

A Political Economy of China's Policy of Non-Interference: Experiences from Resource-Rich African Countries

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Abstract

China-Africa relations constitute a sub-set of the much wider south-south relations dating back to the 1950s and 1960s when most developing countries were fighting for their independence. With a common history of foreign occupation, China and Africa also share experiences of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers. Since their first formal contacts in the mid-1950s, China and Africa have worked together to support the cause of oppressed peoples and occupied territories around the world. They have also helped each other to achieve and consolidate their nationhood. While China supported Africa's liberation struggle from colonialism, Africa fought for the formal recognition of the mainland China as the sole government of the whole China by the United Nations General Assembly. However, after a decade of disappearance from the continent, China returned to Africa at the turn of the 21st Century emphasising economic cooperation at the expense of political relations. Nonetheless, China has continued to sermonise its old policy of non-interference as a guiding principle in relations with Africa. Contrary to the ideals of non-interference, this article raises questions of Chinese interference in governance affairs of resource-rich and populous African countries.

Keywords: China; Non-interference; resource rich African countries; governance.

Introduction to China-Africa Relations

China and Africa have enjoyed many years of friendship and comradeship. Although early history shows that Chinese people and Africans have had trade-related contacts on the shores of the Indian Ocean since about AD 618-907, formal relations between the two did not start until after the Chinese nation was established in 1949. Without coincidence, it was about the same time most African territories were fighting for self-determination in the face of the petering World War II. Commonality of history between China and Africa became an important unifying factor in the early days of their diplomacy. The two have a shared history of territorial encroachment and challenge of state-building and sovereignty. Whereas most African countries found themselves as occupied territories by European countries, China, after losing the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, had its territory in the north, and Manchuria annexed by Japan with the support of the Allied powers. Also, despite convincing China to support them during the World War I, on condition that they would repel any Japanese encroachments on Chinese territories, the Versailles Treaty breached that promise by handing over the traditionally significant area of Shandong (the birthplace of Confucius) to Japan in 1919 (Van Beek, 2011: 389-408). Seeing that most of the provisions of the Versailles Treaty had, seemingly, been curved to help the Allied Powers share the spoils of the World War I rather than creating a peaceful world through respect for the principles of equality and sovereignty of nations, China was looking for new allies. This article is an attempt to historicise, theorise and review the enforcement of China's policy of non-interference in the affairs of other nations, particularly in relation to resource-rich African countries.

Despite an increase in the number of scholars writing on many facets of China-Africa relations, not much literature exists on how China's policy of non-interference has evolved from the early days of ideological cooperation to the present day trade partnership. In an attempt to mitigate this knowledge void, the article traces the origins and underlines the efficacy of the concept of peaceful coexistence, of which China's policy of non-interference is a part.

In so doing, the paper builds a case around the role of the Soviet and Chinese communist revolutions in the emergence of the concept of peaceful coexistence. The article then examines how China's 'going out' policy at the turn of the new millennium plays out with the question of non-interference as an entry strategy. Here the article shows how China has redefined its cooperation with different resource-rich and resource-poor African countries on its return to the continent. Later, the article discusses, with evidence, the unfolding events in resource-rich and populous African countries where China has economic interests and shows how these contradict the policy of non-interference.

Non-interference as a Marxist Legacy

Although India's Jawaharlal Nehru and China's Zhou Enlai are credited for championing the principle of non-interference, the concept of peaceful coexistence can be traced back to the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) following the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917. This socialist revolution sought to create a society anchored on social justice without exploitation of man by man within one country or indeed in the larger global community of countries. Prior to the revolution, the Tsar-supported capitalists and land owners faced accusations of oppressing the Russian people and plundering the lives of other people living there. The toiling masses had revolted several times, but as in other countries, the numerous revolts by the peasants and artisans, as well as national revolts, ended in defeat (Chernikov, 1988: 63). In the succeeding years, when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' gospel of Marxism spread to Russia in the 1890s, it fomented a new political awakening founded on the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat and peasants who suffered exploitation at the hands of the Tsar and the capitalists. Given the previous failure of the other means to achieving justice for the oppressed masses, a more effective alternative was for the workers and peasants to rise and seize state power. The concept of non-interference seemed to sprout out of the foreign reactionary forces that resisted the socialist revolution led by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Thus the argument that: The [Soviet Russian] civil war would not have lasted for long but for the intervention of foreign imperialist powers in Russia's internal affairs. They rendered aid to all counter-revolutionary insurgents and conspirators. When it became clear that the internal reaction could not crush the Revolution, imperialists launched an open intervention ... and, in violation of the international norms, moved their troops to occupy Soviet Russia. The crusade against the Soviet Republic involved 14 capitalist states. American, British, French, and Japanese troops landed in the north, south, and east of the country. German soldiers began a sweeping offensive in the west. The interventionists supplied the counter-revolutionary Russian troops with arms, uniforms, and advisors (Chernikov, 1988: 79-80).

