

The Implications of China's Increased Involvement in Africa: An Economic, Political and Cultural Analysis

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Twenty years ago, the People's Republic of China was East Asia's largest oil exporter. Today, it is the world's second largest importer.¹ Beginning in 1993, China became a net importer of oil, a status that is not likely to change in the foreseeable future, with analysts positing that "oil will be the only primary fuel capable of fulfilling China's growing needs in both transportation and industry."² As China's economy surges forward, growing by double-digits the past several years, the nation's dependence on oil and, consequently, its demand for the energy resource has grown exponentially. With the country transitioning away from the use of coal, daily oil consumption doubled over the course of the last ten years.³ In the future, experts expect demand for the good to continue growing, predicting an increase of 130 percent by 2025.⁴ Such an increase comes on top of an already substantial demand for the good, one that is equal to 40 percent of the world's total.⁵

China needs oil in order to continue its phenomenal economic development. For the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the procurement of energy resources is particularly important given that "growth is the cornerstone of China's social stability."⁶ Limitations on energy could slow economic expansion, inspiring social unrest and posing a severe challenge to the CCP's leadership of the country. Thus, for the Party, the ability to continue obtaining a sufficient amount of oil to fuel development is a matter of serious importance. Such a dire need for oil has led the CCP to pursue a policy in which China imports the good from every available source.⁷ Among these sources is the continent of Africa, an area of the world rich in oil and mineral deposits but frequently ignored by many of the more developed countries.

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¹ David Zweig and Bi Jianhai. "China's Global Hunt for Energy." *Foreign Affairs* 84, 5 (Sept./Oct. 2005).

² Ian Taylor. "China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa." *International Affairs* 82, 5 (September 2006): 937-959.

³ *Ibid.*, 943.

⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration. "China Country Analysis Brief," available at www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/china.html, accessed April 20, 2007.

⁵ David Shambaugh. Lecture for PSC 171: Politics and Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China. April 25, 2007.

⁶ Zweig and Jianhai, *op.cit*

⁷ Howard W. French. "China in Africa: All Trade, With No Political Baggage." *New York Times*. August 8, 2004, final edition.

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In many ways, China's turn to Africa has been one inspired by necessity. "As a late entrant into the global oil industry, Africa represents the last major source of oil reserves that are not managed by Western energy companies."⁸ Although the Middle East still provides China with a substantial portion of its oil, Western firms dominate the region, heightening competition and significantly increasing the price of the good.⁹ As a result, China has diverted much of its attention to obtaining oil from the world's poorest continent, a move that has proven successful in light of the fact that "[t]he Gulf of Guinea, along the Western African coast, is among the fastest-growing areas of oil and gas development in the world."¹⁰

Driven by its need for energy, China's increased economic engagements with Africa has led to a significant evolution in bilateral political, foreign aid, and cultural exchanges. This paper seeks to examine the dynamics of the rapidly developing Sino-African relationship, reviewing the history of their interactions before analyzing each of the aforementioned facets of the connection and considering international criticism of Chinese involvement with the continent. Ultimately, it will fully explicate the benefits of the relationship for the Chinese as well as consider the implications of China's increased engagements with Africa on the continent's indigenous populace.

The History of Sino-African Relations

While the Sino-African relationship has grown increasingly dynamic in recent years, contact between the two is not a new phenomenon. During the fifteenth century, the Ming Dynasty sponsored exploratory voyages "intended as demonstrations of the greatness of Chinese civilization."¹¹ A few of these navigators were reported to have touched down on Africa's eastern coast, the first known contact between the two civilizations.¹² Far from beginning an age of steady trade and interaction, however, the landing of these explorers was an anomaly in a period of relative disconnect between China and Africa. Rather, the normalization of relations between the two would not occur until the founding of the PRC and the advent of the Cold War.

In his book, *China's African Policy*, as well as within the pages of several journal articles, scholar George T. Yu elucidated China's Cold War approach to Africa.¹³ From 1949 through the late 1980s, China, Yu notes, saw Africa as "a stage in the world's unfolding

⁸ Hany Besada. "China in Africa a Reliable Friend?" *Taipei Times*. March 25, 2007, final edition.

