

China's Worldview and Representations of Its Engagement with Africa

EARL CONTEH-MORGAN, PHD*

During the past two decades, political-economic and diplomatic ties between China and Africa have widened in scope and have become intensive. This development has occurred largely because of the onset of China's remarkable economic industrialization, its need to ensure access to strategic and other raw materials, and its desire to develop closer diplomatic ties with allies in an international system dominated by the West—an entity whose current hegemonic worldview differs fundamentally from its own in many respects. Accordingly, China generates a great deal of narrative (both positive and negative) on its engagement with Africa. For instance, some of the issues that prompt Sinophobic discourse include its cozy relationship with authoritarian African governments, its policy of noninterference, its seeming lack of concern for systemic corruption in Africa or for environmental degradation, and what is perceived as its looming threat to the current structure of global trade and governance. At the same time, the tangible effects of its role in Africa—such as new or upgraded infrastructure, increased trade and investment, and a strong aid relationship with Africa, among others—equally generate a positive narrative of its involvement in Africa.

This article examines the narratives (both positive and negative) that have emerged as a result of China's rise and the way they are related to its worldview, which challenges that of the West. In other words, it is predicated on the competing narratives of individuals, institutions, and states (private and public actors) as a basis for addressing the ways in which the China-Africa partnership is represented by the West and by Africans themselves. The study begins with an overview of both disparaging and affirmative narratives about China's engagement with Africa. Subsequent analysis elaborates upon China's human rights worldview in particular and its contribution to both dimensions of the discourse. The theoretical and empirical emphasis of this analysis concerns “clashing world-

*The author is professor of international studies at the University of South Florida and a former Senior Research Fellow at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo, Norway. In addition to having published many articles in professional journals, he has authored, coauthored, and coedited several books, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries. He is currently researching a book-length manuscript on Sino-African relations from a political economy perspective.

views,” but the discussions also have implications for Africa’s development in China’s engagement in the continent.

Differences in worldviews spawn social constructs of nation-states, ideologies, and cultures situated within discourses/narratives of power, geostrategy, and geopolitics.¹ Geostrategic or geopolitical differences and rivalries by hegemonic powers often produce competing representations of each other. In this article, the language of analogies, rhetoric, synonyms, metaphors, and so forth, found in newspapers, the Internet, books, articles, official speeches, policy documents, and the like informs a great deal of the discussion. The focus is on the images/narratives and representations of the China-Africa relationship or the perceived intentions of China in Africa that pervade written material and public speeches.

The ongoing Sino-African partnership has spawned a plethora of commentaries from the Western hegemonic powers, much of it negative and directed at China’s role in the continent. Both national and international media, academics, think tanks, international financial institutions, bloggers, nongovernmental organizations, and individuals have criticized China’s investment, trade, aid, and extractive activities, among others, in Africa.² Western reactions, whether governmental, popular, or individual, could be interpreted in terms of political economy. What one might call criticisms of China’s engagements with Africa is a case of competitive, spatial regional-power relationships between other great powers and China. One could also interpret them as indicators of threat perception generated by China in a geographic location traditionally perceived as “the domain” of the West. The competition or rivalry is restricted largely to the framing of China’s activities in Africa as a recolonization of Africa, exploitation of the continent, or its conquest of Africa, among other statements with undertones of insecurity regarding China’s presence there.

Changes in great-power rivalry in Africa are best understood within the context of overarching great-power objectives. Competition over ideology had a different discourse and framing compared to current competition over a much broader (political, economic, cultural, etc.) form of contention underlined by a globalization paradigm. Today’s international system—especially the great-power rivalry in Africa—is a subtler, quieter, and more rhetorical contest for regional influence/dominance. What one could interpret as a Sino-Western rivalry in Africa may simply be competition between a capitalist dictatorship represented by China and the capitalist democracy represented by the West. For a long time, the traditional understanding has been that liberal democracy and capitalism go together—a notion seriously challenged by this new Chinese model/consensus. The latter is having a noticeable impact in Africa to the extent that the framing of China’s presence in Africa is investing the continent with the aura of a spatial competition for power and influence between China and the West. Spatial and power competition tends to be preoccupations of major powers. In a world currently dominated by markets, economics, trade, and investments, the competition involves economic resources in general and strategic minerals in particular, as well as a contest between a liberal democratic West and a nondemocratic but “capitalist” China. The latter has emerged as an economic su-

perpower in search of economic resources in Africa and thereby has ignited what seems to be regional competition with the West in Africa.

This article argues that the foundation of the narrative (either negative or positive) of the China-Africa partnership lies in the following three factors: (1) differences in a human rights worldview between China and the West; (2) China's recent and ongoing phenomenal rise, perceived as threatening the status quo in Africa (particularly the enormous size of China's economic investments there), a place long dominated by the West; and (3) the perceived and/or real threat that China may end up unraveling the Western consensus in Africa, especially since some African countries are beginning to adopt a "look East" policy.

