

China and Africa: Strategic Partnership or Crypto-Imperialism?

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Abstract

The relationship between China and Africa is raising serious concern for both scholars and African long time allies like the USA, European Union and Japan. While some scholars view China-African policy as a hidden form of imperialism, these allies view Chinese incursion into the continent as a threat in terms of the competition for Africa's abundant natural resources. Following from the above, this study attempts to uncover China's real intention in Africa. In doing this, it highlights the various Chinese aids, assistance and investment flows to the continent as the necessary channels through which China's impact can be felt in Africa and assesses the nature of their strategic partnership and the mutuality of benefits. The study observes that China-Africa relations portends both opportunities and challenges as China seems opportune to explore and exploit the abundant resources in the continent while Africa contends with the challenges of exploitation and some sort of hidden imperialist control from the Asian country. It adopts a qualitative method of study with reliance on the observation of facts related to their relationship and hopes that the findings will not only add to the existing body of knowledge on China-Africa relations, but will aid African countries in designing some rules of engagement based on a mutually trusting and respectful alliance in their relations with China. The study concludes that China's relation with Africa is nothing short of exploitation in the 21st century.

Keywords: Africa, China, strategic partnership, crypto- imperialism

INTRODUCTION

As global demand for energy continues to rise, major players like the United States, European Union (EU), and Japan are facing the challenges of China as a new competitor in the race to secure long-term energy supplies. As its economy booms, China is intent on getting the resources needed to sustain its rapid growth, and is taking its quest to lock down sources of oil and other necessary raw materials across the globe. As part of its effort, China has turned to Africa, an oil-producing source whose risks and challenges have often caused it to be overlooked economically. Some reports describe a race between China and the United States to secure the continent's oil supplies while others note that Chinese interest in Africa have surged considerably though Western States still make the vast majority of investments in Africa and remain highly influential.

China's booming economy, which has averaged annual 9% growth for the last two decades, requires massive levels of energy for sustenance. The extent of the country's energy demand has compelled China to push into new markets from the Middle East, and particularly Africa. Africa holds a fraction of the world's proven oil reserves, 9% compared to the Middle East's nearly 62% but industry analysts believe it could hold significant undiscovered reserves. As a result, China is seeking to increase its

oil imports from the continent as it now receives about one third of its oil imports from Africa. China's biggest suppliers in Africa as of 2006 were Angola, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Sudan. It has also sought supplies from Chad, Nigeria, Algeria and Gabon (Hanson, 2008:8).

The objective of this study is to undertake a comprehensive review of literature on the strategic bilateral relations between Africa and China with a view to uncovering China's real intentions in the continent. In doing this, we are motivated by the observations that the rapid and sustained expansion of the giant economy of China has been associated with a robust and increasing intensification of its economic relations with various African countries. And that these relationships are, in turn, associated with both opportunities and challenges for both parties. For China, it is opportunity to explore and exploit the abundant natural resources in the continent and for Africa, the challenges of contending with some level of exploitation which scholars and analysts alike have come to view as crypto-imperialism instead of strategic partnership. It focuses on trade, investment and aid flows as the key channels through which the impacts of China may be transmitted to an African economy. In fact, some scholars and analysts alike have come to the conclusion that China has consumed so much oil and

other resources such as timber, coal and copper, so much that it has become a glutton and is battling with the process of dieting to prevent obesity.

The basic problem of this study lies in the inability of scholars to understand the real intention of China in her relations with the African continent. While some scholars are of the opinion that they are in the continent as partners in the process of development and as such strategic partners with a promise of mutual benefit, others view her venture in Africa as purely exploitative and something akin to a hidden imperialism designed to benefit the Asian country to the detriment of Africa. It thus becomes an interesting exploit by researchers and scholars to attempt an analysis of their relationship in a bid to establish the nature of partnership between them. Again this study attempts to fill the yawning gap by many other researchers who have severally analysed China's African policy without a clear cut examination of the strategic nature of their relationship, this gap we intend to address. The question that needs to be addressed then is have the Chinese Cooperation ventures contributed to driving new forces, generating positive spin-off, and serving as effective vehicles for Africa's development in the 21st century?