⁹ Taylor, *op cit*, 942.

¹⁰ Peter Lewis. "China in Africa." *The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies' SAISPHERE* (2006): 40-43.

¹¹ Gerald Segal. "China and Africa." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 519 (January 1992): 115-126.

¹² Lewis, *op cit*, 40.

¹³ George T. Yu. *China's African Policy: A Study of Tanzania*. New York: Praeger Press, 1975.

revolutionary struggle against imperialism.”¹⁴ At first, in the mid 1950s to early 1960s, the continent was considered an arena for Sino-American competition. Later, following the Sino-Soviet split, it would become a battleground for the Communist world's two goliaths.¹⁵ Throughout this period of time, China's primary goal in the region was to increase Third World solidarity by exporting its model of national revolution and economic development to the African nations. Once much of Africa conformed to the Chinese mold, the PRC believed that a “third camp” in the Cold War would naturally arise, featuring developing nations who had struggled to assert their sovereignty and successfully modernize under the auspices of the liberal Western and “revisionist” Soviet models.¹⁶ Chinese leaders pursued this goal by offering advisors as well as \$2 billion in foreign assistance to African liberation movements between 1954 and 1974.¹⁷ The 1970s Sino-American rapprochement, however, coupled with China's drive to utilize developed countries in the modernization of its own economy quickly led to the marginalization of Africa in Chinese foreign policy.¹⁸ By the end of the Cold War, Sino-African relations were of little significance, leading some scholars to assert that “[i]t is hard to make a case that Africa matters very much to China.”¹⁹

The recent revival of relations between China and Africa has come as the result of China's profound economic development and consequent need for energy resources.²⁰ Unlike past interactions between the two, which were driven by ideology, the modern Sino-African relationship is inspired by economic considerations. Beginning with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) at the turn of the millennium, Chinese trade and investment in Africa skyrocketed, increasing economic interdependence and paving the way for further Sino-African political, foreign aid, and cultural exchanges.

The Sino-African Economic Relationship

Economic exchanges in the form of trade and investment have provided the impetus for the cultivation of strong ties between China and Africa. Although such economic exchanges constitute only two percent of China's aggregate trade, it has grown exponentially in recent years.²¹ In 1999, prior to the establishment of the FOCAC, bilateral trade between

¹⁴ George T. Yu. “China's Role in Africa.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 432 (July 1977): 96-109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 100.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 101.

¹⁸ Ian Taylor. “China's Foreign Policy Towards Africa in the 1990s.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, 3 (September 1998): 443-460.

¹⁹ Segal, *op cit.* 115.

²⁰ Drew Thompson. “Economic Growth and Soft Power: China's Africa Strategy.” *China Brief* 4, 24 (December 7, 2004).

²¹ Ernest J. Wilson III. “China's Influence in Africa: Implications for U.S. Policy.” Paper presented before the U.S. House of Representatives Sub-Committee on Africa, Human Rights and International Operations,

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the two regions totaled \$2 billion.²² Today, seven years after the creation of FOCAC, economic exchanges between the two total more than \$40 billion a year.²³ Such a tremendous increase places Chinese trade with Africa as second only to the Middle East in terms of its growth rate.²⁴ In the future, bilateral economic exchanges are expected to continue expanding, with senior economists at the Chinese Ministry of Commerce predicting that Sino-African trade will top \$100 billion in value by the end of the decade.²⁵

The fact that China and Africa “have complementary economic and commercial needs” serves as the primary reason for such rapid growth in bilateral trade.²⁶ Africa is capital short, has a weak manufacturing base, is highly import dependent, desperately needs basic infrastructure, and exports a lot of petroleum. China, meanwhile, has ample investment capital, a huge manufacturing export base, is willing to build infrastructure, and needs to import petroleum.²⁷ The African countries provide attractive markets for Chinese producers who have an abundance of manufactures, especially low-cost consumer goods, machinery and armaments.²⁸ Such an attraction has led 700 Chinese state owned enterprises to begin operating on the continent. Opportunities to invest in Africa have also enticed Chinese producers, leading them to commit over \$1.2 billion to African capital and infrastructure.²⁹ Such investment has, in part, been inspired by China's Commerce Ministry and National Development and Reform Commission, which published a list of African countries and resources in which investment is eligible for state subsidies.³⁰

