**The Harvard-Yenching Institute Training Program in**

**African History and Cultures**

**(Academic Year 2019-2020)**

**Harvard Faculty Advisors:**

Emmanuel Akyeampong

Departments of History and AAAS  
 Oppenheimer Faculty Director of the Center for African Studies

John Mugane   
 AAAS and Director of the African Languages Program

South-South trade has gained a new prominence in Africa’s relations with Asia with China becoming Africa’s largest trading partner and lender in 2009. The scale of China’s presence in Africa in the last two decades obscures the equally important initiatives of other Asian countries in Africa, and their lengthy histories of engagement with Africa. Indians from Gujarat have been central to commerce in East Africa for centuries, and Tanzania is proudly multi-racial in its acknowledgment of Tanzanians of African, Arab, and Asian descent. Durban in South Africa has the largest Indian population in any city outside India, a development that originated in the first Indian indentured servants sent to Natal in the 1860s to work on sugar plantations. Japan appointed its first honorary consul to Cape Town in 1910. By the mid-1990s, Japan had emerged as the top bilateral lender for many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The relations of Japan, China, and India with Africa have coalesced in compacts that regulate trade and development partnerships. Japan inaugurated the Tokyo International Conference on Africa (TICAD) in 1993, and has organized six such conferences, the sixth being held in August 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya. China introduced its Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 in Beijing. Held every three years, the Forum has alternated between Beijing and venues in Africa. India has developed its India Africa Forum Summit, hosting the first summit in 2008. In November 2016 India in partnership with Japan announced the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with the stated objective of rediscovering ancient sea routes and creating new sea corridors that link India and countries in South and South-East Asia with Africa. One could see this as a response to China’s One Belt One Road Initiative.

These significant developments have heightened the need and urgency for a deeper understanding of Africa’s historic relations with Asia; for an intellectual engagement and understanding of Africa on its own terms; and for an appreciation of how Africa’s long history shapes the continent’s current engagement with Asia. The Harvard-Yenching Institute’s Training Program in African History and Cultures is designed for young Asian faculty with PhDs or advanced graduate students considering a career in academia or policy research on Asia and Africa. The program will run for nine months in the 2019-20 academic year (September 2019 through May 2020), and the Harvard-Yenching Institute and Harvard’s Center for African Studies will host four to five successful applicants. Participants will enroll in two history lecture courses on early Africa and modern West Africa offered by Emmanuel Akyeampong; and a course on African languages and cultures offered by John Mugane. Harvard’s African Languages Program offers some 24 African languages, and participants will enroll in one African language of their choice for the two semesters at Harvard. Participants will also attend the weekly seminars in the African Studies Workshop held on Mondays under the leadership of Professors Jean and John Comaroff. The workshop provides a forum for leading and emerging Africanists to present new materials and publications in progress with discussants drawn from the Africanist community at Harvard and throughout the Boston area. The workshop is open to the public.

One of the hallmarks of the training program will be a two-week field trip to Tanzania and Kenya during the January break led by Professors Akyeampong and Mugane. The focus of our trip will be the historic coastal towns of Zanzibar and Mombasa, which display in exciting ways the cosmopolitanism that has emerged from centuries of Indian Ocean trade. We will encounter and experience the different phases of Asia’s historic engagement with East Africa, enjoying cuisine in Mombasa that is a blend of African, Arab, and Indian influences, and then riding the Chinese-funded and constructed Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway for the 300 miles from Mombasa to Nairobi. The field trip will be an opportunity for those who took East African languages or Swahili in the fall semester to practice their skills. The academic year will climax in an article-length paper (about 25 pages) researched and written during the fellowship year. The paper will be on a topic of the fellow’s choice, and a Harvard mentor will be arranged for the fellow with research expertise in this area. The papers will be presented in a half-day colloquium that will be open to the Harvard community.

The application deadline for the program will be October 31, 2018. The applicants who pass initial screening and review will be interviewed by the Harvard faculty advisors for this program this winter between mid-December 2018 and mid-January 2019. A specific date will be announced later on.