

## **A word from the director**

Regular users of the CCS website may have noticed that updates of content, such as commentaries and our weekly briefing, have been put on hold. In recent years, the Centre (and South African higher education as a whole) has come under significant financial strain, forcing us to reduce staff to the point where we are at present unable to maintain previous levels of output. This has been exacerbated by shifting our meagre resources increasingly into teaching, curriculum development and peer-reviewed research outputs.

The reasons are twofold. Firstly, there is the urgent need to develop an educational infrastructure which caters to developing Asia literacy within Africa. To this end, the Centre is nearly at the end of a two-year process of gaining approval for both a post-graduate diploma and Masters programme which will commence in 2018. We also run a short course, a Summer School, an international semester programme and have an online course in the pipeline. Additionally, we teach supplementary courses on Modern and Contemporary China to all degree-taking Mandarin language students in the Modern Foreign Languages department at Stellenbosch University. While these activities detract from our online presence, it is our belief they are vital in terms of developing the building blocks of a properly African-based academic programme focusing on East Asia. This re-positioning, coupled with increased budgetary constraints, has led to a decrease in research reports, working papers and policy briefs - although we still produce them internally and with our partners when we have resources available. Thankfully in recent years, excellent and freely available work focusing on similar themes is increasingly available through outlets such as the China-Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University.

The second reason - and it's always a reason - is that of money. While our teaching has started to generate a modest income, over the next few years, the flow of students from undergraduate to post-graduate will generate more sustainable sums. Additionally, an increased staff focus on publishing book chapters and journal articles is geared toward raising more government-subsidised funding (the South African Department of Higher Education and Training offers remuneration for accredited publications). Certainly, this has become more achievable in recent years, as our relatively junior staff have gone on to obtain their doctorates, enabling them to publish in higher-level research outlets.

2017 will be an absolutely crucial year for the Centre, where we will focus all remaining energies on securing multi-year research and teaching support. In short, failure to secure this funding will seriously jeopardize our longer term academic project. This prioritization is hopefully temporary, and, in the meantime, we have come

up with creative ways to keep some of our platforms running (such as our weekly briefing, which will soon be in partnership with the China-Africa Project). We are currently in discussions with other partners regarding sustaining some of our other platforms, such as our journal, African East Asian Affairs. In the age of the internet, there are many more ways to skin a cat, and I use this opportunity here to call on our partners and users around the world to contact the Centre if they have any proposals for co-management of online content.

Our 14-year existence is, on the one hand, a great achievement, given the precarious nature of academic centres in an African setting (or anywhere else, for that matter). On the other hand, given the growing presence of China within Africa over this period, and the attendant academic and public interest, it is not really surprising at all. As our readers and others who follow East Asia know, the importance of the region, locally and internationally, will continue to grow, not least as we enter a period in which Euro-American leadership seems to be in disarray. Certainly, China's role within Africa specifically seems more important now than ever before. This sense of urgency serves a great motivator, as does your continued support.

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