From a Marxist premise, such international interventions are necessary acts of self-preservation by the international imperialist-capitalist system. Indeed, by supporting its satellite regimes overseas, the international imperialist-capitalist system strives to protect its commercial interests in other 'sovereign' states. For this reason, any society that claims to embrace the values of Marxism should surely abhor any form of interference in the affairs of another, especially for capital gain. Therefore, the decision by Russia to voluntarily return, within a month, the Chinese territories it was given by the Versailles Treaty, made China believe that the Bolshevik Revolution had turned Russia into a suitable partner in the fight for global justice and equality among nations (Van Beek, 2011: 389-408), a new struggle China was bracing itself to embark upon. Russia's actions inspired ideological awakening in China with the intelligentsia beginning to foment a Marxist revolution. The overthrow of the Tsar regime in Russia by the Bolsheviks and the end to the Chinese Empire and dynastic rule through the overthrow of the last Dynasty, the Manchu Qing in 1919, paved way for mutual ideological interaction between the two countries. The rapid spread of communist ideals across China, culminated in a civil war between the radical supporters of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong and the Nationalist Party or Guomindang under Chiang Kai-shek. However, after Mao Zedong and the Communists emerged victorious and pronounced the founding of the People's Republic of China atop the gate of Tiananmen on 1 October 1949, China's new policies led to a decline in Sino-Soviet relations (Lieberthal, 2004: 56-60). After the loss to the communist peasants, members of the Guomindang fled the mainland China to form Taiwan. As explained later in this article, the political question of this renegade province became an important driver of China's search for new allies overseas in the later years. Having fought and won the freedom of their own at home and having disowned the capitalist North, China and Russia formed a united front to fight for equality in global relations and to emancipate all oppressed peoples of the world (Lieberthal, 2004: 56-60).

At the United Nations Security Council, China has used its permanent seat and the veto power to offer checks and balances against misuse of political, economic and military power by the United States and its allies (Bbaala,

2014: 215-243). Most African leaders saw China as the ultimate defender and spokesperson of the developing world on key international platforms. This point was made clear by President Julius Nyerere, of Tanzania, when he stated that not only did African countries need to unite among themselves, but to also elevate China's role on the international stage (Hongwu, 2009: 27) as the spokesperson for the whole of the developing world. When the African liberation movement needed political and material support, China rallied. The Afro-Asian Bundung Conference in Indonesia, in April 1955, where the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai conferred, was a watershed moment in the construction of Sino-African relations. The five principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in another country's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence (Jiabao, 2004: 363-368), contained in China's foreign policy, proved attractive to other developing countries which were fighting for their own freedom at the time. The pronouncement of these principles at the Bundung Conference, unequivocally defined not only the political nature that the early China-Africa relations were poised to assume, but most importantly their efficacy in promoting global justice and peace. China's adoption of these principles was in direct response to the humiliation it suffered at the Versailles Treaty and during its wars with Japan. By espousing these principles, as the *sine qua non* elements of a socialist society, at international symposia, China did not only win the hearts of Africans but also made many African liberation movements adopt and embrace socialism as the ideology that could ensure global peace, sovereignty of all nations and respect for human rights in global relations. With specific reference to the principle of non-interference, Part IV of the China-Africa's Policy thus states:

China will continue to strengthen solidarity and cooperation with African countries in the international arena, conduct regular exchange of views, coordinate positions on major international and regional issues and stand for mutual support on major issues concerning state sovereignty, territorial integrity, national dignity and human rights. China supports African nations' desire to be an equal partner in international affairs. China is devoted, as are African nations, to making the United Nations play a greater role, defending the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, establishing a new international political and economic order featuring justice, rationality, equality and mutual benefit, promoting more democratic international relationship and rule of law in international affairs and safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries (China's Africa Policy, 2006: Part IV). This position provides the moral basis of its [China] expression of power in Africa by asserting that Chinese foreign policy will, unlike the [North], be guided by the principles that that the relationship will not devolve into one of exploitation (Alden and Large, 2011: 21-38).