The method to be adopted in this study is purely qualitative with great reliance on observation of facts related to their relationship as well as discussions with various stakeholders on the relations between them. Such stakeholders will include staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, officials of some of the embassies of countries that have friendly relations with China, staff of the Chinese embassy in Nigeria among others. However, reliance will also be on secondary sources of data which includes textbooks, journals, and magazines, internet sources as well as archival materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relations between China and Africa have a long history and have seen several changes over the course of time. Two of the critical and most commonly known phases are China's role in Africa during the Cold War and, recently, the perception that China's ventures in Africa are motivated mainly by its quest for energy security. Viewed objectively, there are few reasons for China to establish close strategic relations with Africa. China and Africa are geographically far apart and share neither language nor culture. Yet, in the 10th century BC the Egyptian city of Alexandria began trading with China. Subsequently, Chinese and Africans came into contact because of Arab and European maritime expeditions occasioned by the slave trade. However, it was only in the latter half of the 20th century that China and Africa truly rediscovered each other, essentially at the Bandung Conference on Non-Alignment held in April 1955.

Diplomatic ties between China and Africa date back to 1956 with the establishment of Sino-Egyptian relations (Kohli, 2009:3).

Prior to the 1970s, China-Africa relations were by and large ideologically driven. It provided financial support, equipment and training to a variety of liberation movements, particularly in Algeria, Angola, Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Rhodesia, etc. China's "involvement in the Non-Aligned Movement and other Third World conference type activities, were designed to demonstrate its own anti-imperialist approach to aid and to identify it with those nations that continued to suffer the effects of colonialism (Akpan, 2010:14). From training "freedom fighters" in the revolutionary 1960s and early 1970s to providing scholarships to children of African elites, China has been exporting its values for years to Africa. To exemplify its commitment to a non-imperialist stand, starting in 1967, China began building the Tanzam Railway between Tanzania and Zambia. Following the death of Moa Zedong, however, the Chinese government gave less attention to Africa. Instead, China turned inward throughout the 1980 and 1990 to experiment with its new economic reform programs (Uchehara, 2009:3).

Because of the global domination by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Programs (which advocated extensive economic liberation and privatization), the China-Africa relations were partially eclipsed during the Cold War. Following the Tiananmen incident of 1989 (under the economic transformation initiated by President Deng Xiaoping), China renewed its engagement with Africa and referred to it as the Beijing Consensus. In order to feed its blooming economic need for resources (oil, minerals, timber, etc.) and to market its manufactured goods in Africa, China resumed its economic relations with Africa through an institutional framework known as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2006. In contrast to the West's view of Africa that chaos, conflict, corruption, and poor governance characterize its underdevelopment, China propagates that the African continent is rich in culture, religion, social dynamism, and energy. Realizing that the African continent has a great opportunity for business, the Chinese government encourages the following industries and projects to be invested in Africa.

A processing industrial products in the fields of electronics, machinery building, textiles, and garments, investing in agricultural products in order to add value to Africa's exports and improve Africa's terms of trade, extracting natural resources, such as petroleum and high-value minerals, and investing in infrastructure, power supply, and real estate

development (Uchehara, 2009:3). China's highest leadership actively espoused FOCAC's ambitious vision, which was enthusiastically embraced by 43 heads of state and a total of 48 African delegations.

China's rising economic engagement is tied to conspicuously strategic goals, centered on access to energy and other scarce high-value commodities. On the diplomatic front, Beijing has shown a new determination to complete the process of eliminating bilateral ties between Taiwan and a dwindling number of African capitals, and to use its accelerating entry into Africa to consolidate global allegiances and Beijing's putative leadership of the developing world. Beijing has also taken on a more active role in the security sphere. China's contributions of soldiers and police to UN peacekeeping operations, concentrated in Africa, have increased tenfold since 2001. As of May 2007, China has provided over 1,800 troops, military observers and civilian police toward current UN peacekeeping operations. Three-fourths of current Chinese peacekeeping forces are supporting UN missions in Africa (primarily Liberia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kohli, 2009:4). Beijing's proactive engagement with Africa is based on several key factors that underlie the new Chinese approach. Chinese officials portray themselves as seeking only friendly and respectful political linkages with Africa, based on a legacy of over 50 years of solidarity and development assistance.

In Beijing's view China's historical experience and development model resonate powerfully with African counterparts, and create a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the West. China emerged from colonial encroachment, internal chaos and economic destitution to achieve spectacular economic growth and infrastructure development. In the past two decades, its achievements have lifted over 200 million Chinese citizens out of poverty. In the meantime, China can claim that it has achieved political stability and increasing international clout. Such a national narrative, some have asserted, has a powerful resonance in Africa. Most importantly, Beijing's approach to Africa fits squarely within China's global foreign policy, including important initiatives in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Africa is seen as integral to Beijing's strategic ambition to advance a "new security concept" that can ensure China's peaceful rise as a global power and strengthen relations with key neighbours and regions. Through its overarching global approach, China's leadership seeks to sustain internal development and political stability at home, legitimize the historic benefits of China's rise within the international community, and achieve its long-term goal of a multi-polar, equitable and "democratic" international system (Bates et al, 2010:5).

