China's Expanding Influence in Africa and Its Potential Impact on U.S. Foreign Policies: Interview with Dr. Yoon Jung Park, Analysis of Other Scholarly Publications and News Reports

By Edward Locke

In the recent decades, the whole world has witnessed China's rapidly expanding economic and technological influences in Africa, much of which has occurred under the umbrella of the Belt and Road Initiative. China's economic projects in Africa cover road, real-estates, dams and port constructions, petroleum exploration, and copper mining. Typical examples of these projects include African Union Headquarters, parliament buildings for 7 countries, the $3.6 B Nairobi-Mombasa Rail Road, which reduced travel time to just four hours, and a massive suspension bridge in Mozambique, the longest in the continent. Since 1997, China has financed more projects than the next eight overseas lenders combined.

Interview with Dr. Yoon Jung Park

An interview via Zoom with Dr. Yoon Jung Park, one of the leading researchers in the field of China/Africa studies, Thursday, April 13, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., yielded a great deal of interesting information on China's recent economic ties with Africa. She focuses on the preliminary impacts of Chinese migrant communities, particularly in South Africa, African perceptions of and responses to the new Chinese migrants. Born in Seoul, Park's family immigrated to the U.S. in the 1960s after the anti-Asian laws were repealed in 1965; and she grew up in Los Angeles, and lived in Africa (Johannesburg and Nairobi) from 1995 to 2010. Park indicated that although U.S. gives Africa more aid for free, China's investment in African infrastructure is "significantly" much larger than U.S. "China has multiple interests in Africa. […] The reason why many people have labelled Chinese engagement in Africa as neocolonial is because of the interests in natural resources; the way China is engaged with Africa in resource sector is very similar to the way everyone else has always been engaged with Africa in resource sector. […] Americans, French, Indians, Brazilians, Canadian in mining and oil extraction, they all go in to remove natural resources out of Africa; and they add value outside of Africa; thus, aside from the jobs that are created in terms of the actual extraction of resource, there is no value added, so in that sense, it keeps Africa at the bottom of the development chain. If what Africa is providing is only natural resources, you are not creating value; you are not creating highly skilled jobs." Park said that this is the reason for criticism of "neocolonialism," and that this is still practiced by business investors from all of the above-mentioned countries including the U.S. and China. "In other words, in the resource extraction sector, China does not really behave differently from other countries."

In response to criticism about "neocolonialism," China's Foreign Ministry has issued *The Initiative to Support Africa's Industrialization* (支持非洲工业化倡议), on August 25, 2023, calling for support to African countries' efforts to build local manufacturing industry. The official document is available at http://www.focac.org/zfgx/zzjw/202308/t20230825_11132908.htm. Currently, growing numbers of Chinese manufacturing businesses are operating in Africa as well.

According to Park, China's economic relations with African states are generally welcomed by African governments which need foreign investors; but serious problems do exist, especially in terms of labor practices and environmental protection laws, which either do not exist or are not implemented in many places. These are the two areas Park considers as the most serious problems across board. "In many places, African governments invite Chinese in, but do not have the will or capacity to control or manage the people they have invited in." In terms of business practices, "China's State-Owned-Enterprises (SOEs) tend to be better in terms of labor and environmental practices, in large part because of concerns about China's international reputation. However, China's smaller private investors, as well as ethnic Chinese from other countries, are more concerned about making profit." Problems of corruption, working conditions, workplace safety, and labor relations, especially wages paid to African workers, with some private businesses owned by ethnic-Chinese are quite serious and even perceived by some local critics as the worst among all private foreign investors. The ethnic-Chinese investors include those from China's Mainland, Taiwan, Australia, Canada or other countries. Most of locals do not or cannot distinguish between SOE and private sector, or ethnic Chinese from China, the Chinese diaspora, or even Korea, Vietnam, or Malaysia. Therefore, if any Chinese businessman misbehave, for example, a stingy boss from Taiwan mistreats African employees, or an ethnic Chinese from Australia gets into a serious problem of labor safety in a mine, locals might blame China and Chinese Government although the above private businesses are by no means under the jurisdiction of Chinese Government. Chinese ambassies often instruct their citizens in African countries to obey local laws and customs. However, due to the easy migration of Chinese across different African countries, Chinese ambassies usually do not know their exact whereabouts, and thus, this intervention is not effective. The best solution to the above-mentioned problems is for local African governments to improve their laws and regulations and to strengthen their implementation. This will help but again, the effectiveness is limited due to the fact that African governments "desperately" need private Chinese investors, and thus, tend to turn a blind eye to Chinese misdeeds, telling their citizens that 'Chinese are the only investors who create jobs,' and to ‘leave them alone.’” This is quite similar to what happened in China in the first five or ten years of Deng Xiaoping’s economic opening to foreign investors. The African governments are essentially saying that “eventually we will put them under control; but for the time being, let them in first.”