Since the 1950s, the neo-Marxist scholarship in the developing world has written on how the North-South relations have tended to favor the former at the expense of the latter. They mainly belong to the international dependency theoretical school whose goal has been to cultivate a desire for increased south-south cooperation as an alternative development path. This theoretical school was popularized by the United Nations think-tank, the Economic Commission for Latin American Countries (ECLAC) in the late 1950s. Andre Gunder Frank is particularly a foremost contributor to the development of this theory. The central argument among the dependency theorists is that the global political and economic relations are smartly orchestrated to facilitate access to global resources and markets by the international capitalist system controlled mainly by the United States and Europe. Thus in his 'metropolis-satellite' thesis, the most revolutionary on this subject, he argues that the present underdevelopment of Latin America is the result of its centuries-long participation in the process of world capitalist development (Frank, 1969: 7). He argues that the interface between the developed and underdeveloped countries assumes the form of a metropolis-satellite relationship in which the economic and political structures of developing countries had been converted into local representative structures (satellites) of the international capitalist-imperialist system headquartered in major northern cities (metropolises).

Further, the international capitalist-imperialist systems is organised in such a way that its metropolises in the north are deconcentrated into local metropolises and satellites in the developing countries. And that resources move from the satellites to the metropolis within a developing country and from the metropolises in the developing world to metropolises in the developed world. Within the developed country, itself, there is movement of capital from peripheral regions (satellites) to the capital city (metropole). As an example, Frank (1969: 8) explains how the development of industry in Brazil's local metropole.

Sao Paulo, has impoverished and decapitalised the other (satellite) regions of the country due to the movement of capital from these regions to the capital city from which it is relayed to the metropolises in the north. Elsewhere, this view is shared by Rodney (1972) who asserts that: ‘Western Europe and Africa had a relationship which ensured the transfer of wealth from Africa to Europe. The transfer was possible only after trade became truly international; and that takes one back to the 15th century when Africa and Europe were drawn into common relations for the first time-along with Asia and the Americas. The developed and underdeveloped parts of the present capitalist section of the world have been in continuous contact for four and a half centuries. The contention here is that over that period Africa helped to develop Western Europe in the same proportion as Western Europe helped to under develop Africa’.

Nkrumah (1968: 1-7) clearly depicts the place of the African countries in the global order controlled by the capitalist-imperialist system. He refers to the independence of the African countries as ‘sham independence’, contending that they were independent *de jure* but dependent *de facto*. This is on the premise that theirs was a false dawn of liberation since at the time of African independence, the European powers only substituted the old-fashioned colonial system of controlling Africa to a more effective neo-colonialism. Under this new form of control, one African country no longer finds itself under one industrial power but a tighter neo-colonial control driven by the international capitalist-imperialist system controlled by the developed countries. In this regard, Nkrumah (1968:2) further argues that sham independence essentially meant the replacement of ‘national imperialism’ of the colonial era with ‘collective imperialism’ of the neocolonial era. He goes further to accuse the international capitalist-imperialist system of having turned African countries into ‘client states’ of the powerful nations that pull its strings. Although the dependency theory was initially introduced to explain the relations between developed and developing countries of Latin America, the growing hegemony in Sino-African relations is now giving the theory the impetus and leeway into explaining the geo-politics and geo-economics in Sino-African relations. The advent of the 21st Century Scramble for Africa, as seen in the cut-throat competition for Africa’s resources and markets among the major powers (including China), has redefined international relations. Former comrades of the African continent like China can now resort to non-traditional rent-seeking measures that effectively employ the policy of non-interference as a gateway to Africa’s resources and markets. The use of non-interference policy, as noted by Roughneen (2006) cited in Obi, 2009:93-109), puts China at a competitive advantage over other global powers in accessing Africa’s resources and markets. An example of how China’s non-interference policy can serve as an entry strategy is its willingness to publicly embrace [Robert] Mugabe, despite international sanctions imposed from 2002 onwards, [resulting] in Harare’s official promulgation of its ‘Look East’ policy in 2005 (*South Scan* 20 (8), 2005). In return, China hoped to obtain rights in Zimbabwe’s platinum, iron and steel mining. Another case of policy contradiction came in 2006, when reports went viral in the Western media that Nigeria looked to Beijing for arms to fight the militia in the oil-rich Niger Delta region after Washington had turned down the request (Obi, 2009: 93-109). During the same period, the militia had attacked the American oil giant Shell, shutting down its production estimated at 115, 000 barrels of oil per day (Obi, 2009: 93-109).