The Anti-China Narratives: A Brief Overview

The most prevalent and often repeated criticisms of China's presence in Africa are that its strategy in the continent is totally self-serving, aggressively business oriented, and solely focused on gaining access to strategic minerals, notably oil, to feed its rapidly industrializing society.³ In its ongoing preoccupation with Africa's natural resources, China turns a blind eye to African states that blatantly violate the civil rights and political liberties of their citizens. In the process, China undermines the promotion of democracy in the continent. In addition, critics argue that China is very comfortable doing business in Africa because it capitalizes on the corrupt practices already rife in the oil and mineral sectors. This suits China because its own society is pervaded by corrupt practices. For instance, at the international regime level, it is not a supporter of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, a set of rules and regulations aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in the management of natural resources.⁴ The fact that China ignores dictatorial rule and corruption, solely focusing on economic self-promotion, has earned it the label, according to critics, of economic ruthlessness.

Since Africa was the victim of partitioning by Europe in 1884–85 and has since been the target of plunder and economic exploitation, China's engagement with Africa today is viewed by critics as an economic invasion or another instance of colonization of the continent. For instance, even some Africans are critical of China's role in Africa, likening it to the practices of European colonial rule. According to Lamido Sanusi, former governor of the Nigerian Central Bank, "In much of Africa, they have set up huge mining operations. They have also built infrastructure. But, with exceptions, they have done so using equipment and labour imported from home, without transferring skills to local communities. So China takes our primary goods and sells us manufactured ones. This was the essence of colonialism."⁵ The fact that China is upgrading long-neglected infrastructure or constructing brand-new roads, airports, seaports, or stadiums, among other projects, does not seem to impress critics of its growing presence in Africa. In fact, these infrastructural projects are seen as a means of China making it easier to transport African raw materials to the homeland, as did the European colonialists.

Moreover, China's cordial relationship with authoritarian leaders is especially criticized because it is seen as decreasing Western influence over dictators; furthermore, it constitutes an attack on good governance and democracy in particular and the spread of universal human rights in general. For instance, Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), chairman of the US Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, expressed his concern over China's support of dictators: "China is playing an increasingly influential role on the continent of Africa, and there is concern that China intends to aid and abet African dictators, gain a stronghold on precious African resources and undo much of the progress that has been made on democracy and governance in the last 15 years in African nations."⁶

Because China openly goes against Western objectives to promote democracy in Africa, its relationship with Sudan and Zimbabwe has especially been the source of many of the negative comments directed against it. China is even far more responsible for the accusation that it is in Africa solely for economic reasons and is not constrained by any ethical standards. Consequently, during a meeting with representatives of Western oil companies in February 2010 in Lagos, Nigeria, Assistant Secretary of State Johnnie Carson stated that "the United States does not consider China a military, security or intelligence threat. China is a very aggressive and pernicious economic competitor with no morals. China is not in Africa for altruistic reasons. China is in Africa for China primarily."⁷ In other words, the United States considers China more of a predatory power preoccupied with gouging Africa's raw materials. It is therefore not surprising that a little over a year after Carson's remarks, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton responded in a similar fashion during a visit to Zambia when asked if she believed that China is an important role model in terms of good governance: "In the long run, the medium run, even the short run, I don't." She then added: "We saw that during colonial times it is easy to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders, and leave. And when you leave, you don't leave much behind for the people who are there. . . . We don't want to see a new colonialism in Africa."⁸

Again, in 2012, during a speech in Senegal, Secretary Clinton continued her disparaging portrayal of China's growing presence in Africa, noting that Africa needs "a model of sustainable partnership that adds value, rather than extracts it." Additionally, unlike other countries, "America will stand up for democracy and universal human rights even when it might be easier to look the other way and keep the resources flowing."⁹ This was not only a reference to China's role in Africa but also a warning to African nations to be wary of a country that seems preoccupied with extracting oil and other strategic minerals from the continent.

Many of the critical comments either explicitly or implicitly portray China as threatening to Western hegemony in Africa—especially to American objectives there. It is therefore not surprising that some observers see China's presence in Africa as threatening to the United States. For instance, Cong. Donald Payne (D-NJ), a member of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights, and International Operations, expressed concerns about a US-China rivalry in the continent: "Engagement of China

and the U.S. in Africa has begun to resemble a competition for resources and influence that has the potential to result in an ugly dynamic akin to that created by the Soviet Union and the U.S. during the Cold War.”¹⁰ However, comments by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Swan in February 2007 show a perception of China in Africa as nonthreatening compared to the sampling of statements and comments between 2010 and 2013 mentioned above. According to Secretary Swan, “For the Chinese, there are three primary interests: access to resources, access to markets, and securing diplomatic allies. None of these is inherently threatening to U.S. interests. We do not see involvement, economic or diplomatic, in Africa as a zero-sum game for the U.S. and China. The important thing is to encourage China to become involved in Africa in a way that supports international norms, rather than subverts them.”¹¹