Strategic partnership on the other can rightly be said to be partnership built on shared level of planning by parties in a relationship in order for both to have mutual benefit. In other words, efforts by strategic partners suggest some level of alliance that would bring benefits to both parties. But the situation seems to be different in the case of China and Africa as what ordinarily should have been a mutually beneficial relationship between them has instead resulted in the designs of basic medium of controls and manipulation which at the end leaves a party, in this case Africa on the disadvantage. Africa is disadvantaged in this relationship for obvious reasons which border on the development differentials existing between the continent and China. From lack of basic infrastructure and poor leadership to inter-ethnic conflict and corruption, the continent paints a vivid picture of despair and underdevelopment in comparison to China which is emerging as a super power not only in the Asian continent but in the world at large.

Another common strategic partnership involves a supplier or manufacturer partnering with a distributor or wholesale consumer. Rather than approach the transactions between the companies as a simple link in the product or service [supply chain](#), the two companies form a closer relationship where they mutually participate in advertising, marketing, branding, product development, and other business functions. As example, an automotive manufacturer may form strategic partnerships with its parts suppliers, or a music distributor with record labels.

In line with the above explanation, and for the purpose of this paper, strategic partnership is simply the acclaimed mutual relationship between Africa and China. For one, they are strategic partners in the sense that each possesses one or more assets that can help the other. Understandably, Africa possesses the needed oil and other resources while China possesses aid in whatever form that they deemed fit to give to the continent.

Although the term "crypto" was first coined by Copeland (1969:22), when he used it to describe the attempt by America to establish a stable regime in an unstable situation in Egypt following British efforts to reduce its imperial commitments in the Middle East in his coinage, "crypto-diplomacy", this study adopts directly Agara's (2004:146) cloning of the concept "crypto-imperialism" in his analysis of globalization. For both Copeland and Agara, "crypto" means "hidden" and when attached to diplomacy as enunciated by Copeland it becomes "hidden diplomacy" and with imperialism, it is simply "hidden imperialism" which is of particular interest to this study. Crypto-imperialism simply implies the building of hidden empires in which the control apparatus of these empires is concealed by a veil of

secrecy behind rhetoric about freedom and liberation. It is thus, a form of control and manipulation in which the manipulated state, most often, may not even realize the extent to which it is being manipulated (Agara, 2004:146). Crypto-imperialism is indeed the political arm of economic exploitation which is manifested in neo-colonialism. In Copeland's account of hidden diplomacy, the United States of America's main concern was to effect a change in government without getting physically and noticeably involved (Copeland, 1969:113). Since crypto-diplomacy and crypto-imperialism are similar, they rest on a valid assumption that power is based on repressive or constructive action and everything that a government does has effect on its power base. Thus, this assumption finds concrete expression when the political control of an independent state is seized and a regime susceptible to being manipulated is installed and is sympathetic to the "power behind the veil" that installed it (Agara, 2004:147).

However for the purpose of this paper, crypto-imperialism remains the hidden hand of exploitation foisted on the continent by China in her bid to garner resources for her growing industrial concerns in exchange for aid in whatever form it deems fit for the continent. The above scenario best describes the predicament of Africa in her relationship with China which remains the power behind the veil in the lopsided relationship between the two. For Africa, her potentials lie in her resource rich nature which China acknowledges and attempts to explore and exploit to the maximum. But the question is does the continent realize that it is being exploited? This and many other questions will be addressed in this study.

THEORETICAL DEPENDENCY THEORY

This theory is built upon Lenin's theory of imperialism and focused upon the economic penetration of the 'Third World' particularly Latin America by the large capitalist states. It is simply a view of the relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries. Emerging from the 1960s, dependency crystallized around a critique of the structural developmentalism associated with Raul Prebisch and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) which was founded in 1948 in Santiago, Chile. ECLA characterized the world as divided into centre (the developed industrialised North) and periphery (the underdeveloped agricultural South), the relationship between them was determined by the structure of the world economy. Latin American economic activity was based upon primary export production. This had been dealt a devastating blow during the Great Depression when the bottom fell out of the market (McLean and Macmillan, 2003:145).

