1. The New Global Order

Global capitalism fosters a system in which the North benefits disproportionately from resource exploitation of the South, and the South becomes increasingly dependent upon that exploitation. According to dependency theorists, this relationship makes capitalism directly related to geography, in that both *relative location* (at least seemingly) and the *physical characteristics* of a territory determine a nation’s or region’s role and status in the global economy.[[1]](#footnote-1) This was especially true during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Krugman’s (1991) idea of economic cores and peripheries helps to demonstrate how “small initial differences in endowments between two locations result in radically different development outcomes.”[[2]](#footnote-2) His theory can be coupled with Pomerantz’s suggestion that “Western Europe became rich thanks to the increasing returns that set in once the British discovered coal and subsequently used their initial advantages to extract wealth from the rest of the world through colonialism.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Together they explain the driving force behind today’s post-colonial economic divisions. Proponents of the resource cure, which only deepens the division between regions and/or countries, “suggest that oil wealth produces poor developmental and political outcomes,” implying that “countries will worsen developmental outcomes by relying on their comparative advantage and engaging in trade.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Indeed, this relationship has flourished during the colonial era, and still today it flourishes in a less explicit form (although that is arguable). Replacing colonialism, globalization has been called the new Western imperialism, a complaint often made by nations on the African continent. Because of this notion of twenty-first century imperialism, Africans tend to to have a fairly negative perception of the United States – a country second to China as Africa’s biggest trading partner.[[5]](#footnote-5) China, on the other hand, has been welcomed with mostly open arms into economic relations with Africa.[[6]](#footnote-6) For centuries, the Chinese have been economically active in Africa, but globalization’s increasing potency in economic culture has pushed China far beyond its borders: China’s investments in, and trade with, Africa have increased exponentially within the past decade. This recent activity notably contradicts the above theories’ implication that the post-colonial core-periphery model is static. That is clearly not the reality. Beyond the post-colonial era these theories have lost predictive abilities. The global economy is changing: historically lesser powers are coming to the fore, weaker nations are forming voting blocs, and economic coalitions are giving the U.S. a literal run for its money.

 This new economic order demands that we address the new relations that are defying the typical core-periphery model and what ramifications they have for the core countries dependent on that model for their power. China is the new up-and-coming economic world power. In its rise, it has recruited new players to its team – namely, Africa. China’s relationship with Africa represents a “south-south[[7]](#footnote-7) dialectic relation, which is taking place in an emerging new global economic configuration marked by a technology gap.”[[8]](#footnote-8) The formidable link formed between China and Africa has sparked much debate among all international players – specifically, in the West. This is simply because economic power translates into political power, especially in a world so interconnected by global economic and political institutions, such as the IMF, World Bank and the United Nations. This paper shall analyze the various geopolitical and economic perspectives of those affected by the Africa-China relationship – those Western nations, African nations and the Chinese – as they are revealed in their respective media.

I claim that the negative perceptions Westerners, especially the U.S., have about Sino-African relations are due to the fear that these relations will contribute to China’s rise and undermine U.S. hegemony in Africa and beyond. Indeed, China is intent on developing its global economic power; but it goes beyond that: China “does not fit the theoretically constructed pattern of either a core or a periphery nation,”[[9]](#footnote-9) and, because of that, China is in a position to create a new geo-economic order, different from the North-South imbalance. I will also demonstrate that Chinese perceptions of Sino-African ties paint a rosy picture of a relationship that extremely complicated. Finally, African opinions will reveal that Americans are overly negative, and the Chinese are overly positive about the effect China has on Africa. By comparing Western, Chinese and African perceptions as revealed in their respective media, I will show why African perceptions of China’s involvement in its economies are mixed. In conclusion, I will assess whether China is a healthy partner for Africa.

*2.1 The Eagle fears the Dragon*

 It is not difficult to tell that the U.S. is not yet ready to give up its hegemony over the world. Two other economic powers, however, are vying for the position: the European Union and China. The EU’s ascension to power is not a primary concern for the U.S.; however, China’s is. Superpowerdom is morphing into a multi-polar and multilateral structure, in which new nations are rising and other nations are banding together to increase their weight in global affairs. China has indeed been expanding its reach across the world to other Global South nations. “China has been able to enter political, military and commercial deals with countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and the countries and observers in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).”[[10]](#footnote-10) For the purposes of this paper, though, the most important alliance made is that established between China and Africa.

