

Title

The nature of the Chinese engagement in African Development: A critical analysis

Author/s

Md. Didarul Islam, Assistant Professor, Dept. of World Religions and Culture, University of Dhaka, PhD Candidate, University of Leeds, UK, Email: didar@du.ac.bd

Abstract

China has been expanding its market in African countries through different economic collaborations which subsequently gave it a stronghold in the political front. African countries are regarded as friends of China nowadays. The relationship between China and Africa is friendlier than the western relationship to Africa. In the recent years, Africa has reduced their dependency on the western countries and shifted this dependency towards China for better economic deals. Western critics claim that Chinese engagement in Africa is mainly for coveting the natural resources of Africa because the trade gap between China and Africa remains high. In this paper, it has been argued that the Chinese cooperation and engagement in African socio-economic development is qualitatively different from the western engagement. But this different approach is helping China in maximising their market economy significantly. African countries consider China as more trustworthy, and their business is primarily based on 'win-win' collaboration so that both China and Africa could benefit. African countries hope that Chinese engagement will ensure their infrastructural development and will help them to come out from the western hegemony. The Chinese model of development, i.e., visible development strategies based on 'constructing infrastructures' in Africa is different from the western development model, i.e., based on conditional aid and ensuring human rights and democratisation in the country. This paper examines Chinese engagement in Africa against western engagement with the continent.

Key words

Africa, aid, China, engagement, development, human rights, motivations

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Introduction

China focused on African countries with a view to expanding their market economy and making some friends in international circuit since the early 1980s. China's engagement with Africa is premised on a different strategic approach that is different from the western countries. China's turn to Africa is considered as reuniting the historical economic and political relations with Africa; and maximising economic and diplomatic benefits from Africa (Alden, 2008, P. 351). Chinese engagement in Africa is viewed more beneficial for China than the African countries (Alden, 2008; Ayers, 2013). Ayers (2013, p. 227) termed the new shift towards Africa as '*new scramble for Africa*' for coveting African resources which will eventually extract natural resources of Africa and will make African economy much dependent on China. On the contrary, the African countries and China view this relationship as a 'win-win' situation (Munyi, 2012). This paper attempts to examine to what extent the Chinese engagement is any different to that of the western engagement.

The Chinese model of development, i.e., visible development strategies based on 'constructing infrastructures' in Africa is different from the western development model, i.e., based on conditional aid and ensuring human rights and democratisation in the country. This paper examines Chinese engagement in Africa against western engagement with the continent. The paper has followed qualitative research approaches, literature review in particular consisting of books, journals and reports. Besides a discussion of theoretical positioning on the Chinese engagement in Africa, aspects like the motivations of the Chinese engagement, the Chinese development model, non-interference standpoint of China and human rights issue have also been analysed to understand to what extent China is different to the other external powers in terms of relationship with Africa.

Background of the study

Discussion on the Chinese development engagement in Africa is usually grouped in two theoretical positions: the threat theory and the liberal peaceful rise theory from development perspectives. A large volume of literature has been produced representing China as a threat for African countries. For instance, Rotberg (2008) described China as an exploitive foreign power who is voracious for African natural resources. Michel and Beuret (2009, pp. 107-108) described China as an economic 'god father' who has settled a complex web so that African countries are bound to be dependent on the Chinese economy. In addition, French (2014) argued that the Chinese presence in Africa is because of its endeavour to

promote influence and power as an imperial force. He also showed that the huge presence of Chinese immigrants is not only as a part of China's official policy in Africa, instead many Chinese people got a new life and hope in different African countries.

Ayers (2013) and Prah (2007) viewed the western position of criticising China as self-contradiction. Prah (2007) thinks that the western countries do not have any moral legitimacy to criticise China for same actions they carried out in Africa. Ayers (2013) argued that the western countries exploited Africa for a long time and kept Africa in debt trap. western engagement in Africa was only beneficial to the western powers and Africa continued as a poor continent despite having commendable natural resources. Arighi (2007) and Munyi (2012) on the other hand consider the peaceful rise of China worth effective for the development of African countries. They put the argument that unlike the western interventions which brought nothing but poverty in Africa, Chinese engagement has brought a new opportunity for Africa getting trade benefits as partner instead of being aid seeker. This threat-benefit continuum usually depends on author's viewpoints (Ovida, 2013, p.134).