FRAMEWORK:

Dependency theory is construed to be imperialism by other means which take up in part an old theme of a minority of sixteenth century economic theorists such as the German Friedrich List and the American Henry Garey, according to which free trade might be good for highly industrialised countries but bad for relatively underdeveloped ones, since the latter would need to protect their 'infant industries', as List called them, against their stronger foreign competitors. Lack of such protection would make the underdevelopment of the less industrialised countries worse and condemn them to long-run backwardness and poverty. In their own time, List and Garey lost the argument in economic theory and in most textbooks. There the 'classic' theory prevailed according to which free trade was supposed to benefit everyone, since it would lead each country to specialise in those activities in which it had a comparative advantage, such as port wine for Portugal and textile and machinery for England (Deutsch, 1989:16).

The core of dependence theory can be summarized as follows: foreign penetration and external dependence lead to large-scale distortions in the structure of peripheral economies, which in turn result in intense social conflict and ultimately in harsh state repression in dependent societies. In fact, nearly all third world countries are deeply penetrated by, and in important ways dependent on, the industrial world and especially the world economy (Duvall et al, 1999:67). Penetration can occur in a variety of economic, political and cultural modes and at different periods in a country's development. Economic penetration can be by financial or technological means. In relatively early stages of development, the most common way is by direct foreign investment, where multinational corporations establish subsidiaries involved in mining (Kennecott Copper in Chile, British Petroleum in Iran), agriculture (United Fruit in Guatemala, Firestone Rubber in Liberia), manufacturing (Volkswagen in Brazil), and commerce (Sears, Roebuck and Coca-Cola in Korea and almost everywhere else) (Russett and Starr, 2005:455).

Dependency theory built upon ECLA's intellectual traditions had authors such as Andre Gunder Frank who in his work, 'Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America' published in 1967 concentrated upon the external mechanisms of control exerted by the centre or metropole upon the periphery or satellite. The centre maintained the periphery in a state of underdevelopment for purposes of super-exploitation. Underdevelopment, Frank contends, was not an original or inherent condition; rather it was the determined outcome of the historical relationship between dominant and subordinate states (McLean and Macmillan, 2003:146). As underdevelopment was a product of capitalist development, it would only end when the capitalist

system itself collapsed. For him, socialist revolution was the only solution.

From the entire above treatise on dependency theory and by extension underdevelopment, it becomes clear that the Chinese penetration of Africa may not be completely devoid of the trappings of imperialism. For one, the relationship remains at best lopsided in favour of the industrialized China to the detriment of the African continent which has been banished to the role of resource suppliers in a division of labour guided and directed by the Chinese themselves. It therefore becomes quite doubtful if the China African policy in recent times is built on genuine mutual interest and the need to support the continent in her bid for development.

China and Africa: Evolving a New Policy in the 21st Century

China's 'new' Africa policy adopted by the Chinese government in January 2006 captures the guiding principles of the new strategic partnership in the following terms (a) Sincerity, friendship and equality, which means that China adheres to the principles of peaceful coexistence and respects African countries' independent choice of development paths. (b) Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity, which means that China supports African countries' economic development and is committed to cooperation in various forms, for the benefit of both parties. (d) Mutual support and close coordination, which includes a commitment from China to strengthen cooperation with Africa in multilateral systems and to appeal to the international community to pay more attention to questions concerning peace and development in Africa. (e) Learning from each other and seeking common development, which refers to strengthened exchange and cooperation in various social fields and support for African countries to enhance capacity building and cooperation to achieve sustainable development (Aning and Lecoutre, 2007:22). As lofty as the above strategic policy seems, China's return to Africa in the 21st century is characterized not only by a need for economic resources but, more crucially, by the financial and political muscle to play the game dramatically and competitively. Basically, China's entry into Africa is characterized by '**an aid-for-oil strategy**' that has resulted in increasing supplies of oil from African countries in return for comprehensive and exploitative trade deals (Pan, 2006:12).