In other words, in the early 2000s, China was not thought to be as threatening as it is now. The narrative on China in Africa seems to have become more negative. Although China is now considered more of a predator state in Africa, a colonizing actor, or a nation aggressively focused on business transactions to the neglect of good governance, during the George W. Bush administration, the narrative was more neutral and/or rather positive. For example, in 2005 National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice observed that “America has reason to welcome the rise of a confident, peaceful, and prosperous China. We want China as a global partner, able and willing to match its growing capabilities to its international responsibilities.”¹²

China in Africa: Some Positive Comments

Just as there are many negative views of the China-Africa engagement, so does one find a number of complimentary statements from both public figures and private individuals. For example, former Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade commented in 2013 that

when it comes to China and Africa, the EU [European Union] and the US want to have their cake and eat it. In an echo of its past colonial rivalries, European leaders and donor organisations have expressed concerns that African nations are throwing their doors open too wide to Chinese investors and to exploitation by their Asian partners. But if opening up more free markets is a goal that the West prizes . . . why is Europe fretting about China’s growing economic role in Africa?¹³

That is, some key African political elites see the Sino-African relationship as just part of the normal process of international economic relations and not a case of China adopting a predatory economic role in the continent. Some African public officials even see China as a role model for Africa. Accordingly, Helen Mamle Kofi, Ghana’s ambassador to China, considers China’s economic structure and behavior an “example to follow in terms of economic, financial, social, technological and cultural integration.”¹⁴ Such a statement underscores the tangible examples of China’s presence in Africa, but other observations emphasize the psychological boost that Africa has received because of

China's activities there since the end of the Cold War. Its engagement with African nations has been a morale booster and a source of hope for a continent largely abandoned after the Cold War.¹⁵ The retrenchment of the superpowers from Africa and the devastation caused by requirements of the Washington Consensus were in varying cases responsible for the severe economic decline and violent conflicts in Africa during the early 1990s. In particular, the West's interest in Africa markedly decreased, reflected in a sharp drop in demand for the continent's basic exports. Thus, China's presence in Africa in the late 1990s served as a psychological boost and restoration of self-esteem to African nations. With 2000 and the formation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the rapid growth in economic involvement, and an emphasis on resuscitating Africa's long-neglected infrastructure, China became a source of hope and inspiration for much of the continent. It provided some African nations an alternative from the austere measures of the Washington Consensus.

Many of the favorable comments on China in Africa also depict China as a capable power with the willingness to help develop the continent. The consistent policy posture toward Africa began with the era of independence and China's help in the struggle against colonial rule. The current fight against Ebola in West Africa is cited in addition to China's meager but significant help during times when China itself was underdeveloped. News bulletins released by the World Health Organization commended China's efforts in helping Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone fight Ebola. This recognition came from diverse sources, both private and public, underscoring the fact that China does more than simply concentrate on trade and investment; rather, it also has concerns about the health security of African states. Many major European newspapers such as the *Financial Times* of the United Kingdom and the *Global Times*, among others, comment on the fact that China is acting responsibly in the world by assisting African nations plagued by other insecurities and is not just safeguarding its own economic interests.¹⁶ Further, China's focus on upgrading and developing Africa's infrastructure is a source of positive comments by both private and public actors. They assert that China has made infrastructure development a priority, compared to the actions of the West, which built infrastructure only to ship Africa's resources to Western nations. The area of infrastructure is seen as a strong indicator of China's genuine, honest, and sincere attitude toward African countries. Supporters point to the reality that speaks louder than words. For example, China has completed 1,046 projects, including the construction of railways totaling 2,230 kilometers and highways covering 3,530 kilometers, thereby helping to improve the social and economic lives of ordinary Africans.¹⁷

China's View of Human Rights versus Universal Human Rights

In June 1993, during the 49th meeting of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commission and the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, China articulated its position on human rights as a process of historical development predicated on a country's socioeconomic, political, and specific history as well as its cultural values. In other words,

for China, human rights requirements vary from country to country, depending upon each one's historical development. Differences among countries mean that the understanding and practice of human rights also differ. Accordingly, no one standard of human rights should be required of all countries because of variations in the stages of historical, socioeconomic, political, and cultural development.¹⁸ This conception of reality differs fundamentally from that of the West and in actuality becomes a source of conflict with China. It informs much of China's African policy and generates concerns, perceived threats, and negative statements about its role in the continent.

