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Is China Recolonizing Africa: Some Views from Tanzania

Abel A Kinyondo

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IS CHINA RECOLONIZING AFRICA?
Some Views from Tanzania

Abel Kinyondo
University of Dar es Salaam

This study assesses Sino-African cooperation with a view to understanding its nature and subsequently identifying ways to improve it. Using a mixed method that combined in-depth interviews, Afrobarometer, and Johns Hopkins’ China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) data, I find that, despite a few gains, China takes the lion’s share of benefits from the cooperation. Indeed, the balance of trade is skewed toward China, and there is very little Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) flowing to Africa. Moreover, ‘debt trap diplomacy’ is crippling African economies, raising alarm over whether China intends to recolonize the continent. Also, while Chinese aid is negligible, the amount of contracts revenues and diplomatic support it gets from the continent makes one think Africa deserves more from the cooperation. Nevertheless, China, just like any other country, acts in its nation’s interest. Therefore, it is incumbent upon African countries to ensure that they demand more from the cooperation. In the end, to address China’s hegemony over Sino-African cooperation, Africa should prioritize the development of local content through technological and skill transfers, curb corruption, and build a critical mass of negotiators.

Keywords: Sino-Africa, China, Recolonizing Africa, FDI Flow, Chinese Hegemony, Hegemonic Cooperation, Aid, Loans, International Cooperation, Trade Balance, Curbing Corruption in Africa, Debt Trap Diplomacy, China Africa Research Initiative, CARI.

¿China está recolonizando África? Algunas perspectivas desde Tanzania

Este estudio buscó evaluar la cooperación entre China y África con el fin de comprender su naturaleza y, posteriormente, identificar formas de mejorarl
un método mixto que combinó entrevistas en profundidad, datos de Afrobarometer y Johns Hopkins (CARI) encontramos que, a pesar de algunas pocas ganancias, China se lleva la mayor parte de los beneficios de la cooperación. De hecho, la balanza comercial está sesgada hacia China y hay muy poca IED china que fluye hacia África. Por otra parte, la diplomacia de la trampa de la deuda está paralizando las economías africanas al punto de alarmar si China tiene la intención de recolonizar el continente. Además, si bien la ayuda china es insignificante, la cantidad de ingresos por contratos y el apoyo diplomático que recibe del continente hace pensar que África merece más cooperación. Sin embargo, se observa que, al igual que cualquier otro país, China actúa en interés de su nación, por lo tanto, corresponde a los países africanos garantizar que exijan más cooperación. Al final, para abordar la hegemonía de China sobre la cooperación chino-africana, África debe priorizar el desarrollo de contenido local a través de transferencias tecnológicas y de habilidades, frenar la corrupción y construir una masa crítica de negociadores.

Palabras clave: Relaciones Chino-Africanas, Ayuda, Préstamos, Cooperación Internacional, Balanza Comercial, China, África, Tanzania, Política Comercial, Hegemonía China, Negociación Internacional, Trampa de la Deuda.

中国要重新占领非洲吗？来自坦桑尼亚的一些看法

本研究旨在评估中非合作，以了解中非合作的性质，并找出改进中非合作的途径。通过结合深度访谈、非洲晴雨表，约翰·霍普金数据以及CARI的研究方法，笔者发现，尽管合作取得了一些成果，中国仍然从合作中获得了最大利益。事实上，贸易平衡向中国倾斜，中国对非直接投资很少。此外，债务陷阱外交正在使非洲经济陷入瘫痪，以至于中国是否打算重新占领非洲大陆的话题引起了恐慌。再者，尽管中国的援助微不足道，但它从非洲大陆获得的契约收入和外交支持，让人认为非洲应该从合作中获益更多。然而，笔者注意到，中国同其他任何国家一样采取符合本国利益的行动。因此非洲国家有责任确保自己对合作提出更多的要求。最后，为了解决中国在中非合作问题上的霸主地位，非洲应优先通过技术和技能转让来发展当地内容，遏制腐败，并培养众多的谈判家。

关键词：中非关系，关系，援助，贷款，国际合作，贸易平衡，中国，非洲，坦桑尼亚，贸易政策，中国霸权，国际谈判，债务陷阱。
Sino-African relations have existed since ancient times, but were first formalized in 1956 when Egypt established diplomatic relations with China (Anshan 2007). This move paved the way for China to strike up relations with the rest of Africa. Over the subsequent half century, China has emerged as Africa’s largest trading partner coupled with a visible growing volume of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in the continent (Chen, Dollar, and Tang 2015). Over the past decade, China has increasingly become a major economic player in Africa. Bilateral trade between the two partners grew twentyfold between 2014 and 2015 with trade value rising from US$10.6 to US$220 billion in this period (Schwab 2016). One can hardly pass through an African country without coming across a road, railway, stadium, skyscraper, or a set of infrastructures that were built by the Chinese. China has become a key partner to Africa’s development.

Yet, for all the fancy involvement of China in Africa, there still lingers a perception that China is up to no good (Schwab 2016). Suspicions abound that China is here to plunder Africa’s natural resources. Some (see, for example, Anshan 2007) have gone as far as saying that China is executing modern imperialism at Africa’s expense to enable her to become a global player. According to Al-Jazeera (2014), China is investing billions of dollars in Africa in exchange for exploiting the continent’s vast mineral and energy resources, at the expense of local people. An obvious question stems from this: Is China attempting to recolonize Africa?

The question has been debated significantly in recent times. Unfortunately, this debate is mainly dominated by non-African residents (Schwab 2016). For French (2014), perceived doubts are not coming from Africans but mostly from ‘soured’ Westerners. Moreover, little solid data are often employed when debating China-Africa cooperation, or, indeed, when it comes to conducting scholarly research on and in Africa itself (Kinyondo and Pelizzo 2018). It is in this context that the present study makes a contribution, relying mainly on interviews of key Tanzanians and residents who have been in the continent long enough to make an informed value judgment on Sino-African cooperation. The primary data are triangulated with Afrobarometer and Johns Hopkins’

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1Or at least this is what archeological evidence seems to suggest. Chinese goods were traded not only on the East African shores, but were also taken across the Sahara and reached West Africa. For instance, eleventh-century Chinese pottery and coins were found in Gao and Timbuktu by various archeological excavations; see Takezawa and Cisse (2012), Insoll (1998), and Moraes Farias (1998).
China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) data to establish validity and reliability. In analyzing these data, I show that China has hegemonic cooperation over Africa.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. The next section introduces the key claims underpinning international cooperation that set the theoretical groundwork for the rest of the discussion. In doing so, I review some of the seminal thinkers that have shaped these claims. I then describe the methodology and present the study’s findings, before highlighting pertinent conclusions upon which future policy recommendations can be developed.

**Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

As the world is becoming increasingly a global village, economic, technological, political, and security interdependencies—hereby referred to as international cooperation—have become inevitable. According to Taylor (1976) and Axelrod (1981, 1984), international cooperation entails coordinated behaviors among independent and selfish states that enable them to possibly reach a win-win situation. The simplest mode of international cooperation was presented through the theory of comparative advantage and gains from trade. It assumed the presence of two firms from two different countries under conditions of ‘perfect competition’ for both goods and factor markets. As the theory assumes varying productivity across the two countries, this was expected to lead to a price differential that would ultimately raise the possibility of international specialization and mutually beneficial trade (Stern 1997). Consequently, each country would be forced to specialize in those goods in which it has a comparative advantage over the competing country.

Unfortunately, the real world is not that simple, and the concept of free trade based on comparative advantage is farfetched due to several factors. Two are noteworthy. First, smaller countries lack the market power to determine the prices of their exports, which weakens the argument for comparative advantage. Second, countries charge tariffs that act as deterrents to the free movement of goods across trading countries. It is in this context that international cooperation has been viewed differently in the past few decades, a point to which I now turn more fully.

One pioneer of international cooperation, Thomas Schelling, coined a so-called *Strategy of Conflict* (Dai, Snidal, and Sampson 2017) where states with conflicting goals have no option but to cooperate to attain shared interests and are thus forced to engage in strategic interactions or cooperation. Earlier works on international cooperation emphasized the need
for anarchy (Milner 1991; Powell 1994) and the idea that some cooperation can be forced by more powerful parties (Milner 1997). However, this approach may not work in reality as it invokes the prisoner’s dilemma: There is a disincentive for parties to cooperate even if that is the only way to provide them a win-win situation. Long-term benefits therefore force rational parties to cooperate even in the face of anarchy. Folk theorem generalizes from instances where cooperation results in mutual gains among involved parties. An important issue to note here is that mutually beneficial cooperation is not automatic and can only occur under specific circumstances that are well documented by Oye (1986). Building on Schelling’s insights, Keohane (1984) came up with the After Hegemony concept. He stressed that conflict and cooperation are two sides of the same coin. Fearon (1995) explains this concept better by pointing out that states have a mutual interest to avoid wars because they are costly. In his world, war results from the failure of states to find a peaceful way to cooperate.

International cooperation is also built on reciprocity and reputation. The principle of reciprocity is straightforward. If you cooperate with me, I am more likely to cooperate with you in future, and, of course, the opposite applies. Consequently, continuing cooperation can only be hindered by possible defection of one of the cooperating parties. Goldstein (1991) and Ward and Rajmaira (1992) have, among others, identified the conditions under which reciprocity can enhance international cooperation.

Closely related to reciprocity is reputational cooperation. This stipulates that a state may not be willing to cooperate with a party that is a renowned defector. Some scholars (see, for example, Downs and Jones 2002) questioned the importance of reputation as states may choose to cooperate regardless of past defections. However, honesty remains important in forging international cooperation. It all boils down to trusting that a party has a reputation to reciprocate any cooperation accorded to them. Indeed, for Tomz (2007), countries strive to repay their international debts to enhance future access to international capital.

The discussion so far suggests that international cooperation can be achieved in three ways. First, it can be tacit: occurring without an expressed agreement between parties. As Axelrod (1981, 1984) advanced, at those times when expectations between parties converge, countries can cooperate without striking an explicit agreement. Second, a more common way to achieve cooperation is through negotiation: the After Hegemony concept. This was typically advocated by Keohane (1984) and Oye (1986) when examining the conscious processes involved in policy coordination negotiations—around nontariff barrier cooperation,
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pollution cuts, and so on—between states. The third way to achieve cooperation is through imposition: hegemonic cooperation. According to Milner (1997), under this arrangement, a stronger party can force a weaker partner to alter its policies to suit the interest of the former. These kinds of cooperation mostly explain hegemonic stability theories. The more skewed the power relation, the more unequal the gains from the cooperation are expected to be. Note, however, that while the gains usually favor the stronger party, there are cases in which the weaker party could gain more under special arrangements. Identifying what some of the conditions making this possible might be will form part of the present inquiry as it seeks to assess the nature of cooperation that China has with Africa and establishes ways to improve it.

Method

I employ a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews of key informants residing in Tanzania supplemented by broader, more quantitative data on Africa from two respected sources. The choice of Tanzania as the source of qualitative data is a “no brainer” as its diplomatic ties with China go way back to the precolonial era. Moreover, unlike other African countries that also had long-term diplomatic relations with China, such as Egypt, but opted to switch ties to the West following the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the USSR, Tanzania has always maintained its ties with China. It is thus a great place to find balanced opinions about Sino-African cooperation, given that this method provides greater, deeper, and more meaningful insight as to why respondents answer as they do. To validate the qualitative data from Tanzania, the study triangulated it with two types of authoritative secondary data that cover Africa more widely. First is the Michigan State University-funded Afrobarometer data, which are collected to gauge public attitudes on various socioeconomic variables throughout Africa. Second is the Johns Hopkins data, known as CARI, that look at various relevant quantitative Sino-African data such as imports, exports, and FDI.

The target group for the qualitative survey included key senior stakeholders who were Tanzanian nationals or residents from a range of sources such as political parties, development partners (DPs), local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs, academia, and senior government officials (see Table 1). The purposeful sampling was used to garner detailed, reliable information from key informants so the researcher could be certain about their command of the subject at hand.
The methodology involves two important aspects that promote reliability and validity of these data on which this study is based. First, the in-depth interviews from Tanzania permit me to isolate useful thematic areas. Although the in-depth views were sourced from Tanzania, not all respondents of the interviews are Tanzanians. This is important as the mixture of views from locals (Tanzanians) and foreigners (DPs and international NGOs) help provide a balanced story. Second, these views were tested for their wider applicability by triangulating them with globally respected data sources, that is, Afrobarometer and CARI. This ensured that views from respondents could be immediately confirmed or disconfirmed to bolster reliability and validity in the study.

The qualitative data analysis was conducted in three stages and consisted of three specific activities (see Yin 2009). I first scrutinized the data to identify themes, concepts, and propositions. The second stage involved coding and refining the data as well as understanding the subject matter as unfolding from the reduced data. The final activity involved understanding the data in the context of Sino-African relations. The analysis continuously shifted back and forth from field notes to recorded data to transcribed data to maintain a circular process of checking, revising, and confirming with the original data (Gray 2013). Correlation analysis was employed to analyze Afrobarometer data, whereas simple descriptive statistics were used to present CARI data.

The circular process of checking, performed here, is very similar to the hermeneutic circle theory popularized by Gadamer (1960). The basic idea of the hermeneutic circle is that the understanding of each of the component units or parts is what enables one to develop an understanding of the whole, but it is only through the understanding of the whole that one can fully understand the meaning of each of the parts.

