The statistics are appalling. The Australian embassy tallied, two days before Christmas 1965, an average of 1,500 assassinations per day since September 30th. In the following six months, perhaps 80,000 were killed in Bali alone, where mass graves lie next to tourist beaches. Sarwo Edhie, the commander of the army’s Para-Commando Regiment, claimed shortly before his death in 1989 that ‘three million were killed. Most of them on my orders.’ This is likely to be an exaggeration - best estimates of the dead range from 500,000 to 1 million - but it evokes this military insider’s perception of the scale of the massacre.

The violence also ended any resistance in Indonesia to big-business capital. The PKI had been a key organising force behind Indonesia’s trade union movement, for example. As an Australian diplomat observed on 19 November 1965: ‘it has apparently become the practice in factories and other workplaces for the army to assemble the labour force and ask them whether they wish to continue work as usual or not. Those who decline are asked again, and, unless they change their mind, summarily shot.’ With the army’s ‘pacification’ of the population, and the downfall of the United States’ antagonists Sukarno and Aaidit, Western and Japanese capital began to flow into the country. The coincidence of army, Cold War and global economic interests was made clear by an American NBC broadcast about the aftermath of the massacres, with shots of an American rubber processing factory looming out over a becalmed Indonesian landscape, as ‘Communist’ prisoners marched to and from the plant.

The massacres of 1965–66, in Joshua Oppenheimer’s analysis, created Subarto’s Indonesia: a quelled nation of factories and sweatshops, in which the army and paramilitaries could act with impunity. As he collected the footage for his films, Oppenheimer felt as if he had ‘wandered into Germany 40 years after the holocaust, only to find the Nazis still in power.

One story, two eras.

In 1965, John Cooley, Africa correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor - at the time, one of only two national US papers, and correspondingly influential - published a tract called East Wind Over Africa. Its title was a reference to Mao’s incendiary 1957 speech in Moscow and its pages sketched Communist China’s sweep across the continent, ‘from Cairo to Capetown, and from the Islands of the Indian Ocean across the mountains and bushlands to the Gulf of Guinea’.

Somewhere in the African Bush a tribesman smeared with red camwood paint, wearing animal skins, bends over a transistor radio. A Radio Peking speaker exhorts him in his own language to throw out the white colonialists who are robbing his country. In a nearby town an African schoolteacher listens to a Peking broadcast in French, English, Swahili or Lingala on political economy, telling him how Africans must shake loose the domination of the monopolists and imperialists, ‘with the United States at their head.’ In his classroom, because no other materials are available, he uses books and magazines from Peking for teaching English. One of his students has just received an airplane ticket for Peking from the Chinese Embassy; he is going on a grant for a year’s study in China. In another farming community a village policeman is startled to find a manual on guerrilla warfare tactics sandwiched between innocent-looking textbooks on how to repair tractors. All over Africa, from Casablanca to Capetown, such scenes take place daily. Peking is engaged in a propaganda effort on the African continent that is probably unprecedented anywhere, unless perhaps by the Soviet propaganda in Eastern Europe after the Second World War.
Cooley embellished his thesis with a deliberately imperialist colour. By expelling the United States entirely from Africa, Mao Tse-tung’s planners could advance far toward their declared objective of isolating the United States on the world scene ... In Africa nothing is settled. Few final boundaries, ideologies or national loyalties are clearly drawn. To Peking’s planners, Africa is the flux of a new world Afro-Asian society, the stuff of a major revolutionary outpost in a Sinocentric world.2

Now fast-forward to February 2014. Half a century after John Cooley’s panicky assessment, Jane Goodall – a veteran animal rights campaigner and long-time resident of Africa – condemned Chinese involvement in Africa under the headline ‘China Is Africa’s New Colonial Overlord’. In Africa, she wrote, ‘China is merely doing what the colonialists did. They want raw materials for their economic growth, just as the colonialists were going into Africa and taking the natural resources, leaving people poorer.’3 In 2007 two correspondents for the New York Times, Howard French and Lydia Polgreen, reported a similar story from Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. ‘We are back where we started,’ they were told by a Chamber of Commerce leader, at the site of a now quiet factory that once clattered out millions of metres of colourful cottons. ‘Sending raw materials out, bringing cheap manufactured goods in. This isn’t progress. It is colonialism.’ Since coming under Chinese ownership, it had only dispatched unprocessed cotton to China’s own textile factories. ‘Who is winning?’ a local politician asked rhetorically. ‘The Chinese are, for sure. Their interest is exploiting us, just like everyone who came before. They have simply come to take the place of the West as the new colonizers of Africa.’4

This anxious narrative about China in Africa has held steady for fifty years. For decades, it proclaims, the PRC – preaching political and economic revolution while Mao was alive, promising no-strings-attached development since the 1980s – has set its cap at Africa. It has built an empire through investment and aid; cheap manufactures; medical, military and political education; and plentiful gifts or sales of weapons. Chinese government officials unsurprisingly portray China’s presence in Africa in far more benign, win–win terms: as ‘promoting peace and development’.5 According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the 2017 completion of a Chinese-constructed railway linking Mombasa and Nairobi demonstrated ‘China speed, China quality, China contribution and China spirit, translating the principle of sincerity, practical results, affinity and good faith, as well as the value of justice, friendship and shared interests into concrete actions’.6

It is undeniable that China since the late 1950s has deployed hard and soft power in its determination to exert influence over Africa. In the Mao era this translated into enormous aid budgets. By 1971, China was throwing ‘more than’ – in Zhou Enlai’s revealingly hazy formulation – 5 per cent of its national budget into foreign aid; in fact, two years later it had reached 6.92 per cent. Compare this proportion with the 0.7 per cent of national income that the much wealthier UK annually reserves for international aid (a figure which is regularly threatened with cuts). It is estimated that the PRC paid out more than $24 billion in international aid between 1950 and 1978 (multiply that figure by about 4.5 to translate into contemporary dollars); 13–15 per cent went to Africa. The real figure is likely to be much higher – Mao-era China was notably vague in distinguishing between outright gifts and interest-free loans, and in stipulating timetables for repayment.7 It thus seems certain that Mao-era China spent a greater proportion of income on foreign aid – including in Africa – than did either the US (around 1.5 per cent of the federal budget in 1977) or the USSR (0.9 per cent of GNP in 1976).8 In Africa this is a story of ambitious outreach across a vast, disparate continent in which China did not have an immediate geopolitical compulsion to involve itself. Through this undertaking, which came at huge cost to the Chinese people – stunning amounts of aid were provided at moments when the country could least afford them – the PRC changed from being a recipient of international aid, to becoming a donor. It is hard to understand China’s current self-projection as a global political and economic power without keeping in mind its self-reinvention as an international benefactor under Mao.

The story of China in Africa – both in Mao’s lifetime and since – is far more complex and interesting than Western cynics or Chinese Panglossians suggest. In addition to its other drawbacks, the oversimplification of this story by some commentators has the troubling overtones of racism. It construes Africans as passive, simple minds, susceptible to every one of China’s ‘machinations’.
Again, Cooley’s analysis is emblematic: ‘Africa, especially Black Africa, is vulnerable to subtle personal diplomacy like that of the Chinese.’

The reception of Maoism in Africa tells us about the appeal of China’s message of anti-colonial, anti-Western rebellion, in the era of decolonisation – a time when a host of new states were searching pragmatically for political and economic models to fast-track them into becoming modernised nations. But Mao-era China’s outreach to Africa is also a story of conspicuous failures, mistranslations and miscalculations – of diplomacy and intrigues both careful and reckless. The story takes in Algeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Zambia and many other African states, but this chapter will zoom in on Tanzania and Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia, until 1980), two countries where different aspects of the Maoist repertoire were applied with particular vigour through the late 1960s and 1970s. The outcome of these experiments – famine in Tanzania; one-party thuggery and economic calamity in Zimbabwe – contrasts the charismatic appeal of Mao’s ideas and models of rebellion and self-reliance, with their manifest failure to create stable, responsive institutions for governance.

Communist China exerted a symbolic influence on Africa from the very beginning of the continent’s decolonisation. The veteran Kenyan political scientist Ali Mazrui wondered if the homophony between Mao and Mau-Mau – the revolt that pushed the British to grant independence to Kenya – was more than a coincidence: if ‘the designation of Kenya’s “peasant revolt” [was] a corruption of “Mao Mao” in honour of Mao Tse-tung’. The name seems to have achieved currency in 1948, the year that Communist victory in China’s civil war began to look credible. Was it purely happenstance that one of its leaders, Waruhiu Itote, called himself ‘General China’? Walter Sisulu, the secretary general of the African National Congress, visited China in 1953, charged with a mission from Nelson Mandela (who had acquired the complete works of Mao around 1950) to ‘talk to the Chinese about revolution’. ‘Listen chap’, the CCP apparently responded, ‘revolution is a very serious affair. Don’t play with it. Don’t take a chance unless you are really ready for it.’ The discouragement notwithstanding, Sisulu was impressed by China – except ‘I never liked Chinese food ... I would say I want English food.’ (For unclear reasons, Chinese hosts at one

point served him camel.) The trip, he remembered, made him a Communist. He returned ‘with encouragement, but no guns’.