Park points out that the presence of Chinese goods in African marketplaces is substantial, because Chinese goods are more affordable although of a lower grade; for example, Chinese brands of cell-phones are not as sophisticated and advanced as Apple i-phones, but they work for Africans’ needs and are more affordable. In many places, U.S. brands even do not have a presence. Chinese embassies and business people have even started hosting large cultural events to build good relations and brand loyalty amongst local people and to advertise their products and services. They do this more actively and aggressively than Western counterparts. Park also pointed out that the presence of Chinese products nowadays has moved beyond low-end ones to high-end ones such as computers and telecommunication devices and equipment.

Park also talked about Chinese immigration to South Africa, indicating that “most of the Chinese who are moving to Africa today are from Mainland China and they arrived in Africa sometimes in the last 20 years, starting in the late 1990s, and growing to large numbers in the 2000s.” According to Park, South Africa is one of a few countries in Africa to have an ethnic-Chinese population. The first group of them are of third or fourth generation and most of them speak Cantonese or Hakka dialects. Their ancestors came to South Africa during Dutch colonial times, after the discovery of diamond and gold; and they call themselves South-African Chinese, and number around 10,000; most of them intermarried with local Africans, and almost all of them are nowadays professionals. The second group came from Taiwan during the Apartheid; they received huge incentives from the Apartheid regime to set up factories and create jobs, and numbered between 30,000 and 35,000. Most of these Taiwanese invested in garment and textile factories; some of them returned to Taiwan or moved to Guangdong Province or other places of China with their businesses, after Mandela came to power in South Africa and switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China in 1998. Today, they number around 7,000 to 8,000. The fourth group is from Mainland China; they are now the majority of ethnic-Chinese living in South Africa; some of them are settled in South Africa while others keep moving across different African countries looking for more profitable business opportunities. The most recent data indicates that there are about 350,000 ethnic-Chinese in South Africa; among them 10,000 South-African Chinese, 7,000 Chinese from Taiwan, and the rest from Mainland China (approximately 333,000). The number fluctuates and is fluid; ethnic-Chinese come and go, and they move around Africa. For example, when crime rate rises and economy goes down in South Africa, they might move to Lesotho or Zimbabwe, or even to Portuguese-speaking African countries such as Angola, Mozambique, or even to Brazil.

Answering the question of how the U.S. Government could effectively compete with China in terms of expanding influence in Africa, Park said that “if the U.S. Government is interested in engaging with Africa, it should rather attempt to address African needs. Framing U.S. engagement as a competition between the U.S. and China does not serve Africa’s interests. Furthermore, the U.S. Government currently does not have a sufficient budget to compete with China in infrastructure investment. Instead, the U.S. should focus on its exemplary record of projects like PEPFAR and its democracy and governance projects that support African civil society organizations. The U.S. and Chinese Governments could cooperate by assisting Africa in a “complementary” way, i.e., each country doing what it does best, so that all three parties might benefit from each other. Park indicated that she previously shared her views in a closed briefing for staffers working on the U.S. Congressional Subcommittee on Africa.

Opinions from Other Mainstream Scholars

Information available online and from scholarly publications, presented by experts in the fields of U.S. foreign policy and China/Africa studies and from well-established think tanks appears to support Park's research outcomes and recommendations.

According to a news report titled *Bolton Vows Bigger U.S. Role in Africa, but Goal Is Countering China's Sway* by Mark Landler and Edward Wong, in New York Times, December 14, 2018 (https://www.proquest.com/nytimes/docview/2155584102/F2F18C236ABB47D5PQ/11?accountid=41101), China's aid to Africa is for most part for-profit commercial deals rather than strictly humanitarian assistance, for which U.S. is more generous, "From 2000 to 2014, Chinese financing to Africa totaled $121.6 billion, […] About 40 percent of that can be defined as aid, based on the parameters of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, […] the United States provided $106.7 billion in aid. […] most of the Chinese money comes in the form of loans, many of which are for projects being built by Chinese state-owned companies. […] borrowers often have to start repaying the loans within a few years, unlike loans from the World Bank, which can have a grace period of a decade."

China's economic relations with Africa is generally speaking based on satisfying each other's unmet needs. Chinese Government plays an important pro-active role. According to a video by Wendover Production (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co0RGa99W0M), in terms of financing of large infrastructure projects that "would be viewed as risky by any traditional bank," i.e., private banks in the West, China's state-run Export-Import Bank could offer low-interest or no-interest loans, which are considered "a form of foreign aid since China doesn't expect to get all their money back, at least adjusted for inflation, since they are not charging much interest and there's a high risk of default." In exchange, China gets natural resources for its industry. "China as a country has shifted from having a low-skilled to a medium-skilled workforce as their education level has improved, but for the lowest cost, lowest skilled manufacturing work, the country of China is no longer competitive. Therefore, Chinese manufacturing firms are setting up their own operation in Africa, one of the cheapest and lowest skilled labor markets in the world."