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**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Embassies/Development Partners</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>National NGOs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>International NGOs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Government Ministries/Departments/Agencies</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of interviews/respondents 46

*Note.* NGOs = nongovernmental organizations.
Before delving into the views from respondents and triangulating them with available secondary data, it is useful to situate this study in a broader view of Sino-African cooperation as shown by Afrobarometer data. It is particularly interesting to understand whether Africans view Chinese influence in the continent positively. To answer this question, I correlate the percentage of respondents who believe China has influence with the percentage of those who view this influence as beneficial. We find that these two variables are strongly, positively, and significantly (from a statistical point of view) related to one another ($r = .625$, sig. = .000). The strength of this association is evidenced by the scatterplot in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that, while respondents who believe China to have a lot of influence are also more likely to say that it is beneficial, the relationship between the amount of influence and its nature is not entirely straightforward. In fact, if the scatterplot is divided along the sample’s means, this generates a typology that indicates four types of African countries.
First, respondents of some countries (e.g., Mali, Niger, Benin) are “Sinophiles.” They believe China has considerable influence and this influence is deemed to be good to their country. Meanwhile, a second group of respondents from other countries (e.g., Sao Tome, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Mauritius) are “cautiously optimistic.” They do not think that China has that much influence on their country but are sure that influence is good. Third, respondents from South Africa believe China to be very influential, but they fear that this influence is not so good. Finally, a group of countries (e.g., Ghana, Madagascar, Lesotho, Malawi) think that China has little influence but are sure that its influence is not benign.

The Tanzanian case is intriguing as respondents from that country are literally close to the intersection of these two axes. The percentage of Tanzanians who believe China’s economic activities have influence is slightly higher than the continental average. Also, the percentage of Tanzanian respondents who believe China’s activities and influence to be positive is similarly higher than the continental average. However, Tanzanians seem to be torn between the amount of influence they think China has (hence, being just above continent average) and the positivity (again approximately at the continent average level) it may bring in the country.

This ambivalence is surprising because Tanzania was one of the very first beneficiaries of the Chinese infrastructural push in Africa. Indeed, the Chinese built the famous Tanzania-Zambia Railway Association (TAZARA), a railroad running from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to Kapirimposhi, Zambia, between 1970 and 1975, losing 65 Chinese lives while providing a zero-interest loan of US$150 million in the process (Hanekom 2017; Songtian 2018; Sun 2014). Even during the Cold War, China continued to provide economic and military assistance to Tanzania. Many of Tanzania’s huge infrastructures were built by Chinese companies. It is thus surprising that Afrobarometer data show Tanzanians exhibiting only a slightly higher-than-average level of appreciation to their Chinese counterparts. Given the long-term relations Tanzania has had with China, coupled with the huge investments that China has kept unleashing in the country, logically, Tanzania should have been in the pure category of Sinophiles together with the likes of Mali.

A brief mention of the outlier in Figure 1 is warranted here. South Africa alone believes that China has enormous influence on it while that influence is deemed to be negative. Despite political turmoil happening from time to time, South Africa is a far richer country than most African
nations. In fact, it claims a place among the world’s five major emerging economies known as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa)—all of which are members of the G20 and together comprise around 41 percent of the world’s population. This provides South Africa with a sense of being an equal rather than China’s economic puppet. That said, Chinese companies have flooded the country raising South African eyebrows about China’s increased influence in the country—as is the case elsewhere in Africa. This phenomenon is discussed in more detail later.

Figure 1 exhibits the way Africans view China’s growing presence in the continent. It will be interesting to see how such a perception evolves as China’s presence continues to grow over time. It is in this context that views from key respondents from Tanzania were gathered and triangulated with Afrobarometer and CARI data to provide a hint on how Africans see Sino-African cooperation going forward and on ways to create a win-win situation. Later sections present those views.

Respondents’ Understanding of International Cooperation

It is important to first gauge respondents’ understanding of international cooperation. This provides some context for the responses to the questions that followed as well as a useful way to draw out themes to test with the more general data from Afrobarometer and CARI. To this end, almost half the respondents (46%) described it as cooperation among African countries and the rest of world with the aim of strengthening security, economic/financial stability, political stability, social development, and smoothening the business atmosphere among the member states. They thus view international cooperation following the After Hegemony framework (Keohane 1984; Oye 1986). Yet, 28 percent of the respondents alluded to the idea that international cooperation is guided by agreements aiming for mutual benefits among members—suggesting faith in the existence of tacit cooperation (Axelrod 1981, 1984). However, they were quick to point out that most cooperation with Africa is not balanced in the sense that non-African countries benefit disproportionately more due to their superior financial muscles, military power, technology, and competitiveness. This, of course, suggests the hegemonic cooperation (Milner 1997) discussed earlier.

About 9 percent of respondents view international cooperation as something purely based on historical background of colonialism, communist ideology, and/or social ties. This means that international cooperation in developing countries (such as Tanzania) with the rest of
the world depends on either colonial ties (e.g., with Germany and the United Kingdom) or ideological ties (e.g., with China and Cuba). Francophone or Anglophone African countries provide evidence exhibiting the hegemonic cooperation framework (see Milner 1991, 1997; Powell 1994).

Some people in the donor community residing in Tanzania see international cooperation as a result of globalization where nations are necessarily interactive, interconnected, and interdependent economically, socially, and politically. But it is clear that different countries have different levels of bargaining power depending on their level of socio-economic development or, to use the language of world system theorists, on their position in the world system—which is, among other things, a function of a country’s history, colonial past, developmental path, and so on (Arrighi 2002).

Sino-African Trade: Context and Framework

Sino-African cooperation is, to some extent, the product of a long history that was mainly informed by socialistic ideological ties. Ideology-informed cooperation was believed to be superior to its alternatives because it was based on the idea that it would be equally beneficial for all the cooperating partners. This belief is easy to understand. Unlike their capitalist and imperialist counterparts, socialist ideas and ideals were not believed to have predatory tendencies.

It should be noted that during the Cold War, foreign aid was an important political tool that China used to gain Africa’s diplomatic recognition and to compete with the United States for Africa’s support. As early as 1963, the then-Prime Minister Zhou Enlai visited ten African countries and announced the well-known “Eight Principles of Foreign Economic and Technological Assistance” (Sun 2014). These principles were designed to compete simultaneously with the “imperialists” (the United States) and the “revisionists” (the Soviet Union) for Africa’s approval and support (Sun 2014).

Since then, Sino-African cooperation has changed from being driven solely along ideological lines to a more institutionalized framework. Sino-African cooperation is now based, more practically, on a framework called the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which provides an institutional arrangement for promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the two parties in implementing China’s foreign policy agenda (Osei-Hwedie 2012). FOCAC was launched in 2000, spearheaded by the joint ministerial conference in Beijing, and has since
been held every other three years. Built on a so-called win-win platform, FOCAC aims to inculcate solidarity and cooperation based on equality, consultation, consensus, friendship, partnership, and mutual benefit (Anshan 2007; Osei-Hwedie 2012). For instance, at the 2018 FOCAC summit, a US$60 billion package for Africa was announced comprising US$35 billion in preferential loans and export credit lines, US$5 billion in grants, US$15 billion of capital for the China-Africa Development Fund, and US$5 billion in loans for the development of African small and medium enterprises (Moore 2018).

