Alerted by the missing research on strengthening ties between China and Algeria Élisabeth Allès, Thierry Pairault and Fatiha Talahite initiated an international academic exchange. In February 2013 Pairault and Talahite gathered 17 academics from France, Algeria and China in Paris to discuss the rising political and economical Chinese presence in Algeria and on the African continent. The omnibus volume “China-Algeria. A unique relationship in Africa” emerged out of this Workshop. Thus, it examines the particularities of the sino-algerian interactions: Which strategies do Chinese economic and political actors employ to establish ties to and in Algeria? What are the implications, challenges and opportunities of the Chinese presence in Algeria, the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa? By gathering 14 micro- and macro-studies around these central research questions, the editors Pairault and Talahite offer insights in the changing political, economic and human relations between China and Algeria and the African continent.

In her introduction Talahite points out that the Chinese presence in Algeria effects three interrelated spheres: politics, economics and human relations. The rising economic interactions are intertwined with migration movements and an increasing contact between Chinese and Algerian people. Additionally, both processes are shaped by political actors, discourses and interactions. This meta-level discussion serves as an umbrella for all the contributions, which are organized in three sections: First, the relationship between China and Algeria is discussed, focussing on economic interactions. Second, case studies highlight how Chinese businesses and private business-people establish themselves in Algeria and the Algerian market. In the third section, the relationship between China and Algeria is placed in a broader regional context including China’s connection to the Maghreb as well as Sub-Saharan Africa.

Three aspects characterize the uniqueness of the sino-algerian relations: First, contrary to other North or Sub-Saharan African states, the Algerian government is not searching for financial development aid. In depth case studies of several infrastructure projects illustrate that the Algerian officials seek technology transfer in the context of sino-algerian economic cooperations. However, Rouibah reveals in his case study on a dam construction project a hierarchy within the economic partnership. Since the engineers and technicians are Chinese while the workers are Algerian, the aspired technology and knowledge transfer is limited.

Second, the Chinese “petroleum diplomacy” (p. 63) enables Algeria to challenge its traditional economic partners and to enlarge its petroleum market. China, on the other side, profits by diversifying its oil imports and minimizing dependencies and risks (p. 65). Moreover, since Chinese enterprises participate directly in the excavation of Algerian oil resources, China gains direct access to oil (pp. 66-67). Thus, Algeria is an important partner for China in order to secure the energy supply for the Chinese economy. Despite the increasing Chinese involvement in the Algerian oil sector, China does currently not replace the traditional Algerian partners, like the United States or Great Britain (p. 80).

Third, in contrast to most African states Algerian officials are not looking for cheap weapons in order to modernize the Algerian military (p. 97). Consequently, the Algerian import of Chinese military products permits China to position themselves as a new and important player within the market of military supplies. Furthermore, the sino-algerian economic relation in the field of military products follow as well the logic of challenging traditional partners, in this case Russia, and diversifying suppliers or sale markets. Additionally, the Algerian contracts with China in the military sphere also include technology transfer, which aims at developing the local milita—

1 Élisabeth Allès (1953-2012)
These particularities of the sino-algerian relationship translates themselves currently into two flows: On the one side, China replaced France as the first supplier of Algeria in 2013 (p. 9). Like other Maghrebian and African states, Algeria imports mostly Chinese products of small or medium technology (pp. 50-56). Therefore, Pairault argues that the increasing Chinese imports do not threaten traditional Algerian suppliers - like France - since the imports are very diverse (p. 59-61). Thus, the increasing economic flows do not include a high rate of Chinese foreign direct investments (p. 38) but are rather restricted to commerce (p. 189).

On the other side, Algeria was the first destination on the African continent for Chinese workers between 2005 and 2011 (p. 23). Pinaguerrassimoff gives a historical background for the recent migration of Chinese workers, technicians and alike to the African continent. The migrants as well as governmental authorities consider the labour migration as temporary. Mobility is a resource; this kind of nomadism is seen as a capital (pp. 233-234). Nevertheless, the migration patterns differs between a Chinese construction workers and a Chinese technicians or cadres. Thus, based on the Algerian context Hammou and Pairault assert that there is a visible and an invisible Chinese migration to Algeria and the African continent in general. Despite the temporality of the Chinese migration, some Chinese settle permanently on the African continent and in Algeria, engaging mostly in industrial production or trade (pp. 162-163).

The role of the state is addressed by tracing how the Chinese and Algerian governments strive to stimulate and control these economic and human flows in line with their interests. China, on the other hand, is missing a regional policy approach to the Maghreb or the African continent. Thus, the interactions are bilateral and based on historical and personal connections like in the case of Algeria (p. 179). More so, the increasing linkages with the North and Sub-Saharan African states are related to the internationalization of Chinese enterprises and the securing of access to energy resources (p. 180). On the other hand, since 2007 the Algerian government applies a new industrial strategy, which grants the Algerian state an active role in the economic development (p. 124). In this context, the Algerian state implemented visa restrictions for Chinese workers in 2004 and in 2009 the 49/51-rule for economic cooperation in order to protect its own development aims. The dialectic between flows and controls sheds light on the diverse power games and negotiation processes between Algerian and Chinese actors but also different Algerian and Chinese institutions on various scales.

With the combination of studies based on statistical data and empirical research, this omnibus volume contributes to tackle the research gap in the area of transnational studies concerning the sino-algerian relations. Especially, the actor-centered and empirical contributions offer new perspectives on how interactions and technology transfer on the micro-level are realized and what the challenges are. Moreover, the contributions address development potentials and alternatives for China and Algeria adding to the academic criticism of Western-centric and neoliberal economic interactions. The editors are deepening the aspect of development opportunities and challenges in the context of the Algerian-Chinese interactions within a second Workshop in Mai 2015.3