China’s actual intervention in Africa intensified during the Great Leap Forward – when Mao and his lieutenants volunteered for leadership of Africa, Asia and Latin America. (‘We are the Third World,’ Mao once presumptuously told a group of foreign visitors.) In spring 1961, following the worst year of the famine, Marshal Ye Jianying insisted that ‘no country in this world has had more experience than we ... [This experience is] for the benefit of other countries and countries which are still not yet liberated. They are very much in need of the kind of experience which will enable them to crush imperialism and feudalism and to gain independence and democracy ... Mao Zedong’s ideology [is] the compass.’ A secret People’s Liberation Army policy document from the early 1960s noted that Africa was mired in the experiences of China’s past, and needed a helping hand to catch up:

Africa itself looks like the seven powers of [China’s] Warring States [c.500 BC] ... It is a huge political exhibition, where a hundred flowers are surely blooming, waiting there for anybody to pick ... Africa is now both the centre of the anticolonialist struggle and the centre for East and West to fight for the control of an intermediary zone ... We must tell them, in order to help them, about ... the revolutionary experience of the Communists in this generation ... In Africa we do no harm to anyone, we introduce no illusions, for all we say is true.

The PRC began with a diplomatic offensive: inviting African leaders to China, and hosting and banqueting them lavishly. Chinese hospitality melted hearts – especially of those who were discriminated against in racist regimes in Africa, such as ANC delegates. Chinese warmth overwhelmed visitors with a rush of feeling that the world was on [their] side. There were flowers, confetti, gongs, cymbals, firecrackers, cheering multitudes, limousine cavalcades, and tète-à-têtes. In the early 1950s with the heroes of the Chinese revolution. While in the early 1950s hardly any Africans travelled to China, between 1957 and 1959 there were eighty-four delegations from the Belgian Congo alone. In the first half of 1960, Mao met 111 African representatives (having met only 163 in the entire decade preceding). At the same time, the
chairman's vocal support for the black liberation movement in the US won him the love of prominent pan-Africanists building bridges between the US and Africa. The celebrated American pan-Africanist William Du Bois spoke passionately for Sino-African solidarity: ‘China is flesh of your flesh and blood of your blood.’ China and Africa, Mao told a banquetting hall of trainee guerrillas, were ‘one and the same’. ‘You’re more or less like us,’ one of the Chinese instructors told his pupils. ‘We’re not really yellow nor [are] you really black.’

As so often, the Chinese Communists chose their guests well. One visitor in particular paid rich dividends. Secretary general of the Zanzibar Nationalist Party Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu was an exuberant, omni-talented organiser, anti-colonialist and Marxist who became the first East African to be invited officially to the PRC. An admirer called Babu a ‘sociable socialist’; a British acquaintance acidly described him as ‘a veteran of Chelsea cocktail parties and [the Labour Party’s] Movement for Colonial Freedom in London’; and the CIA in Africa badly wanted him assassinated. Babu had long revered Mao’s China and his visit in 1959 intensified his veneration. As he later recalled:

In the 1950s, it was almost obligatory for young radicals to read as much as possible about the Chinese revolution and its success in 1949 … I studied … China as a development model in contrast to the western model. China, in short, was a symbol of a poor humiliated country emerging, through their own effort and against all odds, into a contender for world leadership. It evoked all the emotions of joy and hope for the oppressed who were still struggling under very difficult circumstances … The meetings with the Chinese leadership and the late night discussions with them on all questions of anti-imperialist struggle were most inspiring and helped to mould my world outlook … the leaders I met included, of course, Chairman Mao, Chou en Lai … Deng Tsiao-Ping, and others. These were people of very strong character, well known for their resilience, perseverance and self-discipline who had liberated a quarter of the human race from repression and warlordism.

Appointed East and Central Africa correspondent of the Chinese government news agency, Xinhua, Babu went on to become a very effective mouthpiece for Mao’s model of armed revolution, introducing it to a younger generation of Zanzibari sympathisers, such as a good-time revolutionary called Ali Sultan Issa. On visiting China himself in 1960 (when the famine was reaching its peak), Issa was taken on a trip to retrace the route of the Long March. He accepted everything he saw as unvarnished reality.

The tour opened my outlook and broadened my horizons, to see how the communists had made huge sacrifices and how wherever they went, they confiscated lands and gave them to the peasants … They took me to many cities. Poverty was not so visible there as in India; everyone had food and something to wear … I had not been as impressed by the greatness of the Russians as I was with the Chinese … I was free to develop and put all ideologies to the test, to see which was most viable and most suitable to our own conditions in Zanzibar. In China, I was deeply impressed by their vast and formidable country, by the people’s sacrifice and their achievements, so that when I returned to Zanzibar I was in complete agreement with Babu about China, that this was the ideological line to follow.

China followed up these invitations with scholarships – distributed through men like Issa – to Zanzibari students. ‘Some students did not last very long in China,’ Issa remarked. ‘Our boys wanted their freedom to drink and have sex, but in China, everyone’s eyes were … asking “Why do you want to fornicate?” … [But] most of them returned to Zanzibar and that was how we managed to politicize the whole island.’ In January 1964, insurgents violently ousted Zanzibar’s Arab rulers (much of the island’s Arab population were killed or fled). A loose coalition of moderate and radical socialists took over government through a ‘Revolutionary Council’ – including Babu, who became minister of foreign affairs, under the presidency of Abeid Karume, subsequent architect of a repressive dictatorship. In an interview that
from his works. Aspects of the Zanzibari revolution were strikingly
similar to the Chinese: former political elites reduced to street-
sweepers; independent newspapers banned; private shops turned into
malfuctioning cooperatives; security forces with arbitrary powers to
imprison and kill.) When, in spring 1964, Zanzibar entered a political
union with Tanganyika, the nearest state on mainland Africa, to form
independent Tanzania, Babu persuaded its first president, Julius
Nyerere, to visit China in 1965. Babu travelled to China ahead, to
ensure the visit was flawlessly choreographed. It all worked out beaut-
ifully. ‘If it were possible,’ sighed Nyerere in wonder, ‘for me to lift
all the ten million Tanzanians and bring them to China to see what
you have done since the liberation, I would do so.’ Across the next
ten years, Nyerere would become a key African Maophile.

The PRC reserved some of its most experienced diplomats for
 postings in Africa. It is no coincidence that, while China’s Ministry of
Foreign Affairs imploded during the early years of the Cultural
Revolution, while Chinese diplomats all over the world were recalled
to China for re-education by the peasants, the only ambassador who
remained in station was Huang Hua — Edgar Snow’s old translator —
in Cairo. China’s best diplomatic weapon, however, was Zhou Enlai,
who, on a 1964–65 tour around Africa, described ‘an exceedingly favo-
urable situation for revolution ... a mighty torrent pounding with great
momentum on the foundations of the rule of imperialism, colonialism
and neo-colonialism’. Zhou recited Mao’s poetry, advised local
Marxist-Leninist parties about le moment juste for seizing power,
scooped up diplomatic recognition for the PRC by Tunisia, and chatted
in French with the king of Morocco while an orchestra played the
ouverture from Swan Lake. Even cynical Western reporters admitted
that Zhou was able to ‘hug babies without looking like a politician
and pump hands without a trace of humbug.’

One of the least risky — though rather costly — ways of promoting
Maoism to Africa was to inundate the continent with ‘external propa-
ganda’, as evoked by John Cooley at the start of this chapter. By 1960,
China was exceeding the Soviets in broadcasting to Africa for fifteen
hours every week (the USSR managed only thirteen and a half). News
agencies were bombarded with images of Sino-African coopera-

tion: Chinese officials and engineers grinning toothily while shaking
hands with African co-workers, or labouring on African roads,
government 'never asks for any privilege and never poses conditions',
Zhou declared; it seeks 'to aid [recipients] to move forward, step by
step, on the pathway of self-sufficiency'. Furthermore, 'the experts
step, on the pathway of self-sufficiency'. Furthermore, 'the experts
step, on the pathway of self-sufficiency'. Furthermore, 'the experts
step, on the pathway of self-sufficiency'. Furthermore, 'the experts
to formulate any special demands or to benefit from special advantages.'
This last principle had a particular appeal for African audiences used
to Western or Soviet technical advisers as sweating white men in pale
suits, insulated (by porters and five-star hotels) from any hardship,
ordering locals around from the comfort of a shooting stick.