Many African countries see FOCAC as a positive arrangement to usher the continent out of a shameful cycle of dependency (Arrighi 2002; Cardoso and Faletto 1979). This is because it is assumed to be based on five critical values that are seemingly never practiced by traditional DPs in Africa. They include (1) mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) mutual nonaggression, (3) mutual noninterference in internal affairs, (4) equal rights and reciprocal benefits, and (5) peaceful coexistence (Enuka 2010; Songtian 2018). Since 2013, FOCAC has been using the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBORI), which focuses on funding physical infrastructure such as ports, rail lines, and other projects across Asia, Europe, and Africa (Koran 2018). Through this strategy, China hopes to expand its market base, access to natural resources, and attain superpower status (Chellaney 2017; Koran 2018). Critics, however, maintain that the program has saddled developing countries with crippling debts and increased their dependence on China.

Sino-African Cooperation and Sovereignty

China casts itself as a noninterfering economic partner to Africa. This was partly accepted by 30 percent of respondents citing, among many examples, China’s off-hand involvement pertaining to the situation in Zanzibar. Most Western countries deplored the Zanzibar government for ‘unfairly cancelling’ the 2015 election (see BBC 2015), but China was never interested in joining the debate. Whether that is a good thing or not, one thing seems clear: China never meddles in the internal matters of countries it cooperates with as long as Chinese business interests are not jeopardized. The belief in this scenario was well illustrated by one respondent interviewed for this study:

China does not consider whether you violate human rights or not, it only focuses on the economic benefits. China cooperates with African countries with its eyes closed, as if it doesn’t see what’s going on in the
African political arena. China has heavily invested in the Sudan—the same country is being blamed for human rights violations, still China closes its eyes on that.3

Suggesting that China has a zero-interference policy is not strictly true, though. It actually does interfere, perhaps much more than traditional DPs. The difference is that, instead of working with the opposition figures, activists, media, civil society organizations (CSOs), and NGOs, and so on, it works directly with the government of the day and/or the ruling party. The Western world is deemed to be interfering only because China works with opposition elements in African countries. Tanzania, for instance, witnessed an uproar when its former Chinese ambassador Dr. Lu Youqing, adorned in the ruling Tanzanian party (Chama cha Mapinduzi [CCM]) uniform, accompanied the party’s former Secretary General in a local political rally. The event ran contrary to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations barring diplomats from engaging in partisan politics in host countries (Mahira and Nyanje 2013).

Chinese economic partnership also comes with stringent diplomatic conditions that contravene national sovereignty. For instance, any form of Chinese assistance requires a partner country to denounce Taiwan as an independent country (Haroz 2011). African countries that have rejected this condition—such as Burkina Faso, Gambia, Swaziland, Sao Tome, and Principe—do not receive Chinese development assistance. In 2016, Kenya deported 50 Taiwanese nationals to China to stay in China’s good books (Manero 2017). One could argue that these countries are a ‘pushover,’ given their smaller financial muscles. However, the fact that, in 2014, South Africa denied entry to the Dalai Lama following tacit diplomatic pressure from China, speaks volumes on the extent China possesses hegemonic power relations over its African partners—especially when its interests are directly affected. The issue of China’s shaky non-interference strategy was spotted by one respondent who said, “China cooperates with African countries with its eyes closed as if they don’t see what’s going on in the African political arena as long as their economic interests are not touched.”4

For a country that brags about noninterference, China has established a military base in Djibouti. Ironically, the base is in close proximity to the U.S. military base Camp Lemonnier (Hong 2018; Koran 2018).

3Interview with local nongovernmental organization (NGO) member #2 (Dar es Salaam, January 2018).
4Interview with politician #3 (Dodma, February 2018).
This could allow China to use its Djibouti military base to restrict other countries’ access to a very strategic Djibouti port, among other possible negative implications. China’s military encroachment in Africa seems to be gaining momentum as the country increasingly wants a share of the market for military gear in the continent. Ofodile (2009) records that, in 2008, South Africa had to turn away a Chinese ship carrying 77 tons of ammunitions to Zimbabwe. This raised major concerns as the ship had an estimated three million rounds of ammunition, 2,500 mortar rounds, and 1,500 rocket grenades (Ofodile 2009), signaling an imminent bloodshed in the then-beleaguered Zimbabwe.

Sino-African Cooperation and Mutual Respect

There is a misconception that Sino-African cooperation is based on mutual respect. This fallacy is especially perpetuated by African leaders who appear willing to serenade China as the ‘messiah’ of the continent. Perhaps this is a result of China’s well-oiled propaganda machine. As Songtian (2018) puts it, Sino-African cooperation is based on the pursuit of “equality, mutual trust, and mutually beneficial cooperation.” Given this, it is not surprising to hear from one of the respondents that “Unlike the Western countries, China respects our cultures, form of democracy, and the way we run our countries. This is very important to us as sovereign nations.”

However, stories about China upholding mutual respect with their African ‘comrades’ are exaggerated, to say the least. Examples throughout the continent show China’s disrespect toward Africa. For instance, in 2013, Zambia’s government seized control of a Chinese-run coal mine, having established that Chinese managers had failed to address safety, health, and environmental concerns. In 2010, two Chinese managers at the mine were accused of shooting miners during a labor dispute (Al Jazeera 2014). Indeed, Esosio and Tse (2015) reveal that Zambian miners have to work for two years in Chinese-run mines before they get safety helmets, that ventilation below ground is poor, and that deadly accidents occur almost daily. More frequently, better jobs are lost to Chinese employees, who are ferried in from China (Esosio and Tse 2015). The growing Chinese presence in South Africa may have cost the country 75,000 jobs from 2000 to 2011 (Esosio and Tse 2015). Issues around poor treatment of Africans in the workplace were strongly supported by one respondent, who stated that

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1 Interview with politician #5 (Dar es Salaam, December).
When Africans are employed, working conditions are substandard. Human Rights Watch reports dangerous work conditions in Zambian mines. And pay disputes at a copper mine also in Zambia led to two Chinese managers shooting at miners in 2010.\(^6\)

Hong (2018) reports WikiLeaks’ diplomatic cable materials, suggesting that only a decade ago, local Chinese authorities were “extremely concerned about the high degree of concentration of Africans into a few Guangzhou neighborhoods.” Guangzhou is a popular African traders’ destination for the purchase of cheap, but sometimes fake, goods destined for resale in Africa. The leaks continue to reveal that even Africans with Chinese spouses are not necessarily guaranteed the right to remain in the country with their families.

Relatedly, Hong (2018) reports an incident in 2018 during the Chinese New Year break, a gala show on state television that showed an Asian woman in blackface and oversized butt pads and an African actor in a monkey suit. Despite the uproar that followed the incident, criticisms of the clip were censored. But this was not the first time such racist clips were aired on national television in China. In 2016, an advertisement for a laundry product showed a black man being shoved into a washing machine, only to emerge as a boyish-looking Asian man with a much lighter skin (Hong 2018).

In Ghana, the law restricts mining of small plots of 25 acres to Ghanaian nationals. However, despite this law, the Chinese continue to operate mining at that micro-level knowing for sure that such practices are illegal (Hong 2018). The most ridiculous bit of it all is that across streets in Accra, there are a lot of billboards stating the law restricting foreigners from small-scale mining—written in both English and Chinese, suggesting that Chinese may be sponsoring them.

