacts of some business practice on the local level. In episode five, a prosperous store owner comments on his patrons: “they have very good spending habits. They don’t save money. Very good spending habits.” The wholehearted praise of customer spending betrays a neoliberal subjectivity for whom consumption fuels the economy. The Chinese boss finds it a good thing that local people spend all their salary within a week after they get paid, it does not seem to occur to him nor to the show’s producers that the African inhabitants fall victim to blind consumerism. If according to the market logic there is nothing wrong to sell a bicycle for 75 dollars with 20 dollars of profit, as the store does, the absence of ethical concern on the part of the merchants is disquieting. The much appreciated “business-friendliness” in Africa usually means lack of regulation, therefore vulnerability to exploitative business models. Reflecting the value orientation of the Chinese cultural elite in the 2010s, the show manifests a predilection for the financial sector. The banker You Jingshu, who got his first pot of gold in high-interest small amount loans, is given much coverage. In China, during the first decade of the new century, the encouragement of consumer spending, sometimes beyond one’s means, led to a boom in banking and finance. Starting from 2012, peer-to-peer (P2P) lending soared in China, cloaked in the innovation-sounding “Internet finance”. After the top leadership transition, the Chinese government grew vigilant to the fever on financial market. In 2015, a year before *Chinese People in Africa* was aired, the first regulations on Internet finance were issued, and by the end of 2016 a large percentage of P2P lenders were shut down. It took the Chinese regulators additional years to clean up the damage caused not only on national economy but also on social stability. The documentary’s favorable treatment of high-interest banking reveals a lingering neoliberal penchant not in sync with the post-2012 official position.

Also disturbing in the portraying of successful businessmen is the latter’s relationship to the law. In reform China, neoliberal conditions encourage individuals to conduct transgressions (Ren, 2012: 97), consequently it becomes common for one to behave according to a neoliberal logic of calculation rather than observance of the law. That explains the somewhat ambivalent attitude the Chinese population have vis-à-vis personal wealth, which may have been generated not so “cleanly”. The far-away continent of Africa is a good place for an



entrepreneurial subjecthood to thrive, the show suggests, thanks to laxity in legal affairs. In episode five, a satisfied You Jingshu comments on his life in Uganda: “In China, if you are poor, people look down at you; if you are rich, people are jealous of you. Here people are happy for you. You have a sense of security.” Such “sense of security” is obtained in a quite dramatic way in the show, however. A local female employee at You’s bank learned about a robbery in the planning and reported to her boss. You contacted the police, who dispatched forces to ambush the supposed bandits on their way. Just when the latter were driving toward the bank, police officers got out and opened fire, killing most of them. What should cause concern in this anecdote is that police action did not take place in an actual robbery in medias res, but was preemptive, before any real crime was committed. In this case, law enforcement cracked down on citizens who were said to have criminal intentions, without any crime taking place and without trial. However, no one in the show seems to find such doing problematic. The least one could say is that, in true neoliberal vein, success stories in the documentary often walk a tightrope in regard to the law, creating situations where the distinction between lawfulness and unlawfulness blurs.

### **PROFESSIONALS: MANAGING THE LOCAL**

Documenting Chinese activities in Africa in the 2010s, *Chinese People in Africa* registers paradigm changing in Sino-African relationship clearly. Episode three opens with footage on the run-down Inyala station along the Tanzania-Zambia Railway, and the old, sole current employee at the station whose house full of objects from China of another time gives a museum feel. Gone is the Third-Worldism symbolized by this railway financed and built with the help of the PRC in the 1970s. In the reform era, China’s engagement with Africa shifts to the economic area and is conducted in the principle of non-interference. *Chinese People in Africa* presents overseas Chinese nationals taking managerial roles vis-à-vis local Africans, who appear as patients, refugees, apprentices and workers. The documentary tries to show its viewers that the Chinese expatriates are professionals who put their expertise to the service of people in need. The language of neoliberal universalism the program speaks unconsciously, which should not surprise, since that is exactly what makes a discourse “ideological”, leaves one wonder about what effect would be produced on domestic as well as foreign audiences, and whether it would be counterproductive to the program’s claimed objectives.