China’s Departure and Return

From 1970s to the late 1990s, there was a recession in Sino-African relations. This could be attributed to many factors. Firstly, Africa’s importance to China declined when the economic reformist, Deng Xiaoping came to power in China in December 1978. His economic reforms led to the reintroduction of close ties between China and the North and to the introduction of market-based economic policies. This saw China reduce its aid to developing countries, including those in Africa. In fact, China itself became a receiver of aid (Kim, 1991 Cited by Van Beek, 2011: 389-408). Secondly, China had politico-economic challenges at home following the calamitous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) and the Civil War (1947-1949) which brought Mao Zedong and the communists to power. During this time, most African countries also looked north for development aid. An important development during this period was the promulgation of the Washington Consensus-based policies by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, US Treasury and Federal Reserve Board, with a prescription of new economic model for the developing countries. The new policy package prescribed a shift in the North’s multilateral aid from financing social and economic development projects in the developing countries to the financing of reforms through the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).

Some of the specific policy prescriptions in the Washington Consensus included the need for fiscal discipline, realignment of public expenditure to favour areas with high economic returns and potential to improve income redistribution such as primary education, provision of primary healthcare, and infrastructure, tax reforms, interest rate stabilisation, competitive exchange rate, trade liberalization, liberalisation of foreign direct investment inflows, privatization, deregulation to remove both entry and exit barriers, and protection of property rights (Williamson, 2004). However, the implementation of the SAPs ... was fraught with pitfalls and failures in most African countries (Bbaala, 2014: 215-243). At the same time, many African countries were not only in dire need of development financing, but were also becoming heavily indebted partially due to the loans obtained for the implementation of the SAPs.

The reduction in infrastructural support aid to Africa, under the new conditions, was premised on the belief that the developing countries would not sustain their external borrowing owing to poor fiscal management and lack of accountability, and a lack of efficient institutions. Although most African governments managed to religiously stick to these policy measures, two decades of implementation of the SAPs are remembered for dismal economic growth, high unemployment rate and high poverty levels due to the deindustrialisation effect of these policy interventions. With or without the Washington Consensus, decades of development aid to Africa by the North had generally failed to bring about any visible growth and development to the African continent. Instead, as Dambisa Moyo, a Zambian-born economist puts it; aid brought corruption because African governments had become more accountable to the donors than to their own people (Cited in Van Beek, 2011: 389-408). Indeed, in some countries like Zambia, the government was unable to account for the proceeds from the sale of public assets during privatisation. After about two decades of subsidence in relations, China revived its relations with Africa at the dawn of the new millennium with refocused interests. The promulgation of its new *Zouchuqu* (Going Out) policy coincided with Africa's disappointment with the results of the SAPs. Consequently, when China came back to Africa, it knocked on an already open door. Its already good image on the continent, dating back to the days of freedom struggle; its stance on international justice; its promise of 'win-win' economic partnership, and unconditional aid were enough reasons for many contemporary African leaders and the old comrades to see the so-called Beijing Consensus as a superior model of development to the Washington Consensus (Ramo, 2004 cited by Samy, 2010: 75-90). At the launch of Zimbabwe's new foreign policy, in 2003, President Robert Mugabe thus remarked: 'We are returning to the days when our greatest friends were the Chinese. We look again to the East, where the sun rises, and no longer to the West, where it sets' (NewZimbabwean.com cited in Alden, 2007: 64). China's new foreign policy meant an abandonment of the old policy of 'Economy Serves Diplomacy' in favour of 'Diplomacy Serves Economy'.