China drew motivations behind her engagement in Africa from two major factors: political legitimacy and maximizing economic benefits. Firstly, after the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen square China faced an image crisis in international arena and felt isolated in the international circuit (Taylor, 2006, p.939). This isolation forced the policy makers of China to search for new allies (Ayers, 2013). As part of developing strategic relations with the developing countries in Africa, China opened more opportunities for Africa to broaden their influence as African countries constitute twenty five percent in United Nations. China established a trustworthy relationship with most of the African countries which signifies two things; in one hand, they would vote for China in international platforms like in the United Nations. This new political friendship was a counter move against the unipolar realm of USA. On the other hand, African countries have found a new bargain partner for the region. This new relationship accelerated the peaceful rise of China (Alden, 2008, p. 355).

Secondly, Chinese establishment of new economic relations was a great opportunity to maximise their profit in African continent. China could easily import raw materials such as oil, gold, cobalt, platinum and copper. In exchange of unrepentant access to the African market, China flooded the African markets with Chinese products (Ayers, 2013). Chinese companies set up different industries and aided by the cheap African labour, they succeeded in making considerable profits (Ninda, 2012). As a result, the Chinese Communist

government could legitimise their authority indirectly on economic ground.

Results

Chinese engagement in development

Chinese engagement in the African development has many positive impacts including poverty alleviations, building infrastructure and robust of bilateral trade. These endeavours have placed China as a good friend of the African countries. Hanaver and Morris (2014) showed that China has four kinds of benefit in Africa; excavating natural resources, expanding market for the Chinese goods, ensuring political legitimacy within and outside China and development of Africa to turn African dependency from the western countries to China. In turn, African countries become aligned to China for aid and investment which is devoid of ideological projects of the West; such as democracy, human rights etc (Alden, 2007). Despite the positive implications of the Chinese engagement, critics state that the Chinese engagement is unsustainable and counterproductive (Stahl, 2016) for Africa because China will loot the resources of Africa and will maximise their economic benefit. Alden (2007) views Chinese engagement not only as the trading partner but also as neo-coloniser. Tiffin (2014) argued that the Chinese interventions in Africa are unsustainable. Because the Chinese companies are damaging environment and cultural heritage. For instance, the Chinese companies extract mines by polluting the air and garbage of industries are dumped in the rivers. To the contrary, Chinese engagement can be viewed advantageous for both Africa and China as a 'win-win' situation as Ayers (2013) and Ninda (2012) argued that both China and Africa are broadening their market economy and volume of trade while minimising western dependency. Bringing different cases of the bargaining capacity of the African countries, Munyi (2012) concluded that African countries now-a-days can bargain on conditional aid to get more advantageous treatment from the West.

Chan (2008) thinks that one of the basic differences between China and the West in maintaining relationship with Africa is following the Shanghai school of International Relations which suggests the use of 'easy methods' to maintain international relations including state to state friendship between China and African countries, unconditional aid and highly visible aid model which are opposite to the development strategies. According to Campbell (2008), China never engaged in development strategy based on Washington consensus led by the west because the conditional development of the western model is counter-productive for Africa. Instead, China always imposes minimum

regulations in African development, trade and aid following the Beijing Consensus (Alden, 2008, p. 356). Large (2008) also described that China is different from the West because the motto of China is "win-win" business collaboration (Large, 2008, p. 375). Michel and Beuret (2009) considers that the African governments consider China as a hardworking nation who does not spend her time in 'lecturing' their ideologies and the story of good governance.

Economic development

Chinese engagement in economic development of Africa is a two-way benefit nexus. Africa has a huge consumer market for China. China has established thousands of business and construction firms in Africa and China says that investing in Africa is viable for them (Forbes, 2019). In 2014 alone, the volume of trade between China and Africa was 214 Billion Dollar. The significant rise of trade volume in 300 per cent from 2000 to 2015 is an example of Chinese growing expansion of market economy in Africa. In 2003, African trade surpassed the British trade in volume (Brautigam, 2010, p. 174). In 2017, the largest trading partner of China were South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Angola, Congo and Ethiopia (CARI, 2019). Ethiopia imported goods from China costing 1310 million euro in 2012 which was more than any other trade bloc including EU and USA (Cheru, 2016, p. 596). The total trade value of Ethiopia with China was just after EU reaching 1529 million euro in 2012 (Cheru, 2016, p. 529). This trade relation signifies that China has already established a concentrated trade block and trade dependency in Africa; and the competitiveness between the West and China where China established itself as a better choice to the Africans for less complex business terms and conditions than the West (Ninda, 2012).

In 2016, the Chinese non-financial investment; real estate for instance itself increased by 25% in Africa in general and particularly in countries like Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda, the investment increased 100% per year (MOFCOM, 2017). Construction works like Egypt-Suez trade and economic cooperation area, the largest automobile industry in South Africa, manufacturing industries in African countries, building new buildings, bridges and highways are the mega projects in Africa in 2016 with a contractual value of 65.2 Billion USD with an increase of 7.2% per year (MOFCOM, 2017). These mega projects will create many job opportunities in Africa and accelerate the African economy as well.

