

## Researching the China-East Africa Cold War Relationship: Archives, Institutions and Personal Collections

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The goal of this essay is to introduce the readers to archival and other sources that I have found in Tanzania and Zambia that tell part of the global history of the People's Republic of China, as described in the introduction to this issue. I carried out this research initially as part of my ongoing research project on the TAZARA railway and on Chinese technical assistance to Africa in the 1960s and the 1970s. There are official archival sources in the Tanzania National Archives in Dar es Salaam and in the Zanzibar National Archive; there are unofficial archives still remaining at some of the sites of development projects that were undertaken by China in the 1970s (these are not open to the public); and there are examples of tangible and intangible heritage in all three of the participating countries. There are also small personally curated collections in private hands, held in most cases by railway workers but lately in China increasingly by collectors.

This article is not meant to be comprehensive, because the research that it draws upon was focused on two specific projects: the history of public diplomacy during the Cold War (especially the history of women's and youth delegations) and the history of the TAZARA railway. Nevertheless, it gives a window into the ways some documentary and other records of the historical China-Africa relationship are repositied, curated and protected, while in others they are vulnerable to the forces of privatization and dehistoricization.

My research began first in Shanghai, where a visit to the Shanghai Municipal Archive in 2007 yielded unexpectedly interesting materials on technical cooperation projects on the island of Zanzibar. Some of these documents provided rare and detailed reports not only of successes but also the problems that had occurred. A second set of files contained records of visits of East African delegations to China, including women from Zanzibar in 1963-4. These reports stressed familiar themes such as the long-term friendship between Tanzania and China; shared struggles against colonialism and imperialism; and the rural development model that China offered newly independent African countries. During my next visits to Tanzania therefore, I followed up with research on the history of technical cooperation and also on the experiences of delegations, based on these leads.

I visited the following collections (among others): the Tanzania National Archives (TNA), the East Africana Section of the library of the University of Dar es Salaam, and the Zanzibar National Archives. I also visited the National Archives of Zambia and the archive of the United National Independent Party of Zambia, UNIP. Each of these archives

has materials that record the history of engagement between China and Tanzania, with holdings such as newspapers and press releases as well as government reports. The East Africana Section at the UDSM has an easily accessible newspaper collection with many diverse publications from the 1960s and the 1970s, in Kiswahili and in English. The most interesting records for my own purposes were those found in the Zanzibar National Archives, and I will describe those more fully below. Finally, I will describe other forms of tangible and intangible heritage from the 1960s and 1970s era of China-East African technology cooperation that I found in Tanzania and Zambia, including personal collections.

### Zanzibar

When I visited the ZNA in the summer of 2014 I found records of the visits that Zanzibari and other East African delegations had made to China. What interested me more, however, were records of the visits of Chinese delegations to Zanzibar. These Chinese visitors were taken to similar sites to those that had been selected for African tours of China, such as model rural villages where socialist mobilization for development could be witnessed and shared. For example, members of a Chinese youth delegation were greeted in 1966 with bouquets of flowers and treated to a welcoming parade led by the Youth League of the ruling Afro-Shirazi Party. They were then taken for a visit to the model village or "camp" at Bambi on the island of Zanzibar, where they were given lessons on youth's critical role in socialist modernization and nation building.

It is now widely known that the Zanzibaris and other Africans who went to China during the Cultural Revolution were given lessons in which China was put forward as a model for the future, a "powerful idea, historical narrative and set of nation-building precepts."<sup>1</sup> While the delegations from African countries to China are better documented, the accounts in the ZNA of the Chinese visitors who were taken to the model village of Bambi on Zanzibar speak of a pedagogical diplomacy that went in both directions, as it demonstrated the practice of a mutual historical relationship that could shape a "march into the future" in friendship and solidarity.<sup>2</sup> These ideals were put into practice at sites like Bambi through such activities as carpentry and handicrafts, as reported in the newspaper *Kweupe*: "We will be able to preserve and to develop our traditions and culture that have been made backward by those colonial rulers."<sup>3</sup>

Bambi was one of ten planned urbanization schemes in the island's "New Zanzibar" project, although in the end Bambi was the only model settlement completed outside of

Zanzibar town. Bambi's "new city" included a multi-story cement-brick apartment block constructed with assistance from the German Democratic Republic (GDR).<sup>4</sup>

The ZNA contains many more documents that record the exchanges and especially the political and technical cooperation between China and the revolutionary government of Zanzibar in the mid- to late 1960s. There is a copy of the speech made by Zhou En Lai at Zanzibar in 1965; and a survey of the economic development needs of the island that is similar to documents we viewed in Shanghai. Recommendations were made for following the "path to self-reliance," including budget estimates for potential assistance from the PRC. There are records of the Chinese medical teams and of the Lenin Hospital, Zanzibar's most long-lived (and arguably most successful) form of development cooperation with China.