A diplomat based in Guinea in the early 1960s noted that unlike
Soviet or European Communist aid missions, Chinese teams 'stress
manual labour and do not hesitate to perform the humblest tasks, as
in road-building, along with the Guineans. Their rice experts and their
engineers live like the Guineans, in native villages... earning no more
and eating no better than the Guineans they work with. They create
an impression of frugality and austerity.' The Chinese approach boiled
down to two simple prescriptions: 'One, don't beat; two, don't scold'
(yi bu da, er bu ma). The Zanzibari revolutionary Ali Sultan Issa later
remembered how he experienced the difference between the Chinese
and the Soviets: 'the Chinese were backward... but still they helped
... the Russians were advanced with Sputnik and everything, and yet
they were... very mean and arrogant... it was through our experience
and contact with the Chinese that we looked for our solutions
through the Chinese way'. Admiring Tanzanians asked their Chinese
military instructors: 'How come you are so hardworking, so positive,
so practical and competent?' (The Chinese seized the opportunity to
stress the importance of their political education.) Zambians who
shared a training camp with a handful of Chinese instructors marvelled
even at the quality of food that the army cook provided, repeatedly
acclaiming it as a 'miracle'. Back home, China opened its universities
to African students, offering generous scholarships — their stipends
equalled senior engineers' salaries.

China also donated a harder form of currency to Africa: military
training both in China and in Africa — across the PRC's foreign aid
budget (we lack the precise proportion for Africa) at the end
(for example, in Tanzania and Zambia); and training 'freedom
fighters' — guerrillas pledging to liberate their countries from colo-
nial or neo-colonial rule (such insurgents charged that some post-
investment governments, for example that of Cameroon, had
allowed colonial interests to return by the back door). Many African
independence movements at some point passed out of PRC schools of
guerrilla training at Changping, north-west of Beijing, or the
Nanjing Military Academy. Between 1964 and 1985, the PRC spent
between $70 and $220 million training some 20,000 fighters from at
least nineteen African countries.

We know almost nothing from internal Chinese records about the
training of these foreign revolutionaries, for it remains an issue of
immense political sensitivity within the PRC. But African accounts
are less secretive. At the time, the journey to China was clandestine.
Two recruits — one from Mozambique, the other from Southern
Rhodesia — bumped into each other en route. Determined to keep
up the cloak of secrecy, both lied about their final destination until
they washed up together in Hong Kong and found themselves getting
on the same train to China. Students at Nanjing were not uncom-
fortable: they did not even have to make their own beds. Recruits
from anglophone African countries ate English food, the francophone
ate French cuisine. The official name of the course — offering training
in the use of bazookas and sub-machine guns — was 'economic
development'. 'Special engineering' was code for sabotage, using
pineapple-shaped anti-personnel mines. There were lessons on
strategy and tactics, and long hours of films, plays and operas enacting
confront between landlords and peasants. Instructors made an effort
to link Chinese ideas to African reality: Zulu campaigns during which
enemy forces had been surrounded were equated with Mao's strategy
of 'surrounding the cities from the countryside'. Students were told
to create 'liberated zones', or base areas, as Mao had done in the
1930s.

From at least 1960, Nelson Mandela engaged closely with Mao's
military strategies, discussing them with comrades over dishes of
umombo (mashed brown bread with sour milk). 'It could be that he
did not know how to cook or was lazy to cook,' speculated a forbearing
comrade. That year, as the ANC moved from non-violent to violent
resistance of South Africa's apartheid government, at least six ANC
members travelled to China to study Mao’s guerrilla war: how to make weapons, how to carry out hit-and-run raids. It was, remembered Raymond Mhlaba, an ANC leader later sentenced to life imprisonment at the same trial as Nelson Mandela, ‘extremely interesting and useful’. The Chinese even carried out cosmetic surgery on Mhlaba, removing a growth from his forehead that had made him too recognisable to South African police. Well pleased with the result, he left China (in his own words) ‘a trained and handsome soldier’. As Mandela prepared for the ANC’s shift to armed struggle, he carefully read Mao on guerrilla warfare, matching South African analogues to Mao’s milestones in the Chinese revolution and making dozens of pages of notes. The ANC’s blueprints for action held close to his reading. Shortly before Mandela was arrested and imprisoned in 1962, the ANC planned to have their armed wing funded substantially by China, alongside the Soviet Union.

African guerrillas recited Mao’s ‘Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention’ and reminded each other that ‘the popular masses are like water and the army is like a fish’. A founder of the South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) admitted: ‘We all read Mao, as a practical manual of guerrilla warfare.’ A member of the Mozambique Revolutionary Committee felt that ‘the methods of the [Chinese] Army … are right for Africa. The Russian methods are wrong – they were partly afraid of the peasants and crushed and collectivised them. The Chinese had to build a National Liberation Army on solid peasant support; they taught us we had to utilise 30 million Africans in southern Africa.’ Mao’s championing of revolutionary audacity gave marginalised rebel groups confidence: those who ‘dared to struggle’ would triumph in the end. Africans retooled Mao’s defiant catchphrases for their own purposes. In African translations, enemies were no longer ‘paper tigers’, but ‘emasculated paper tigers … which shall not escape being crushed to pulp’.

In 1961 a team of Cameroonian guerrillas smuggled into China learned the 101 of insurgency: how to blow up bridges, houses, railways, tanks, trucks, power plants and broadcasting stations; how to sabotage airfields and telecommunications; how to conduct ambushes and psychological warfare. A large tranche of the training was dedicated to political education: there were lectures on Communism, its applicability to rural areas, and its inevitable global victory over imperialism. Planning to join the Armée de Libération Nationale Camerounaise, the graduates returned to Africa with bags containing Chinese lecture notes, a detailed political programme, binoculars, cameras, transistor radios and a spruce uniform (consisting of black denim trousers, black leather windcheaters, Chinese-style leather caps and green belts). ‘It appears to be the intention’, noted with trepidation the British diplomat who had the chance to rummage through their bags after they were apprehended en route to Cameroon, ‘to hold other courses at intervals with the aim of producing a regular supply of African guerrilla leaders to return to their own countries in the dual role of rebels against their legal governments and militant agents of China, with the purpose of carrying the Cold War into Africa.’

These Cameroonian recruits were a mixed bunch of drifters: out-of-work taxi drivers, bakers, travelling salesmen. The 24-year-old François Faleu received ‘consistently bad reports’ from his school, yet ‘took a great interest in the Chinese course and made comprehensive notes, showing a far greater enthusiasm for his lessons in sabotage than he appears to have shown in school’. The tactics taught were ruthlessly Maoist. ‘Terrorist activities must be carried on,’ one student scribbled in his notebook during a conversation with Shanghai’s ‘Peace Committee’, ‘killing off all the puppet agents and traitors and carrying the struggle into the country. The country can do without the towns but the towns cannot do without the country.’ ‘The assistance given’, the British diplomat concluded, ‘by the Chinese authorities, amounting to nothing less than the organisation and training of a rebel army to destroy the democratically constituted government of Cameroun, can now have no objection [sic] other than that of establishing Chinese Communist domination in that part of Africa.’ The curricula of training camps set up in Ghana and Tanzania were heavily flavoured with Mao too: they dwelt on People’s War, building base areas, ideology, guerrilla strategy. This emphasis on political education – it ideology, guerrilla strategy. This emphasis on political education – it
MAOISM

The man who 'opened the gates' of Africa to China was Julius Nyerere. Nyerere was an ardent anti-colonialist and advocate of African liberation, who saw in Mao's China a model of anti-imperialist, self-sufficient, agrarian development suitable for a poor, rural country such as Tanzania. Tanganyika's own decolonisation had been peaceful – a process eased by Nyerere's own skill as a mediator and orator. He was a highly educated teacher of biology and English, who had studied economics, history and (in an extracurricular fashion) socialism at the University of Edinburgh. But having witnessed in 1964 Zanzibar's revolution and the mutiny of Tanganyika's newly decolonised army, Nyerere was no stranger to political violence. The latter crisis was only resolved with the help of a British garrison and aircraft carrier from Yemen. Nyerere was thus not averse to the imposition of military and authoritarian solutions: in 1962, he declared his own organisation, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the only legal party in the newly independent state; unsurprisingly, Nyerere was re-elected unopposed every five years until he handed on to his chosen successor in 1985.