While Sino-African trade is bilateral in its nature, with goods flowing both to and from the two partners, African exports to China are far more homogeneous than the diverse array of goods imported by the continent. Over 90 percent of Africa's exports to China are natural resources, the preponderance being energy resources.³¹ This has led to a situation in which Beijing's closest connections in Africa are with oil-producing states, the top five being Angola, South Africa, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Equatorial Guinea.³² Such a pattern of trade, copious amounts of low-cost manufactures and investment in exchange for oil and other natural resources, has served China well, providing the economy

Washington, D.C., July 28, 2005.

²² Taylor, “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa,” 937.

²³ Zweig and Jianhai, *op cit.* Taylor, “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa,” 937.

“Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zfit/eng/zyzl/hywj/t157833.htm>, accessed April 21, 2007.

²⁴ Joseph Kahn. “China Courts Africa, Angling for Strategic Gains.” *New York Times*. November 3, 2006, final edition.

²⁵ Taylor, “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa,” 937

²⁶ Wilson, “China's Influence in Africa.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Lewis, *op cit.* 41.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 42.

³⁰ Zweig and Jianhai, *op cit.*

³¹ Lewis, *op cit.* 43.

³² Taylor, “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa,” 938-939.

with both the energy it needs to continue growing and a more diverse marketplace in which Chinese manufactured goods can be sold. As a result, both the volume of economic exchanges and the level of economic interdependence between China and Africa has increased, with 30 percent of China's external oil dependence imported from Africa and numerous African nations now turning to China for many of their basic needs.³³ Such a dynamic economic relationship has led to the evolution of many other components of the Sino-African connection, among them an increase in political interactions. These interactions, coming in the form of state visits, forums, and continuous dialogue, have driven China and Africa ever closer, increasing their mutual dependence, paving the way for a smooth future of growth in trade, and adding political capital to China's arsenal of tools for use in international diplomacy.

The Sino-African Diplomatic Relationship

Booming trade between China and Africa as well as the establishment of organizations such as FOCAC has opened the doors for increased bilateral political interactions. Beyond simply paving the way for continued economic transactions between the two, higher frequencies of diplomatic exchange has increased solidarity between China and Africa, offering China a significant amount of political capital as it attempts to expand its influence in the international political arena.

Thus far, FOCAC has convened three times. The inaugural meeting was held in the year 2000 in Beijing, with the 2003 session held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the most recent forum held in November 2006 in the Chinese capital.³⁴ In addition to bringing together the leaders of China and the African nations, these meetings provided an opportunity for high-level officials to plan future summits and exchanges. At the 2006 forum, political leaders from 48 of the 53 African countries were in attendance, including 40 heads of state.³⁵ Through discussions and deliberations they produced two major communiqués – “The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009)” and “The Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.” Mixed in with the foreign aid and cultural exchange promises of the communiqués, the two sides made several political commitments. Among them lies a vow to “increase high-level visits, conduct strategic dialogues, enhance mutual political trust and promote enduring friendship.”³⁶ China seems to

³³ Gill, Bates, Chin-hao Huang and J. Stephen Morrison. *China's Expanding Role in Africa: Implications for the United States*. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007.

Lewis, *op cit* 42.

³⁴ Gates, Huang and Morrison, *op cit*. 9.

³⁵ Kahn, *op cit*.

³⁶ “Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation,” available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t280370.htm>, accessed on April 20, 2007.