### **Institutional Collections**

While official government archives in Africa and in China may have important documents and files on technical cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s, these materials are becoming more difficult to access, especially in China. The Beijing Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive was closed to the public after 2014, [apparently it has recently been re-opened] and the Shanghai Municipal Archive has also limited its formerly open access. Scholars of Chinese history are becoming famous for their ability to locate historical documents from the Mao era in Chinese flea markets, and materials from the 1960s and 1970s are increasingly marketed on the internet for high prices which puts them out of reach for graduate students and also for many Chinese historians. As a consequence valuable documents are moving into private collections – no longer with their original owner (for example, a family photo album) but with collectors who may be speculators or history buffs. Whatever the motivation behind this form of collection, private collecting of materials perceived as valuable will certainly have an impact on the location, documentation and circulation of archival materials, as Chinese historical documents are subject simultaneously to state restrictions and to private market forces. These processes are underway in African countries as well, though they take different forms.

Still, institutional collections of materials can be a valuable source of historical documentation, although these are not customarily open to the public. I have been fortunate to be able to work with a CCTV documentary film project and this allowed me to visit the archives of the Beijing Jiaotong (Communications) University, where the earliest teams of TAZARA railway workers were trained between 1972 to 1974. The curriculum materials and student records held in Beijing allowed us to gain broader understanding of these years of engineering education when we paired them with teaching and other records at the TAZARA training school in Mpika, Zambia. They also helped us to identify the students from Tanzania and Zambia from the 1970s who had been to China and we were able to do oral history interviews with many of them about their experiences, and to compare their

personal collections of photographs and documents with those from the archives.

In Mpika, the training institute keeps a small museum and teaching materials collection that has not only printed textbooks from the construction and post-construction period but also teaching materials for practical training such as surveying equipment; demonstration tools and a scale model of the train. The curriculum materials are still used in modified form for railway courses today and include many that were left behind by the Chinese expert teams that stayed at Mpika through the mid-1990s. Some of them still have personal notations or Chinese characters handwritten in them. By combining these sources with those from Beijing Jiaotong University, it is possible to see the ways that technology transfer took place through not only specially designed TAZARA railway textbooks but also through practical training and use of specialized teaching materials.

Other current and former TAZARA institutions also have important materials in their collections, yet just as in China these documents have become more difficult to access. In Dar es Salaam, for example the TAZARA headquarters still had a number of files on the history of the Chinese Railway Expert Team or CRET, but these like other TAZARA documents have been moved gradually back to Beijing in recent years.<sup>5</sup> In China, records at regional railway bureau headquarters have been off limits to researchers, or moved to Beijing, including important internal reports about Chinese workers that were deployed to Africa for TAZARA's construction.<sup>6</sup>

The machine workshop at Mang'ula in Tanzania still houses a number of valuable machines made in China, most of them with identifying metal plaques that state the name of the Chinese factory where they were made and the date of manufacture. Those machines that are still active also constitute a form of archival preservation. Over my years of research there the Chinese-trained machinists have demonstrated the practical, hands-on or "*shou ba shou*" (手把手) pedagogy they learned from Chinese experts. Yet today the Mang'ula machine workshop has, like many other institutions, limited access to visitors due to the privatization of the site. A for-profit education investor has made it into a private technical college and the fate of the machines is now entangled in the future operations of this institution.<sup>7</sup>

Institutional collections from training schools, colleges, workshops and other sites can therefore be valuable sources for historical research on Chinese development cooperation in Africa. By combining records of instruction from Chinese and East African institutions it is possible to reconstruct the historical trajectories of students, teachers, ideas and teaching pedagogies between China and Africa in the Cold War era. Oral interviews in the three countries (China, Tanzania, Zambia) brought teaching materials to life as respondents remembered and reenacted the ways they had used classrooms and workspaces for theory and practical forms of training. And by visiting the sometimes empty spaces that remain from

the TAZARA period at places like Mang'ula, the intangible heritage of technology transfer is made real through the stories and work practice of the former workers.