Like China under Mao, Tanzania under Julius Nyerere always thought beyond its borders, despite – or because of – severe economic problems at home. 'Tanzania is not yet wholly free,' Nyerere declared, 'because Africa is not wholly free.' When Tanganyika won independence in 1961, colonialism was still very alive in much of Africa. Zhou Enlai, in a speech addressed to the prime minister of the Republic of China, stockpiled illustrated leaflets in the Central African Republic designed to popularise guerrilla tactics. Leopoldville Radio reported in March 1966 that 2,000 Rwandan Warutus, trained by Chinese instructors, were concentrating on the Rwanda-Burundi border, preparing to attack Rwanda, overthrow the government and establish an operational base for subversion ... Mozambique security forces recently captured from terrorists ten automatic pistols, four automatic rifles, thirty-two anti-personnel mines and a quantity of hand grenades – all of Chinese make. Tanzania, which had become the self-styled centre of the African liberation movement, hosted training camps for guerrillas; many of the instructors were Chinese. Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah (a passionate advocate of African unity and opponent of colonialism both old and new), hired Chinese military instructors after bad experiences with Russian advisers, who had got roaring drunk and tried to seduce the wife of an orderly. Whereas the Russians had demanded a car and unlimited drink, the Chinese requested only secrecy, food, furniture and a cook, and got straight down to work. Mr Li, the explosives expert, demonstrated with chemicals from Shanghai; Mr Zhang commando-crawled over the palm-fringed drill ground, teaching his students the art of laying anti-personnel mines. Nkrumah went on to publish his own guerrilla warfare manual, but its 'stilted English' – according to one reader – came directly from the Chinese instructors; the manuscript was based on Mao's Selected Military Writings [with] countless quotations from Mao. Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia frankly admitted in 1968 that 'the only people who will teach young Africans to handle dangerous weapons are in the eastern camp. How can we expect that they will learn to use these weapons without learning the ideology as well? When they come back, we can expect not only a racial war in Africa, but an ideological one as well.'

There was quite simply a lot of affection for China in 1960s and 70s Africa. 'Ninety per cent of the population are peasants,' commented one Guinean. 'They all call Chairman Mao their father. Even though many have never seen even a photograph of Chairman Mao, they all know who he is.' 'Chairman Mao is a great man,' acclaimed a Kenyan, 'a great Marxist-Leninist, the second Lenin, he is not only the leader of the Chinese people, but also of the African people.' A Cameroonian trade unionist chose to put his admiration into song:

The boat of hope is forging ahead in the foam
At its helm standing erect is a giant
Mao Tse-tung, successor to Marx, Lenin, Stalin
Helmsman of the new era
Who guides the revolution of the peoples
... As your students we will
Forever be loyal to your teachings.
And like the sunflower follow
The sun which is your thought.
Once again, let's wish Mao Tse-tung a long life.
the Congo in 1967, echoed Nyerere's sentiment. 'Why do the Chinese people cherish such a profound friendship for our Congolese and other African friends? This is not only because the Chinese people shared in the past the same experience with the African people of being subjected to coloni-stpliant and oppression and are both now confronted with the common task of struggle against imperialism, but also because the Chinese people who are armed with the great thought of Mao Tse-tung are fully aware of the fact that without the liberation of all oppressed people and oppressed nations of the world, the Chinese people cannot win complete independence.'

Common interest – the quest for egalitarian development and anti-colonial liberation – and carefully orchestrated Chinese charm led to Nyerere importing Maoist China's models. He referenced the symbols of the Chinese revolution whenever possible, the Long March being a particular favourite. Nyerere's anti-colonialism blurred into socialism via a somewhat idealised view of pre-colonial economic relations on the continent. 'Our Africa was a poor country before it was invaded and ruled by foreigners. There were no rich people in Africa. There was no person or group of persons who had exclusive claim to the ownership of the land. Land was the property of all the people ... Life was easy ... Wealth belonged to the family as a whole; and every member of a family had the right to the use of family property. No one used wealth for the purpose of dominating others. This is how we want to live as a nation. We want the whole nation to live as one family. This is the basis of socialism.'

Nyerere also fell in love with China's Great Leap Forward rhetoric of 'self-reliance' – an idea that had its roots in the stories of Communist self-sufficiency spun so effectively by Edgar Snow. In reality the Communist Party of China could not have survived the 1930s and '40s without regular handouts from the Soviet Union; by the 1950s, it was a client state.) Self-reliance appealed particularly to a Tanzania anxious not to be swept up into the superpower conflicts of the Cold War. 'When elephants fight,' Nyerere quoted a Swahili proverb, 'it is the grass which gets crushed.' From 1960, the political implosion of the neighbouring Congo – the overthrow and murder of Patrice Lumumba by his army chief-of-staff Mobutu Sese Seko and associated thugs, with covert backing from Belgium and the US – haunted Nyerere. The events in the Congo have demonstrated', he concluded, 'that it is possible for a colonial power to leave by the front door, and the same or different external forces to come in by the back ... [we are entering] the Second Scramble for Africa.'

Nyerere studded his essays with calls to 'self-reliance' and after a six-week tour of Tanzania in the winter of 1966, which the Tanzanian press described as his own 'Long March', he launched a social and economic revolution entitled 'ujamaa': a socialist war on poverty, fuelled by autochthonous hard work. Nyerere's ambition for Africa was galvanised by his perception of China's own trajectory.

Africa will be free ... we shall not surrender the goal because we cannot see it clearly, any more than you [the CCP] surrendered because you could not see the China of today from the caves of [Yan'an] ... you sympathise with us in our struggle, just as we sympathise with the Chinese people's determination to defend their own country and build it according to their own desires ... faith can move mountains ... You believe in the creative power of the people; you believe in your great leader, Chairman Mao Tse-Tung; you believe in the spirit of self-reliance and self-criticism; and you believe in the oneness of the oppressed peoples of the world."

As Tanzania's National Central Library stockpiled copies of the Little Red Book, Mao's book of quotations began to generate imitations in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa: there were little green books of Nyerere's sayings; in 1965, The Little Blue Book collected those of Abeid Karume, Nyerere's brutal vice president; and in Ghana, the Axioms of Kwame Nkrumah were also published in book form. In the 1970s, the Libyan dictator Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi, fascinated by Mao's ideas – All methods of education prevailing in the world should be destroyed through a universal cultural revolution’ – based his Green Book of political, social and cultural theories on Mao's Little Red Book. Tanzanians set off on their own 'Long Marches' imitating Nyerere imitating Mao. Schoolchildren coveted Mao pins and laboured in the fields instead of studying algebra and Shakespeare, while teenagers imitated the Cultural Revolution's attacks on Western culture and consumerism, denouncing 'Playboy and the Beatles, tight trousers and miniskirts, cosmetics and beauty contests'. 'You are our Green Guards', Nyerere exulted, sending them out on marches around the country, wearing green shirts and badges emblazoned with images of himself and Mao.
Nyerere rolled out his *ujamaa* dream of Tanzanian socialism in February 1967: nationalising banks, industries and natural resources; collectivising rural Tanzania into socialist villages; and dispatching Tanzanian youth to labour camps in the countryside where they were lectured on the need for 'dedicated exertion, the suspicion of .. consumption... the virtues of frugality and self-denial'. The campaign was pervaded by the spirit of Chinese collectivisation, in its fixation on 'self-reliance', its slippery shift in the early 1970s from voluntary to compulsory participation and its hope that collective spirit and industriousness would magically guarantee success. Again, like its Chinese precedent, *ujamaa* failed, generating starvation and poverty. (At almost the same moment – in spring 1972 – the Sinophile Babu also experienced firsthand Nyerere's toughness when he was thrown, without due process, into solitary confinement in Tanzania and sentenced to death for allegedly planning Karume's assassination that April. Only an intense campaign by Amnesty International secured his release.)

Although not as rigidly implemented as Stalin's or Mao's collectivisation, Nyerere's 'villagisation' also relied on coercion. His ambitious, forced mobilisation of the population led to an escalation of violence reminiscent of government brutality against farmers in China's Great Leap. Youth Leaguers – Nyerere's young vigilantes – burned the houses of those who resisted moving. 'Anti-ujamaa' behaviour became a punishable crime. 'When Tanzania Youth League Members come to anyone,' complained one letter to a national newspaper in 1973, 'he is sure of being beaten severely, forced to run long distances and pay a large sum of money.' As in China, *ujamaa* preached the mobilisation of women, which in reality meant a double burden: women were expected to dedicate themselves to both farming and family work. ' Destroyed, where we were living, there!' one woman said of Nyerere's *ujamaa* enforcers. 'If you had stayed and they met you, they burned with fire.' Tanzanians were only weakly committed to collective farming, and preferred to concentrate on their private plots; they were underequipped, slashing at wasteland armed with only hoes and machetes. A 1976 report soberly observed *ujamaa*'s results: 'There is not enough food for many children, and even adults often pass the whole day without eating any food of substance.'