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have taken the lead in fulfilling this promise, having “established the diplomatic precedent of beginning each new year with a major official visit to Africa.”³⁷ In 2004, President Hu Jintao and several other top Chinese diplomats visited the continent, with similar visits made by former Vice Premier Huang Ju in 2005, Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao in 2006, and Hu as well as Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing in 2007.³⁸ These visits have given the two sides the opportunity to address a number of issues, ranging from trade to development assistance. In addition, they have strengthened the Sino-African connection, furthering China's efforts to create a multipolar world that offsets American primacy.³⁹

Referring to itself as “the largest developing country in the world,” China markets itself to the African nations as an alternative, non-Western model of governance and development.⁴⁰ Thus far, Beijing seems to have been successful in this presentation of itself as “[i]n general, African states view China as one of their own – a Third World country.”⁴¹ Such solidarity has provided significant support to China in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, helping block resolutions condemning Chinese human rights abuses.⁴² In addition, it has aided China in obtaining the rights to host major world events such as the 2008 Olympics and the 2010 World Expo.⁴³ With political ties between the two sides only growing stronger, the substantial African voting block is expected to continue backing China in many of its political and economic endeavors.⁴⁴

Kick-started by a surge in bilateral trade, political engagements between China and Africa have increased in both frequency and importance. Such a flourishing diplomatic relationship all but guarantees continued growth in trade and provides China with a continent full of strategic partners to be utilized in multilateral diplomacy. As China continues to ascend toward international political superpowerdom, these partnerships will prove integral in any disputes that may arise with the West. One implication of the increased frequency in Sino-African political interactions has been a rapid rise in the amount of Chinese development assistance granted to Africa. This assistance reaffirms the bonds of the Sino-African

“Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009),” available at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zxxx/t280369.htm>, accessed on April 19, 2007.

³⁷ Gates, Huang and Morrison, *op cit.* 8.

³⁸ French, *op cit.* “China Focus: High-Level Visits Increase Warmth of China-Africa Relations.” *People's Daily*. November 11, 2005, final edition. Available at http://english.people.com.cn/200511/11/eng20051111_220446.html, accessed on April 21, 2007. “Chinese FM Starts Tour Highlighting Beijing Interest in Africa.” *Agence France Press*. December 31, 2006. Available at <http://www.wnc.dialog.com>, accessed on April 21, 2007.

³⁹ Lewis, *op cit.* 41.

⁴⁰ China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “China's African Policy.” Available at http://english.people.com.cn/200601/12/eng20060112_234894.html, accessed on April 20, 2007.

⁴¹ Wilson, *op cit.*

⁴² Chris Alden. “China in Africa.” *Survival* 47, 3 (Autumn 2005): 147-164.

⁴³ Pliny Han. “China-Africa Co-op Fruitful Over the Past 50 Years.” *Xinhua*, available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-01/30/content_5673943.htm, accessed on April 22, 2007.

⁴⁴ Lewis, *op cit.* 41.

relationship, enhancing China's ability to employ soft power resources in its international political endeavors.

Chinese Foreign Aid to Africa

The advent of more frequent meetings between Chinese and African leaders has led to large increases in Chinese assistance to Africa's poorer nations. While Beijing attributes such increases in aid to China's effort to implement the concept of a "harmonious world," it does not hurt that development assistance to Africa both greases the wheels of trade and earns China "significant political capital among African countries, ensuring their support in the U.N. and other multilateral forums."⁴⁵

Both FOCAC and the many high-level exchanges between China and Africa have led to several different forms of development assistance. At the 2003 FOCAC, China announced debt forgiveness to 31 of Africa's heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and least developed countries (LDC) totaling roughly \$1.3 billion.⁴⁶ Not to be outdone by their own past actions, China, in the Beijing Action Plan that came out of the November 2006 FOCAC, promised to double development assistance to Africa by 2009 as well as cancel numerous government free interest loans granted to HIPC and LDC. In addition to financial assistance, the latest Beijing Action Plan also proclaimed China's intent to build valuable infrastructure in Africa, including 10 hospitals and 30 anti-malarial clinics.⁴⁷ All of this comes on top of the multitude of schools, hospitals, dams, government offices and stadiums already being constructed by China throughout the continent.⁴⁸ African excursions by Chinese leaders and diplomats have also yielded new packages of assistance. Visiting eight countries in 10 days in January and February 2007, President Hu Jintao "left behind a multibillion dollar trail of forgiven debts [and] cheap new loans."⁴⁹ Whether the aid emanated from forums or state-to-state summitry, it has been increasing in recent years, helping African nations in dire need of assistance and providing China with the support of its leaders as Beijing pursues new trade opportunities and political ties with the continent.