Second, China also emphasized that for Third World countries, priority should be given to combating hunger, reducing poverty in general, and acquiring improved living standards. In China's view, the right to live or subsist is considered the preeminent human right. That is, it does not make sense to discuss human rights when the quality of human existence (ensuring people's right to subsistence) is absent.¹⁹ This means that technical and industrial development is one of the necessary conditions for universal human rights. The emphasis, according to China, should be on creating an environment that would enable people to achieve economic and social progress so that they meet the basic needs of food, clothing, and overall decent living standards. Accordingly, the key criterion for judging the human rights situation of a country is whether its government formulates relevant and appropriate policies effective enough to provide basic needs and improved quality of life. The emphasis is definitely not on civil liberties and political rights as understood in the West. The foremost inalienable right for China is the right to development, defined as promoting economic and social progress or meeting basic human needs. Consequently, it is not surprising that the promotion of democracy, defined as freedom of speech, an independent media, and overall protection of civil liberties or political rights, among others, is not a priority for China in its dealings with African states.

Third, in China's view of human rights, individual rights and freedom are not absolute except as spelled out by law and within the confines of law. Within this context, a citizen's rights and obligations are indivisible. Thus, external impositions and expectations of one universal view of human rights would contradict the principle of state sovereignty. Hence, the state, considered responsible for the welfare of all groups, has the absolute right to determine what should be allowed to constitute binding human rights. China's noninterference principle would amount to a violation of its human rights principle if not upheld in its relations with African states. This view is considered quite contrary to the Western view of human rights, reflected in the promotion of democracy or requirements by the World Bank or International Monetary Fund for free and fair elections as a condition for the transfer of foreign aid and technology, among other matters.

Furthermore, China sees past injustices of colonialism, imperialism, or foreign interventions as obstacles that prevented people in the Third World from enjoying human rights. Accordingly, the existing inequalities between North and South due to the unfair global economic structure also act as obstacles to the enjoyment of human rights by Third World people.²⁰ Their freedom is also constrained by continuing interventions and impositions. Accordingly, China deliberately distances itself from the Western record in Africa

by describing its relationship with the continent as one of “win-win,” “mutual respect,” or “equality,” among other descriptors. This stance is quite different from what has been described as the patronizing, arrogant, and impositional policy attitude of the West.

In addition, China's view of human rights underscores the fact that the UN Charter expresses the right of all countries, regardless of their size or level of development, to choose their own political system, path to development, and cultural values without interference from any entity. Thus, to accuse another country of abusing human rights and even seeking to impose universal criteria of human rights amounts to violation of the national sovereignty principle and therefore interference in the internal affairs of that country. Oftentimes, the outcome is political instability or social strife within the target country. Interference in the internal affairs of other countries is tantamount to power politics, which infringes on the UN Charter and in no way safeguards the rights of citizens. During the World Conference on Human Rights, China responded to the threat of universal human rights by underscoring four principles that it claimed would strengthen international cooperation in the field of human rights in general.

First, it called on the international community to pay attention to gross human rights violations resulting from foreign aggression and occupation, foreign invasion, colonial rule, apartheid, and regional conflicts. Second, China called for the promotion of a favorable global environment that would facilitate human rights—specifically, creation of relationships of mutual respect; equality; amicable coexistence; and mutual, beneficial cooperation in accordance with the UN Charter and norms of international law. This is why China favors national (African) or regional (African Union) solutions to African problems. China argues that conflict settlement should be based on mutual accommodation and understanding; therefore, no country should be preoccupied with world dominance or hegemony through power politics, aggression, or military interventions. Third, China believes that developed countries are obliged to help developing countries achieve economic stability by establishing a fair and new international economic order based on justice and equity. This includes, but should not be limited to, debt cancellation, capital transfers, trade, aid, and technology transfer. In this way, the North-South gap would gradually diminish, bringing about development and peace in the South. In many of these issues, China's actions invoke criticism from the West because it does not abide by the regimes set up to deal with them. For instance, China does not recognize the debt-cancellation regime set up by the West. When it is ready, China simply cancels the debt of African states without imposing any conditions on them and without making sure that they deal with corruption issues or adopt good governance in general. Fourth, China believes that each country has the right to formulate its own policies on protecting human rights based on its own historical, political, economic, and sociocultural conditions. No country should impose its own views of human rights on others. Discussions of human rights should always proceed from a spirit of mutual respect and equality. Here, China directly set itself apart from the West, which is inclined to and whose global policy is to promote universal human rights, defined as the protection of civil rights and political liberties.

A fundamental difference exists between US and Chinese conceptions of human rights. The Chinese emphasize economic rather than political rights. In particular *Sreng-cun quan* (subsistence rights) is largely an economic notion considered more important than political rights and individual freedoms. The Chinese position on human rights and that of many developing nations received a boost in 1966 when the UN General Assembly passed the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The covenant is significant because it underscores the similarity of national interests between China and many developing countries, including African states. Although the Carter administration looked favorably on the covenant, the US Senate in 1978 refused to ratify it. The US understanding of the covenant's substance was based on a fundamental superiority of political rights over economic, social, and cultural ones. In fact, under the Reagan administration, the covenant was explicitly undermined not only by officially rejecting economic, social, and cultural rights but also by defining human rights to mean strictly political rights and civil liberties.²¹