What did Mao and the CCP hope to achieve in Africa? 'Chinese policy', declared the British Foreign Office, 'is undoubtedly to use Dar es Salaam at one end, and Brazzaville at the other, for subversion across the waist of Africa.' In reality, the story was a little more confused. Mao, his lieutenants and the exporters of the Chinese model – military instructors, aid workers, railway engineers and builders, doctors – saw an opportunity both to liberate Africa from centuries of colonial exploitation and to disseminate the greatness of Mao. The two aims were so closely intertwined that few, if any, acknowledged the existence of contradiction between internationalist idealism and national gain. Through the 1960s and early 1970s, Mao and his closest subordinates, Zhou Enlai and Lin Biao, publicly declared that Africa was 'in revolutionary upsurge', following the model of Mao's 'People's War'. Everything about Mao-era China's campaign to aid Africa was politicised: the work schedules for the Tan-Zam Railway; the introduction of rice cultures in Guinea; the curricula of visiting students in China; the handing out of medicine – every material act had to advertise the superiority of the Maoist world view. Africans – be they patients, students or railway workers – were the 'seeds of revolution'. To qualify as a doctor to Africa, candidates had to possess (in this order of priority) 'good political thought, clear personal history, no complicated social or overseas relations, good professional skills, good health'. The Chinese medical teams were arguably the most effective means of propagating Maoism, because of the sheer number and range of people they saw in their clinics, the walls of which were thoroughly pasted with images of the chairman. If these medics studied a local language, the first sentence they would master was: 'Chairman Mao sent me here.' Opticians tested eyesight using passages from the Little Red Book. When a doctor had cured a Zanzibari man's cerebral embolism, the Chinese medics told him that his recovery was due to Chairman Mao. The man recorded his recovery for posterity by posing for a photo with his son and the doctors, the Africans waving pictures of Mao above their heads.

There was at least some genuine idealism to this project. China was ingenuously hopeful about the prospects of the African revolution. 'Among the independent countries in Africa,' speculated one policy document from the early 1960s, 'if only one or two of them complete a real national revolution ... the revolutionary wave will be able to
swallow the whole African continent, and the 200 million or more Africans will advance to the forefront of the world." As Khrushchev did with the Cuban revolution, Mao felt an emotional connection with the Algerian war of independence. ‘Chinese aid is granted you unconditionally,’ he promised a National Liberation Front (FLN) diplomat; it arrived (in the form of uniforms, small arms and ammunition) through Morocco, Tunisia and Albania. Mao personally gave classes in revolution to the FLN at Zhongnanhai during a 1959 visit. Naïve idealism shines through the (many) poems that Chinese soldiers, builders, medics and agronomists composed while toiling on Africa’s alien soil. ‘I’m not far from my homeland – only 30,000 kilometres,’ lyricised one particularly prolific agricultural surveyor. ‘The temperature is scorching: over 43 degrees. / I am seeking the happiness of the human race. / However many hardships I experience, it will still be sweet.’

Yet this idealism smoothly combined with nationalist, even imperialist goals. Mao’s own rhetoric confused world revolution and Chinese glory: ‘If we can take the Congo, we can have all of Africa.’ Africa thus became a passive territory to be scrambled for. When in the 1950s Mao gave a Cameroonian visitor a copy of his (1938) *Problems of Strategy in the Guerrilla War against Japan*, he scrawled in the frontispiece: ‘In this book you can read everything which is now going to happen in the Cameroons.’ Chinese military instructors ‘hammered’ the theory of People’s War into Palestinian guerrillas who, on their return to the Middle East, lectured an irritated Nasser about the virtues of Mao’s strategies. Nasser bluntly pointed out that the population of the Middle East was nowhere dense enough for a guerrilla to move Maoist-style ‘like a fish through the water’ (of the people); neither was there anywhere for the Palestinians to build a base area, safely out of the reach of Israel. The Chinese were ‘annoyed’ at Nasser’s heretical common sense.

There was a clear logic of self-interest to China’s Africa game: the continent was strategically all-important in the chess game of winning entrance to the United Nations. Every year a debate took place in the UN as to which of the ‘two Chinas’ should take the seat at the UN: the mainland PRC or the ROC on Taiwan. Eventually, it was the small but numerous African nations that tipped the balance in the mainland’s favour. In 1971, after six African states dropped their opposition to the PRC, Beijing won the UN seat from the ROC. More than a third of the supporting votes mainland China received came from African delegates who, ‘arms swooping above their heads, jumped up and down in their seats as wild applause engulfed the circular chamber’. Mao personally reserved aid packages for those African nations that recognised the PRC, and his passion for guerrilla struggle was always tempered by national concerns. If a regime did not recognise the Communist government diplomatically, the latter would support guerrilla rebels on its fringes. If diplomatic recognition was in the offing, as happened in Cameroon in 1965, support for anti-government guerrillas might fade away. African leaders played the same game, threatening to switch sides to either the PRC or ROC; the imminent loser would have to produce enough aid to guarantee continuing recognition.

One evening in March 1962, a rumpus erupted at the Peace Hotel in Beijing. A Zanzibari student, known as Ali, visited the hotel’s kiosk and asked to buy some cigarettes. An argument ensued when the shop assistant either refused to sell them, or to sell them in the quantity Ali desired. Several other hotel employees appeared and dragged Ali off to the yard outside the hotel, where they beat him senseless, as well as striking a heavily pregnant Zanzibari woman – a presenter at Radio Peking who tried to intervene – with long-handled spittoon covers.

The incident infuriated a young Ghanaian medical student in Beijing called John Hevi. He organised a hunger strike among Africans in China in protest at the incident before breaking off his studies and returning home. He then penned a book-length denunciation of the hypocrisies of China’s doctrine of ‘Sino-African Friendship’. The resulting 1963 publication, *An African Student in China*, failed to find anything laudable about life in China. The accommodation was squalid, the social life ‘spleen-burstingly’ dull. Above all, though, it was the insincerity that Hevi objected to: his hosts’ endless rhetoric about liberation and racial equality, he argued, glossed over Chinese expansionism and the worst type of colonial racism. China can only be compared with Nazi Germany, like the Nazis, the Chinese Communists are searching their borders and adjacent territories with hungry eyes, looking for more and more Lebensraum.

While the heavily choreographed and monitored Chinese hospitality machine was expertly geared for short-term visits – and worked wonderfully on susceptible egotists like Sukarno and well-wishers like...
Yerere – it could not maintain the same level of intensity for guests who stayed several years. African students like Hevi were turned off by political regimentation (in language classes, mastering ‘the people’s communes like a newly risen sun, light up the path of progress for the Chinese people’ took priority over ‘a cup of water’), and by paucity of food, consumer goods (though their access was far better than local Chinese) and sexual opportunities. ‘God knows there is a lot we’ve got to do to make Africa free,’ concluded Hevi. ‘But what sort of freedom can Africans expect from the hands of those who keep their own people in such subjection?’

There were a number of obstacles to the exporting of Maoism to Africa, beginning with language and culture. In May 1967, a sharp-eyed American diplomat in Dubai noticed that one of Mao’s quotations, emblazoned across ‘a big-character banner draped on the front of the Chinese Communist Embassy’, had become somewhat mangled in translation. ‘Since there are no tigers in East Africa, and thus no word for “tiger” in Swahili, the translation appearing below the Chinese ideographs solemnly declares that “Imperialism and all enemies of progress are paper leopards.”’ A Chinese embassy reception in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1972 went badly when the African audience kept on bursting into laughter at speeches meant to be serious, then left early. Film showings at Chinese embassies in Africa were in general not very successful, due mainly to the lack of alcoholic drinks served. (American embassy showings, by contrast, were careful to provide better refreshments – and usually more entertaining films.)

Suffering from Cold War nerves, the Western media hyped China’s influence in Africa. What were the ‘Aims Behind the Acrobat’, wondered The Economist in a report on a travelling Chinese troupe. American newspapers shuddered at the announcement in 1965 that China would build the Tan-Zam Railway. ‘Red Guard Line Chugging into Africa’, ran the headline in the Wall Street Journal. ‘The prospect of hundreds and perhaps thousands of Red Guards descending upon an already troubled Africa is a chilling one for the West.’

British embassies in Nairobi and other African cities spun anxious reports about Chinese activities. Why were Chinese embassy officials in Khartoum so ‘remarkably’ out and about, given how few Chinese were in Sudan? How had one Mohammed Magin Bagalalliwo, a Ugandan setting off for a holiday in the Sudan, ended up at the Peking Hotel, Moscow, apparently ‘on his way to China’? Diplomats insisted on using phrases like Chinese ‘infiltration of Sierra Leone’, when ‘relations with’ would have been more appropriate. After the PRC was accused of directly aiding revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, it turned out that the ‘Chinese Communist troops’ identified as assisting the revolutionaries were ethnic Chinese harvesters of sea slugs who had worked on the island for decades.