The market share of US products such as car and smartphone started to lose to Chinese products as people in Africa can afford these expensive commodities at a half price from the Chinese

companies (Ninda, 2012). This creates the mobilisation of internal markets and brings affordable access to technology, particularly telecommunication to majority of Africans. This tech-friendly business strategy stirred the expansion Chinese tech market in Africa. Intensive presence of Chinese companies and goods in Africa has created few adverse effects on the African economy and lifestyle. One of the obvious negative impacts for extensive Chinese exports to Africa is on the home-grown manufacturing markets, textile and footwear, for instances. These homegrown markets have been facing a threat of money and technology driven consumer market economy. China used to claim that they are not damaging any home-grown market. Instead, they are replacing other western markets. But the reports and experiences of different organisations suggest that China flooded Africa with relatively cheaper products. The irony is most of these products are manufactured in Africa as the African labour is much cheaper than China. For example, Ninda (2012) found that in Ethiopia, of 96 domestic producers who had to compete with Chinese products, at least 28 percent faced bankruptcy, 32 percent found downsize market. Though China maintains a win-win collaboration with Africa, lack of diversity in trade relationship can be counterproductive for Africa. For instance, African exports to China is mainly based on raw materials. Regulations for African goods are strict in China and takes long process. If Africa does not create variations in their exports, it will be difficult for them to export goods made of African raw materials (Tiffin, 2014).

Creation of jobs

The western countries did not concentrate on creating more jobs for the Africans. China claims that they have created millions of positions for the Africans in working sectors in Africa. But China has been accused of reducing the employability of the Africans (Ayers, 2013). Africans are less paid than the Chinese and in good positions, it is hard to find Africans. Though there is no constant data how many Africans got job only because of Chinese engagement, Tiffin (2014) argued that Chinese development projects could establish employment at a minimum level, because Chinese corporations hire labours from China as they are more skilled than the Africans. In 2017, there were 2.26 million Chinese people working in Africa in well paid positions. Algeria, Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Zambia constitute 57 percent of the Chinese workers in Africa (CARI, 2019). Chan (2008) stated that Chinese people come to Africa for a project purpose and keep segregated from the Africans for safety issue but a significant portion of them continue to live in Africa. Howard (2014) has showed that how this huge number of Chinese are building a new

empire in Africa keeping the Africans in less paid jobs.

Aid model

China is different from the western countries in terms of 'aid-based' development model. Moyo (2009) has accused the Chinese aid model as dangerous for Africa, not a solution for African economy. It is a trap that never ends and continues problematise national economy which keeps a dependency character for indefinite period of time (ASWNet 2021). Tiffin (2014) found that at least in development techniques and providing aid and loans, the West is different from China. The western countries do not give any aid in Africa without social and economic reforms such as human rights, democratization, accountability and privatization. The western countries follow the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) developed by World Bank and IMF in order to bring developing countries out of debt-trap and poverty suggesting many structural reformative measures from the government such as reducing expenditure on social safety net programs, opening up service sectors, education, medicine for instances for the non-government sectors. The motto of this programme is privatisation and reducing the expenditure of the government. One of the proponents of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Paul Collier (2007) argued that SAPs will pay of the African countries to maximise growth and to come out from the debt trap. But Glennie (2008) has opined that SAPs will make the poor more vulnerable when they will be deprived from state subsidies in sectors like education and medicines.

Chinese aid model has some criticisms mostly from the western academics. The western world in the face of losing control over Africa accused China of strengthening the autocrats in Africa and damaging democratic values (Ayers, 2013). But Brautigam (2009, p. 165-70) thinks that these accusations have least importance because one hand, China does not care about who are in the governments and these accusations are mainly based on westernised narratives. At the same time, confusion was raised due to the reluctance of aid model of China which is often classified as Official Development Assistance (ODA) but erroneously so. Guerrero and Manji (2008, p. 3) argued that Chinese aid model in Africa does not have any deep-rooted purpose like poverty reduction, democratization and improve of human rights. Instead, this aid model is mostly targeted towards intensifying indirect financial intervention in African countries and consolidating Chinese investment in development projects. For instance, China provides aid for constructing roads, bridges and high-rise buildings which will have a visible effect on Africa. This aid does not come as a gift of friendship, it is an agreement.

China claims that Chinese aid is unconditional. This aid comes as either grant or low interest loan. Despite the availability of any written conditions like the western aid, Chinese aid has always indirect conditions (Tiffin, 2014). For instance, Chinese companies have total control over African development projects like Bridge and Roads. In exchange of this, China is giving them billions of dollars as loans. In addition, as Chinese loan or aid is conditioned mainly for infrastructural and visible projects, they add conditions of procurement of these projects until a certain year. Paul Collier (2008) has also condemned China for damaging accountability and good governance in Africa. But China pays least attention to these criticisms (Ayers 2013, pp. 232-33).

