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Eric: Today we're going to bring you three topics. I'm here in Singapore as I mentioned, and I've had the chance to be invited by Nanyang Technological University in the Africa Studies Centre here. A big shout out to Amit Jain and the wonderful team there who really does an amazing program here and this is the only Africa Studies Centre in Southeast Asia and this centre I have a feeling is going to be a lot more important now in the days to come as relations between African countries and Southeast Asia become more important and we'll talk about that coming up.

We're also going to talk about some insights that I picked up here on Chinese mining strategy and we're going to get Géraud's feedback on this. There are some very interesting insights that I picked up from some Chinese stakeholders here that I want to share with both of you and then finally we're going to talk to Cobus about all of the unfolding drama that's going on between the United States and South Africa and how that's going to impact South Africa's relations with China and maybe even more broadly China's relations with Africa.

But let's start with the past couple of days that I've been here in Singapore having some fascinating discussions with just a wide range of folks particularly over at the NTU campus and midweek I gave a lecture entitled "What does China want from Africa?" and it was just a lot of fun to have the chance to meet with the students, a lot of Chinese students, a lot of Singaporean students, quite a few researchers from India as well.

Let me just, you know walk you through a little bit of what I was saying and those of you who are watching us on YouTube will have the benefit of being able to see some of the slides and I'll put the slide deck also in the show notes for you and so basically what I the point that I was trying to make was to show that when China first went to Africa in the early 2000s and this is in the modern era. It really was about resources in many respects it really was about the hunt for oil mineral and timber, opening new markets for Chinese companies, there was excess you know surplus, you know supply on the Chinese side they needed to find outlets for their state-owned enterprises. I put a slide up here and those are you listening on the on the audio show - it shows that in the period from 1999 to 2004, China sourced about 30% of its oil from African countries, a lot of that came from Sudan, came from Angola, and the Republic of Congo, but then as we move forward in in time China starts to you know evolve its own economic strategy. I kind of put to the students a question - I said well the engagement in Africa really booms until about 2013, and then I asked the students I said what happens in 2013, and then of course 2013 is the year that the Belt and Road Initiative begins. This is when Xi Jinping went to Kazakhstan and announced it.

At that time from 2013, we start to see a decline of Chinese oil buying from Africa, all the way from 30%, now it goes down really below 10% today. We're seeing that across the board in a number of different sectors. So as you can see from the slides and again I'll put those slides up for folks, I kind of laid it out with data, wasn't really trying to put any narratives about whether this is a good trend or a bad trend and you know it's very interesting because in the room there was a lot of engagement from the students. But over on my left hand side there were a couple delegation of senior African stakeholders who were present as well. I could tell that they were not very happy with the data and the narratives and the talk that I was giving and when it came time to do the Q&A, the host of the program deferred to them and said would you like to say any comments just to kind of get the conversation going with the students and the faculty who were in the program. Their comment was they were very disappointed in the fact that I as a white American was coming to talk about China-Africa relations and they you know expressed their displeasure at the program.

Of course Cobus, this is something that you and I have confronted quite a bit over the past 15 years that we've done the show but I thought it would be an interesting discussion today to talk about who tells the China-Africa story. That was their frustration, was that they wanted Africans to be in Singapore talking to Chinese, Singaporeans, Indians and other folks about the China-Africa story and the fact that me as a white American male is coming to do that, they found objectionable.

I understand where they're coming from and just before I open it up for our discussion on this, I want to take us back to 2018. I was in Beijing and I just done an event with one of our partner organizations in Beijing and afterwards a group of us with a lot of young African students went for a drink. I could feel at the table that I was with a lot of coldness from these African students, and I said is everything

okay, did I do anything to offend you, and they said, you know and Cobus, you and I just been doing the podcast and a little bit of the site for about eight years until that point. They said, listen we just don't feel that you should be doing the China-Africa Project, we feel that there should be Africans doing the China-Africa Project, and I said to them I said I completely agree 100%. You know that everything that we're doing all the tools that we're using are free. Twitter, even podcasting, social media blogger. Why aren't you doing it? You guys are here in China, you have the expertise. I agree there should be 20 China-Africa Projects out there talking about it and then their attitude was - well I don't have time I'm a student. I'm busy. Okay I get it so let me leave the conversation there. Géraud when I told this story to you about what happened at NTU, you 100% understood where they were coming from. Maybe kind of talk about what you think this African delegation was touching on when they expressed their displeasure of the fact that I was the one talking about this.

Géraud: I think you were finding yourself in a context where you have stacked up many layers that just made your narrative in your presentation not being heard by those African delegation. Because you are coming in a context where it's been for years that Africans have been frustrated to hear non-Africans talking about the relationship between Africa and China.

You had many people expressing those voices, those frustration, African leaders for instance. They will be telling you why the WTO, the IMF or the World Bank or Janet Yellen or any Western decision-makers will come to Africa telling Africans how they should be dealing with China and everything because it's disrespectful. It's as if we are child for you to come and tell us how we should be engaging with China. You had that context already happening there.

And then you have the second layer of making things difficult is the fact that, first of all you're white, you're an American and that's already made things even much more complicated. Americans in a context where you have a China-US tension that we do have right now on the international stage, basically makes any Americans who talk about China-Africa needs to be really careful on the word he's using, the heights approaching, the discussions to be able to be heard, not to be just stop because you're white American, don't, to be first of all heard about your argument.

The third layers will be like, you've been invited in a third-party country so we have a White American being invited in Asian countries Singapore to talk to Singaporean student about China-Africa relation. So basically all the three parts of the triangle, none of you had quote-unquote the legitimacy to start the conversation without an African being there. So now you have decision-makers of stakeholders coming from Africa being there, they feel like why are we talking about China-Africa here with, with none of you being Chinese, none of you being Africans, all of you being foreigners but you're talking about us and other countries. So only in that context there, any African decision makers or intellectual would be like I'm not even hearing you, so which means that any kind of sound argument you'll make about it especially if those factual arguments are counterfactual, are counter intuitive to what we would like our relationship to be with China was not going to be heard at all. It's going to be 'no no you're trying to downplay a relationship, you're trying to say that we are not important, you're trying to say that we know we are not valuable, you are trying to say that we're where the third four feet six will of China's priority in the world you are trying to tell...' basically they will hear all of that except the fact that beyond the appearances this is what the data are telling us. This is a problem, and I think this is the part of the narrative that you find yourself unfortunately in a very bad situation. If you are invited in university in Zambia, in Kenya, in Johannesburg, in any other African country you don't have that same tension because you'd be on African soil invited by African university, by African scholars, by African student to talk to African student about our relationship with China. You wouldn't have that problem. But all of you find yourself in a third country where none of you are Chinese or South Africans, but talking about China-Africa be like yeah that was recipe for - no not for disaster but the recipe for...

Eric: It was a recipe for a little bit of awkwardness. Just to point out, I 100% agree with everything you've said but just to clarify, nothing that I was saying was meant to denigrate the - that's what they heard though of course, but at the same time I just want to make it clear for the audience that's not what we do.

Kindly note that the audio transcript may not be 100% accurate.