Julius Nyerere was frequently irritated by accusations of slavish loyalty to China from the British and Americans. On a visit to London in 1965, he expressed annoyance at the Cold War conspiracy theories over his relationship with China. Yes, he admitted, ‘Tanzania invited seven Chinese technicians to train our reorganized army in the use of the weapons we were getting from that country ... China has given us a grant of £1 million, and made credits available to us totaling more than £10 million.’ But Nyerere added that there were ‘ chica Chinese in Tanzania – and 16,000 British’. The Western diplomatic panic about seven Chinese military instructors was so great, Nyerere observed, one might think that he had ‘employed 70,000 of them’.

When it comes to actual facts this country is completely Western, in government, in business, in the schools, in everything. The year after Nyerere became president of an independent Tanganyika, he had published his first of two translations of Shakespeare’s plays (Julius Caesar, followed by The Merchant of Venice in 1969) into Swahili.

Chinese workers in Africa impressed through their frugal work ethic but their political regimentation inhibited their easy mixing with locals. The Chinese, remembered one Zanzibari civil servant, ‘always moved around in groups. You never found a Chinese person alone ... mostly we didn’t bother ourselves about them because they kept to themselves. I heard about the wonderful Chairman Mao Tse Tung with his Red Book, which I never read. My image of China in those days was a country ... that sent us commodities that were of poor quality.’ In 1967, a Chinese agrarian adviser in Tanzania suffered severe bee stings, but his comrades would not allow him to be treated by a non-Chinese doctor. By the time a companion medic had been found, the man had died. In the early 1970s, the Chinese chargé d’affaires and his translator in Zambia were killed in a traffic accident while visiting a Chinese construction project. The disposal of their
bodies posed serious political problems. On making enquiries, the Chinese railway workers discovered that the only crematoria in Lusaka were run by ethnic Indians. 'In order to show our resistance to the reactionary Indian faction [China had fought a sour border war with India in the early 1960s], we carried out a home-made cremation': throwing petrol over the bodies in the military camp until they were consumed by flames. The Chinese were at times antagonistic to other aid workers: they refused to allow a group of Americans building a road parallel with the Tan-Zam Railway to enter the land alongside the route, and besieged them for five hours, chanting slogans and brandishing steel-tipped rods all the while. Chinese political education alienated some. President Houphouet-Boigny, leader of the Ivory Coast, had his own suspicions about Chinese ambitions. At Nanjing, in China, Africans are being taught to assassinate those whose eyes are open to the Chinese danger; in order to replace them with servile men who will open the gates of Africa to China ... We should be blind if we failed to realise that China, which is overpopulated and would soon have a thousand million mouths to feed, looks enviously at our huge continent populated by only 300 million. If we are not careful we shall be served up as Chinese soup.' One angry resident of Dar es Salaam alleged that Chinese doctors 'inject the sick people' then 'present them with the gift of small red books'. (On the plus side, local workers on Chinese-run projects found it easy to take a break if they sat under a tree apparently reading a copy of the Little Red Book.)

Chinese evangelism dramatically increased during the Cultural Revolution. In March 1967, Kenyan newspapers published parts of a pamphlet supposedly issued by the New China News Agency, provocatively entitled 'New Diplomats Will Bring the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to Africa'. China had just pulled all but one of its diplomats back to Beijing; according to this pamphlet, they were poised to 'return to Chinese embassies in Africa' as 'new revolutionary diplomats' ready to 'form militant local Red Guard units to purify the revolutions in Africa'. Chinese officials exasperated African participants in the international merry-go-round of Afro-Asian solidarity meetings with their demands for ideological endorsements. 'I am tired of being asked what I think of the Soviet position when I am eating a sandwich,' fulminated a Kenyan delegate, 'and what I think of the Chinese position when I am drinking my tea. I would like to be able to eat in peace.' At a Chinese diplomatic reception in Dar es Salaam in 1967, a Chinese diplomat asked a Tanzanian his opinion of Mao. On receiving the response that 'Mao was the great leader of the Chinese people just as Nyerere was the great leader of the Tanzanian people', the diplomat immediately offered a correction: Nyerere was 'the leader of Tanzania, but Chairman Mao was the leader of the whole world. There was to be no misunderstanding.' But political promiscuity was too deeply established in East Africa for such monotheism to succeed. Take the example of Issa, the Zanzibari revolutionary and disciple of Babu with simultaneous weaknesses for jiving, Mao and narrow-legged Italian tailoring; we heard him complain earlier about the absence of good times for African students in China. There was undoubtedly a Maoist steel to him. Recalling the Zanzibari revolution of 1964 (in which the island's prisons were thrown open and common criminals freely given weapons), he observed that 'thousands of people died, generally Arabs. I cannot say how many. A revolution is not a tea party ... [Mao's] sacrifice of lives was justified ... I would have done the same things, yes.'

Yet Issa never fitted the self-sacrificing, disciplined model of the Mao-style Communist. Aged thirteen, he began secretly tipping on coconut wine and absconding from his boarding school at night to 'have as many girls as possible ... my number one pastime was dancing and seducing'. He left secondary school early, frankly telling the headmaster that 'I want to work, so I can drink and fornicate'. The flaky Issa regularly let his political comrade and friend Babu down. Once he stood him up for a meeting when a girl dragged him back to her parents' house for drink and sex; and when in 1951 Babu arranged to meet him two months hence in London, it took Issa a whole two years to reach Britain. During that time he had married, impregnated then divorced (by letter) a South African prostitute, learned the jitterbug, developed a passable Frank Sinatra impression and almost enlisted in the US Army to fight in Korea.

Issa's first four children were named Raissa (after a Bolshoi ballerina), Fidel (after Castro), Maotushi (after Mao) and — self-explanatorily — Stalin. Amid countless other infidelities, while his wife was teaching Swahili in China he conducted liaisons with two Englishwomen on the same plane between Uganda and Sudan. As a minister in President...
Karume's Zanzibari dictatorship of the 1960s, he sent Tanzania's youth down to starvation conditions in rural camps to cure their 'declining respect' (according to Ilsa, the idea came 'from the Chinese'), while he regularly smoked marijuana and abandoned his wife (and mother of his four children) for a London party girl (with whom he had another four children, before abandoning her to a council house in Retford). In the meantime, his ministerial colleagues imprisoned the husbands of any woman with whom they wanted to sleep. In the 1980s, as Zanzibar battled economic decline, Ilsa persuaded an Italian financier to back his opening of the island's first beach-resort hotel. One visitor observed him singing 'revolutionary songs in Spanish, Russian, and Chinese to his slightly disoriented Italian hotel staff'.

On 17 December 1974, Ma Faxian – chief of staff for the Nanjing-Shanghai military zone – was given a full eight days' notice that he was to undertake a new mission: to travel to Zambia and train, under conditions of great secrecy, the country's army for two years. His commander told him flatly: 'This is a task that will help the world revolution, it is the concrete application of Chairman Mao's revolutionary diplomacy. In sending you to fulfil this tough but glorious assignment, the organisation hopes that you will be modest and circumspect, strengthen internal unity, overcome every difficulty and strive to complete this task.' His piece said, Ma's superior made the somewhat unconvincing request: 'Feel free to give your own views.'

Unusually for a military agent of Mao's world revolution, Ma decided to put his life on the record. Deep into retirement, he relayed the story of his African mission to Li Danhui, one of China's best historians of the Cold War. His account is revealing of the motivations of the foot soldiers of Mao's world revolution – and of the successes and failures of their missions.

When John Cooley wrote of central 'control operations' for China's Africa offensive, he implied a tightly organised operation by revolutionary automatons dedicated to brainwashing an entire continent. Reality was different. Ma was doubtless an impressively competent and committed individual. Without any background in African affairs or any foreign-language skills, he travelled out to Zambia – a country rich in political and economic uncertainty – and constructed a military school and curriculum from scratch. The pressures and hazards he encountered were enormous. Censured as top secret by the Zambians, the training had to take place far from any established settlement, in an isolated, uninhabited stretch of mountainous woodland. The instructors and students lived in tents, cooking their meals around campfires. The fastidious Ma observed that water was so tightly rationed that 'we couldn't even wash our feet every day'. The Chinese had to bring everything with them: bowls, chopsticks, scissors. Telling his story, more than three decades later, Ma remained every bit the disciplined (if long-winded) Communist Party soldier. 'Our great ideal was to liberate mankind. We came to Zambia ... to carry out the task of proletarian internationalism ... under the guidance of Chairman Mao's path of revolutionary diplomacy, we wanted to unite with the Zambian Army, develop friendship, and ... accelerate the death of imperialism and colonialism. Our concrete task was ... to positively propagandise Mao Zedong's military thought.' Ma piously based the training programme on Mao's military strategy and on the idea of 'people's war'. His curriculum featured five days of Mao-dominated political education in every twenty in order to 'expand the influence of our party, our army and our country in the Zambian military'. As Ma worked off on 'developing friendship', his students were not just military men; the minister of defence and President's Kaunda's own son also attended classes.