On a more disparaging level, commentators use China's position that it does not mix business and politics as a major justification to level serious criticisms of that country's attitude toward human rights violations or African dictators. Its posture of noninterference in politics is viewed as lack of support for Western and international efforts to promote democracy and human rights in African states by putting pressure on corrupt, despotic leaders to liberalize or respect political rights and civil liberties. At the UN multilateral level, for instance, China even supports governments considered despotic, thereby weakening the diplomatic and economic pressure applied on them either by the UN, international financial institutions, or major Western powers. For example, China has thwarted efforts to impose sanctions on Sudan and Zimbabwe, abstaining in July 2004 from voting on UN Resolution 1556, which called for disarmament of the Janjaweed militias in Darfur. In August 2006, it again abstained from voting on Resolution 1706, which called for an expanded UN Mission in Sudan to encompass Darfur. It voted favorably only when 1706 was replaced by a very watered down Resolution 1769 in July 2007, authorizing a UN–African Union peacekeeping force.

Because China is primarily interested in making business deals and building strong diplomatic ties with African states, it does not think that arms sales constitute political interference in a state's politics. Accordingly, and as part of the lucrative arms deals between African states and major powers, China sells weapons to many African states.²² For example, China not only has sold weapons to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, among others, but also has provided military training to many of those countries. Since arms transfers perform a number of geopolitical functions, one could argue that China's arms-transfer activities are not just for economic gain; rather, they strengthen geopolitical ties, diplomatic support, and military technological dependence on China by African states. The geopolitical importance of the arms-transfer relationship translates into a greater role for the Chinese government in decisions regarding the transfer of weapons to African states in particular. In terms of human rights concerns, arms sales per se are not a violation of those rights; otherwise, all major and medium

arms-transfer nations would be guilty of gross human rights violations. The problem with China is that it at times does not abide by arms embargoes or sanctions imposed by international financial institutions, the UN, or Western nations. However, the overall problem with arms sales is that the weapons have often been used to fight genocidal civil wars, commit extrajudicial killings, and retard human development by decades. This is especially the case when arms are supplied to dictatorial regimes and warlords in African countries.

China has had a long tradition of despotic rule from the time of the emperors to its current communist system. Its political culture, therefore, de-emphasizes individual rights in favor of collective rights with an exclusive emphasis on economic and social rights underlined by interest rather than moral duty. In its worldview, China adheres to the belief that interests supersede rights.

China's geoeconomic and geopolitical ambitions in Africa are easier to achieve because African states prefer the principles of China's foreign policy compared to the top-down approach of the West. For example, China's principles of mutual respect for sovereign territorial integrity and mutual noninterference in domestic affairs are appealing, not only to African autocratic governments but also to semidemocratic and democratic ones. The substantial contrast between the patronizing, top-down approach of the West and the mutual respect and noninterference of China has created a great deal of influence for China in Africa.

China's geopolitical objectives in Africa and globally are directly tied to the support of and maintenance of positive/cordial relations with all African states. China needs African states at the UN to counter condemnation of its human rights record by the West and to help advance its "One China" policy as well as other political objectives. Its geopolitical ambitions and advantages in Africa are directly a result of its mutual position on human rights and noninterference in the politics of African states. In sum, human rights considerations are subverted by China's need for African allies in global politics and by the geoeconomic objective of satisfying its energy requirements in order to continue its rapid industrialization. In other words, interests are paramount, but human rights considerations are relegated to a secondary level.

This discussion has pointed out both favorable and adverse reactions to China's engagement with Africa. On the negative side are accusations of China undermining the promotion of democracy by supporting dictators and even shielding them from UN and/or Western sanctions. Further, China has been charged with contributing to environmental degradation in the continent and failing to employ many Africans at the same time it flouts labor standards or violates the human rights of African workers. In brief, on the positive side are China's contributions to economic development in the infrastructural, agricultural, medical, educational, peacekeeping, and peace-building fields. China also seems to have broken the monopoly of the West in Africa by providing an alternative source of technology, trade, investment, and international support at the UN and other international venues. This article attempts an objective evaluation of China's role by

critically interrogating both the dominant and positive narratives of that country's extensive involvement in Africa.

Attempt at a More Critical and Balanced Examination

The question for analysis concerns whether China's support of authoritarian African regimes is outweighed by its extensive developmental activities in the continent. One could argue that African states at independence were in no way democratic because the colonial administration bequeathed them with regimes prone to autocratic rule. In essence the African state at independence was external to African society and not an internal, indigenous formation.²³ Therefore, it is not the business of China to interfere with historical, political legacies that pervade African nations as a result of colonial rule. Besides, supporters of China's engagement with Africa could argue that democratic, semi-democratic, and authoritarian regimes in Africa approve of China's role in the continent at a time when Western assistance is not only tight but also characterized by all types of impositions and calls for austerity measures. At the same time, China is viewed as a benevolent power because it is upgrading long-neglected and dilapidated infrastructure, flooding the continent with interest-free loans, transferring appropriate technology, and establishing special economic zones to stimulate the local and regional African economies. For the past two centuries, Africa has been unwillingly incorporated into—and marginalized within—the Western-dominated global capitalist system, but China is offering it a sigh of relief and a thought-provoking development alternative, as well as a source of aid, trade, and investment.²⁴