Another point of contention concerns dumping cheap and low-quality goods in Africa from China. Recent research (see, for example, Hong 2018) has also suggested that Chinese presence has not brought to Africa significant skill developments, adequate technological transfer, or any measurable upgrade to its productivity levels. For instance, in Nigeria, the influx of low-priced Chinese textile goods has caused 80 percent of Nigerian companies in this industry to close (Esosio and Tse 2015). Lamentations concerning China’s disinterest in transferring skills and technology were summed up by one respondent interviewed for this study:

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\(^6\)Interview with International NGO member #7 (Dar es Salaam, November 2017).
What annoys me is that even the materials and human resources used to implement projects in Tanzania are imported from the funding country of particular project, although they are available within the host country and for a cheap price. This is one of the worst agreements that African countries engage in, and to my opinion is the exploitation of the highest level.7

Not surprising, then, that the majority of respondents recommended the local content requirement should be observed in all Chinese projects happening in Africa. Specifically, they opined that the Chinese government should use local experts in their investment activities to cultivate a sense of local ownership and skill transfer. On the matter of building local content, one interview respondent said, “There should be a protective policy and a well enforced law to make sure that Chinese companies in Africa employ African experts rather than importing experts from China.”8

These cries from Mother Africa seem to be well known in the highest echelons of Chinese leadership. Following much murmuring, the Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang started a four-country African tour in the process of acknowledging the “growing pains” in Sino-African cooperation in 2014 (Ndhlovu 2014). The gesture is yet to show any significant changes in the hegemonic nature of Chinese cooperation with Africa.

**Sino-African Cooperation and Balance of Trade**

One of the biggest concerns pertaining to Sino-African cooperation is China’s hegemony over trade with its African counterpart. There was a palpable feeling among respondents that the cooperation only favors China. This was well summed up by one respondent:

I would wish the cooperation to be of a “win-win” strategy so that both parties in the agreement should have equal benefits; bad enough that the ratified International treaties between Tanzania and China are signed under confidentiality, there is no publicity at all in their agreement.9

It should be noted that China currently stands as Africa’s largest trading partner (Songtian 2018). This happened as it overtook the United States and Europe, increasing trade from US$10 billion in 2000 to more

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7Interview with academic #4 (Morgoro, November 2017).
8Interview with civil servant #1 (Dodoma, January 2018).
9Interview with local NGO member #2 (Arusha, February 2018).
than US$120 billion in 2010 (Wharton University of Pennsylvania 2016). The main reason behind China’s vigorous trade expansion in Africa is its insatiable appetite for the raw materials it needs to grow its economy (Haroz 2011). Were (2013) claims that, despite popular opinion, some African countries actually have a trade surplus with China. At least ten countries (including Zambia, Congo Angola, Gabon, and Sudan) fall into this category and benefit from China’s activities in their countries (Were 2013). However, a closer look at these countries questions Were’s supposition of favorable trade surplus—a point elaborated later. Figure 2 sums up the hegemony of China’s trade over Africa.

Figure 2 shows that between 1992 and 2016, China generally recorded a more favorable balance of trade in Sino-African cooperation. This was interrupted by eleven years (2004–2014) of the swing going Africa’s way. But this swing can be misleading as most of that was a result of China’s increased appetite for natural resources (mainly extractives). For instance, at the peak of the swing in 2014, the balance favored Africa by US$12,507.3 million. A quick look at the data shows that 82.4 percent swing was caused by imports from seven natural resources–rich African
IS CHINA RECOLONIZING AFRICA?

countries. This corresponds to arguments that China is in Africa to plunder the continent of its natural resources (Schwab 2016; Taylor 1976).

Although it is true that some African nations had a trade surplus with China between 1992 and 2016, Africa, as a whole had not. By 2008, Africa had a US$10 billion trade deficit with China. This is particularly pertinent when one considers that Sino-African trade “represents close to 10 percent of the continent’s exports and imports” (Schwab 2016). Furthermore, China continues to import basic raw materials from Africa and not finished goods. According to Were (2013), approximately 70 percent of registered African exports to China consist of crude oil, and 15 percent are raw materials. The percentage shares of China’s main oil suppliers in 2003 included Angola (9 percent) and Sudan (7.7 percent), which explains the misleading swings in balance of trade in Sino-African cooperation (Hanekom 2017).

Sino-African Cooperation and FDIs

As alluded to previously, the majority of respondents interviewed for this study were concerned with the lack of effort from China to undertake some serious investments in Africa. According to one respondent, China has to improve the way it brings investments and transfers technologies to Africa. Chinese are ready to employ Africans on the field like marketing, public speakers, trading and other simple works but not on technical positions. They neither want Africa to have its own manufacturing base nor do they want African people to acquire their technologies.

Figure 3 clearly elaborates this notion that China is not keen to bring FDI to Africa. It does not matter which country or territory one compares with the continent, Africa remains at the very bottom in terms of receiving FDI from China. For instance, Chinese FDI was at its highest in Africa in 2016 when US$39.9 billion of Chinese FDI was spent in the continent (CARI 2018). This was less than half what the British Virgin Islands received (US$88 billion), almost one-third of what Cayman Islands received (US$104.2 billion), and constituted only 5 percent of what Hong Kong received (CARI 2018). Simply put, Chinese coopera-

10South Africa (39%), Angola (27.2%), Congo Brazzaville (4.8%), South Sudan (3.8%), Equatorial Guinea (2.8%), DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo; 2.5%), and Nigeria (2.3%) (China Africa Research Initiative 2018).

11Interview with academic #2 (Dar es Salaam, January 2018).
tion with Africa is not one that involves genuine FDI flows, but one that uses the continent as a source of raw materials and a dumping place for low-quality finished goods and services.

Figure 4 clarifies the argument. Disaggregating Chinese FDI to Africa in recent times (2013–2016) makes it easy to see that China is not particularly keen to pump real investments in the continent. The biggest FDI (approximately US$36 billion) goes to construction where we know that a lot of Chinese employees migrate to undertake these projects rather than building local capacities (Masiga 2018; Schwab 2016; Volodzko 2015; Were 2013). This is closely followed by mining (raw materials) at US$35 billion. In stark contrast, when it comes to investing in Information and Computer Technology—including transmission services, which are core ingredients of the fourth industrial revolution—China spends a meager US$6 billion in Africa.

To make matters worse, Chinese cooperation with Africa seems to cripple Africa’s manufacturing base. For instance, a Botswana politician, Motlhaleemang Moalosi, was quoted by Ndhlovu (2014) as claiming that Chinese bring more harm than good to local business as “they have killed local contractors by offering cheap prices for sub-standard work,” such as the bungled Morupule B power station project (Ndhlovu 2014).
Chinese officials were quick to point out that mistakes by a few contractors should not be generalized to the rest of the country (Ndhlovu 2014). This is a fair comment, but when similar events occur elsewhere, it is difficult to vindicate them. According to Ketlhalefile Motshegwa, the Secretary General of the powerful Botswana Land Boards, Local Authorities, and Health Workers Union, “there are so many projects that we could point to which shows shoddy workmanship by Chinese contractors in particular” (Ndhlovu 2014). He suggested that corruption may have a role to play in this, otherwise “how do you explain the fact that some of these contractors continue to get jobs with all this bad track record?” (Ndhlovu 2014).