 Africa has been the historical garden of resources for all nations, and this is reflected in those nations’ aggressive efforts to form direct links with the continent. The U.S. established agreements through the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and the EU established the Development of Partnership for Peace and Security and created a “European Union Strategy for Africa.”[[11]](#footnote-11) The continent has historically been a place of contention, as evident in the colonial and post-colonial eras. To add to tension, the emergence of China “as a force in Africa complicated the tussle between the EU and the USA over the ‘who controls Africa’” question.[[12]](#footnote-12) In the past decade, China has made clear strides in ensuring a strong and lasting relationship with Africa. In 2006, Beijing sealed the deal, so to speak, with Africa in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). In this summit, China “announced eight steps to strengthen its relationship with Africa” and three steps “related to the issue of development assistance.”[[13]](#footnote-13) This move occurred at a time when “massive loss of lives in Iraq and the destruction wrought by US military occupation exposed the new reality of the diminution of the USA’s prestige and credibility.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Campbell (2008) notes that FOCAC revealed Chinese desires to create a link with Africa based on “’increasing common interests and … a growing mutual need.’” European leaders understood this acknowledgment to be of historic significance: it meant a new power vying for resources. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “’We Europeans should not leave the continent of Africa to the People’s Republic of China … We must take a stand in Africa.’”[[15]](#footnote-15) Her statement clearly shows that China is a threat and that its presence in Africa is a manifestation of that threat.

But China’s presence in Africa proved to be different from that of other powers’. Friedman (2008) writes, “Whereas all others have failed in uprooting the entrenched poverty of sub-Saharan Africa, … if China could succeed there could be no doubt but that China had become an economic superpower.”[[16]](#footnote-16) As China grows, it invests more and more into Africa. The volume of Chinese trade with Africa “has risen from US$81.7 million in 1979 … to US$39.75 billion in 2005.”[[17]](#footnote-17) China’s GDP grew by one third between 2004 and 2006; while in contrast, “US debt had risen to over $9.5 trillion.”[[18]](#footnote-18) China’s economic growth is only supplemented by its efforts to create a more multilateral global economy by building new alliances with other periphery nations.[[19]](#footnote-19) The PRC doubtless provides the impetus toward the “global restructuring of capitalism,” which means that “the geographic breakdown of the world into north-south and core-periphery, while still significant, is diminishing in importance.”[[20]](#footnote-20) That of course means U.S. – and more broadly, Western – economic power is diminishing in importance as well.

But not only is Western economic supremacy threatened, inevitably its authority in global politics is also undermined by the rising Dragon. Sautman & Hairong (2007) address a U.S. Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) report on U.S.-Africa relations, which devoted a chapter to China. This report affirms that “the PRC protects ‘rogue states’ like Zimbabwe and Sudan, deploys its influence to counter Western pressures on African states to improve human rights and governance, and competes unfairly with U.S. firms in contract bids in Africa (Council on Foreign Relations 2006:49-52).”[[21]](#footnote-21) The West accuses China of supporting authoritarian regimes by conducting trade with them without admitting that the West, too, conducts trade with these same nations. This is evidence that Western condemnation of China’s relationship with Africa is due to fear of China’s rise to power and diffusing influence. According to a 2011 Pew Research Center survey, 20 percent of Americans view China as the greatest threat to the U.S. – the highest percentage on a list of countries including North Korea, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq.[[22]](#footnote-22) Regarding Chinese relations with Africa, this fear is cloaked in the “democracy for all” mantra that the U.S. and other Western regimes use to justify imperialist actions in Africa and other developing regions, as well as anti-China sentiment. But in fact, the PRC’s methods have made it more popular than the U.S. global hegemon, according to another Pew Research Center survey (2007).[[23]](#footnote-23) Those Asian and African nations surveyed had some of the most favorable ratings of China; while in Western nations (European and North American), China was viewed generally most unfavorably.[[24]](#footnote-24) The surveyors attributed anti-Chinese sentiment in Western Europe to anxiety over China’s increasing military and economic power.[[25]](#footnote-25) The most important discovery in this survey is “that while clear majorities in 8 of 10 sub-Saharan African nations surveyed say that America’s influence in their countries is generally good, China’s influence is almost universally viewed as having a more beneficial impact on African countries than does that of the United States.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