However, a question worth reflecting upon—one that is part of the discourse of China's engagement in Africa—is whether Africa is being recolonized by China. Is China an imperialist power? Is China also transforming Africa's subsistence economies into mercantilist economies tailored to serve the industrial needs of China? During European colonial rule, the colonies supplied raw materials to the colonial power and served as an import market for its manufactured goods. In general the economy of each colonial territory was suitably designated to produce and supply raw materials for European industries. The overall objective was to ensure maximum profits for the business interests of the colonial power. The question to examine concerns whether China's infrastructural investments (especially roads, railway systems, ports, airports, hydroelectric power, etc.) in Africa are mainly geared toward profit maximization at the expense of African states.

As a communal-oriented society, China has a great deal in common with African societies that are also based on communalism or that emphasize the community as opposed to the individual. In communal societies, social and economic concerns are given priority over individual civil and political rights. In its political culture, China emphasizes the state's interests because it views the state as the protector of groups—and groups' interests in communitarian values are privileged over individual interests. Thus, it is not surprising that China does not interfere even with despotic African governments. China's foreign aid or assistance to such countries is premised on the understanding that a project

contributes to the basic development needs (food, shelter, health care, transportation, etc.) of collectivities or population groups as opposed to assistance to promote civil rights and political liberties—hence the clash between China's and the West's worldviews regarding human rights in Africa. For the West, the objective of foreign assistance is to give priority to promoting democracy, establishing good governance, or strengthening civil society. These goals fall squarely within individual human rights. China, however, emphasizes social and economic rights, defined as rights to basic subsistence, work, education, employment, and overall security. The community's security in food, clothing, and shelter is considered the most important function of government; as a result, the state expends many resources toward that end. China's foreign policy concerning African nations reflects this emphasis on ensuring basic human needs or social and economic rights. In the Chinese communist tradition, inspired by Marxism, civil and political rights preferred by the West are possible only if a society has established a solid socioeconomic rights foundation. In China's conception of human rights, the West is putting the cart before the horse by insisting on civil and political rights before the acquisition of a solid socioeconomic foundation.

During the immediate postindependence era, African states and China promoted the "right to pollute" and "right to development" philosophy as a call for newly independent states to work toward providing basic human needs to their citizens. Furthermore, because of the preoccupation of developing countries with economic growth in particular, in 1986 the UN General Assembly proclaimed the Declaration of the Right to Development. The declaration charges states with ensuring that their people have access to basic human needs, including health care and employment, and assurance of distributional equity in income. These rights or securities are either interrelated or mutually supportive. Education and good health, for example, are necessary conditions for acquiring gainful employment that would allow people to afford the basics of food, housing, clothing, and adequate health care. In China's view, interfering with the functions of the state impedes the latter's capacity development that would ensure such social and economic human rights. Because African states strongly endorse economic and social rights, in 1981 they institutionalized them to development by signing the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Since most African states are incapable of offering the key ingredients of food, clothing, housing, health care, and education, which constitute the right to development, China steps in to help them meet these social and economic objectives. China identifies with Third World nations, and it is geopolitically advantageous for it to do so because China has received a great deal of international support for them, especially from African states. Indeed, by many measures and indicators, China is more Third World than industrialized world.

The Western domination of members of the Third World has always been based on rules and regulations imposed on them as colonial territories and now as independent states. Such domination, manifested in the economic hegemony of international financial institutions (especially the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), translates into political and economic conditions detrimental to the right to develop-

ment. For example, the World Bank's and International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment policies plunged a large segment of the global South into deeper deprivation and poverty. As a condition for receiving loans or foreign aid, developing nations are forced to end subsidies on food, health, and education, among other things. They are forced to emphasize export crops instead of food crops for local consumption, lower the minimum wage, and open their small markets to external competition. Consequently, the Washington Consensus has proven detrimental to basic human needs that constitute the core of economic and social rights.²⁵ The neoliberal paradigm has produced more poverty in Africa since the mid-1980s but has not generated any meaningful growth. Even where growth has occurred, vast distributional inequity remains because of this emphasis on political rights and civil liberties at the expense of a state's role in ensuring a modicum of social welfare.

China: An Alternate Model?

China's presence in Africa, coupled with its near-miraculous economic growth and industrialization, has impressed many African states, offering them an alternate model of development. China has also broken the monopoly or geopolitical and geoeconomic hold of the West and its neoliberal impositions. China's success has brought back in full force the question of the role of the state in providing the right mix of state intervention and private initiatives necessary to ensure economic growth that will promote human development.