One of the criticisms against China is that it provides aid to the autocrats in Africa (Alden et al., 2008). In response to that, Ayers (2013) argued that it is not erroneous for China to provide aid to a country run by an autocrat as they consider this as internal issue. In addition, the western power, the United States for instance used to provide two billion USD annual aid to Egypt which was run by an autocrat; Husni Mubarak.

Non-interference dilemma

According to Taylor (2008, p.68), Chinese engagement in Africa is premised on the 'Five principles', such as mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal issues, mutual benefits and peaceful co-existence. Their non-interference stance focusing on the state sovereignty in African internal issues has set China in a more flexible position to work with every government including the democratic governments and the autocratic governments. Large (2008, p. 373) also noted Chinese strategy of non-interference in African countries as a substantial difference than the West which has contributed to develop a more trustworthy business relation with African countries.

It is true that China is premised on non-interference theory for peaceful coexistence (Alden and large, 2015, p.132), but their policy is not static and unchangeable. China intervenes in a country when it is related to their benefits. According to Ayers (2013), though China does not actively interfere in a country, but indirectly they always have a potential influence in Africa. During the Sudan crisis, China started acting more seriously as South Sudan was supplying oil in China with an amount of 5% of China's need and China National Petroleum Corporation had a share on the oil fields in South Sudan (Tiffin, 2014). To protect their business, China consequently deployed an army of 850 troops to UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan (Tiffin, 2014). Alden (2007, p. 93) argues that the Chinese presence in Africa is mainly economic and China

does not have any long-term intention to intervene in African politics.

Development without human rights

In terms of Human rights and ensuring individual freedom, China has significant differences with the western countries. Western countries are premised on democracy, human rights and freedom of expression. In contrary, China being a communist nation pay least heed to the western values. Arguably China's policy undermines the promotion of human rights which is an inevitable part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Taylor, 2008, p. 72). Unlike the West, their human rights standpoint in Africa is grounded in communitarian focus on socio economic development, solidarity and stability (Taylor, 2008, p. 65). It must be kept in mind, in Chinese development model, economic development, social stability and collective rights are more important than individual human rights (Taylor, 2008, pp. 65-66).

China has been accused of assisting countries like Zimbabwe despite continuous accusations of human rights violations (Campbell, 2008, p.102). In response to this, it can be said that China's main purpose is the maximization of business in African countries. Therefore, they do not want to lose any partner by going against any government. China believes that there is no rogue state and human rights is only meant to be 'survival and development' (Taylor, 2008, p. 67). This standpoint subsequently gives China a flexible opportunity to work with any government in Africa (Taylor, 2008, p. 71).

BRICS and China-Africa partnership

BRICS, a consortium including five emerging economies including Brazil, Russia, Indian, China and South Africa was established in 2010 consisting of five rising economic giants: Brazil, Russia, China and, later including South Africa with a view to increasing collaboration in development aspects among these countries. Africa's engagement in BRICS has opened a new horizon for the African poverty driven countries. BRICS investments in Africa are mainly in infrastructural development sectors and poverty alleviation projects through creating more job opportunities for the Africans. China keeping in mind the South-South strategic cooperation strategy has been leading this BRICS-Africa relationship. South-Africa in addition is facilitating economic mobilization and socio-economic development of Africa.

Sustainability is a challenge in African countries and China is more likely to concentrate in this sustainability at present. China has become more aware of this fact because of the safety of huge investment of China in Africa (Hanaver and Morris,

2014). China in BRICS has been more concentrating on regular economic growth of African countries and to keep Africa in a leverage position. The establishment of important institutions such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Belt and Road Initiative have been paving the way for more opportunities for the African countries (Shelton, 2019). Apart from positive acknowledgements, South Africa and China are becoming competitor too in terms of expanding their market in other African countries (CCS, 2015). But in general, it can be said that BRICS will enhance the institutionalisation of Chinese capital in Africa which will play positive contributions in African economy.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that the Chinese engagement in Africa is qualitatively different to the western countries in terms of motivations, methods of development engagements, maintaining financial relations, non-interference and human rights issues. However, China is no different to western countries who try to maximize their economic benefits out of Africa. Since China does not focus on western values like democracy and human rights, China enjoys a favourable position to continue their economic and diplomatic relations with Africa. Moreover, China does not maintain a static relationship with African countries. They revise their standpoint according to their needs. The Chinese engagement has become promising for the possible development of Africa.

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