This popularity has threatening political implications for Western powers in the United Nations. While the U.S. has demonstrated its hard power influence across the globe, China uses its unique position as a nation in the semi-periphery to practice soft power tactics. And those tactics are, undoubtedly, paying off for China. The fact is the location of global superpowers is morphing into something other than the strict north-south, core-periphery structure of the world economy. Western nations’ individual diplomatic powers are gradually being crippled by China: The Chinese supply aid and trade to African nations without the conditions of “good governance” attached to Western aid and trade; and Western institutions such as the IMF and World Bank “see their years of painstaking efforts to arrange conditional debt relief being undermined by China’s unrestricted lending.”[[27]](#footnote-27) “Politically, China intends to build diplomatic support among African nations for its priorities at the United Nations and other global institutions where its interests are increasingly diverging from the West.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

2.2 Anti-Chinese sentiment in American media

The media of a country is telling not only of what the media thinks its audience needs to hear but what its audience wants to hear. Furthermore, Zhang (2010) cites that “scholars decades ago found that the news media are a major information source for decision-makers. Even in the age of global communication, this argument continues to be the case.”[[29]](#footnote-29) In her analysis of four different national newspapers, Liss (2003) found that from 2000 to 2002, “the overall theme of the major news dailies is to portray China in a negative manner.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Six recurring themes foster the overall negative perception of China: “great power rivalry with the United States, inevitable conflict over the reunification of Taiwan, breakdown of domestic law and order, human rights abuses and a repressive political system, widespread social unrest, and corruption within the political system.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

I have looked at the latest articles from four Western media sources regarding the theme of “China in Africa.” The latest articles used were from the year 2006, the earliest as recent as April 26, 2011. The sources used were the following: *The Economist, The Washington Post, The New York Times,* and *TIME.* I chose these media sources because of their international scope and their vast readership; they are, I believe, the most representative of Western perceptions. There were a total of 17 articles (or photographs with commentary) used in this content analysis. Using Liss’ qualitative list of recurring themes as a guideline, I created my own set of themes specific to the analysis of media addressing China in Africa. They are as follows: 1) China is exploiting/vying for control of Africa’s resources; 2) International breakdown/defiance of law and order; 3) Human rights abuses or poor business practices; 4) Corruption within China’s government or business system; 5) China is hurting Africa locally; 6) Poor African perceptions of China; 7) China is helping African civilians through infrastructure development; 8) China is helping the African economy grow; 9) Good African perceptions of China. I noted the number of times the major points in the 17 articles fell under those themes. Major points were counted by graph: The same point was not counted twice if it occurred within the same graph; however two or more different points were counted within the same graph. This is the formula I will use for the rest of the content analyses below. For now, though, these are the combined findings according to theme:[[32]](#footnote-32)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Exploitation of Resources | Defying Law & Order | HR/Bus. Practice | Corruption | Hurting Africa Locally | Poor African Perceptions | Infrast. & Dev’ment | Helping African Econ. | Good African perceptions |
| 11 | **28** | 16 | 9 | **31** | 27 | 23 | **27** | 18 |

One particular author sums up these findings quite well when he writes: “If we believe the news headlines, China is propping up dictators, dispensing billions of dollars for shady deals, and destroying whole ecosystems in its quest to extract oil and minerals from Africa.”[[33]](#footnote-33) It goes without saying that the majority of the themes about China’s relationship with Africa were negative. Out of nine themes, six were negative. The demonization of China is as much present in Western media as the demonization of Islamist terrorists. National security is one problem. Losing economic power is another. The Pew Forum report cited above, which shows that the U.S. views China as its number one threat – ahead of Iran – means Americans are terrified of China’s sudden economic presence. The economic unification between China and Africa translates into a loss of political leverage for the U.S. This is reflected in the table above: The second most addressed theme was China’s defiance of international law and order. When China trades with “rogue regimes,” Western institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and even the UN lose their grip on the global economic order. While Western media acknowledges that since China has begun trading with Africa the African economy has grown exponentially, the primary concern they raise is political. China’s economic power undermines Western hegemony, and this – as clearly seen in the table – scares the West.