In practice, the mission had its share of human imperfections. The team picked to carry out the assignment – eleven military experts, five translators and one cook – were a disparate group, previously unknown to each other. One of the instructors was a liability from the beginning: he was melancholy with family problems – someone at home was clearly displeased that he had been dispatched some 11,000 kilometres away for the foreseeable future. When the group of Chinese first encountered Zambians (an advance party sent to Beijing), the two sides could only smile at each other, for none of the translators had yet arrived – a significant obstacle in Mr Ma's mission to 'support the world revolution [through] propaganda about Mao's military philosophy'. Ma knew almost nothing of Zambia when he was served with his short-notice appointment. His sole source of information for days afterwards was a two-hour briefing from military intelligence, which focused on doctrinaire Marxist political analysis of the country. Only in the Q&A session afterwards had Ma and comrades
been able to ask more practical questions: What is the weather like in Zambia? What do Zambians eat? Should the Chinese instructors bring their own toothpaste, tea and underwear? (Yes.)

Given the top-secret nature of this military mission, Mr Ma and company were intriguingly slapdash about security on their departure and journey. Several family members came to send him off at the airport in Beijing; another fifteen or so swung by to say hello during a five-hour stopover in Shanghai. During another stopover in Karachi, the group had no idea what to do in an international airport or where to spend the night while waiting for their flight on to Africa; no one had given them any instructions. They decided to take refuge in the waiting room and see what happened. Fortunately, someone from the Chinese embassy turned up and asked them – again with a disarming lack of discretion – if they had just come in from Beijing.

Once in Lusaka (where they lived while not teaching military recruits in the bush-camp), Ma’s team became more vigilant. Indeed, security arrangements now severely limited the group’s opportunities for mixing with Zambians. Ma and his comrades were permitted no unauthorised contact with non-Chinese, including their immediate neighbours; neither were they allowed to walk more than two hundred metres beyond the house they occupied in Lusaka, and that only in daylight. Every night spent in the capital, one of the party would be on sentry watch, looking out for suspicious activity. ‘We were to keep ourselves extremely secret,’ Ma recalled. ‘Everyone was always to carry a box of matches, to burn their personal papers and possessions at a moment’s notice.’

Ma was consistently disappointed by lackadaisical Zambian approaches to hospitality. At the welcome ceremony held for the instructors at the training camp, the Zambians had prepared no tea, cigarettes or food. Instead, they trooped expectantly into the kitchen of the Chinese team. ‘We’d prepared nothing!’ Ma told his interviewer, his consternation still palpable thirty-six years on. The Zambians had contravened the most fundamental laws of hospitality. ‘We were the guests, they were the hosts!’ Ma and company had to grit their teeth and tell themselves: ‘It’s all for friendship … [But] they tricked us.’

Time and again through Ma’s stay in Zambia, this experience was repeated, when he felt that Zambians were taking advantage of Chinese generosity: guzzling Chinese fizzy drinks meant only for special occasions, inviting themselves over for meals, cadging sun hats. (This was not how Chinese people behaved, remarked the culture-shocked Ma. ‘They were like silly children.’) Far from being masterful puppeteers of the Zambians, Ma and his comrades were frequently wrong-footed by their hosts’ demands. A simple example concerned seating facilities in the camp. When the Chinese instructors arrived, they brought with them nothing but tents and tools to create an inhabitable area. They then fashioned neat little stools out of foraged wood to sit on during classes. But, Ma recalled, the Zambians had a habit of asking for anything they took a liking to: soon enough, they requested one of the home-made stools. ‘For the sake of friendship’ the Chinese advisers gave it up; as a result one of the instructors always had to stand, musical-chairs-style, during classes.

One of Ma’s compatriots, an engineer on the Tan-Zam Railway, was baffled by his African co-workers’ addiction to spending their wages on dancing and drinking. Ma too was disappointed by the Zambian students’ lack of grit. Enthused for the first three weeks, the students promptly lost interest. Three months, they said, was too much for a training course: they longed to return home. ‘They liked being praised, but were less keen on criticism,’ Ma complained. They did not look after their equipment, or want to practise what they had learned. Within weeks of the course beginning, some were arriving late, or not at all, for class. Ma recounted an anecdote in which a Chinese foreman on a construction project found an African worker taking an unauthorised nap under a tree. When the Chinese man challenged him about it, the African replied without embarrassment: ‘God has told me to rest.’

Still, Ma and his mission certainly made gains for Maoism. ‘Before, our leaders didn’t allow us to read Chairman Mao’s works,’ reported one of Ma’s Zambian students. ‘Now we can … Because our army equipment is all from China, we need to study … Mao’s works.’ Ma observed that students were far more interested in Mao’s political and military theories than they were in the practical classes: he was surprised by how quickly they began to apply them to Zambia’s own situation. Students adored Maoist military films, with their message that the strength of the people was more important than advanced weaponry. When a film had finished, amid claps and cheers, the audience would stay in their seats and demand a repeat showing. ‘These
Maoism

are the best films in the world,' one viewer commented, extrapolating: 'the Chinese army is the best in the world.' A visiting Chinese magi-

clan was also a great success, though with counterproductive conse-
tances. One fine spring day, the Chinese embassy in Zambia received

a visitor: a childless Zambian so impressed with the performer’s display

d of supernatural powers (pulling fish, flowers, ducks, sweets out of

thin air) that the African now requested the conjuror conjure him his

heart’s desire: a son. An awkward scene ensued, with Chinese diplo-

mats explaining that the show was all trickery and sleight of hand,

and the Zambian refusing to believe it, or to leave. Finally, a Chinese

attache had to ask the Zambian Foreign Affairs Department to send

a representative to extract the petitioner.160

Mao’s Africa adventure cost China. As Ma Faxian’s memoir shows,

African countries were often skilled at extracting maximum value from

their sponsors – and the rivalries between the PRC and the USSR, and

between mainland China and the Republic of China on Taiwan, made

it possible for the unscrupulous to play one side off against the other.

Public pledges of reverence for Mao from developing countries or strug-

gling guerrilla movements should not, therefore, be taken at face value.

Political pilgrims to China often had transparently ulterior motives in

acclaiming Mao as the global guru of revolution. A PLO delegation

in 1965 began its audience with a paean to the chairman: ‘We are inspired,

inspired by your military works ... Your swimming is as glorious as the

Yangtze ... You are the symbol of great liberation and freedom in Asia,

Africa, and Latin America.’ After about ten minutes of this, the speaker

finally got to the point: ‘The aim of my visit is to ask for support.’161

And it seems that the Palestinians received it. In the 1970s, the PLO

leadership boasted that ‘the Chinese give us everything we ask for’.162

China will never be able to produce a precise figure for the cost of

its aid to Africa during Mao’s lifetime: there were too many bad loans,

too many projects that ran over budget, too many technicians and

advisers who ended up staying on years after their mission was meant
to have finished. By 1972, for example, China’s investment in the

Tan-Zam Railway was already double what had originally been projec-
ted.163 A British resident in China during the 1970s remembers

the official explanation for pinched railway schedules: ‘the trains have
gone to the Tan-Zam’.164 And some paid for China’s African revolution

with more than goods or currency: 145 Chinese aid workers died in

Africa during the Mao era.165 Africans too lost their lives in Chinese

projects. Just as Mao argued that ‘millets and rifles’ were more important

than high-tech weaponry, he insisted that ideologically motivated, low-

skilled masses were more effective than industrialisation: they achieved

‘more, faster, better, cheaper’. But speed led to carelessness and lack of

quality control. Tunnels leaked, trains derailed, accidents proliferated.

In 1971, 870 people died or were injured in at least 1,000 accidents in

Chinese projects in Africa; the following year, there were 1,806 accidents,

resulting in 1,703 injuries and 67 deaths. Chinese technicians found it

hard to pass on management of the projects to their African counter-

parts before they left.166 One project in Sierra Leone was grassed over

within two years of the Chinese experts’ departure.167

And for all that expenditure of effort in the interest of ‘world revolu-
tion’ and ‘friendship’, the recipients of this aid could be carelessly

ungrateful. When Ma Faxian’s comrades, after more than two and a

half years of instructing and giving seats, fizzy drinks, cigarettes and

Chinese dinners to their Zambian students, returned to China, no one

saw them off. Much less did all this effort lead to Zambia following

China’s path. In 1974, President Kaunda decided to resolve border issues

with South Africa and Southern Rhodesia through peaceful negotiations

rather than armed struggle. Anti-Chinese messages now began to appear

in the Zambian media. For Ma, there had never been any real meeting of

minds between the Chinese instructors and their Zambian pupils.