China's money flowing into Africa is a clear and significant sign of its determination to meet words with deeds on the continent. A symbolic signal in this regard is the fact that in 2007, with over US\$9 billion worth of investment, it dwarfed the World Bank's money flow into Africa, and the Bank, unable to inject more than US\$2.5 billion into the continent, is

now, bowl in hand, persuading Beijing to partner with it in financing African projects, so far to no avail. When one takes into account the huge foreign reserves, now estimated at US\$1.5 trillion, that China has built as a result of an effective export strategy and the establishment of a sovereign fund, China Investment Corporation, endowed with US\$200 billion, one can easily expect China to become the most dominant player in a continent that needs financial resources, which China is ready to provide without conditions. China's oil policy in Africa is also criticized for the pricing and risk management of state-owned oil corporations, which have the potential to play a part in crowding out Western companies. Chinese state-owned enterprises in the commodities and energy sector, unhampered by short-term profit expectations, can take greater risks than others and live with a distorted cost structure because of the subsidies they receive.

Looking at the global ownership structure of oil and gas reserves, however, the criticism is admissible to only a limited extent. 80-85 per cent of global oil reserves and 60 per cent of the world's reserves of natural gas are in the possession of state-owned or para-state enterprises, whose policies are likewise determined not solely by economic factors but also by political considerations and influence from national political bodies (Umbach, 2008:39). With more than 800,000 Chinese currently living, working and running businesses in Africa, over 800 small and medium businesses involved in manufacturing and bidding for construction of ports, railways, hospitals, administrative buildings and other facilities, usually at a very competitive price, and using comparatively advantageous cheaper labour and other factors of production, it is no surprise that many Western actors with interests in Africa are taking notice of China in Africa and becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Not only do China's strengths justify this uneasiness, but the fact that China has come up with an economic and political development model that seems to have produced tangible results in terms of poverty alleviation and national control of assets, makes the country more appealing to most African countries (Mark, 2007:14).

China and Africa: Strategic Partnership or Crypto Imperialism?

The traditional friendship and relations of good cooperation between China and African countries have stood the test of time and gone through the trial of international turbulent events. This relationship being good example to the developing countries has been further consolidated and developed extensively. China maintains close political relations with African countries through frequent exchanges of high level visits. To establish a long term and stable relationship of cooperation between China and African countries in the 21st century, President Jiang Zemin put forward

five principles of guidance during his visit to Africa in 1996, namely, sincere friendship, equality, solidarity and cooperation, common development and being oriented to the future.

Other Chinese leaders such as Premier Zhu Rongji, Chairman Li Ruihuan and Vice President Hu Jintao visited Africa successfully in the recent years. Since 1997, over forty (40) chiefs of state and heads of government from various African countries have visited China. China and African countries have conducted fruitful bilateral and multilateral dialogues. The brilliant example is the forum on China-Africa Cooperation Ministerial Conference held in Beijing in October, 2000 which adopted a program towards the creation of a new type, long term and stable strategic partnership between China and Africa based on equality and mutual benefit (Alden, 2004:32).

The above paints a vivid picture of the traditional intent of China's venture into Sub-Saharan Africa and as well presents the lofty goal and ideals in Sino-African relations. But China's conduct and mode of operation in Africa raises some fundamental questions: Is China-Africa relations based on equality and mutuality of benefits? How strategic is their partnership? These and other questions are to be addressed in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Analysts are fast in attributing China's exploit in Africa to the search for resources most especially, oil. China's booming economy they observe which has averaged annual nine percent growths for the last two decades requires massive levels of energy to sustain its growth. This has actually pushed China into the global arena in search of not only oil but other natural resources. It has equally invaded Africa starting from Congo where Chinese middle men are buying ore for their processing plants to Nigeria where Chinese companies are making in routes into the oil industry (Hanson, 2008:9).

Some scholars and analysts however assert that China's most successful African energy investment has been in Sudan, which now sent sixty percent of its oil output to China. China's first oil imports from Sudan were in 1995 when CNPC began oil exploration there and has expanded steadily. In 1997, the US imposed economic and trade sanctions on Sudan and China then moved in to fill the gap that Western countries had left. Currently, China's National Petroleum is the largest share holder and essentially controls the Sudanese energy sector as it is the main investor in Sudanese oil production. China covered the cost of most of the US \$15 billion 932 mile pipeline to Port Sudan where it is building a tanker terminal. In 2005, approximately 10,000 Chinese workers were employed in Sudan (Van de Looy, 2006:17).