Consequently, in the new relations, China seems to seek stronger ties with resource-rich African countries than the resource-scarce ones, making its interaction with the continent increasingly resource-based. An examination of China's presence in Africa shows that it is executing its relations through Chinese state-owned enterprises, predominantly engaged in oil and gas exploration, mining, timber processing and construction. Since China, unlike most European countries and the United States, does not have an overseas development agency, a decision was made in consultation with African leaders, to institutionalise the new relations through the creation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in the year 2000, with its first meeting held in Beijing in the same year (Ping, 2009: 35-53). The Forum, acting as the flagship for the China-Africa relations, had in its agenda two major policy matters; how to promote and establish a just and equitable new international order, and to further strengthen cooperation between China and Africa in economic and social development. A FOCAC ministerial conference was to be held every two years, alternating between China and Africa (Ping, 2009: 35-53). At the second ministerial conference held in Ethiopia, in 2003, the Addis Ababa Action plan was drawn to review the successes and challenges in the new Sino-African relations (Hongwu, 2009: 41-32). At the third FOCAC ministerial conference in Beijing, in 2006, the year declared by China as the 'Year of Africa', the 'China-Africa Policy' was issued by the Chinese government. Further, a 'New Strategic Partnership' involving new trade and infrastructural relations, and an 'Action plan' detailing how Beijing would assist Africa in political, social, economic and technical areas, were produced (Hongwu, 2009: 41-32). The 2006 Beijing FOCAC Summit, which attracted 43 African heads of state, was in itself an announcement to the world of how much the Sino-Africa relations had been rebuilt within short time.

With this, there has been optimism, at least among some scholars, that the ‘new principles of international relations such as mutual respect and equal treatment among developing countries, and the successful South-South cooperation model cultivated in Sino-Africa relations have generated more hope and confidence for the future of human race’ . (Hongwu, 2009: 25).

Non-interference as an Entry Strategy

Contrary to Africa’s traditional expectations, China’s return to Africa at the stroke of the new century seems to mimic characteristics odd to the old China that supported the struggle of the oppressed peoples and nations in Africa and beyond. To a large extent, the new China-Africa relations are increasingly becoming a replica of the much admonished neo-colonial North-South relations.

Over the last decade, since China’s return to Africa at the dawn of the new millennium, Sino-African trade has grown exponentially from US\$6.5 billion in 2004 to an estimated US\$200 billion in 2013 (*Xinhua News*, 2013 cited in Antony, 2013: 134-149). In 2014, Sino-African trade grew to US\$222 billion representing a 6% growth from 2013. Of this trade, US\$117 billion represented Chinese imports from Africa while US\$105 was the value of Chinese exports to the continent (Standard Bank, 2015), leaving China with a staggering US\$12.5 billion trade deficit. However, this trade deficit does not mean that Sino-African trade benefits Africa more than China. It primarily reflects the gigantic nature of China’s appetite for Africa’s resources given the fact that commodities account for a lion’s share of Africa’s exports to China. In 2010, for instance, resources accounted for 64% of the continent’s exports to China. Meanwhile, although China’s exports of manufactures to Africa has risen drastically from US\$10 billion in 2000 to US\$60 billion in 2010, Africa’s non-resource exports to China during the same period has only grown marginally (Hanusch, 2012: 492-516). To further understand the nature of Sino-African trade, one needs to analyze its geo-economics. Firstly, although China’s exports are widely distributed across African countries, its imports are concentrated in a few resource-rich countries. Recent data show that while China obtained US\$100 from the export of goods to 38 African countries, it spent the same amount on imports from only 23 resource-rich countries in the continent (Haugen, 2011: 157-176). It is also important to note that despite China’s trade deficit with Sub-Saharan Africa, only less than a half of the countries have a surplus in their trade with China. Most of these are resource-rich countries, notably Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Equatorial Guinea (IMF, 2013:5). In exact terms, 17 out of 53 African countries have a trade surplus with China due to their commodity exports to that country while the remaining majority face a widening trade deficit owing to their increased imports of Chinese manufactures (Muyakwa, 2009: 7) coupled with resource scarcity. Effectively, China’s new policy is to deal with two segments of African countries- community sources and markets.