**Sino-African Cooperation and Financial Intermediation: The Debt Trap**

Mischievous Chinese loans, dubbed as ‘soft loans’ by China, were the biggest point of contention in all the interviews. Respondents saw China using loans as a means to impose their hegemony on African countries. Others were concerned with the secrecy with which the countries taking these loans employ. Simply put, Chinese loans were clearly the scariest
Abel Kinyondo

part of Sino-African cooperation for respondents, regardless of cadres. Table 2 gives a feel of amounts of Chinese loans and where they go in Africa.

Table 2 reveals a very interesting pattern: Most Chinese loans are directed to countries with a large endowment of natural resources. In total, 76 percent of Chinese loans are directed to such countries.\textsuperscript{12} For example, 20 percent of the loans went to Angola, a country rich in natural resources, particularly oil.

It is also interesting to know where exactly these loans are going. Table 3 indicates that 72 percent of Chinese loans to Africa go to only two sectors: power and mining. Another mysterious 6 percent goes to an ‘unallocated’ category. This could be a source of concern as critics have already accused China of engaging in corrupt activities (Ndhlovu 2014). In a departure from traditional DPs, China is unconcerned with issues pertaining to environmental protection, budget, humanitarian projects, reconstruction, or disaster preparedness, as well as funding refugees. China literally ‘minds its own business.’

There is no doubt that the Chinese so-called ‘debt trap diplomacy’ has aided its hegemony over Africa and other needy countries across the world. They do so using the famous Angolan model in which natural resources are used as collateral for loans. This is how it works: Angola owes China approximately US$60 billion, having accumulated debts over the course of more than two decades (Olander, Van Staden, and Alves 2018). With an abundance of oil in Angola, the country should not have found repaying the debt difficult as it would simply sell oil in the global market and use some of the proceeds to service the Chinese loan. Unfortunately, Chinese debt trap diplomacy does not allow Angola to sell oil in the open market. Rather, the oil itself is used to repay the Chinese debt. This means that Angola is short of liquidity as their biggest earner is ‘trapped’ by China. So Angola goes back to Beijing to borrow even more, digging a bigger hole for itself in the process (Olander, Van Staden, and Alves 2018).

We also know that China holds 66 percent of the bilateral debt with Kenya, mostly thanks to the loan given to Kenya to construct the Nairobi to Mombasa Standard Railway Gauge (SGR) (Masiga 2018). While it is

\textsuperscript{12}Only Ethiopia is an exception to the rule here, and we know why. First, Ethiopia is a strategic leading country in the horn of Africa; second, it accommodates the headquarters of African Union, a strategic place to garner Africa’s support to China in the United Nations Assembly; and, finally, the leadership in Ethiopia gave China complete freedom to experiment with their African investment agenda unchallenged.
IS CHINA RECOLONIZING AFRICA?

Table 2.

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(continued)
Table 2. (continued)

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<td><strong>12,147</strong></td>
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well known that Kenyan officials siphoned billions from the Chinese loans (Moore 2018), the jury is still out over the possibility that China may have inflated the actual cost of the SGR project. The prospects of Kenya repaying the loan are dim. China has already offered an option of being given Mombasa Port in exchange for the loan, prompting political commentators like Masiga (2018) to suggest that Kenya is beginning to virtually become a Chinese colony.

A similar approach was used in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2008. Sicomines, a Chinese consortium, acquired mineral rights at Katanga in exchange for infrastructure investment (Volodzko 2015). China took advantage of the fact that traditional DPs are not interested in infrastructural development and offered to build electrical and water plants in exchange for the mine. In Djibouti, we find a similar story. By the end of 2016, China owned 82 percent of Djibouti’s
Table 3.  
Annual Chinese Loans to Africa, by Specific Sector (Millions of US$, Unadjusted).

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Abel Kinyondo

external debt (Chellaney 2017). There are fears that China may, in the end, take over Djibouti’s port as the country cannot afford to repay the debt.

Analogous concerns abound in Tanzania where China plans to build Bagamoyo Megaport, a US$10 billion investment (Chellaney 2017). While the processes stalled for some time when President Magufuli came to power, the government has since announced that the deal shall go on as originally agreed. If things proceeded according to plan, Bagamoyo is set to become the largest port in Africa. The fear is that, because the government already owes China billions of dollars from the construction of the Mtwara–Dar es Salaam gas pipeline, China may eventually resort to the Angolan model and take over Bagamoyo Port—or, indeed, the pipeline itself. In Zambia, there is a fear that China has literally taken over the economy (Chellaney 2017). It is reported to have taken over strategically important physical assets and businesses including the Zambian Broadcasting Corporation, which are reportedly collateralized in the event Zambia fails to pay its debts. As if the country is not in deep enough trouble, it increased its debt to China by 350 percent between 2015 and 2016 (Chellaney 2017).

Debt trap diplomacy has made China one of the biggest creditors in the region, accounting for 14 percent of sub-Saharan Africa’s total debt stock (Schneidman and Wegert 2018). In Kenya, for example, the volume of Chinese loans to the government has now become six times larger than that of France, the country’s second-largest and traditional creditor (Schneidman and Wegert 2018). The fear behind China’s debt trap diplomacy stems from empirical evidence from elsewhere around the world. For instance, after China pumped a lot of loans to Ecuador in 2009, it demanded—and was later repaid through—oil (Anoba 2018). The same happened in Venezuela, where China flooded the country with loans between 2007 and 2014 to the tune of US$63 billion. All was well when oil was averaging US$100 a barrel, but after oil prices slumped, Venezuela found itself in an impossible position to repay the debt (Anoba 2018).

The Sri Lankan case is perhaps the worst of all. For Chellaney (2017), the country used Chinese loans to build Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, which opened in 2013, and the Hambantota’s Magam-pura Mahinda Rajapaksa Port. Both installations have remained white elephants. The Chinese have done the same in Pakistan where they have built the multibillion-dollar Gwadar Port. While both Sri Lanka and Pak-
Pakistan are bleeding from Chinese loans, China has effectively confiscated the installations. They have reportedly docked their submarines in the Sri Lankan port twice and landed warships at Gwadar port security twice (Chellaney 2017).

The indication these cases show is that indebted countries are either forced to pay cash to China or hand over management of infrastructures such as ports to Chinese state-owned firms. When it is too risky financially, China has resorted to demanding majority ownership of infrastructure upfront. For instance, China clinched a deal in Nepal to build a dam in 2017. Given the financial risk Nepal holds, China, through the state-owned Three Gorges Corporation, has acquired a 75 percent stake in the dam (Chellaney 2017). In Cambodia, where loan repayment had to be rescheduled, China demanded to be granted additional projects in exchange. Consequently, while China ended up canceling a US$90 million debt that Cambodia owed, it used the opportunity to secure several new contracts, putting Cambodia in a worse situation (Chellaney 2017).