It is however argued that both China and Sudan benefit from the above relationship. China has been able to diversify its oil resources and become less dependent on other oil producing countries while Sudan has found a reliable economic partner that does not question its domestic political situation. China has offered a financial life line to the Sudanese Government and in addition uses its position on the UN Security Council to ensure that Sudan has avoided serious sanctions by the West. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1556 that demanded that Sudanese government disarm the Janjaweed and brings to justice those leaders who had incited and carried out human-right abuses. The Security Council threatened to consider further sanctions if the government failed to comply but China as a permanent member threatened to use its veto power and urged the West to "cool down". It is no secret that China has assisted Sudan financially and militarily even though it was aware of the widespread ethnic cleansing taking place in Darfur. Human rights watch has for this reason accused China of cooperating in the genocide in Darfur since 2003 while others have simply captured the China-Sudan relations simply as "oil for China, guns for Darfur" (Van de Looy, 2006:17).

If the above is the situation in Sudan, Angola which recently recovered from a thirty year civil war cannot be said to fare less. China has invaded Angola assisting in infrastructure reconstruction and offering a "soft loan" of US \$ 2 billion with no political strings attached in March 2004 (Van de Looy, 2006:18). The terms of the loan specify its repayment within 17 years at an interest rate of 15%. The money has been earmarked for reconstruction and development projects such as railways, electricity and administrative buildings.

However, the terms of agreement are advantageous to China as 70% of the construction projects are to be assigned to Chinese companies. Domestic contractors can be awarded only 30% of the projects covered by the loan, a fact that is causing consternation among Angolan businessmen. The loan is not going to create opportunities for Angolans, which are vital for the livelihoods of the local people. A second important term of the agreement is that China can import 10,000 barrels of oil a day from Angola which currently exports 25% of its oil to China (Van de Looy, 2006:18). In poorer countries such as Congo, China hunt for resources has more complex effects. On the other hand, Congo's long deprived citizens are in much more desperate need of trade, investment, economic growth and the rising living standard they might bring with them. Its corrupt and underfunded government is much less able or inclined to manage China's engagement for the benefits of its people.

In Nigeria, outside China's foray into every sector of the economy, there is also the startling revelation that 90% of the fake drugs imported into the country come from China. Recently, it is reported that the Director General of the National Agency for Foods, Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Dr. Paul Orhii visited China in the company of officials from the Health Ministry and members of the Senate Committee on Health to discuss ways to curtail the importation into Nigeria of fake drugs from China (Akpan, 2010:16). This revelation threw up a major contradiction in the issue of fake drugs between both countries. This is a country (China) which executed the head of the Chinese equivalent of NAFDAC, 62 year old Zheng Xiaoyu for taking bribes worth some 6.5 million Yuan (\$ 850,000) from eight companies to approve fake medicines that killed an unknown numbers of people. The harsh sentence reflected Beijing's resolve to wipe out corruption and so ensure consumer safety and yet it encourages importation of a whopping 90% of Nigeria's total fake drugs in to the country. Here lies the notion of trade relations between China and African countries.

Some experts suggest that the need to secure natural resources, whether oil, metal or timber is the driving components of Chinese foreign policy towards Africa. China's manufacturing sector has created enormous demand for aluminum, copper, nickel, iron ore, and oil. As this trend was under way in 2005, David Zweig and Bi Jianhai wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that China has been able to adapt its foreign policy to its domestic development strategy to an unprecedented level by encouraging state controlled companies to seek out exploration and supply contracts with countries that produce oil, gas and other resources (Akpan, 2010: 15). At the same time, Beijing aggressively courts the governments of these countries with diplomacy, trade deals, debt forgiveness and aid packages (Scarlet and Taylor, 2008:615). The Chinese approach to foreign relations is officially termed "non interference in domestic affairs" as its leaders say human rights are relative, and each country should be allowed their own definition of them and time table for reaching them. Unlike the United States, China does not mix business with politics argues its officials who also submits that attempts by foreign nations to discuss democracy and human rights violate the rights of a sovereign country.

But China's foreign policy appears to be evolving as it realizes the need to protect its economic interests. For instance, it has altered its policy of blocking UN Security Council resolutions authorizing peacekeepers for Darfur and placed modest pressure on Khartoum to allow the UN peacekeeping deployment, a development which points to the fact that China is learning the limitations of non

interference however much that principle remains part of its official rhetoric (Akpan, 2010:16).

China's thirst for oil and other resources is becoming so important that even the "One China Principle" is being disregarded since Chad had diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Diplomats and pundits fear that the west is "losing" Africa and other resource rich regions. China's sudden prominence, according to this view, will reduce the clout of American, Europe and rich democracies in the developing world. China will befriend ostracized regimes and encourage them to defy international norms. Corruption, economic mismanagement, repression and instability will proliferate. If this baleful influence spreads too widely, say the critics, the "Washington consensus" of economic liberalism and democracy will find itself in competition with a "Beijing consensus" of state-led development and despotism (McBride, 2010:4).