Africa has plenty of low-cost labor sources due to under-development, which is similar to China's economic situation 30 to 40 years ago, in the 1980s, before Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening policy took effects. Thus, many private Chinese entrepreneurs move to Africa for cheap labor and new markets. Africa needs to kickstart the industrial development through construction of basic infrastructure such as roads and power stations, and exploration and export of natural resources. Africa has a great wealth of mineral deposits but lacks money and technology; China, in the contrary, has money and technology but no mineral deposits; and both sides trade what they have for what they don't to fulfill their needs.

Some scholars from prestigious U.S. foreign affairs think tanks appear to agree with Park's assessment of Sino-African economic deals and her recommendations to U.S. policy-makers. In *China's Expanding African Relations Implications for U.S. National Security Prepared for the United States Army*, a Rand Corporation publication by Lloyd Thrall (https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR900/RR905/RAND_RR905.pdf), the author states that, "Beijing engages readily with socialist, free-market, democratic, authoritarian, and theocratic regimes alike. […] The vast majority of Chinese investment and loan activity is profit-driven and succeeds on its own commercial merits, rather than as a state-directed foreign policy tool. […] China's stance of not interfering in domestic governance and human rights issues is often appreciated and reciprocated by African governments, even among those with democratic traditions and solid human rights practices."

Regarding the impact of China's growing influence in Africa, the paper concluded that "Unlike the zero-sum geopolitical competition that defined the Cold War in Africa, contemporary Sino-American interests in Africa are far less divergent and less dangerous. The United States and China share a fundamental interest in the stability of African states and functioning markets as a prerequisite for the economic benefits, deepening relationships, and global leadership image that each of them hopes to portray. […] U.S. and Chinese interests diverge most seriously over the role of foreign powers in supporting good governance and human rights norms in Africa, particularly regarding pariah states. While Beijing has blunted international pressure on such states as Sudan and Zimbabwe, it has also used its closer relationship with such states to curb their behavior when it too seriously threatened stability or Beijing's international reputation."

The author recommends that "Policymakers should avoid elevating low-level competition to bilateral strategic tension and should seek to insulate Sino-American relations in Africa from broader currents in the bilateral relationship. A China that invests in pariah states and resists international human rights norms in Africa is not ideal, but it does not pose an exceptional threat to American interests. Sino-African relations have strong economic foundations that are unlikely to erode, and China's approach to African governance reflects deep roots in China's domestic political structure and history. Zero-sum approaches and adversarial rhetoric are unlikely to be useful." The author concludes that "To support U.S. leadership in Africa and strengthen international norms, the United States should focus on reinvigorating its African relationships rather than fostering competition with China."

Feature Story 1:
Chinese Investment in Manufacturing in Africa

A YouTube video, titled "Zambia: Under Chinese influence" and produced by France 24 English Channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Co0RGa99W0M), explored both positive and negative impacts of China's deals with Africa. It acknowledged that "China's presence in Africa is key to economic development on both sides; and Chinese investment in Zambia perhaps highlights this the most" for creating jobs and wealth for the local people, but indicated that there are also "resentment." The video showed footages of manufacturing plants, police post, community hospital and school built by Mr. Yaochi Huang, a Chinese business investor. He planted trees and raised zebras by the entrance to his factory to make African employees feel happy. Mr. Huang told the reporter that inside China, due to fierce competition, profit margin dropped; thus, in 2007, he took advice from friends to move to Zambia. He worked for other people's manufacturing plants for two years at the beginning and then started his own business weaving bags for large companies that sold grain, food and cement. His business is worth US$250 million. In 2017, he founded the Marco Polo company to make tiles.

The anchor next showed footage about a Chinese farmer who settled in Zambia to manage a pig farm, employing Africans as assistants, and about a Chinese orchard farmer who grew dragon-fruits and immigrated from Zhejiang Province to escape fierce competition in China. The anchor also showed footage of Chinese and Zambian employees' residential compound; apparently, they are of similar if not equal qualities of comfort. The anchor showed both positive and negative reactions of Zambians to Chinese presence. Antonio Mwanza, Deputy Media Director of The Patriotic Front, the center-left ruling party under President Edgar Chagwa Lunga, which claimed to be a pro-poor party of peasants, workers and students, or "the ordinary Zambians," praised China for offering Zambia better economic deals than the West, with billions of dollars of investment in mining, communications and transport, energy infrastructure, and with transfer of technology.