*3.1 The Dragon has to eat, too*

The question remains: Are China’s efforts of forming South-South alliances part of its attempt to establish a “harmonious world” – an ideal so potent in its Confucian culture[[34]](#footnote-34); or is China motivated by capitalism and self-interest in its quest for hegemony? The Chinese, who claim its activity in Africa is based solely off “mutual interest,” naturally do not attempt to publicly acknowledge the toll that activity might or does have on African nations. As shown in the above analysis of Western media, opinions across the world differ on whether China’s economic influence benefits Africa more than it hurts it. Sautman & Hairong (2008) sum up the China-Africa analysis well by arguing three things:

1) given the world system, it is difficult to assess the pluses and minuses of China-in-Africa as a single phenomenon; 2) as a player in the world system, China in Africa has more in common with the West than is usually acknowledged; 3) there are nevertheless notable differences between Western and Chinese presences in Africa, many of which derive from China’s experience as a semi-colony, its socialist legacy, and its developing country status, features which together make PRC policies presumptively less injurious to African sensibilities about rights than those of Western state.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

I have previously demonstrated that Western objections to China’s relationship with Africa are primarily rooted in fear of China’s growing political and economic clout. However, to ignore that China’s attraction and aid donations to Africa are based on self-interest is naïve. That is not to say China has ill intentions; as with all aid, the unintended consequences are difficult to forecast.[[36]](#footnote-36) As Samy (2010) notes, “Understanding a country’s aid policy requires an understanding of that country’s broader foreign policy objectives as the two are inextricably linked.”[[37]](#footnote-37) There has been a relationship between Africa and China dating back to the first years after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, to 1978. During this period, China provided support to African nations struggling for independence from colonial powers, as well as economic assistance to newly independent African countries.[[38]](#footnote-38) The historical Sino-African relationship shows the ideological link between the two that still underlines their link today. From the beginning, China demonstrated its opposition to Western colonialism and imperialism.

 Though the China-Africa relationship has shifted since 1978 to being primarily economic rather than ideological, vestiges of anti-Western sentiment remain. Included in the eight principles of China’s foreign aid policy were the following:

 “equity and mutual benefit; respect of sovereignty of recipients and non-imposition of conditions; provision of grants or highly concessional loans and flexibility in repayment; focus on self-reliance and independent economic development; small investments yielding quick returns; provision of high-quality equipment and material at international market prices; ensuring that technical assistance is transmitted to recipients; and similar treatment for Chinese and recipient experts.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Several of these points are clearly written so as to disconnect China completely from the colonialist intentions of previous powers that penetrated Africa. China does not demand abidance of international norms and standards in return for aid as Western nations are wont to do. What China asked for in return was political support in the international arena.[[40]](#footnote-40) Lagerkvist (2009) poses an interesting question when he asks if the emergence of China will create a model of “’effective governance,’ guided by a South-South vision of mutuality, equality and reciprocity at work,” or if “there is a dark Chinese hand at play … endorsing ‘bad governance’ because China fears democratization per se.”[[41]](#footnote-41) The fact is China uses its economic relationship with Africa to serve as political leverage in intergovernmental affairs. The two together have the power to put China’s will into effect: blunting Western hegemony in global institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank. China is using its economic prowess and might to speak strongly politically. A major factor pushing China to Africa is its goal of unification with Taiwan. Pant (2008) notes that a “pre-requisite for doing serious business with China is to recognize China and sever ties with Taiwan”; today, only six African nations recognize Taiwan.[[42]](#footnote-42) The importance of Africa is seen in numbers: “Africa accounts for almost half of the non-aligned nations and a full third of United Nations member countries, all of which have demonstrated themselves as reliable supporters of China’s position in opposing hegemonism and power politics.”[[43]](#footnote-43) No nation interacts with another for purely altruistic reasons. But as U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Robin Renee Sanders writes, China and Africa “need each other and the linkages are not only unmistakable, but profound.”[[44]](#footnote-44) This South-South dialectic is facilitated, in part, by a likeness in regimes and culture, and it has helped produce between China and Africa a symbiotic relationship. Many African nations and China turn to one another as nations who do not wish to adhere to global standards of domestic policy – inevitable allies, tired of Western interference in their sovereignty.