Such fears notwithstanding, China has continued to sell arms to Sudan, among other African countries and views such sales as a means of enhancing its status as an international political power, and increasing its ability to obtain access to significant natural resources especially, oil. In the period from 2003 to 2006, China's arms sales to Africa made up 15.4% (\$500 million) of all conventional arms transfers to the continent. Notable weapon sales include those of Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Beijing has also sent Chinese military trainers to help their African counterparts while arms sales and military relationships have helped China gain important African allies in the United Nations, including Sudan, Zimbabwe and Nigeria for its political goals, including preventing Taiwanese independence and diverting attention from its own human rights record (Shuan and Taylor, 2007:59).

However, it has been generally observed that not all Chinese investment in Africa is viewed positively by the international community. First, Chinese construction firms have lower costs and can consequently outbid their Western competitors, winning contract for projects. International observers fear that the Chinese way of doing business, paying bribes and attaching no conditions, undermines local efforts to increase transparency and good governance and as well defile pressures from the IMF and the World Bank on such countries because they are supported by China. Secondly, Chinese companies are bringing their own labourers to work in Africa. In areas where unemployment is already high, the effects of migrant Chinese labour will be felt over time. For example, in Angola, some domestic suppliers and retailers have had to close down because they could not compete with the Chinese. In other parts of Africa resentment against the Chinese is also being felt (Alden, 2004:33).

Nonetheless, it is also argued that concerns about the dire consequences of China's quest for natural resources may be over blown. China does indeed treat some dictators with kid gloves, but is hardly alone in that. Its companies do not always uphold the highest standards, but again, many Western firms are no angels either. Fifty years of European and American aid have not succeeded in bringing much prosperity to Africa and other poor but resource rich places. A different approach from China might yield better results. At the very least it will spur other donors to seek some effective methods.

The above defence notwithstanding, and for all the hue and cry, China is still just one of many countries looking for raw materials around the world. It has won most influence in countries where western governments were conspicuous by their absence, and where few important strategic interests are at stake. The truth remains that China has a visible presence in Africa and its *modus operandi* offers much but mutual benefits and strategic partnership in the real sense of it, as far as its relations with Africa is concerned. At best China receives the bulk of the benefits while Africa continues to supply its much needed resources for little or nothing.

Assessing The Benfits of China-Africa Relations

Africa registered 5.8% economic growth in 2007, the highest level ever, in part because of Chinese investment. Experts say the roads, bridges and dams built by Chinese firms are low cost, good quality and completed in a fraction of the time such projects usually take in Africa. China also contributes peacekeepers to UN mission across Africa, including Liberia and Darfur. It has cancelled \$10 billion in bilateral debt from African countries, sends doctors to treat Africans across the continent, and hosts thousand of African workers in Chinese universities and training centres (Mark, 2007:36).

Critics say these projects are meant to build goodwill for later investment opportunities or stockpile international support for contentious political issues. Princeton Lyman, Council on Foreign Relation's (CFR) adjunct Senior Fellow for African studies, says China's interest in Africa has both positive and negative effects. According to him, it is good for the continent because it brings in a new actor which is willing to invest, but it is bad for Africa if it turns countries away from the hard work of political and economic reforms. Concerns about China's role in Africa have been voiced by a range of actors, from human right groups and international observers to Africans themselves particularly in the run-up to the 2008 summer Olympics (Akpan, 2010:17). Many Africans are concerned over how China operates in Africa, accusing Chinese companies of underbidding local firms and not hiring Africans. Chinese infrastructure deals often stipulate that up to 70% of

the labour must be Chinese. To others, the way China does business particularly, its willingness to pay bribe as documented by Transparency International and attach no conditions to aid money, undermines local efforts to increase good governance and international efforts at macroeconomic reforms by institutions like the World Bank and the IMF.

But Elizabeth Economy, CFR's senior fellow and director for Asia studies notes that China's policy towards Africa is a flexible one. According to her China's broad and deep diplomatic and economic engagement ensures that even as it falls short in meeting African expectations and needs, it is constantly reassessing and adapting its policies (Taylor, 2007:32). This cannot be said of Africa's policies towards China. In fact, experts say that the African Union's lack of a coherent official China policy weakened the continents ability to negotiate with China. Ian Taylor (2007:32) also argues that the individual countries benefiting from China do not want the African Union involved in their dealings and thus have resisted multilateral dealings. Overall experts assert that China's involvement could jump-start change on the continent, but only if African governments become more assertive partner in their dealings with China.