The primacy of trade and, particularly, the resources in China’s new engagement with Africa has become a matter of increased discussion on many a forum. There is a neocolonial school contending that despite the China-Africa relations originally seeking to foster peaceful coexistence, global equity and fair play, their current state as reflected initially in China’s omissions and later on in its commissions, are raising questions not only of neocolonialism, but blatant interference in the governance of countries in which it have strong economic interests. Although on one hand, some scholars assert that despite the shifts in China’s global alliances since its foundation in 1949, non-intervention and anti-hegemonism are the two principles that have perennially defined its international relations (Van Beek, 2011: 389-408). Others on the other hand argue that China’s predominantly economic cooperation with Africa at the turn of the 21st Century was raising some contradictions with its principle of non-interference. Rather than a principle built on promoting global peace and justice, non-interference is increasingly being reinterpreted as simply China’s pledge to support those in power however venal or corrupt they may be (Hilsum, 2008: 137-140) provided they are willing to meet China’s trade interests. Some of China’s actions in resource-rich or even populous countries tend to vindicate this view. One factor that has increased scholarly curiosity into this subject has been an odd tendency by China to remain noncommittal to the call for action against, and in some instances even give aid to, regimes widely unpopular among their own people and internationally cited for human rights abuses.

Regimes within these countries tend to base their power in extensive patronage networks and control major assets through personal shareholdings, often held by close relative... some of these ‘neo-patrimonial regimes’ have consistently appeared at the bottom of Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index, namely, Angola (1457th out of 179 in 2007), Congo-Brazzaville (153rd), and Equatorial Guinea and the DRC (joint 168th)

(Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index, 2007 cited in Alden and Alve s, 2009: 18). Other than the northern scholarship, the leading industrial countries of the world, through vehicles such as the Group of Eight (G8) (United States, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Canada and Russia) (now the G7 after the suspension of Russia over its annexation of Crimea in 2014), have used good governance as a conditionality for aid to African countries. Thus in the early 1990s, the G8 introduced the political conditionality of transparency and good governance as key elements of their aid to Africa during the implementation of the SAPs (Alden, 2007: 96). These countries are disquieted that China is reversing the hard won political gains of the last decades in Africa through its untied aid to Africa and, in some cases, direct interference in the governance of some countries in the continent.

Although Sino-African relations have long been anchored on the critique of north-south relations for their exploitative and imperialistic nature, they are increasingly identifies with promotion of bad governance in the continent. Therefore, any sincere detestation of north-south exploitation should be of equal measure to that of south-south exploitation. Within Africa, itself, scholars are beginning to raise some evidence-based questions on the shifting Sino-African relations (Bbaala, 2015: 97-120), most of which are begging governance-related answers. In more particular terms, there are concerns that China's economic diplomacy has denied the continent the much needed support for security and human rights and is perpetuating the reign of otherwise unpopular regimes in some of Africa's resource rich or populous countries. Obi (2009: 93-109) reveals that Chinese investments in the natural resource/mineral sector in Sudan, Angola, Zimbabwe and Nigeria have been linked to exploitation, environmental degradation, support for authoritarian regimes and abuse of human rights. In some instances, Chinese firms and workers have been attacked by local communities within some African countries. For instance, in the Niger Delta, Nigeria's rich oil enclave, Chinese oil companies have come under spotlight for facing strong resistance from the local people. In 2007, Zhang Guoha, a chief executive at the China Nuclear International Uranium Corporation (Sino-U) was kidnapped though later released by a group reportedly linked to the Tuareg-led Niger Movement for Justice (MNS) on suspicion that the company was financing the purchases of weapons for the Niger government used to repel the Tuareg uprising (The China Monitor, 2007: 19 cited in Obi, 2009: 93-109). In 2006, in the same week that the Chinese President, Hu Jintao was expected for a state visit to Nigeria, the rebel group- the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) blew up a car bomb near an oil refinery in Warri City and followed the act with a statement warning the Chinese to leave Niger Delta's oil or they would be attacked as thieves (Obi, 2008: 417-434). A similar incident occurred in Ethiopia on 24 April 2007 when guerrillas belonging to the Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF) attacked a Chinese-run oil field belonging to the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation. The incident left nine Chinese oil workers and 65 Ethiopians dead while seven other Chinese nationals were abducted. In claiming responsibility for the attacks in a statement sent to the Associated Press, ONLF warned all international oil firms to leave Ethiopia (*The Guardian*, 2007; China Daily cited in Obi, 2009: 93-109). As in the case of the Niger Delta, some minority ethnic groups home to Ethiopia's oil-rich region have been fighting to have a fair share of the oil money which they feel has often benefited other ethnic groups more than themselves. In response, to protect its commercial interests, China has tended to side with the oppressor- the ruling elite at the expense of playing the role of a peacemaker. Later, following pressure from the families of the dead back home, the Chinese had to abandon their explorations activities in the region (Hilsum, 2008: 137-140).