Others complained about China's influence in Zambia. Andyford Banda, opposition presidential candidate, complained about lack of "transparency," "overpricing" and "corruption." Some ordinary people, such as local merchants selling chickens complained that Chinese were selling chickens boosted with too much vitamin at a cheaper price and hurt their business. Some labor activists also complained about failure of paying over-time.

Feature Story 2:
Integration of Chinese Immigrants with Local Africans

There are also success stories about Chinese immigrants' integration into local African communities. A video by state-run China Central Television News titled "*Faces of Africa: When Chinese Meet Zambians*" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_UhlZgBo8E) told the story of Mr. Frank Fang, who graduated in 1994 with a law degree from a prestigious university from Southern China, and was sent to Botswana by a high-profile state-run company specialized in international cooperation from his home Province of Jiangxi. In order to enjoy more freedom, he quitted the company in 2000 to start his own business in Lusaka, Zambian capital. He married Lucy, an African woman, and they had three sons. The intermarriage between Chinese and African were rare at that time and are controversial even today. He suffered from some pressure from his own Chinese community. The couple opened a clothing store in Lusaka, and later their business grew into high-end fashion chain stores employing more than 200 local Zambians. Frank also owned a farm in the outskirts of Lusaka where he hired a Zambian family to take care of chickens, goats and corns. On weekends, he took his friends there to enjoy BBQs.

African Union Headquarters
(Source: Hiroo Yamagata, Flickr, Creative Commons)

Tanzania-Zambia Railway locomotive
(Source: David Brossard from Wikimedia Commons)

Kenya Railway's DF8B locomotive
(Source: Erasmus Kamugisha from Wikimedia Commons)

A Chinese-owned mall in Ivory Coast.
(Source: Poupy Gaelle Mguestop)

Allegation of "Debt-Trap"

The former Donald Trump administration strongly criticized China's lending policies to African states as "Debt Trap Diplomacy," The so-called debt-trap is created when a country lends to poor countries, intentionally overwhelming them with unsustainable debt, forcing them to surrender strategic assets or concede increased political leverage. But so far, there is no persuasive evidence that such a debt-trap has been imposed on Africa.

Regarding "debt trap," some critics cited the fact that 72% of all Kenya's debt is owed to China. However, state-owned Export-Import Bank of China is usually the principal lender; and Chinese Government makes huge amount of profit generated from state-run enterprises and taxation from a large private sector; therefore, it can always find ways to defuse crises caused by defaults of repayment, through deferment or cancelations, or in exchange of mineral exploration rights.

Chatham House, also known as The Royal Institute of International Affairs, a well-established policy institute in London, published a research paper, titled "*The Response to Debt Distress in Africa and the Role of China*," December 15, 2022 (https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/12/response-debt-distress-africa-and-role-china/02-case-studies-chinese-lending-africa). It concluded that "Chinese lenders account for 12 per cent of Africa's private and public external debt, which increased more than fivefold to $696 billion from 2000 to 2020. […] China did not cause African debt distress in most cases, but it is key to finding a solution. Despite growing political and economic tensions, China and the West have a strong mutual interest in cooperating with each other, and with African nations and institutions, to tackle the challenge of debt distress."

Compared with China's 2021 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) worth $17,734 billion, the above loan of $696 billion constitutes a loss of 3.92% of China's 2021 GDP which is still bearable for Chinese economy, assuming that Chinese Government could grant total forgiveness of these loans, in the unlikely scenario of African countries all go to default on payment. Thus, any crisis of default on debt payment from African countries to China could be easily handled by the Chinese Government through suspension or cancellation, or in the most recent practice, repayment of debt with the right to explore mineral deposits. Therefore, the Trump Administration officer Bolton's "Debt Trap" allegations are not based on reality. Furthermore, based on Chinese Government's perpetual rhetoric of "respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations" as well as on China's foreign policy records so far, allegations of China taking over ports, airports, railroads or other infrastructure facilities in case of default on payment to loans are simply fearmongering without credible evidence.

In addition, as reported by The Voice of America, August 25, 2022 (https://www.voanews.com/a/china-cancels-23-loans-to-africa-amid-debt-trap-debate-/6716397.html), China forgave 23 loans for 17 African countries amid "debt trap" allegations. […] analysts say that since 2000, China has regularly forgiven loans that are nearing their end but have a small balance." A research project conducted by Deborah Brautigam, director of the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, shows that "between 2000 and 2019, China canceled at least $3.4 billion of such debt in Africa." The impact of the cancellation of the above $3.4 billion of debt on Chinese economy is minimal or close to none. According to World Bank estimates, in 2021, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in China was worth $17,734 billion, representing 7.94% of the world economy (https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp). Therefore, China's cancellation of the above $3.5 billion (2000-2019) is only 0.019 or 1.9% of 1% of China's 2021's GDP figure, which is affordable for China as the current number two economic powerhouse on Earth.