In the 2010s China continues its tradition of sending medical aid to African countries, and involves in relatively new peacekeeping operations in Africa under the aegis of the United Nations (UN). Episode four shows doctors in Zimbabwe and Guinea, and soldiers on mission in South Sudan. In assisted countries where, as the show says, “lack of medical material is worsened by poor hygiene practice”, Chinese medical staff often have to go through life-risking adventures: doctors are exposed constantly to HIV patients they operate on in Zimbabwe; Cao Guang, the first Chinese doctor to have contact with the first Ebola virus disease (EVD) patient in Conakry, Guinea, when the epidemic broke out in 2014, spent twenty-one days in anguished confinement. Tan Yijing, a cardiovascular specialist and head of medical team, is amazed at the local patients who “have only respect and gratitude for the doctor and Providence” despite their suffering. The Chinese Blue Helmets, on their side, face thorny situations in which the locals are not hapless sick bodies to take care of, but reckless mass to appease and guard. A Chinese platoon sets out for a refugee camp in South Sudan, where fights are escalating because a man of one tribe impregnated a woman of another tribe,



says the narrator. A search in the camp resulted in confiscation of rusty knives to prevent further harm done. The Western humanitarian aid rhetoric the show adopts premises stereotyped “Africans” that are tribal, impulsive and immature. The abundant images of children at play, carefree in adverse conditions and “easy to satisfy”, reinforce the tendency to infantize the assisted. Both in health care and peacekeeping, a big part of the task of the Chinese resides, the documentary appears to suggest, in getting the locals in line, to be diagnosed, to get drinking water, to enter facilities in the refugee camp, etc. Respecting the so-called strict neutrality of no interfering with other countries’ domestic affairs, the Chinese doctors and troops on mission make visible efforts to detach themselves emotionally in order to “do their job”.

*Chinese People in Africa* features cadres of state-owned enterprises (SOE) as well as private companies who are managers, supervisors or trainers to local people in various domains including agriculture, infrastructure, telecommunication, petrochemical, textile, and public transit. The role the Chinese play in these developmental activities is to teach and lead. In episode two, the managing team of the Chinese telecommunication company ZTC in Ethiopia helps the country upgrade its network from 2G to 3G. Episode three shows Zhu Fuzhi, called “Mama Zhu” at work, in charge of quality control as the authoritative manager of printing and dyeing at Friendship Textile Company in Tanzania. The title of episode two, “Gifts from the East”, suggests that the Chinese bring to Africa from afar not just technological advancement, but also, and especially, their work ethic. Under the ZTC leadership, the show says, locals “learned to be efficient and hardworking”, and consequently, what used to take one month to accomplish is now done within three to four days. In Sudan, Chinese helped build the country’s petroleum refineries and trained Sudanese workers who got out of their old way of living from day to day. Episode two also follows Wan Congxin, senior agricultural technician hired by a private Chinese agricultural company to teach rice-growing skills in great detail, getting up at 5 a.m. to work in the field with his model apprentice. For Wan, the land is richly endowed, its people “truly smart and fast learners”, all they need is an inner drive to “work one’s tail off” for a better life. Wan’s effort pays off: in three years, Wan’s apprentice gained enough to have a new house built, setting a good example for his fellow villagers. More people join Wan Congxin, they stand behind him in the field to plant rice seeds by imitating his gesture, all at the same time, like soldiers in drill. Lauding the Chinese experts’ enthusiasm, no doubt sincere, to awaken what they assume to be dormant neoliberal subjects in the local population, the show runs the risk of gliding into self-congratulation to the detriment of cultural sensitivities.

It is in managing labor in Africa that the Chinese overconfidence in neoliberalism meets some significant frustration. In episode three, the show interviews Ma Qianli, Xu Huanping, and Wu Bin, the former managing team of the Friendship Textile Company in Tanzania, where Mama Zhu works. Ma, Xu and Wu, now all retired, recall their African experience back in the 1990s and early 2000s. Though the show remains intentionally vague, an alerted Chinese viewer would be able to reconstruct the story line. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the PRC went through an arduous process of neoliberal style economic reform. The show mentions the year 1995, that was when the Chinese managing team tried to “reform” this joint-venture in Tanzania while, simultaneously, the same neoliberal logic was applied on domestic economy in order to bring efficacy and profit. Whereas in China reform was “successful” at the cost of tens of millions of workers being laid off, the Chinese tentative of replicating the operation at the Tanzanian factory was met with resistance. It can be deduced