To World Bank economist Harry G. Broadman, Chinese firms can help African countries tap into global value chains giving them a chance to increase the volume, diversity and worth of their exports (Beresford, 2010:8). But African government must enact a series of reforms, of basic market institutions, investment regulations, infrastructure and tariffs to realize these benefits argues Broadman. However, others see the inability of African countries to derive full and commensurate benefits from their relations with China as purely an African internal problem. They argue that infrastructure cannot be built without outside investment while to them; there can never be a stable government with no resources.

While Chinese exports to Africa are poor in quality, they are generally cheaper to African consumers. The export driven strategy of China has contributed to huge job losses in a number of manufacturing industries throughout the African continent. For instance, instead of supporting domestic enterprises through the backward and forward linkages within the domestic economy, the footwear industry in Ethiopia has been facing pressures from cheap Chinese imports (Gebre Egziabher, 2006:13). In addition, although cotton growers in West Africa have benefitted from increased exports of raw cotton to China, nevertheless most observers today share the concern that by purchasing raw materials from the continent and selling value-added products back, China's increased involvement will create unfavourable trade balance for many African

countries (Akpan, 2010:17). The importation of Chinese manufactured textiles to Lesotho, Kenya and South Africa with well established clothing industries has flared up social unrest and disruption by trade unions (Alden, 2006:147). As stated above, Chinese economic involvement on the African continent has contributed to a surge of low cost consumer goods. But, the importation of higher value-added products such as refrigerators, air conditioners, and other machinery products have not stimulated but displaced local product and labourers.

However, proponents of Chinese investment in Africa claim that China has not only provided assistance but has also invested in Africa in areas that the Western aid agencies and private investors have long neglected. For instance, though agriculture is regarded as being very vital to Africa's development, both the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank reduced assistance to Africa's agriculture by as much as 90 percent in the 1990s (Uchegara, 2009:7). The Chinese state-owned enterprises, on the other hand, provided human and capital assistance to Africa without any conditionality.

The above defence notwithstanding, and from all said and done, there can basically not be any strategic partnership that is balanced between China and Africa, neither can there be any level of mutual benefits from such ties. What is holding sway between the continent and China seems only explainable in the context of crypto- imperialism or neocolonial exploits where Africa is banished to the supply of resources needed for China's development in exchange for inferior goods and investments whose terms and conditions are only favorable to China. For one, there is substance in the reports of some western media groups who take every chance to poke at China African policy and even demonize "China citing "resource exploitation" and "neocolonialism" as well as the China Threat Theory", even when they are competing for the same resources . Africa remains at a far loss in this imbalanced and lopsided relationship. This is aptly captured by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Liu Jianchao, "today, China needs Africa. It needs Africa for resources to fuel China's development goals, for markets to sustain its growing economy and for political alliances to support its aspirations to be a global influence" (Akpan, 2010:18).

CONCLUSION

It is glaring from all the above that emerging discourse on the China-Africa relationship depicts China either as the new imperial power or as Africa's benefactor. In the west, reaction to china's involvement in Africa has bordered on suspicion and paranoia. Policy makers and analysts in the West are

concerned that China could gain control over Africa's vast and untapped natural resources, particularly the continent's energy reserves. The current struggle over Africa's resources becomes quite worrisome and evokes memories of an earlier scramble for pieces of the continent in the late 19th century by Western European powers and in the 1950s and 1960s by Eastern powers, principally China and Russia. China's involvement in Africa has serious implications for Africa and its people. Thus, instead of paranoia, this study calls for guarded optimism regarding the deepening relationship between Africa and China. With China confident of emerging on the global stage as the economic empire of the future, it would be unwise for African leaders to turn their backs against the sleeping giant.

However, while there is much for the continent to gain from the relationship, African leaders and Africans must guard against imperialism of any sort and shy away from arrangements that threaten sustainable development in the continent or undermine respect for human rights and dignity. In fact, African leaders must rise above China's rhetoric of anti-hegemonism and develop clear policies to guide their engagements with the Asian tiger. They must be able to resist the lure of aid without conditionality, avoid the economic, political and legal pitfalls of the past and position the continent to benefit from strategic relations with China. Doing so will definitely shield the continent from any type of imperialism whether open or krypto although their current relationship reveals the trappings of it.

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