Therefore, the likelihood of China collecting debt with coercive "debt trap" methods is minimal or non-existent. In addition, unlike the U.S., which possesses a mighty military force with a global reach to enforce its will anywhere in the world, China's military might remains regional and cannot easily reach African shores; therefore, China simply does not have the capability to implement a "debt trap" policy.

Positive and Negative Impacts of China's Influence from the Perspectives of African Leaders

The impacts of China's growing influence in Africa, both positive and negative, could be explained by an African government officer from Liberia. In a video titled "*Gyude Moore: China in Africa, An African Perspective*" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5uzxV8ub9k). Moore, former Chief of Staff of Liberia's President, and Research Fellow at the Center of Global Development, made a speech on March 5, 2019, at the University of Chicago Paulson Institute's Contemporary China Speakers Series. According to Moore, throughout 1990s, civil wars in Ruanda, Liberia, Serra Leone, and Congo (Zaire), and others, humanitarian crises, such as break out of disease, malaria, AIDS etc., caused a lot of problems. 60% government revenues are used to pay interest for debts owed to Western banks, and few Western companies are interested in investment in Africa.

Regarding the root causes of Africans' acceptance of China's infrastructure projects and trade deals, Moore made many complaints against Western practices, including (1) About 101 companies listed in London Stock Exchange owns $1 trillion worth of natural resources in Africa; European companies operating in Africa paid little tax and royalty to African governments, but huge amounts of profits to shareholders, making Africans unable to finance infrastructure construction; Chinese model of loans backed up by rights to mineral exploration allows African countries to have infrastructure built. (2) When African governments offer opportunity for infrastructure projects, bids submitted by European firms are much costlier than those submitted by Chinese firms, which could supply cheaper service without reducing quality. (3) During the European colonial rule, roads and ports were built to connect colonial centers in Europe and African colonies, not to connect different African countries; China's infrastructure projects connect different African countries and allow Africa to connect with the rest of the world. (4) With rapid growing of African population, African countries need to increase opportunities of employment for young people, China's economic expansion in Africa could meet this urgent need.

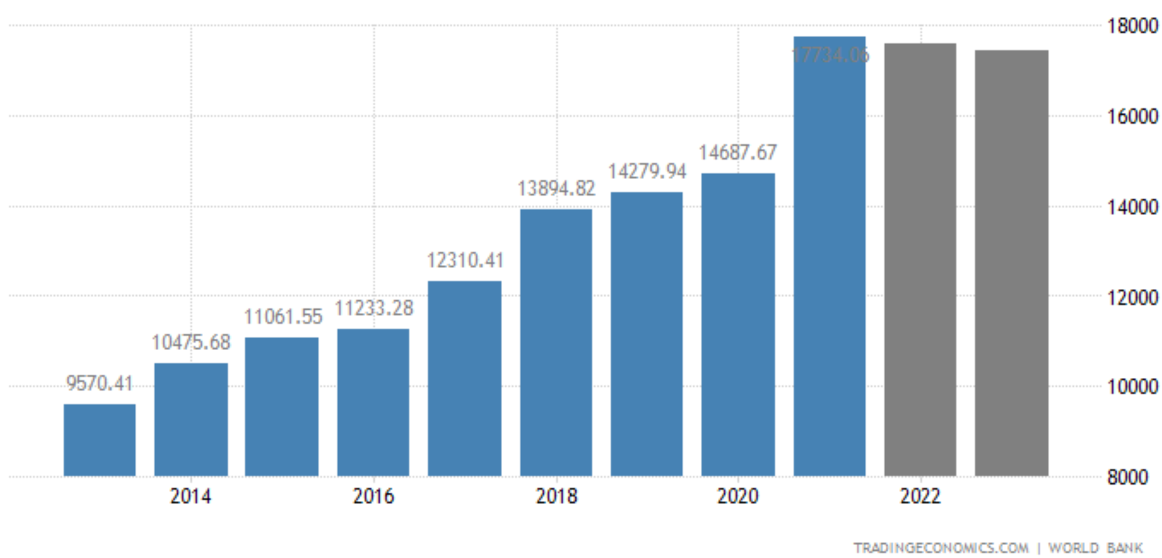
Moore also discussed some problems that exist in China-Africa relations, including (1) import of large quantity of products made in China hurt less-competitive local African manufacturers; (2) China's apolitical sale of weapons to whichever African states or parties engaged in civil wars regardless of the latter's records on human rights and democratic governance is resented; (3) some Chinese are engaged in trades that hurt endangered animals in Africa, which should be banned by the Chinese Government; (4) although Chinese Government is friendly or "very respectful" towards Africans living in China, in many instances, reaction of some "regular citizens" or ordinary people in China are generally speaking "racist" towards 200,000 Africans living in China. Moore also discussed the issue of Chinese firms' bringing with them Chinese employees rather than hiring local Africans. He said that when Chinese firms brought in a lot of Chinese employees, it was usually for temporary durations and due to African side giving them impossible deadlines for some events such as presidential elections, and skilled local Africans were not available. He pointed out that nowadays, the majority of employees in Chinese-owned firms are Africans, although the top managerial positions are mostly occupied by Chinese.