The problem with people in the capitalist system, he bitterly conclud-

ed, is that ‘all they can do is take from other people, but they won’t give

you back even a hair from their bodies’.168

Most of Mao’s ‘freedom fighters’ were disappointingly unsuccessful,
as Mao himself admitted in an extraordinarily frank conversation with

the notorious military tyrant President Mobutu of Zaire, who visited

China in January 1973 to secure diplomatic and economic cooperation.

‘Lumumba never made it here,’ Mao began. ‘Indeed he never did,’

agreed Mobutu (omitting to recall that in 1961 he had sent Lumumba

to his death, handing him over to thugs who tortured then murdered

him). ‘We supported him, and a few others, such as [Antoine] Gizenga and [Pierre] Mulele. But not you!’

reminisced Mao, chuckling at the memory. ‘We gave them money and

INTO AFRICA

215
If there were few Chinese success stories in Africa, the guerrillas of Zimbabwe were the exception.

On 28 April 1966, seven members of the Zimbabwean African National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union, pushed deep down into what is now north Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia), searching for an electricity pylon to bomb. Though they were quickly gunned down by Rhodesian helicopters before they could do much damage, the military fiasco was soon mythologised as a ‘heroic sacrifice’ and as the start of the Chimurenga war of liberation against Ian Smith’s white Rhodesian government. In a sense, Mao had sent them. The seven guerrillas had been trained in China and when the Rhodesian intelligence service searched the dead bodies after the massacre, they found a notebook recording one soldier’s experiences at Nanjing Military College in 1965. Joseph Khumalo, himself a Nanjing graduate and one of the ZANU commanders who decided to throw the seven guerrillas into Southern Rhodesia, later explained the strategy: ‘Mao Tse-tung said “where there is war there is sacrifice ... fight, fail, fight, fail until you succeed.”’

At least three groups of ZANU guerrillas travelled to China for training in the 1960s. In 1970, Chinese instructors – men like Ma Fuxian – were sent to Itumbi in south Tanzania to teach ZANU trainees for two years in an abandoned farm and gold mine before the organisation’s own Nanjing graduates took over the work. These graduates included Josiah Tongogara, the military leader with greatest responsibility for ZANU’s success in the war against white-ruled Southern Rhodesia. (He seems to have learned also from the split personality of Mao’s sexual politics: Tongogara was both attentive to the welfare of post-partum women under his command and pressed female guerrillas into sexual servitude while refusing them access to contraception or abortions.) They spent most of the first month teaching recruits – through use of Mao’s essays – to ‘speak bitterness’, to analyse and confront the ways in which government and society were keeping them down. From there, they moved onto reconnaissance, sabotage, the use of bazookas. The path to protracted war did not always run smooth. To begin with, going off to train as a guerrilla ‘was a sort of adventure’, remembered John Mawema, later chief of security for ZANU. ‘What we saw in the films. People shooting each other. You know, wanting to become cowboys of some sort. But as you go for training you are given the political line of the party, the ideology and the objectives of the armed struggle. Then you realised that all you were thinking was wrong ... I did nine months’ training and the party was more concerned about political education than military training ... [in] the basic teachings of Mao on guerrilla warfare. We dealt more with the party line than military training because the Chinese, who had twenty instructors at the camp, believed that you have got to be matured politically in your head before you go and shoot ... You know the Chinese are very particular about such behaviour.’

Until 1968, ZANU interpreted Mao’s dictum that ‘power comes out of the barrel of a gun’ perhaps too literally. The organisation and its Soviet-funded rival ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People’s Union) went on repeating the error of April 1966, hurling guerrillas over the border from Zambia into Zimbabwe and into doomed encounters with the white Rhodesian forces. In 1968 alone 160 fighters were killed. ‘We thought that it was easy to just go and get a gun and go and fight in Zimbabwe,’ Mayor Urimo, ZANU’s political commissar, explained, ‘but it was very difficult for that group in 1966. That was why they failed ... It was realised that the people had to be mobilised if we were to conduct a successful struggle. Tongogara in particular had learned [that] in China.’ Fay Chung, an ethnically Chinese educationalist and critical member of ZANU, describes the deep impact of Maoist military strategies on Tongogara: he ‘entered the liberation struggle as a lowly soldier. He received his military training in the [Nanjing] military academy in China and forever held the Chinese as his mentors in morality as well as in military skills and strategies. It was from the thoughts and practices of Mao Tse Tung that he learnt that the guerrilla must merge with the people. He taught his soldiers that they were never to mistreat people. He taught his soldiers that they were never to mistreat ...
Handed down to us by Mao Tse-tung / The revolutionary sage. Liberation will come with the 'barrel of the gun': 'Only the gun, the gun is the answer.'

Tongogara's Maoist approach transformed ZANU's prospects during the 1970s. Following Mao's strategy of mass mobilisation and political education, ZANU educated the black rural majority about their grievances against white rule, persuaded them that the struggle was necessary, and established political and supply networks in remote parts of Southern Rhodesia. As the British Army had done during the Maoist-infused Malayan Emergency after 1948, Rhodesian counter-insurgency forces responded by creating 'protected villages' to 'drain Mao's 'sea' away from the guerrilla "fishes"'. These camps were desperate places, rife with poor hygiene, disease and abuses by government workers. Moreover, Smith's government was not in any hurry to win hearts and minds by widening democracy to the black African population.

In contrast to the simplistic but intense political education meted out in ZANU, the Rhodesian Army was staunchly non-political and non-philosophical. 'The Rhodesians' vague conservatism [and] hole-in-the-corner racism', recalled Paul Moorcroft, a journalist who reported the war on the ground, could not compete with ZANU's 'sense of mission' for which Mao's works were 'the bible'. ZANU needed every ounce of Maoist discipline to survive the insurgency, for it was a conflict scarred by routine brutality against civilians, and by biological and chemical warfare. The Rhodesian Army's special forces unit – the Selous Scouts – hired agents to distribute uniforms to ZANLA guerrillas painted with a toxin called parathion; corned beef and jam were injected with thallium; cigarette boxes were soaked in poison. Those affected died in solitary agony in the Rhodesian bush, abandoned by their comrades. These gruesome methods did little to change the outcome of the struggle. By the time Ian Smith's government agreed to negotiate in 1979, ZANU was in control of two-thirds of rural Southern Rhodesia – the countryside surrounding the cities, in Maoist terminology. It was the rural vote in the 1980 elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until elections that brought Robert Mugabe to power, where he stayed until
struggle in Zimbabwe, the Chinese people steadfastly stood behind the Zimbabwean people as comrades-in-arms. I was touched to learn that many Zimbabwean freedom fighters who received training from the Chinese side both in China and at Nachingwea camp in Tanzania can still sing [Mao’s] songs such as the “Three Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention.” At a reunion in 2016, veterans began chorusing it. The Herald – the government and party mouthpiece – reported that ‘some of the comrades seemed transfixed, perhaps remembering the days when these were the maxims by which they lived’.

Moved by this relic of 1960s Maoism – Mugabe sang China’s praises, while blaming all Zimbabwe’s economic problems on Western sanctions – China’s government built a National Sports Stadium and a military academy in Harare, to create national spectacle, and to police its audiences. In military, political and psychological support offered by China to Mugabe’s regime – in which life expectancy halved between 1980 and 2017 – the legacy of global Maoism lived on.

Xi’s willingness to acknowledge this shared history suggests one of the ways in which he is attempting to rehabilitate the Mao era – including its foreign policy – into China’s contemporary self-image. Certainly, it is hard to make sense of the closeness of the contemporary Sino-Zimbabwean relationship without keeping in mind the links stretching back to the 1960s insurgency. This is a curious diplomatic sleight of hand. China’s presence in Africa today is focused on safe economic returns – including for its huge stake in Zimbabwe’s diamond fields – and therefore on political stability, rather than on the kind of ‘revolutionary upsurge’ that Mao cherished while sponsoring ZANLA in the 1960s and ’70s. And yet Xi presumably feels that the 1970s are distant enough to blur into the feel-good factor of the ‘all-weather’ friendship between Zimbabwe and the PRC.

In the autumn of 1976, President Marien Ngouabi of the People’s Republic of the Congo organised a memorial ceremony for Mao – his ‘elder brother’ – in the forests of Owando, his home town in the centre of the country. As China’s own functionaries at home and in Africa pulled free of Mao’s cult, those Chinese diplomats...
indifferent to, or loathing, Mao for the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, since it had condemned most of the foreign service to re-education in rural China – who attended the ceremony were unnerved, even sickened by the encomia: ‘Here, lingering in the African forest, was the cult of [the] former leader.’ After 1976, Mao’s successors tried within China to return the genie of high, revolutionary Maoism to the bottle – and keep it there. But in Peru, India and Nepal, his spirit has continued to float free in the decades since his death.