It is important to note that while China's development assistance is aiding many African nations, it also benefits the Chinese. As is the case with every component of China's engagement with Africa, economic considerations underwrite the granting of foreign aid.

⁴⁵ "Yearender: Xinhua Top 10 World News Events in 2006." *Xinhua*. December 29, 2006. Available at <http://www.wnc.dialog.com>, accessed on April 21, 2007.

⁴⁶ Alden, *op cit.* 151.

⁴⁷ "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009)."

⁴⁸ Gao Ying. "Minister: African People Don't Welcome Colonists." *Xinhua*. March 12, 2007. Available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2007-03/12/content_5834983.htm. Accessed on April 19, 2007.

⁴⁹ Michael Wines. "China's Influence in Africa Arouses Some Resistance." *New York Times*. February 10, 2007, final edition.

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Thus, the Chinese have become “adept at combining ‘foreign aid’ packages with commercial and oil deals.”⁵⁰ Other considerations at work in China’s decision to provide Africa with development assistance are political in nature. By supporting the continent financially, China gains valuable political capital for use on the floor of the United Nations or in other international institutions where China may need help in implementing its policies. Ultimately, aid is aid and Africa is receiving over half of all development assistance granted by China.⁵¹ Such support, however, is not entirely devoid of economic and political benefit to the Chinese.

Sino-African Cultural Exchanges

As is the case with foreign aid, a combination of economic and political considerations have increased the frequency of cultural exchanges between China and Africa. Most of these exchanges are geared at providing Africa with the resources needed for sustainable development as well as bolstering ties between the two sides in order to ensure future success and solidarity in the realms of trade and international diplomacy.

Through the end of 2005, China had signed 65 cultural agreements with African nations and implemented 151 plans of cultural exchange.⁵² This volume of exchange will only increase following the November 2007 FOCAC as the two sides have promised to “[i]ncrease dialogue between different cultures, promote people-to-people exchanges and interaction, particularly those between the young people, and boost exchanges and cooperation in such areas as culture, science and technology, education, sports, the environment, tourism and women affairs.”⁵³ As indicated in the FOCAC vow, Sino-African cultural exchanges come in many forms. Education and tourism, however, are the primary facilitators of such interactions.

In the past few years, China has established Confucian institutes at universities in Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa, with plans to open five more in the near future. Here, young African men and women can study Chinese language and culture, an endeavor currently entertained by over 8,000 students.⁵⁴ For those wishing further immersion in Chinese culture and society, there are 2,000 scholarships available for study at a university in China, with the promise of an increase to 4,000 within the next three years.⁵⁵ Beyond simply offering educational opportunities to Africa’s youth, China also provides training for many African adults, regularly hosting aspiring diplomats for all expenses paid stays at Beijing’s

⁵⁰ Wilson, *op cit.*

⁵¹ Lewis, *op cit.* 42.

⁵² Pliny, *op cit.*

⁵³ “Declaration of the Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.”, *op cit.*

⁵⁴ Gill, Huang and Morrison, *op.cit.*

⁵⁵ “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2007-2009).”

Foreign Affairs University and promising to train 15,000 professionals in a diverse array of fields between now and 2009.⁵⁶ Cultural exchanges between China and Africa also benefit Chinese nationals. For Chinese youths wishing to be immersed in African culture there are 300 spots in the newly announced Chinese Young Volunteers Serving Africa Program. While volunteering abroad, these young men and women will have the opportunity to experience the ideologies and way of life of an African nation and, at the same time, share some of their own culture and ideals with their host.⁵⁷ For adults, Africa can represent a land of opportunity. As Chinese companies continue to expand throughout the region, opportunities for Chinese citizens to work and receive training there have grown. Thus far, upwards of 80,000 people have taken advantage of such opportunities, immigrating to the continent.⁵⁸