China's leverage over African states has increased because of its unchanging attitude toward them since the early days of their independence. Thus, not only is China free of the baggage of colonial rule in Africa but also its African foreign policy has been consistent, based on the proclamation of Chinese prime minister Zhou Enlai and Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru during the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1954. Those principles were reiterated in 2000 as the core of China's African policy. The five principles are mutual respect, nonaggression, noninterference, equality and mutually beneficial relations, and peaceful coexistence. A decade later, during his visit to African states in 1964, Zhou Enlai articulated a philosophy of foreign aid that differed radically from the West's. Among the principles that constitute China's foreign aid philosophy are that it should be based on equality and mutual benefit; that economic relationships and aid in particular should not be subjected to any heavy burdens or impositions; and that the objective of economic and technological assistance is to help the recipient country reach a level of self-reliance. The question is whether China's aid relationship with Africa is true to these principles. That is, does rhetoric correspond to reality, or is China's professed goodwill to Africa contributing in any way to the continent's development, morale, or confidence?

A significant advantage that China has over the West is its largely unconditional aid as well as the growing visibility of its aid-based projects (schools, stadiums, hospitals, roads, etc.) all over the African continent. The West's African policy, especially that of the

United States, presents a stark contrast to China's. The US policy, for instance, varies from administration to administration. After World War II, that policy, for the most part, has been relegated to a marginal position or considered the domain of Africa's former European colonial masters. Clinton was the first American president to actually initiate a significant US African policy focused on extensive economic interactions through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), signed into law as Title 1 of the Trade and Development Act of 2000. The objectives of the AGOA are to widen the scope of US trade and investment with sub-Saharan Africa as a means of stimulating economic growth and further integrating it into the global economy. A major condition of the act is that the US president must determine annually whether to renew the act, based on whether African countries have met conditions such as abiding by the rule of law, reducing corruption, lowering poverty, protecting workers' rights, and making progress in establishing and strengthening a market-based economy, among other requirements. Since 2000 the AGOA has been the primary and official economic link between the United States and Africa. Trade ties between the two entities have been significantly on the downward trend since 2011. For example, between 2011 and 2013, US-Africa trade experienced a reduction of \$39 billion from \$99 billion. Trade in goods is set to decline further in 2014 to a figure far below \$80 billion.²⁶ The AGOA is up for renewal in September 2015. Discussions largely deal with whether or not to continue the legislation. If so, the negotiations must address the length of renewal and whether some aspects should be changed or maintained.²⁷ The AGOA relationship between the United States and Africa is similar to that between China and several African countries in terms of items traded because it mainly consists of oil and, to a lesser degree, textiles. The decrease in US-Africa trade is especially due to a sharp drop in oil and gas exports from African states to the United States. Specifically, between 2008 and 2013, energy exports from AGOA countries to the United States declined by 66 percent to a value of \$20 billion.

The foreign policy of George W. Bush toward Africa could be described as a reaction to the profound and extensive Chinese engagement there. An outcome of this response was the establishment of US Africa Command and the Bush administration's HIV/AIDS policy for Africa. On 4 August 2014, President Obama hosted nearly 50 African heads of state in Washington, DC, for the most significant summit on Africa ever held by an American president. Two facts motivated this unprecedented summit. First, as an African-American with an African (Kenyan) father, President Obama is determined to build his legacy by showing his commitment to Africa, especially after enduring criticisms about his lack of attention to the continent. Second, in 2009 China surpassed the United States as Africa's largest trading partner. Perhaps a third fact has to do with Africa's great potential related to its geoeconomic endowments and the continent's rapid economic growth and expanding middle class.²⁸ Indeed, the United States wants to be in competition with China for the purchasing power of this growing middle class. America has an opportune moment to enhance its relationship with African states because President Obama is also under pressure to satisfy the expectations of both Afri-

can leaders and many US policy makers who hope that the son of a Kenyan would not only elevate Africa's status in Washington but also deepen and expand US-African ties.

Following the end of the Cold War, US and European neglect of Africa contrasted rather vividly with the expansive involvement of China on the continent. Before addressing the unprecedented scope and intensity of China's interactions with Africa since the late 1990s, one should underscore the fact that China has had consistent engagement with Africa since the Cold War years or the era of wars of African liberation. The scant historical knowledge of transactions between China and Africa during the time of the Chinese emperors contrasts very sharply with the rather bellicose and exploitative involvement of Europeans at about the same period or a few centuries thereafter. China, in other words, retrenched from Africa while the West became very involved, either for good or bad. From the early Ming Dynasty, China neglected Africa for five centuries until after the end of World War II and the era of African independence.

With the establishment of modern China in 1949, interactions with Asia resumed. Between 1956 and 1977, China provided close to 60 percent of its total foreign aid, valued at approximately \$2.7 billion, to Africa. Such assistance during this period in China's development is significant because the country was at the same time experiencing political turbulence in its attempt to stabilize its revolution. The years 1956–77 included the internal crisis of the Great Leap Forward (1957) and mass extermination of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The scope of aid offered during this time was extensive/broad, benefiting 36 African nations.