The point here is that China is not helping Africa in exchange for nothing. Chinese projects create access to Africa’s natural resources and local markets, business opportunities for Chinese companies, and employment for Chinese laborers. When Chinese officials emphasize that China also provides aid to countries that are not rich in natural resources, to defuse international criticisms, they often forget to mention that China may have its eyes on other things these countries can deliver, such as their support of Beijing’s “one China” policy, or China’s agenda at multilateral forums (Sun 2014).

China has also been using its aid strategically. There is a strong correlation between the amount of aid given and support for China’s foreign policy objectives. AidData calculates that for every 10 percent increase in voting support within the United Nations (UN), China increases its aid by an average 86 percent. This strategy is working. African countries have supported China in its foreign policy pursuits on numerous occasions (Manero 2017).

It should be noted that not every country in the world bows to Chinese pressure. From Pakistan and Tanzania to Hungary, projects under the OBOR are being canceled, renegotiated, or delayed due to disputes about costs or complaints that host countries receive too little from Chinese projects (Times of India 2018). In Tanzania, President Magufuli cancelled the Chinese SGR project and vehemently rejected
A Turkish company was granted tender to construct the Standard Railway Gauge (SGR), suggesting that China and Chinese companies may no longer be receiving preferential treatment and that they may find the Tanzanian environment more competitive than before.

In Pakistan, plans to build the Diamer-Bhasha Dam came to a standstill when the Chairman of Pakistan’s Water Authority concluded that the fact that China wanted an ownership stake in the dam was against Pakistan’s interests (Times of India 2018). Meanwhile, both Myanmar and Malaysia have pulled out of Chinese investments in recent times. This was once again because China wanted a stake in the infrastructure to be built in these countries (Soti 2008). Shamed by these new realities, President Xi Jinping went into defensive mode, declaring that while the OBORI originated in China, “it belonged to the world”—Malaysia being part of it (Soti 2008).

It should be noted that, as per the definition of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—of which China is not a member—the bulk of Chinese financing in Africa does not fall under the “aid” category. However, both Chinese and African governments have been loosely calling most of the concessional loans “aid.” Even though China gives little aid, it is because China knows it will get ample contracts as payback. Figure 5 illustrates this situation.

Figure 5 clearly shows how contract revenues for Chinese state-owned firms are far above the aid it provides to the continent. The amount of aid was increased slightly in 2014–2015 before dropping again corresponding to the slight fall of contract revenues in 2016. Chinese aid picked up in 2015 when China provided US$2.9 billion. At the same time, Chinese firms racked up contract revenues worth US$55 billion—which is equivalent to more than 18 times the aid spent in that year (CARI 2018). Generally speaking, China’s aid to Africa is negligible.

How Chinese Cooperation Compares with Traditional Donor Countries

Some of the evidence collected for this study permits an examination of whether Sino-African cooperation differs from the cooperation Africa has with traditional DPs such as the United States, European Union members, Scandinavian countries, and Japan. Interestingly, all respondents underlined the similarities between China and its developed
counterparts. To respondents, it was clear that China and traditional DPs aim at defending and promoting their national economic interest, they all seek to exploit Africa’s abundant natural resources and other raw materials, and all seek to use Africa as a ready-made market for their finished products.

However one looks at it, the exploitation of Africa’s resources and domination of its markets are the twin objectives of all DPs, including China. This view was reflected in a quote from one of the respondents who pointed to Nyerere’s caution on trusting outsiders: “Remember the quotation by Mwalimu Nyerere? Once he said we receive aids from outside countries, but we don’t have uncles in those countries.” That said, respondents were nevertheless able to identify some clear differences between China and traditional DPs. The first obvious one is the baggage that the latter carry for being former colonizers (Haroz 2011). A total of 35 percent of respondents claimed that cooperation between

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14 The Tanzanian anticolonial activist.
15 Interview with academic #7 (Dodoma, February 2018).
traditional DPs and Africa is still very much anchored on colonial relations that considered traditional DPs as superior partners. The Chinese are smart enough to take full advantage of this past by pointing out that their cooperation is purely based on ideological consensus rather than neocolonialist ideals. The discussions in this article point to evidence that belies this.

Another key difference concerns the kinds of loans and investments made between traditional DPs in Africa. While China focuses on financing hard infrastructural projects (it has now overtaken the World Bank [WB] in doing so in the continent); traditional DPs still concentrate on soft infrastructures such as establishing democracy and human rights (Condon 2012). Now, democracy and the likes are certainly important ingredients for securing sustainable development. However, hard infrastructures, such as roads, railroads, ports, and reliable power, are indispensable if Africa has to kick-start its development agenda. Regrettably, traditional DPs knowingly or unknowingly do not seem to grasp this. As a result, Africa sees China as a preferred partner.

The conditions made to secure financial support between the DPs are related here. It has been well documented beyond this study that China typically gives loans to Africa to secure its natural resources while largely guaranteeing nonintervention on domestic matters (see, for example, Enuka 2010). By contrast, traditional DPs usually provide financial support to Africa on the condition that countries promote democracy, transparency, and accountability as well as reduce corruption, among other things (Condon 2012). Unfortunately, such conditions are perceived to be patronizing and infringing of Africa’s sovereignty—once again, giving the upper hand to China as a preferred partner.

According to 33 percent of respondents, unlike China, traditional DPs are keen on promoting democracy, peacekeeping, providing humanitarian aid, and promoting issues of human development, good governance, and human rights. They also pay much attention to global issues like climate change, all of which seem not to matter much to China as priority issues (Haroz 2011). In trying to explain this difference, one respondent quipped by saying, “China cannot propagate democracy to Africa while they infringe democracy at home.” In addition, traditional DPs were accused by respondents for not having permanent friends. Interviewees felt that they only retain friendship as far as African countries continue to serve their interests. One government employee respondent paraphrased

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16 Interview with international NGO member #5 (Dar es Salaam, November 2017).
phrased a famous quote credited to Henry Kissinger, saying, “Western countries have the tendency of not having permanent friends and permanent enemies as the one of their major techniques in enforcing their foreign policy.” Traditional DPs have also used military assistance as a tool for international cooperation. Exchange and training programs are offered in the guise of preparedness for fighting terrorism. Yet many respondents (39) in Tanzania, particularly those from the government, deplored this mechanism as an excuse to spy on military capabilities as well creating a ready-made market for weapons manufactured in their countries.

Also, according to 50 percent of respondents, unlike China, traditional DPs have consistently made use of international organizations such as the WB and International Monetary Fund (IMF), including laws and treaties/contracts enacted to serve and protect their interests at the expense of developing countries like Tanzania. In such cases, when the signatory country happens to violate these instruments, it gets punished through travel bans, military invasion, and economic embargoes.