China's presence in Southern Africa has also attracted international attention. For instance, in the aftermath of the 29 March 2008 presidential and parliamentary election, which the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) is widely believed to have lost to the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), China seemed to support the Zimbabwean state orchestrated violence against members of the opposition and the voting communities in regions where Mugabe's party had poorly performed. The violence, systematically executed by the country's defense and security wings loyal to ZANU-PF, seemed to serve the purposes of retribution, buying of time in order to consolidate the stealing of the election and intimidation of voters ahead of the election re-run slated for 27 June 2008.

Amid the intensifying street clashes between ordinary Zimbabweans and the state's defense and security forces, the media in Southern Africa, after a tip-off from the editor of the monthly magazine, the *Nosweek*, Martin Welz, reported on 14 April 2008 that a Chinese vessel - the MV 'An Yue Jiang' - had anchored outside Durban harbor, South Africa ... to discharge weapons destined for Zimbabwe's Defense Force (Fritz, 2009).

Earlier, following Zimbabwe's violent seizure of farm land properties owned by the white minority in 2000, western countries imposed sanctions on selected members of the ruling ZANU-PF citing the alleged violations of constitutional provisions during the war veterans-led attacks. In reaction, Mugabe curbed a 'Look East' policy in 2005, during whose launch he said: 'We are returning to the days when our greatest friends were the Chinese. We look again to the East, where the sun rises, and no longer to the West, where it sets' (newsZimbabwean.com cited in Alden, 2009: 64). Another case that has dominated the scholarly platforms is that of the Sudan where China remained largely silent on that country's actions in Darfur and Southern Sudan. Seemingly, China has placed its own energy needs ahead of the needs of the people of Sudan, despite the evidence of the genocidal violence in Darfur. For a short while China used its position in the UN Security Council to shield the Sudanese government but the Chinese posture in the UN began to change in 2007 after a number of international celebrities called for a Beijing Olympic boycott over China's stance on Darfur (Farrow, 2007).

Led by Hollywood, the campaigners dubbed the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games as 'Genocide Olympic' (Hilsum, 2008: 137-140). Raising further questions on its policy of non-interference, Chinese multinational corporations involved in oil drilling, have been accused of financing the purchasing of military weapons, helicopters, vehicles and war jets for the government forces, which in turn have been used to massacre its own citizens (Large, 2007 and Taylor, 2007 cited in Obi, 2013). Between 1996 and 2003, in violation of a United Nations Embargo, China sold US\$100 million worth of aircrafts and small arms to President Omar al-Bashir, which were used to carry out ethnic cleansing of insurgents in Southern Sudan (Brautigam, 2008 cited in Condon, 2012: 5-25). While the conflict in Sudan, one of Africa's major oil producers with China being a major extractor, deepened, Chinese trade with the country jumped from \$103 million in 1990 to \$5.66 billion by 2006 (Jiang, 2009 cited in Rich and Recker, 2013: 70). China's extractive activities in the Sudan are carried out by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) which is the largest shareholder in Sudan's oil giant, the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company. Reacting to the global criticism of China's role in Sudan, China's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, Zhou Wenzhong was quoted as saying: "business is business. We try to separate politics from business ... I think the internal situation in the Sudan is an internal affair" (*New York Times*, 2005 cited in Condon, 2012: 5-25).

In Zambia, amid the violence that characterized the period around the controversial January 2015, in which the incumbent, Edgar Lungu was announced winner with one percent difference with the leading opposition leader, Hakainde Hichilema, and leading to the August 2016 (the bloodiest election in Zambia's history), private media revealed a US\$192 million loan the Zambian government had secretly acquired from China for procurement of military and security ware. Despite absence of clear evidence on whether the loan played a role in the acquisition of weapons and other equipment used by the police to brutalize the opposition leaders and supporters during and after the tightly contested 11 August 2016 general election whose aftermath saw the detention of the opposition leader for over four months on a trumped up treason charge. Zambia's leading independent newspaper, *The Post*, which leaked the development, was officially forced into liquidation by the state in 2016 for alleged failure to settle some tax arrears with the Zambia Revenue Authority.