Although China's disbursement of aid at this time was not large by today's standards and those of the rest of the major Western donors, China nonetheless used aid to accomplish a geopolitical and diplomatic penetration of the continent that would later prove beneficial. Further, China used its aid selectively to cement political-economic and diplomatic relationships with the African countries of Tanzania and Zambia, its largest recipients, who used Chinese resources for the ambitious TanZam Railway that connects the two countries via a 2,000-kilometer track. Other recipients included Egypt, Somalia, and Zaire.²⁹ Small amounts of aid were extended to several other countries as part of a diplomatic path-breaking instrument (aid serving as a diplomatic recognition function) that has now become a strong Sino-African political and economic partnership.

China embarked on this selective and penetrative use of foreign assistance in spite of its own domestic difficulties and Third World status because it needed friends to help it gain legitimacy/acceptance at the UN and other world bodies in the face of US and Western opposition. China established significant diplomatic goodwill with African states by agreeing to fund the TanZam Railway after all of the Western nations and the USSR, as well as the World Bank, declined requests to fund the project. China, though, was very generous in its assistance to Tanzania and Zambia, supplying an interest-free loan to the two countries payable over 30 years. The purpose of the project was to help landlocked Zambia export its goods through Tanzanian ports.

In addition to the economic instruments of its African policy, China reached out to African countries to alleviate Western and Soviet pressure directed at it and to end its

diplomatic isolation. Zhou Enlai paid a second visit to Africa in 1964–65 and selectively targeted aid to seven African countries that included Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Tanzania, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. China's \$190 million in aid to the seven countries was directed at the critical developmental sectors of agriculture, light industry, power plant infrastructure, health support, and overall technical assistance, forming the bedrock of Sino-African relations since the 1960s. These sectors constitute China's formidable African development diplomacy that facilitates effective crop cultivation, the establishment of factories and hydroelectric power, upgrades of roads and railways, the provision of and training of medical personnel, and educational assistance, among other endeavors. The significance of China's assistance to Africa does not lie in the amount committed, especially prior to the 2000s, but in its deliberate focus on acutely needed assistance or support, as in agriculture, medicine, hydroelectric power, and other essentials of development. China's diplomacy in the 1950s and early 1960s was so impressive vis-à-vis African countries that African diplomatic recognition of China jumped from 18 African states in 1965 to 44 by 1979.

China utilized both grandiose projects and small-scale ones as part of its African diplomatic push. For example, the previously mentioned TanZam Railway, an example of a large-scale infrastructural project, connects landlocked Zambia and coastal Tanzania, covering a distance of 1,156 miles. The project not only benefited the two African countries but also helped China gain a newly independent African ally (Tanzania), marginalized by the West, Russia, and major international financial institutions. China also acquired mineral access to Zambia's huge deposits of copper. This is a good example of China's emphasis on a mutual benefit or win-win relationship in its geoeconomic and geopolitical interactions with African states. Since the 1960s, China has established numerous projects in Africa, including nuclear plants, hydroelectric dams, roads and railways, hospitals, sports complexes, factories, and agricultural training stations. Still, the question of whether China is exploiting or recolonizing Africa remains unanswered.

Summary and Conclusions

Because China's engagement with Africa has become an emotional subject, it has generated both negative and positive discourse. Western hegemonic powers are the source of a great deal of negative framing of China's intentions, including such matters as (1) China's noncritical stance regarding human rights violations in Africa; (2) its economic support for authoritarian rulers and diplomatic support at the UN and other international bodies; and (3) its economic support to African governments without imposing any conditions for democracy and good governance in general. Furthermore, some critics assert that the structure and pattern of Sino-African trade today replicate the pattern of trade between countries in Africa and the European colonizers. This belief is reflected in the fact that China exports finished high-tech goods and apparel whereas African states overwhelmingly export raw materials.

However, the opposing complimentary discourse notes that China catapulted Africa into geostrategic and geoeconomic importance by its extensive investment activities in the continent, which has reignited Western economic and political interest there. Such interest is largely a result of the West's perceived threat to its hegemony in Africa. The enormous Chinese investments amount to nearly 2,000 projects that include mining, energy, health, and education. They have boosted the morale of a continent that was very marginalized and considered virtually incapacitated just before and after the end of the Cold War.

The competing narratives will continue for years to come because China's extensive and intensive activities in Africa have been ongoing for roughly two decades. Consequently, it is difficult to make any conclusive statements about whether Africa is experiencing real economic development as a result of China's investments in Africa. It is also too early to say with any certainty that China is reversing the spirit of democratization that began in Africa in the early 1990s. Perhaps what can be said with some certainty is that China's engagement in Africa has generated a great deal of debate about its intentions, impact, contributions, and activities on the continent.

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