There is a direct correlation between China’s growth rate and its interaction with resource-rich Africa. Trade between China and Africa “surged by more than 33 percent annually” between 2000 and 2008.[[45]](#footnote-45) In 2010, trade between the two parties exceeded a record $110 billion.[[46]](#footnote-46) Though China may be conducting the trade, much the same way Western powers have for years on the continent, the PRC claims it genuinely upholds its promise to base the China-Africa relationship on mutual benefit. The U.S. and others have made the same promise. But Sautman & Hairong (2007) note that Western aid to Africa is much less effective than China’s, which is used for infrastructure[[47]](#footnote-47) that has “the potential to benefit ordinary people, no matter how corrupt the regime under which they live.”[[48]](#footnote-48) Furthermore the “no-strings-attached” model applied by China is a way of pressuring Western governments and global institutions to find “more acceptable international standards that the whole world can unite around, though not necessarily acceptable to Western liberal democratic countries.”[[49]](#footnote-49) This challenge to traditional standards will undoubtedly have a monumental impact on future global affairs.

Unsurprisingly, Western nations accuse China of neocolonialism in Africa. Capitalism is impossible without exploitation, and discourse regarding China-Africa economic relations has reflected this fact. There are fears that Africa’s dependency on Western nations will merely be supplanted by China. Former South African President Thabo Mbeki “warned that Africa risked becoming an economic colony of China if the growing trade imbalance between the continent and the Asian dragon is not rectified soon.”[[50]](#footnote-50) A *New York Times* (2007) article, about a Zambian factory that shut down because of the Chinese impact on the local economy, features a quote from Wilfred Collins Wonana, leader of the Chamber of Commerce in Zambia: “’We are back where we started. … Sending raw materials out, bringing cheap manufactured goods in. This isn’t progress. It is colonialism.”[[51]](#footnote-51) While this same article claims China is “helping push some of the world’s poorest countries further up the ladder of development,” the amount of Chinese imports in Africa is “hampering [its] ability to make its own products and develop healthy, diverse economies.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

 Maswana’s (2009) article reflects this vacillation between China being a positive or negative influence on Africa when he writes that China is certainly making a positive contribution to local development, but it is also bringing fierce competition to producers who just can’t compete.[[53]](#footnote-53) Indeed, China has made efforts to strengthen its bond with Africa because it *needs* African resources: Ding (2008) estimates that China receives 25 percent of its total oil imports from Africa.[[54]](#footnote-54) Chinese officials unyieldingly claim the link with the continent is positive for both parties. Negative results, however, occur, including the undermining of global human rights standards (as mentioned above); local companies competing unsuccessfully with cheap Chinese products; environmental degradation; poor labor rights practices and more.[[55]](#footnote-55) Also, concerns have been raised that China is importing labor and thus not contributing to the alleviation of the unemployment epidemic in Africa. But Brautigam (2010) says it varies by locality how much labor is imported and how much is local – it depends on the industry and the need for skilled labor. She said, however, that Chinese workers are demanding higher compensation to work in Africa. Localization will become more and more necessary to Chinese entrepreneurs. But until then, China’s ideology will continue to shape its actions in Africa: As Brautigam (2010) duly notes, China places precedence on national sovereignty over promoting democracy or human rights. “Chinese companies bring to Africa the poor labor relations, low wages, inadequate safety standards, and weak environmental protections they are used to at home.”[[56]](#footnote-56) That’s a reality that Africans must deal with.

