

Review

The Chinese in Africa: New Economic Partners or Neo-Colonialist?

Dorothy Goredema

Faculty of Social Sciences, Midlands State University, P.Bag 955, Gweru, Zimbabwe.

E-mail: goredemad@staff.msu.ac.zw

Accepted 17 July 2020

This policy brief critiques Chinese political, socio-political interactions with Africa in the 21st century, paying special attention to China's role as the continent's new development partner. This brief aims at drawing the attention of scholars, development practitioners and policy makers to China's economic needs and policies in the 21st century, her pro-active approach in foreign policy and the need to garner support in international organizations as tools of analysis and reasons for increased Chinese interactions in Africa. Using discourse analysis, study findings from related literature, group discussions and through whatsapp and zoom platforms and general observations from different African counties that have and are interacting with China, the brief posits that the Chinese are Africa's new 21st century imperialists and economic competitors not "all-weather friends" Conclusively, Africa needs to stop or minimize economic interactions with China or think through new ways of dislodging its socio-economic and political policies already aligned to neo-colonialism by China.

Cite this article as: Goredema D (2020). The Chinese in Africa: New Economic Partners or Neo-Colonialist?. Int. J. Polit. Sci. Develop. 8(7) 337-339

INTRODUCTION

Brookes and Hye Shin (1999) observed that from the mid-twentieth century, China's African policy went through a rapid evolutionary process such that by the beginning of the 21st century the Chinese policy had shed off most of its old features, adopting a futuristic outlook. For Chisi (2013) that China shifted focus from building ideological solidarity to fighting United States and the West for economic opportunities and diplomatic ties in Africa is evidenced by non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations, amount of humanitarian "aid" poured in Africa and loans offered to many African countries despite their poor history. Chinese presence in Africa in the 21st century can be attributed to demand for raw materials for her rapidly growing industries, need for markets, need for allies to support Chinese interests in international organizations/forums and continued strong economic growth under a more sophisticated new crop of able Chinese leaders (Chisi:2013; Eisenmen and Kurlantzick:2006). Against this backdrop, African leaders, policy makers, development practitioners and scholars

need to come to terms with the fact that behind the seemingly harmless long hand of friendship extended by China towards Africa, China considers Africa her strategy number one in her 21st century economic competition with the West and United States.

Never a Development Partner Nor an All -Weather Friend but a New Economic Competitor and Imperialist.

Researcher reveals that interactions between China and Africa in the 21st century has generated and provoked much discussion among scholars, politicians, development practitioners, African governments, the West, discussions which have seen China drawn in to justify her actions in Africa. Through a closer analysis and critique of the socio-economic and political interactions between China and Africa in the 21st century, the brief posits that China has and will never been Africa's development partner, nor her all weather friend but a new 21st century economic competitor and imperialist, what

Thompson (2007) termed "Beijing's efforts in creating a paradigm of globalization that favors China."

The brief and its line of arguments are best explained within and buttressed by the concept of neo-colonialism, propounded by Kwameh Nkrumah, independent Ghana's first president (Kwame Nkrumah: 1963). In his wisdom, Nkrumah observed and warned African leaders of the subtle and varied methods of neo colonialists which he said are aimed at accomplishing objectives formerly achieved by naked colonialism (Ibid). Nkrumah further elaborated that under neo-colonialism (which he said was the last stage of imperialism), the modern imperialist powers devise a plethora of subtle ways to perpetuate colonialism that many unsuspecting leaders can fall for. Among the strategies used to lure unsuspecting victims is the imperialist power's pledge of non-interference in the affairs of other countries, support for the freedom and sovereignty of nation states (Ibid). Chinese imperialist strategies emphasize every time that China always sticks to the principle of non-interference, mutual benefit and respect for sovereign states.

What African leaders seem to be oblivious of when dealing with China is that Beijing is not nor will never be a development partner but a neo- colonialist. Socio-economic and political development in the world rendered Africa crucial to China's 21st century development strategy. What can be deduced from the first China-African forum held in Beijing in 2000 is that China's growing industries demanded new energy and raw materials, her exporters needed markets, Chinese diplomats required support in international organizations. In addition, Chinese propaganda sought support from allies to advance Chinese interests (China-Africa Forum: 2000; Chisi: 2013; Eisenmen and Kurlantzick:

2006). As such Africa was and is a means to achieving this end/goal. What China calls mutual benefit fails to hold water. China controls the China- Africa-West Trade triangle and she draws very cheap raw materials from Africa and sells manufactured goods at a super profit to the West. China provides quality services and goods to the West. Meanwhile she dumps and floods Africa with its cheap, poorly manufactured merchandise, thus providing a market to goods that could not be sold elsewhere outside Africa. The dumping of cheap electrical goods, foot wear, clothing, agricultural and mining equipment on the African markets has led to the closure of local industries, entrenching Africa's role as a massive importer not manufacturer of foreign goods and machinery. At the same time the West is her greater and richer market, while at the same time she tries to weaken the link between Africa and the West. This scenario hardly qualifies as a win-win situation for mutual benefit.