In the end, the efficacy of mechanisms used by China depends on negotiation capabilities, the so-called principle of mutual respect, and the superior bargaining power of state representatives in the agreements. A good example is seen in Ghana where negotiations with the WB to build a dam stalled for about seven years. When the Ghanaian government decided to engage China, it merely took two months for the deal to be settled. Project implementation started a month later (Wharton University of Pennsylvania 2016). What traditional DPs seem not to understand is that election cycles cannot wait for their formalities of social audits, environmental audits, and the like to take place (Wharton University of Pennsylvania 2016).

Chinese firms seem to also have a competitive edge over those from traditional DPs. Ironically, some respondents at the forefront of praising Chinese efficiency were from traditional DPs. One response was particularly telling,

Our firms simply can no longer compete with Chinese firms. They are a lot more economic than ours as they have way cheaper labor than ours at all levels. For instance, while a typical chief engineer from a Western firm would stay at a five-star hotel and demand several traveling allow-

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17Kissinger is credited for saying that “America has no permanent friends or enemies. Only interests”; see D’Souza (2015, 164).
Interview with diplomat from a Western country (Dar es Salaam, October 6, 2017).

ances back home throughout the project cycle, among many other allowances, a typical chief engineer of a Chinese firm who is paid a lot lower wages would reside in a shabby container at the building site and ensure that the work is done 24/7. How do you compete with that?18

Finally, unlike traditional DPs, China seems to be comfortable investing in highly politically risky areas like Sudan (Were 2013). China seems to have spotted a niche in Africa for hard infrastructure development—a gap left by traditional DPs who appear to be obsessed with building soft infrastructures. Of course, we now know that China’s so-called soft loans to Africa are, by and large, entrapments in which African countries are subjected to loans they can only repay through surrendering their strategic assets, like ports.

Special mention should be made of Scandinavian countries. The common view of most respondents (80 percent) was that these countries have a hybrid international cooperation mechanism that allows for the provision of aid and soft loans with moderate conditions while rarely interfering in domestic politics. One wonders whether the Scandinavian model is the best of them all.

How to Improve Sino-African Cooperation

As expected, all the respondents called for Sino-African cooperation to generate win-win outcomes. In other words, business agreement and other investment decisions should be taken with a view to secure mutual benefit between the two sides. The need for China to build local content in Africa was, time and again, emphasized by respondents across all categories. They argued that China should use local experts in their investment activities to cultivate a sense of local ownership and skill transfer. China should also work hard to debunk the general perception that the products made by its companies are of low quality, they said. However, it was recognized that local African regulatory authorities should work harder to ensure that the perceived counterfeit products do not find their way into African markets.

Concerns still linger that Sino-African cooperation is shrouded in too much secrecy (35 percent of respondents). Efforts to enhance transparency and accountability in all agreements entered into by China and Africa should be prioritized to enhance proper scrutiny. Moreover,

18Interview with diplomat from a Western country (Dar es Salaam, October 6, 2017).
while the principle of noninterference is still appealing all over Africa, China could do well to expand its involvement beyond the construction and extractive sectors. This should necessarily entail China’s emergent support of sociopolitical issues (e.g., humanitarian projects and disaster management) and promote social justice for the well-being of the continent.

Another recommendation is that Africa should work harder to protect its natural resources. To this end, governments should work to build the capacity of their employees in terms of negotiation skills to secure fair deals in the various engagements it has with China. Just like China has its formal framework of cooperation in FOCAC, Africa should also formulate its own agenda. As Crabtree (2018) rightly put it, “China knows what it wants from Africa but most African countries don’t have a strategy vis-a-vis China.” This situation has to change. And fast. The continent likewise needs to hold China accountable and ensure that financing is directed into those sectors that would be the most economically beneficial (Crabtree 2018). Africa cannot afford to keep permitting China to build stadiums, parliaments, and other luxurious buildings while its people are living in abject poverty. To this end, Moore (2018) rightly calls for the continent to come up with stricter project eligibility criteria that could lead to more competent project preparation and implementation as well as reducing project price inflation. This could not only put loans to better use, but also ensure that the projects undertaken are based on the quest for engineering sustainable development in Africa rather than being determined by election cycles. In the end, the hegemony that China exercises over Sino-African cooperation has to be stopped, one way or another.

Conclusion

This study sought to assess Sino-African cooperation with the view to understanding its nature and subsequently how it can be improved. A few benefits of that cooperation are quite salient. The two sides have worked toward some admirable outcomes when compared with some more traditional DPs, particularly when it comes to China’s willingness to invest in hard infrastructure, even in politically risky African countries. Nevertheless, I have shown that Sino-African cooperation is anything but a win-win economic relation. Despite the lingering rhetoric of comradeship between the two sides, China undoubtedly takes the lion’s share of benefits from the cooperation. The balance of trade is skewed toward China; there is very little Chinese FDI flowing to Africa.
(and when it does, China imports employees at the expense of locals). Moreover, debt trap diplomacy is crippling African economies, raising alarm over whether China is moving toward recolonizing the continent. And while Chinese aid is negligible, the amount of contracts revenues plus diplomatic support it receives from the continent makes one think that Africa deserves more from the cooperation.

The fact remains that there is no one country—and this includes China—that does not approach international cooperation without self-interest at heart. It follows that, if Sino-African cooperation is to be more meaningful, the continent should demand more transparency and broader citizen participation. China, just like any other DP, must be closely and thoroughly scrutinized through a combination of democratic institutions such as parliaments and CSOs as well as the media. Should there be any shoddy deal, Africa must stand up to China and reject the loans just as Myanmar, Malaysia, Pakistan, and to a lesser extent Tanzania have shown the way.

Africa also has to cut down on corruption. Those countries struggling with Chinese loans had similar struggles in the past when they took loans from the United States, IMF, and the WB. Anoba (2018) records that there is an annual loss of aid and loan funds to the tune of US$150 billion due to corruption by African leaders. With China opting to deal with African leaders in high secrecy, the existence of grand corruption permeating its loans is almost a certainty. Going forward, issues of developing local content, technological and skill transfers, building a critical mass of negotiators, improving the well-being of Africans, as well as Africa finding access to Chinese finished goods and services markets, must be thoroughly discussed. In the end though, Africa needs to work with the clear understanding that just as traditional DP aid, grants, and loans failed to transform its economy, China’s won’t either. Africa should get serious about engineering its own socioeconomic transformation to avoid being recolonized.

About the Author

Abel Kinyondo is a senior lecturer at the University of Dar es Salaam (DUCE) and a principal research fellow at Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA). Previously, he worked as a director of strategic research at REPOA and head of the Economics and Geography Department at the University of Dar es Salaam. He has also worked for the United Nations Development Program. He holds a PhD from Monash University (Australia), a distinction in Master of Arts (economics) degree from the University of Botswana, and a first-class economics degree from the University of Namibia. He has more than ten years of research experience, having published in internationally repu-
table journals such as the *Oxford Development Studies* and *Parliamentary Affairs*. He has led several teams of experts in formulating various socioeconomic policies, regulations, and codes of ethics in Tanzania and beyond. He currently investigates issues pertaining to tourism, gender, enterprise development, employment, industrialization, natural resources management, and governance.

**ORCID iD**

Abel Kinyondo https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4071-4799

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