3.2 The China-Africa affair in Chinese media: True love?

 I searched through a database containing media from around the world for Chinese articles about economic relations with Africa. I chose 13 from a collection of English-language articles from the following sources: Xinhua’s China Economic Information Service, Industry Updates, and China Daily. The oldest article is from 2006 and the newest is from 2011. I again performed a content analysis of each of the articles from the various media organizations. In these, I found nine recurring themes: China is good for the African economy; China-Africa relations serve the common interest; China helps develop African infrastructure; China is good for African development and/or peace; Africa possesses vital resources; Trade is increasing and/or a strong presence of long-term promises to Africa; African perceptions of China are good; Unfair criticism from the West and/or China is better for Africa than the West; China’s presence hurts Africa locally. Some of these themes, such as “Africa possesses vital resources” and “China’s presence hurts Africa locally” were not particularly recurring. I chose to include them to show the contrast between Western portrayals of the China-Africa relationship, in which China is accused of hurting Africa’s local economies and is there to control Africa’s resources, and China’s portrayal of the China-African relationship. These are the findings:[[57]](#footnote-57)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| China is good for African econ. | Common interest | Infras. dev. | Development and/or peace | Africa’s resources | Increasing trade/long-term promise | Good African perceptions | Unfair critique; China > West | China hurts Africa locally |
| 24 | **29** | 18 | 26 | 8 | **36** | 28 | **12** | 1 |

The table above offers great insight into China’s attitude toward its relations with Africa. The most prominent fact garnered from the analysis is that China is in the continent to stay and that its perceptions of the Sino-African relationship are overwhelmingly positive. The most common theme among the articles was the Chinese focus on increasing trade with Africa in the near future. Beijing leaders have been flying in and out of Africa striking up deals and dialogue with its nations’ leaders. Furthermore, as one Chinese article notes, China’s Ministry of Commerce created a China-Africa Research Center with the intention of bolstering trade relations with Africa:

“China’s outbound investment in Africa has gained strong momentum recently, especially in sectors like manufacturing, finance, mining and agriculture. But very few know much about African nations and rarely possess global vision and strategic thinking. This often leaves a bottleneck in bolstering China-Africa economic relations…”[[58]](#footnote-58)

Chinese media underscore time and time again that China’s intentions are not exploitative. The second most common theme in the articles I analyzed is that China’s relationship with Africa is based on mutual benefit. This is followed by a close third (with a one-point difference between them) – that Africa perceives China in a positive light. The latter theme helps to validate the former. China continually insists that the relationship between the two parties is good for both of them. This may in fact be China’s intention – creating a partnership based on mutual need and benefit. As mentioned above, though, the unintended consequences are difficult to foretell. Looking at Africans’ perceptions of the continent’s relationship with China is critical to making an informed conclusion as to whether China’s intention is the actual reality. I will address this in the following section.

 American media has been relentless in decrying the China-Africa link. It seems impossible that China could do anything helpful in the international arena. But a particular editorial from The China Daily shows that China is no different from any other power – it is neither perfectly altruistic, nor perfectly evil. With economic power comes responsibility – to one’s own nation and to those it can help. What China has done is what Western powers have done also. It has combined the two responsibilities by helping lesser nations help it. Taylor (2009) put it concisely and clearly:

“…it is up to African leaders to manage their relations with China to benefit their own economies and citizens. It is not China’s responsibility to look out for Africa’s interests. … Nonetheless, China’s need and desire for good economic relations with Africa actually affords the region considerable space in its connection with China, but only if this maneuverability is used wisely by Africa’s elites.”[[59]](#footnote-59)

*4.1 Conclusion: What about Africa?*

*4.2 A hate-love relationship*

 Thus far, I have primarily discussed the impact China’s relationship with Africa has on Western nations and on China, with some secondary information about the effect it has on African states. But the most valuable opinions are those of the continent in contention. In this section, I will analyze African media to draw conclusions about African perceptions of its economic relationship with China, often in comparison to its relationship with the U.S. As Sautman & Hairong (2009) found in their analysis of African media, “African views are not nearly as negative as Western media make out, nor as positive as official Chinese sources imply.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Indeed, positive and negative sentiments vary by nation. I have made broad statements about the attitudes of sub-Saharan African countries, but it is imperative to note the geographical (in terms of demographics, resources and location) and political differences among the African nations and how that affects their individual perceptions of economic activity with China. Access to media (especially English-language media) was limited and not nearly as easy to access as was Chinese and American media. However, I have done a content analysis on 19 different articles from Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and from a pluralistic African media source, All Africa. The most recurring themes in each of the articles assessed were the following: China practices blind-eye policies that support rogue regimes; China is the culprit of human rights violations and/or poor business practices; China is good for (nation/Africa); China plans/promises to invest more into Africa, i.e. long-term rhetoric; Africa is too dependent on China; and China helps with Africa’s infrastructural and economic development.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Blind-eye policies/ support of rogue regimes** | **Benefits are mostly one- sided, exploitative** | **Human rights violations, poor business practices** | **China is good for (nation/ Africa)** | **China plans/ promises to invest more; long term** | **Africa is too dependent on China** | **China helps with economic/ infras. dev’ment** |
| **24** | **30** | **27** | 21 | 11 | 12 | 15 |