The archives of African political parties offer another avenue for the researcher interested in locating materials related to the history of the PRC, although access to these can be limited. The archive of the United National Independence Party of Zambia (ruling party between 1964 and 1973) in Lusaka, holds some materials related to China's activities in Zambia, along with notes and announcements from Zambian delegations to China, although the National Archives of Zambia collection on these topics is much larger. The archive of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) ruling party in Dodoma, Tanzania has more limited access and holdings. Records held in the British Public Record Office (PRO) from the period of decolonization include many materials related to China's involvement in the TAZARA project.

### Private Collections and Oral Interviews

As a historian of East Africa, oral history methodology has always been primary in my research on China-Africa technical assistance. Together with a documentary film maker I have been interviewing retired workers in China, Zambia and Tanzania for the last five years, in the process visiting their homes and work sites. In many cases, there are direct links between oral histories and written documents (for example, we have interviewed the Chinese professors who composed some of the earliest textbooks for the TAZARA training program in Africa). A retired engineer in Zambia has kept many objects from his 1970s and 1980s trainings in Beijing, including the complete blueprint of the engine he designed specifically for TAZARA.<sup>8</sup>

Retired workers have their own personal collections of photographs, books, documents and other materials that they have curated and saved over the decades. Worker families may have kept similar items or even letters exchanged during the years of this and other projects. These "tin trunk archives" as Karin Barber describes them, allow the researcher not only to view the materials but to understand through their curation and description by retired workers what meaning the objects may hold for their owners.<sup>9</sup> For example, in a small apartment in Harbin, China we found that, within a very small two-room home, a retired worker had filled almost every open shelf as well as several drawers and cabinets with memory objects from the years he spent as a railway worker in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

While not comprehensive, this short essay is intended to provide a view of some of the research materials available outside of the People's Republic of China that connect to the history of China's engagement with East Africa during the revolutionary period and afterwards. From the time that I began to do research on these topics in the late 1990s to the present, many of the collections that were formerly available to researchers have become more limited in their access or even closed altogether. This has been the outcome of both state restrictions on access and global privatization, as the

formerly public institutions that participated in historical relationships between China and Africa have since been taken over by private individuals or corporations. The continued existence of most of these materials is therefore due in large part to the efforts of far-sighted and dedicated individual archivists or educators (for example in the case of the Mpika Training School, the Beijing Communications University, the National Archives of Zanzibar, and the Zambian National Archives). By combining research in multiple countries and diverse institutional and private collections, it is still possible to put together a comprehensive account of this important period in the transnational and global social history of the People's Republic of China.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> G. Thomas Burgess, "Mao in Zanzibar," in *Making a World After Empire: the Bandung Moment and its Afterlives*, ed. Christopher Lee, (Ohio University Press 2010): 197.

<sup>2</sup> For example in the work of Amanda Shuman, "From Soviet Kin to Afro-Asian leader: The People's Republic of China and International Sport in the early 1960s." *Comparativ*, Volume 23, Issue 3 (2013).

<sup>3</sup> ZNA *Kweupe* Newspaper, July 30, 1966, Issue 52: 209, "Urafiki Unazidi Kutiliwa Nguvu."

<sup>4</sup> Garth Myers, "Making the Socialist City of Zanzibar," *Geographical Review* 84 (4) 1996: 451.

<sup>5</sup> See Liu Haifang and Jamie Monson, "Railway Time: Technology Transfer and the Role of Chinese Experts in the History of TAZARA," in *African Engagements – On Whose Terms? Africa Negotiating an Emerging Multipolar World*, Ton Dietz, Kjell Havnevik, Mayke Kaag and Terje Oestigaard, editors, (Leiden; Boston: Brill Press, 2011): 326-251.

<sup>6</sup> Based on visits to Second Railway Bureau in Chengdu and Fifth Railway Bureau in Guiyang.

<sup>7</sup> Visit to Mang'ula Workshop, August 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Interview in Kapiri Mposhi, Zambia, July 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Karin Barber, "Introduction: Hidden Innovators in Africa," in *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and the Making of the Self*, ed. Karin Barber, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006): 1-24.

<sup>10</sup> Interview in Harbin, China, January 16, 2011.