Elsewhere, in the resource-rich Angola, Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo, China is exclusively focusing on trade deals despite these countries still requiring international support to end civil strife within their borders. Angola, the second largest oil producer in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of China's largest trading partners in Africa. In 2006 alone, China, through the Export and Import (ExIm) Bank extended a US\$4 billion loan to Angola for its postwar reconstruction in exchange for oil (Naidu et al, 2009: 87-115), a part of the 'Angola Mode' or resources for infrastructure (RFI) arrangement where China constructs infrastructure and Angola pays through natural resources in lieu of cash. Although the Sino-Angolan relations remain sturdy, concerns abound on the state of governance in Angola with the country ranking forty-two out of forty-eight on the Index of African Governance list in 2007 (Rotberg and Gisselquist, 2007 cited in Condon, 2012: 5-25). Angola also ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world.

The Human Rights Watch reports that over a period of five years, US\$4.2 billion (representing 10% of Angola's GDP) was siphoned out of the public accounts into private accounts of the country's ruling elite despite the fact that at that time an average Angolan lived on US\$2 a day (World Bank, 2006 cited in Condon, 2012: 5-25). The country's governance system also mimics features of autocracy with very limited space for alternative voices, including civil society.

Notwithstanding the fact that some countries serve a duo role of providing China with resources and market, outside the resource-rich countries, the Chinese policy has been to build strong ties with strategically located countries which could be used both as markets and as entry points to global resources and markets. One such example is Kenya. Although, on average, the country is modestly endowed with resources, it is among China's strategic partners with Kenyan government data showing that the number of hotel rooms occupied by Chinese per night has risen from below 30, 000 in 2006 to over 50, 000 in 2010. Kenya is also an important gateway to China's interests in Eastern and Central African regions (Mulinge, 2012: 18). Through Kenya, China is able to access the East African Community (with a consumer base of 93 million) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (with a consumer base of 385 million) (Kenya-China Economic and Trade Cooperation, 2012 cited in Mulinge, 2012: 15-16). The inauguration of the US\$3.2 billion Chinese-funded Nairobi-Mombasa Madaraka Express railway in May 2017 underlined the strategic position Kenya occupies in China's trade interests in Africa. The 472-kilometre railway is planned to connect South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Ethiopia (BBC World News, 2017). Interestingly, all these countries the railway is intended to snake through are among China's key commodity trade partners. Notwithstanding its position as the gateway to regional markets and resources, Kenya boasts of a population of 44 million people inhabiting a land surface of 582 square kilometers which offer investment opportunities. The strength of the Sino-Kenyan relations have also been demonstrated by the US\$381 million that Kenya has received from China in form of interest-free and preferential loans since 2006 (Coyet, 2010 cited in Mulinge, 2012: 18).

However, the anticlimax in Sino-Kenyan relations, at least to the third parties, was reached in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 Kenyan election as a result of which about 1,200 people died and about 500,000 others were forcibly displaced from their homes following the violence that ensued. The reaction from China was: 'Western-style democratic theory simply isn't suited to Africa's conditions, but rather carries with it the root of disaster... the elections disaster in Kenya is just one example' (editorial comment in People's Daily [the newspaper for the Communist Party] cited in Hilsum, 2008: 137-140). In essence, China chose to maintain its close ties with Kenya's ruling elite and to question the necessity of the entire democratic dispensation in the continent of Africa. Despite the negative effects that the Chinese economic relations with Africa's ruling elite may have on governance, such relations have, nevertheless, curtailed economic free-fall of many African countries, especially when aid from the Global North has not been forthcoming.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Sino-African relations have yielded some important political and economic benefits to both parties over the past six decades, or so. China helped African countries to gain their independence while Africa helped China to get recognition as the legitimate government of the whole China at the expense of Taiwan. As a member of the United Nations Security Council, China has ably represented the interests, not only of Africa, but the rest of the developing world. The transition from the old political relations to the new economic relations has also helped African countries to access the much needed development credit in the face of scarce and highly conditional aid from the Global North. In fact, on its return to Africa, China has filled the financing gap left by the traditional northern bilateral and multilateral partners with whom African countries have usually traded with suspicion. The fact that China's return to Africa coincided with the decline in the socioeconomic conditions due the implementation of the failed structural adjustment programs, meant that African countries had an alternative source of credit for financing social and economic expenditure. However, this article has attempted to expose Chinese negligence and at times, blatant interference in the internal affairs of resource-rich and populous African countries in defense of its economic interests. It has also raised some important questions on China's commitment to the policy of non-interference in the face of the stiffening competition for global resources and markets.

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