Regarding China's expanding influence in Africa, Moore concluded that China's African policies up to now is a "net positive;" "if you have to remove China" as a financier of African economic development, "there is currently no automatic replacement;" "China is going to be a very big part of Africa's future for the foreseeable future." Despite of all of these positive comments, Moore indicated that China talks about "win-win" deals with Africa, "China wins a lot more than Africa, but Africa does not lose."

Regarding U.S aid programs for Africa, Moore praised the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which offered large-sized grants that match anything China has done.

Moore talked about the "suitability of China as Africa's partner" in terms of Africa's need for infrastructure and China's capacity to meet these needs, and the fact that Africa is cutoff from international financial market. He said that "for the average African citizens, first time in a long time, they could see the direct connection between resources leaving your country and some sorts of benefits, whether that is power, or roads, available to you."

Chinese Loans to Africa (source: http://bu.edu/gdp/chinese-loans-to-africa-database.6)



China's GDP in the recent decade based on estimates by the World Bank (source: https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp).

Fierce Complaints and Radical Criticisms of the Practices of China and U.S. by Some American Intellectuals and Students from Africa

The above evaluations of both positive and negative impacts of China's growing economic ties with Africa are supported by plenty of evidence. There are also harsh criticisms about Chinese "neocolonialism" among some intellectuals in the West. Most of these outcries appear to be emotional and based more on ideologies, far left (dogmatic-Marxist or militant Third-Word nationalist) or far right (ultra-conservative, reactionary or anti-Communist), or value judgments, rather than rational, impartial and neutral evaluation of facts.

Alemayehu G. Mariam, an Ethiopian-American Professor of Political Science at California State University, San Bernardino, practicing defense lawyer and political activist, has voiced his opposition to "Chinese neocolonialism" in Africa, in his Al Mariam's Commentaries website (https://almariam.com). In one of his commentaries titled *Chinese Neocolonialism in Africa: The Dragon Eating the African Lion and Cheetah?* (https://almariam.com/2017/09/03/chinese-neocolonialism-in-africa-the-dragon-eating-the-african-lion-and-cheetah-part-i/), he harshly criticizes China' infrastructure projects in African countries, such as Ethiopia, Kenya and Angola, as "a kinder and gentler form of European colonialism updated for the 21st century," quoting some statements by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's Pan-Africanist founding president, who defined the theory of "neocolonialism."

Mariam is also sharply critical of the governance models of some African countries such as Ethiopia and Zimbabwe as well as their leaders whom he labels as "thug-maters" or "dictators;" and he calls the $200 million African Union Hall built by China as a gift to the organizations the "African Beggars Union Hall" and its dome-shaped top "a gigantic inverted beggar's bowl;" he argues that "In 2011 it was reported that Ethiopia "lost $11.7 billion in illegal capital flight from 2000 through 2009. With nearly $12 billion in stolen money from Ethiopia alone, each African country could have built its own African Union Hall. […] The 55 members of the AU could not pony up the $200 million ($3.6 million each) for their headquarters so they had to panhandle China to build the quintessentially iconic building for all Africans." He complained that China has no anti-corruption laws to rein in bribery by Chinese business people operating in Africa while U.S. firms are chained by such laws, "In 2011, Chinese firms accounted for 40% of the corporate contracts in Africa compared to only 2 percent for U.S. firms."

In addition to criticizing China, Mariam is also fiercely disapproving of American policies towards Africa under Obama and Biden, especially in the case of Ethiopia. In *Clash of Civilizations: Ethiopia and The U.S. At The Crossroad Part I* (https://almariam.com/2021/12/11/clash-of-civilizations-ethiopia-and-the-u-s-at-the-crossroad-part-i/), posted on December 11, 2021, he outspokenly states that "What is happening in the relationship between Ethiopia and the U.S. is a 'clash of civilizations.' […] between a civilization founded on white European supremacy and an African civilization deeply rooted in black independency. […] The U.S. wants to divide Ethiopia ethnically and control its destiny. Ethiopians responded to U.S. imperial and neocolonial ambitions with total defiance and heroic audacity as they always have when faced with white supremacy." He is very critical of the sanctions imposed on Ethiopia by Biden Administration amidst the previous civil conflict, and complains that, "Regardless of the party affiliation of the U.S. administration in power, including the Biden administration, they all think Africa is a continent of 'shit hole countries.' […] The Biden administration treats Ethiopia like dirt because it believes Ethiopia is just another 'shit hole African country.' Of course, Biden, unlike Trump, would never say it publicly as he owes his presidency to black voters! But Biden is a dyed-in-the-wool racist who masquerades as a 'liberal.' […] For U.S. administrations, Democrat or Republican, Africa is a 'shit hole' continent of beggars, deadbeats, poverty, pestilence, disease and illiteracy. Africa is cursed by the gods and condemned to be run by corrupt, crooked and atrocious two-bit vampiric dictators who suck the blood of their impoverished citizens. For U.S. administrations, Africa is a continent in endless turmoil fueled by ethnic hatred and doomed to suffer in eternal division and bloodshed."