Tourism has also become a major source of Sino-African cultural exchange. As the Chinese economy continues to grow and the nation's citizens increasingly reap the rewards of its development, more people are choosing to travel, both domestically and internationally. With over two dozen African countries officially designated as destinations for Chinese tourists, 110,000 Chinese nationals visited Africa in 2005, double the number that traveled to the continent in 2004.⁵⁹ Such tourist trips, in fact, have become so popular among the Chinese that it has inspired China's Southern Airlines to offer its first regular flight between China and Africa.⁶⁰

Adding another dimension to the ever-evolving Sino-African relationship, cultural exchanges further familiarize the two sides with one another, signifying both mutual goodwill and a shared desire for increased engagement in the future. However, while both China and Africa seem to be pleased with the development of their relationship, not all are happy about China's increased engagement with the continent. Rather, some international spectators – nations, non-governmental organizations and scholars alike – have decried increased Chinese involvement in the region, claiming that it represents a new form of colonialism in Africa and has undermined Western efforts to promote human rights.

⁵⁶ Howard W. French. "China Wages Classroom Struggle to Win Friends in Africa." *New York Times*. November 20, 2005, final edition. "Forum on China-Africa Cooperation op cit.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kahn, op cit.

⁵⁹ Gill, Huang and Morrison, op cit. 9.

⁶⁰ "China's First Regular Flight to Africa Arrives in Lagos." *Xinhua*. December 31, 2006. Available at <http://www.wnc.dialog.com>, accessed on April 21, 2007.

Chinese Colonialism and Human Rights Abuses – Criticism of the Sino-African Friendship

As the Sino-African strategic partnership continues to strengthen, many individuals, nations, and international organizations have questioned the utility of China's increased engagement with the continent. One concern is that China's heightened involvement signifies the advent of a new age of colonialism in Africa. This concern stems primarily from the belief that China is implementing a mercantilist system in the region – extracting raw goods and resources from Africa, using them in industrial production, then selling finished products back to the impoverished nations at a premium.⁶¹ Fairly recent in origin, such concerns have yet to be legitimated and do not receive a substantial amount of attention from actors outside of Africa. Instead, the incidence of the focus has been on the impact that Chinese aid, devoid of political conditionalities, has had on Western efforts to protect human rights in some of the more volatile African nations. In its quest to gain access to oil, China has partnered up with some of Africa's more unsavory regimes, among them the leadership in Sudan and Zimbabwe, inspiring questions as to whether or not Chinese increased engagement in the region is beneficial to Africa's indigenous populace.

Holding that “[t]he Western approach of imposing its values and political system on other countries is not acceptable to China,” Beijing has consistently stated that human rights abuses and governmental malfeasance in countries such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Equatorial Guinea are domestic affairs and should not be taken into consideration when conducting foreign policy.⁶² The most conspicuous instance of China ignoring such “domestic affairs” in order to continue developing bilateral relations is in its interactions with Sudan, the home of an ongoing genocide. Currently, Sudan provides China with six percent of its oil imports, an amount that is likely to increase dramatically when the new fields in the Melut basin go into production.⁶³ While the rest of the world shies away from Sudan for fear of being charged with supporting its blatant violations of human rights, China has increased its investment in the country, taking in 80 percent of its exported oil.⁶⁴ In exchange for its oil, Sudan has received several significant forms of assistance.

As Sudan's single largest financial supporter, China has provided the embroiled nation with numerous forms of monetary aid, including a \$13 million interest free loan to build a new presidential palace.⁶⁵ Beyond grants and loans, China has also provided Sudan with a wealth of arms and munitions. Now Sudan's single largest supplier of defense-oriented products, China has sold fighter jets, small arms, military trucks, helicopters, ammunition, and

⁶¹ Kahn, *op cit.*

⁶² Kahn, *Ibid.* Alden, *op cit.* 155.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 148.

⁶⁴ Danby, Michael. “China's Shameful Role in Darfur.” *Taipei Times*. April 6, 2007, final edition.