that the local workers' union refused reform on the management's terms. The show sympathizes with these reformers, who as retirees in 2016 are nostalgic about their unfinished cause in Africa, regretting that African workers were not as "cooperative" as Chinese workers. They attribute the failure they encountered to "cultural difference", covering up the real problem, because it was in fact the local workers' refusal to comply to the neoliberal logic. Tanzanian union workers fought for fair pay and better working conditions, unlike in China where, for example, in 2002, a labor law, shortly after it was promulgated, was temporarily put "on hold" so that it would not "get in the way of economic development". The Friendship Textile Factory is of course not an isolated case. The show features another Chinese company, Colored Metals, owner of a copper mine in Luansha, Zambia, whose union secretary praises the company leadership for its willingness to listen to the workers. After negotiations, says the secretary on camera, the company management "agrees that extra hours pay is a totally different matter from salary raise." The show's producers are probably unaware what a highly awkward moment is created, when plain lawful practice is framed as gifts from a generous management.

## CONCLUSION

Dreamers, bosses, professionals: *Chinese People in Africa* delivers a gallery of typical neoliberal subjects that reform-era China up till the 2010s tries to make of Chinese citizens. With hindsight, this 2016 documentary manifests the inertia in ideological orientation when it comes to cultural production, in that it does not register the nation's overall direction change which steered away from the neoliberal roadmap after the top-level power transfer at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013. This is because the main force of Chinese elite, starting from the turn of the twenty-first century, is the generation born in the 1960s, who are deep believers in neoliberalism (Meng, 2022). In most media outlets, official or unofficial, this elite attained dominant ideological position by ignoring, marginalizing, and suppressing oppositional voices (Zhao, 2008: 294). Such predominance continues after Xi Jinping became China's new leader, given that those born in the 1960s, now in their fifties therefore constituting the pillars in their respective fields, remain in their positions. Consequently, it should not surprise that even the official media organ such as the CCTV produce a program in the neoliberal orientation more than three years into the "new era", since the staff working in media and communication do not yet have a mindset adapted to the ideological shift. More specifically concerning Africa, for instance, the continent gained additional importance in strategic status from the Chinese perspective when in 2013, the Xi Jinping administration proposed the "Belt and Road Initiative" which mobilizes both land and sea routes that connect China with other parts of the world. However, in *Chinese People in Africa*, a show that focuses on Africa, the "Belt and Road Initiative" is not mentioned even once. That the show's producers have not internalized a key concept three years after it was advanced is a telling example of how the media elite, entrenched in the neoliberal mindset, are slow in responding to the call of their times.

If it can be said that the new line of socialism with Chinese characteristics "sank in" better in all aspects in China only after 2017, year of the 19th National Congress of the CPC when the leadership core with Xi Jinping as the center had completed its first term, then it is understandable that the 2016 show is not quite in alignment with the new official position yet. Such belatedness illustrates an essential aspect of the nature of the Chinese reform, which can



be compared to a ship on which the Party as political elite holds the rudder and initiates direction shift while industrial, commercial and cultural elites follow at different paces. It would be erroneous to assume that strategic changes occur in the interests of the Party alone, or even at the whim of a leader. Genuinely concerned with Chinese common people's well-being which is both the motivation and objective of the national revival, the Party leads the reform with superb dexterity, always promptly responsive to international and domestic situations. China's post-2012 rejection of neoliberal tenets has strong popular basis and support, even though those of the elites who benefit from neoliberalism are reluctant to execute the adjustment. The discrepancy leaves traces in a show like *Chinese People in Africa* where some content survives careful editing. In episode one, when Simba says "China should make great contributions to the world," he is quoting Mao Zedong. In episode four, Che Xuan, a female soldier of the UN Force, shows compassion for refugee children and her reflection, that "things should not be this way," questions the humanitarian discourse intuitively. Showing all symptoms of the historical moment of its production, the documentary also presages the leftward change in the Chinese reform. The value of studying a cultural product such as *Chinese People in Africa* resides, therefore, in analyzing the way in which a documentary "documents" a moment in the evolution of a process.

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