In addition to the above challenges to the foreign policies of both China and the U.S. towards Africa, Mariam is also openly challenging the "common sense" assumptions or consensus of the mainstream intellectual circles regarding economic progress and prosperity. Expressing his disapproval of the U.S.-Africa Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C, in his commentary titled *Debunking the Myth of Development and Investment in Africa*, August 10, 2014 (https://almariam.com/2014/08/10/debunking-the-myth-of-development-and-investment-in-africa/), he poses some critically provocative or out-of-the-box questions, such as

"Is mere GDP growth and increase in trade volumes proof of economic development? Does the rise in per capita incomes, growth of mobile phones and mobile phone banking, tourism, retail and increases in the number of African billionaires truly represent whether Africa is the 'fastest growing continent'? Could African development be accelerated by investments of companies that sell sugary drinks that have been proven to cause an epidemic of tooth decay and obesity? Could African development be structured in thousands of fancy tourist hotel rooms or in networking banks when the vast majority of Africans are living on less than $2 a day and are deprived of the basic necessities of life? Do African countries need American investments that promote good governance and industrialization or expand Coca-Cola sales and bottling plants and build posh Marriott hotels?"

Although Mariam's positions might make mainstream Americans, Chinese and Africans with capitalistic and mercantilist "conventional wisdoms" feel uncomfortable or even repulsive, a survey he quoted by The Ethics Institute of South Africa (https://www.tei.org.za) 2014, on Africans' perception of Chinese business owners in 15 countries indicated that the behaviors of Chinese business people were "negative than positive." "In terms of the reputation of Chinese business in Africa, 43.3% is negative and 35.4% positive. In respect of the quality of Chinese products and services, 55.9% is negative and 22.7% positive. Regarding environmental responsibility of Chinese companies in Africa, 53.9% is negative and only 11.1% positive. In terms of economic responsibility of Chinese companies in Africa, 40.1% is negative and 28.3% positive. There is somewhat more optimism when it comes to the social responsibility of Chinese companies, with 45.7% being negative and 21.0% positive. Lastly, perceptions of employment practices of Chinese companies in Africa are 46.0% negative and 19.1% positive." This result is alarming for Chinese business people operating in Africa; and the survey should serve as a guidance for them to improve their business practices. Similarly, Mariam's criticisms of China's and U.S. relations with Africa, and of the political behaviors of some African "dictators' and "thugmasters," no matter how radical and offensive they may appear, should not be disregarded as nonsense or even subversive; instead, policy-makers and business leaders in both China and the U.S. should take them seriously and constructively in the improvement of their respective African strategies.

Resentment of China's expanding economic influence in Africa among some people at the grass-root level could be illustrated by an email communication on March 20, 2023, and an interview via Zoom on April 15 with Poupy Gaelle Mguestop, a journalism student from Cameroon at Los Angeles City College. According to Poupy, some people in Cameroon complained that Chinese business people displaced local merchants and that too many Chinese moved to Cameroon, took over local people's place to build Chinatown, and they lived segregated life in enclosed areas, where they own almost all properties, and prefer to deal with fellow Chinese business people;

and besides business operations, they also controlled some mass media, and some of the products they sell are of poor quality and do not last long. "China's growing influence in Africa is growing up as a tree in front of everybody and is just unbelievable. […] In Cameroon for example, China has a large representation in Akwa (heart of the economic capital Douala) where they own most of businesses and pay local people low wages, which is not acceptable. In Ivory Coast for example, they are also taking over and are building their fifth China Mall in Abidjan, the capital of the country. Its benefits are in terms of embellishing and developing the city. But my question is why China instead of local productions?" Complaining about some problems of anti-African racism that exists in Chinese communities, Poupy said that "the sad part of this is how they can't accept Africans in their country but want Africans to have them as a business partner there? It doesn't make any sense," and she questioned "why China does not accept African immigrants, and send so many immigrants to Africa?"