China is applauded by African leaders in the 21st century for its generosity in the form of aid. African leadership perceive the Chinese aid as better than Western aid because the latter's aid is associated with harsh conditionality. While China publicly announced that

she grants disinterested aid with no strings attached, the reality is that foreign aid is and has always been a method by which donors maintain a position of influence and control over the recipients(Chisi :2013). From group discussions held with scholars and development practitioners, it emerged that foreign aid creates space for the giver to control the recipients thereby sustaining and preventing them from falling into the sphere of influence of the donor's rivals. Buttressing the same point is Hayter (1971) opines that aid is a concession by the imperialist powers to enable them to continue their exploitation of the semi-colonial countries. Chinese aid in Africa is enabling her to extract as much value with the least investment from different African countries. China has managed to make inroads in Africa because most African leaders perceive China to be a large and expanding market for Africa's natural resources, offering an alternative to the traditional reliance on the West. African leaders seemingly turn blind eyes to the fact that what is considered as aid today has opened up doors for Chinese investment in future. According to Chisi (2013) and Cas De Villers (1976), the Chinese do not forget where they invested their money, hence the popular saying, Chinese money is followed by Chinese man.

China sees Africa not as equal development partner but a good environment for investment because it is not expensive. Whilst the Chinese are invited to invest in Africa, looting natural resources such as chrome, gold, platinum, iron and nickel amongst others. However it should be noted that while African leaders are inviting the Chinese to invest in Africa no such invitation of African investors was or has been made by China. This serves as testimony that China is Africa's the new imperialist in the 21st century. Thus the Chinese are aggressively pursuing smooth economic strategies, seemingly extending a hand of friendship to Africa when in actual fact they are looking for allies to support her into becoming a world super power. The same observations were made by America which perceives Chinese investments in Africa, both public and public as aimed at securing access to a largely untapped African market thereby ensuring the continued flow of resources to fuel her economic growth and building alliances around the region to counter the USA as the world's most influential and economic power (Kane and Carpenter: 2006). According to Kurlantzick (2006), cultivating African allies offers China crucial support at international forums such as the United Nations where she is beginning to have a more active presence. In return, China has pledged to support African countries at the UN. She supported Southern Africa and Nigerian aspirations for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council(Versi:2006). In furtherance, China has become a defacto champion of African interests in the World Trade Organization in addition to supporting many African nations and leaders with questionable Human Rights records. The African leaders have automatically given support to China

because they are assured of China's support against drastic UN Security Council resolutions. Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Zambia and Nigeria are some of China's allies in Africa. The support rendered by these countries to China as her allies gave China the single largest bloc of votes in the UN and the World Trade Organizations (Thompson;2006). Thus African support for China at international forums has counted a lot towards her vying for "super-power" status.

This critique has proven that the Chinese has and will never perceive Africa as an equal trading or development partner but a market for her manufactured goods and a reservoir for the much needed raw materials for her expanding industries. Aid is given to entice the African leaders into inviting and supporting Chinese investors in Africa, where like the former Western imperialist, they milk Africa of its valuable natural resources through unequal trading practices. Chinese support for some of Africa's worst human rights offenders, corrupt and incompetent leadership is largely aimed at enticing them to support her get votes at international forums so that she becomes the world's 21st's super power. China is fast replacing Western neo-colonialists through the strategy of aid, trade for mutual benefit and non-interference in the affairs of hosting nations. If African leaders continue with their reliance on Chinese loans, grants and investments, then the new narrative in the 21st century will change from "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (Rodney:1981) to How China Underdeveloped Africa in the 21st century. Africa has to find new ways to think through strategies of becoming economically and politically independent. She has land, natural resources in abundance and an educated, hardworking and robust human resource, all which can be harnessed for the continent's sustainable development. Policies promoting transparency, good governance and accountability are also crucial in laying the basis for economic independence and sustainable development.

REFERENCES

Published Books

- Chisi, H.T (2013), "All-Weather Friends? Sino-Zimbabwe Relations, 2000-2008" in Themes in Contemporary History of Zimbabwe Emerging Perspectives in Afrikology, Nyawo, V.Z (ed), Mambo Press, 2013.
- De Villers, C. (1976), African Problems and Challenges: Selected Essays on Contemporary African Affairs, Valiant Publishers (Pty) Limited, Sandton.
- Hayter. T.(1971), Aid as Imperialism, Middlesex, Penguin Books.
- Rodney, W: (1981), How Europe Underdeveloped Africa,

Internet Sources

- Brookes and Hye Shin (1999), "China's Influence in Africa; Implications for the US," accessed at <http://www.bnvillage.co.uk/african-continent-news-new-village/on> 14 June 2020.
- Eisenmen.J and J. Kurlantzick (2006), 'China-Africa Strategy,' American Foreign Policy Council, Current History, accessed at <http://www.afpc.org/china-africa.shtml> on 14 June 2020
- Kane,G.C and Carpenter, O (2006),"The Strategic Competition for the Continent of Africa," USAWC Strategy Research Project, accessed at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/ksi1387.pdf> on 17 June 2020.
- Kurlantzick. J. (2006) "Manchurian Candidate," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed at carnegieendowment.org/publication/index.cfm? on 17 June 2020.
- Nkrumah, K. (1963), Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism, accessed at <http://www.marxist.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/ch01.html>, on 17 June 2020.
- Thompson. D. (2007), Economic Growth and Soft Power: China's Africa Strategy," accessed at <http://www.jamestown.org/publication-details.php?volume-id=395&issue-id=3170&article-id=2368982> on 17 June 2020.

Magazines

- Versi.A. (:2006), "China's March into Africa," African Business.

Focus Group Discussions

- First Whats app group discussion held with development practitioners on 14 June 2020
- Second discussion held with scholars via zoom platform held on 16 June 2020.