⁶⁵ Taylor, *op cit.* 949.
Wines, *op cit.*

anti-personnel mines “that have turned up in Khartoum’s campaign against the Southern Sudanese.”⁶⁶ Arguably, however, the most important form of assistance China has provided Sudan is diplomatic. Wielding a veto in the U.N. Security Council, China has consistently headed off international calls for the installation of a peacekeeping force in Darfur, only recently changing its stance as external pressure mounted and Sudan’s president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, approved international assistance.⁶⁷

Sudan is not the only instance of China undermining international efforts to protect human rights. While Chinese “no strings attached” aid packages to Angola and Equatorial Guinea disrupted World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) attempts to inspire governmental reform there, the Sino-Zimbabwean friendship has led dictator Robert Mugabe to openly boast that his connection with China allows him to ignore Western pressure on him to protect human rights and ensure sound governance.⁶⁸ By offering these regimes with the resources they need in order to continue operating effectively, China severely hampers international efforts to curb poor governance and prevent mass human rights abuses in Africa. With their incentives-based reform system undercut by Chinese aid packages, organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF are left without their primary tool for inspiring change. As a result, the African people are forced to deal with corrupt leaders and the marginalization of human rights.

There is no doubt that China’s relationship with some of Africa’s more unsavory regimes has inhibited the international community from protecting human dignity and inspiring reform within the countries these regimes lead. Further, the newly emerging charge that China’s foreign policy toward Africa has taken on some of the characteristics of mercantilism seems to correspond with the current system, one in which China procures energy from the continent in order to fuel its own economy, produces manufactures, then ships them back to Africa for sale. In light of these issues, China has come under fire in the realm of international politics. Does, however, China deserve such criticism? In a cost-benefit analysis, do the costs of China’s increased involvement in Africa outweigh the benefits enjoyed by the African people? These are the questions that ultimately surface in an analysis of the evolving Sino-African relationship. These are the questions that should be answered in order to pass judgment on Chinese engagement with the continent.

⁶⁶ Alden, *op cit.* 152.

⁶⁷ Taylor, *op cit.*

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Ibid.* 947. Lewis, *op cit.* 43.

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With its economy burgeoning and continued growth a cornerstone of social stability, China has turned to Africa to fulfill its increasing energy needs. Although the Sino-African relationship is one that has its origins in economic considerations, it has quickly become far more dynamic, featuring political, foreign aid, and cultural exchange components. Recent plans for high-level personnel and technological exchanges between Chinese and African militaries have suggested that China may be adding an important new facet to the relationship – security.⁶⁹ Today, China's interests in the continent transcend simply a need for energy. Rather, Africa has become the test grounds for China's rise to international political prominence. Through economic and diplomatic relations as well as provisions for foreign aid and cultural exchanges, the PRC has been steadily building up its soft power resources in the region, attempting to assert itself as a responsible global stakeholder.

Despite its efforts, however, China's increased involvement in Africa has been met with both skepticism and criticism by the international community. Pointing to Chinese financial and diplomatic support of human rights violators and corrupt authoritarian regimes such as those in Sudan and Zimbabwe, critics correctly identify China as a significant force inhibiting Western governments and organizations from being able to ensure peace and stability in Africa. Nevertheless, Chinese engagement with the African nations certainly yields its benefits, especially “in the sense that it is providing sorely needed investment that was not being offered by others.”⁷⁰ Thus, the question being asked by any and all who analyze the evolving Sino-African relationship is whether or not China's increased involvement in Africa is, in aggregate, of benefit or detriment to the continent's citizens.

The answer is far from simple. While Chinese policies are improving lives in some parts of Africa, they are destroying lives in others. In light of this complex situation, scholars and policy-makers examining the Sino-African relationship have concluded that “the net benefits are not clear.”⁷¹ Perhaps, then, it is time to change the nature of the question being asked. Regardless of whether or not Chinese involvement in Africa is beneficial to the continent's constituents, it is not likely to abate any time soon. Thus, rather than weighing the positive and negative aspects of the Sino-African relationship in an attempt to pass judgment on Chinese engagement with the region, the international community must now accept the realities of China's presence there and shift its focus to the question of how, given Chinese involvement, optimal African peace and stability can be ensured.

⁶⁹ China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “China's African Policy.” *op cit*.

⁷⁰ Taylor, “China's Oil Diplomacy in Africa,” 951.

⁷¹ Lewis, *op cit*. 42.