Reaction of Local Africans to China's Expanding Presence

A peer-reviewed research paper titled *The impact of Chinese business on market entry in Ghana and Senegal*, by Laurence Marfaing and Alena Thiel, and published by Cambridge University Press, available online at https://go-gale-com.libpxy.lacitycollege.edu/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T002&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&hitCount=2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CA353319255&docType=Essay&sort=Relevance&contentSegment=ZCUJ-MOD1&prodId=PPPM&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA353319255&searchId=R9&userGroupName=losangeles_cc&inPS=true, discusses some problems in the relationship between local Africans and Chinese newcomers, and the different reactions of different African groups towards Chinese businesses, in Ghana and Senegal.

For the business people, there are mixed reactions; "while established local merchants in Accra and Dakar express their discontent at the growing Chinese presence, aspiring African traders applaud the newly opened pathways to gainful economic activity. We hypothesize that these predominantly small-scale vendors creatively appropriating the new situation for their own ends have found in the Chinese presence a means by which to bypass the restricted economic, social and religious networks that hitherto have excluded them from access to selling space, start-up capital and affordable goods. […] Chinese presence allows previously excluded social groups such as unemployed youth and others who lack access to the relevant market networks to purchase commodities from Chinese stores and to re-sell them in the streets, in other markets or in other parts of the city. Anything from nail scissors to picture frames is sold, until the young trader is able to buy more expensive commodities in larger quantities. These traders are often unconditional supporters of the Chinese presence, and respond to the anti-Chinese protests voiced by commercial unions and associations with strong disapproval."

For labor relations, it appears that negative factors are quite serious, "employment by the Chinese in Ghana is seldom perceived as a permanent employment option. Those working for Chinese businesses in Accra are usually very disillusioned, and given their particularly marginalized position in the Ghanaian labor market, often take a job with a Chinese trader in the absence of alternative income opportunities. Since salaries are pared close to the minimum wage, and Chinese employers often fail to fulfil the local norm of supplementing low incomes with allowances and foodstuffs, options to save capital for private business endeavors are limited, and complaints about employment relations and the absence of future prospects are frequent."

A book titled *China and Africa*, authored by David H. Shinn, former US ambassador to Ethiopia and Burkina Faso and international affairs professor at George Washington University, and Joshua Eisenman, Senior Fellow in China Studies at the American Foreign Policy Council, and published by the University of Pennsylvania Press, presents a comprehensive history of China's relationships with different African countries during different periods of time. It gives full credit to the positive factors in these relationships, while criticizing some shortcomings and mistakes.

In terms of negative impacts of China's interaction with Africa, David et al cited some incidence of conflict between Chinese-operated businesses and local African people. One of them is the "embarrassing incident" in 2007 that "marred Hu Jintao's visit when Zambian workers forced him to cancel a stop at Chambishi where there was lingering unhappiness" over "low wages and poor health and safety conditions in Chinese companies. Guards fired on workers at a Chinese coal mine in 2010, injuring eleven, and strikes over low pay resumed at Chambishi in 2011" (p. 326). The authors also indicate that "Beijing has established a good record on debt cancellation for Africa's poorest countries. […] It has no interest in becoming linked to political conditionality often pursued by other donors."

Conclusions

Based on the facts presented by credible mass media, by scholars from well-established institutions, by experts from U.S. and U.K. intelligence agencies, as well as ordinary people from Africa, it appears that (1) both U.S. and Chinese model of assistance to Africa have gain certain positive achievements while rooms for improvements exist; (2) overall, the U.S. aid to Africa is larger than China's, but China's investments in Africa is larger than U.S.'; (3) the U.S. might need to strengthen public-private partnership to support infrastructure construction and investment of U.S. companies in Africa, while China could focus on promoting a better model of inter-communal interactions between Chinese investors and local African business circle and communities; and (4) African government should gradually improve their legal systems, especially in the areas of protection of labor rights and of the environment, in order to make their relations with both U.S. and China a genuinely "win-win" one, not a new battleground for superpower rivalries, one that is beneficial to all parties, socially just and ecologically sustainable.

In conclusion, Biden Administration's Build Back Better World (B3W) and China's Belt and Roads Initiative in Africa could co-exist and co-prosper for all three parties concerned, i.e., the U.S., China and African states, although both plans need to overcome their existing or potential shortcomings to be sustainable and to yield genuine "win-win" outcomes that could make all parties happier. Both plans could be mutually complementary, giving both U.S. and China opportunities to do their best and to benefit from each other; and both U.S. and Chinese governments should move beyond whatever differences or rivalries that exist between the two economic, technological and political systems, to achieve a constructive outcome that is beneficial to all parties. The U.S. and China could to certain degree compete in Africa; but these competitions should be "benign," not "cut-throat;" and they should not be based on ideology but on the observations of the established international norms.