 Clearly, African perceptions are mixed. In fact, they are an almost perfect mix of Chinese perceptions, which are overly positive, and American perceptions, which are overly negative. The vast majority – at 66.5 percent – of African perceptions of Sino-African relations are negative, while 33.5 percent are positive. This is not surprising given African nations’ inherent skepticism of economic relationships with world powers. But it is also not surprising because of the inherent realpolitik of all international relationships. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson commented rightly that “China is in Africa for China.”[[61]](#footnote-61) The relationships is multifaceted and, as seen in the recurring themes above, extremely complicated – especially for a continent whose policies toward Beijing are not exactly officially established.

4.3 Problems beneath the problems

 China’s non-interference policy has come under heavy fire from Western nations. What African media suggests is that civilians expect China to assume the responsibility of maintaining Western standards of democracy and justice. China’s economic transactions with rogue regimes, such as Sudan’s and the DRC’s, only perpetuates a cycle of undermining international norms. Medard Mulangala Lwakabwanga, DRC parliament member, writes, “[N]ow there is an alternative to having to listen to the West, and that alternative is China.”[[62]](#footnote-62) That China still deals with undemocratic regimes – regimes other nations have kicked to the curb – should not negate the respectable dealings it has had with other nations. It is not China’s policy to place conditions on nations’ internal policies. It is China’s policy to do business, and this policy is not necessarily what hurts Africa. What hurts Africa are the dictators already in place. For many African nations, Chinese activity has been a healthy addition to their economies. “But these nations now have solid democratic roots: they are leaders in Africa in the respect for human rights…"[[63]](#footnote-63) Other nations are unfortunately not in this position.

 Without Western norms to hold it back, China is a smart player in the game of international relations. It knows what other nations need – whether that is arms, as in the case of Sudan, or infrastructure, as in the case of Zambia et al. China is essentially paying Africa to treat China “’as leader of the developing world.”[[64]](#footnote-64) But what China pays makes its “business as usual” produce dire consequences for the civilians of states like Zimbabwe, Sudan and the DRC. China has been condemned for its relationship with Khartoum. One article from the Sudan Tribune states that the Sudan-China relationship is

“a lucrative partnership that delivers billions of dollars in investment, oil revenue and weapons – as well as diplomatic protection – to a government accused by the United States of genocide in the western region of Darfur, and cited by many human rights groups for systematically massacring civilians and chasing them off ancestral lands to clear oil-producing areas”[[65]](#footnote-65)

China’s economic support of a regime like Sudan’s is revealing of its priorities, at least in that state: extracting resources. Goodman (2004) claims that “Sudan is China’s largest overseas oil project,” and, according to the director of North African Studies at a Chinese university, Sudanese oil makes up one-tenth of all China’s imported oil.[[66]](#footnote-66) This Sino-Sudanese relationship proves that the China-Africa relationship cannot be oversimplified. A relationship that may be good for other nations with democratic regimes already in place (such as South Africa, Ghana and Kenya) is clearly not healthy for Sudan and other like nations.

 Another common complaint among African media is that the relationship with China is primarily one-sided, whereby China has the upper hand. For all the investments China sends to Africa, China gets far more returns. If this is surprising, it shouldn’t be. Chinese plans and policies are far more advanced than any of the African nations’. China needs resources and commodities to support its large (and growing) population,[[67]](#footnote-67) and Africa – especially those nations shunned by intergovernmental institutions – is desperate for foreign aid. Sanders (2011) quotes World Bank Managing Director Okonjo-Iweala who aptly states that “’the debate is no longer about whether China should be in Africa; it is there. The debate today is about what the nature of the relationship should be. China has a long term strategy for Africa; Africa does not have one for its relationships with China.’”[[68]](#footnote-68) The point to drive home is that African states need to set standards, and governments must be accountable to the citizens who complain that Chinese goods, services and importation of labor are hurting local producers and laborers. Africa’s modern history has been shaped by outside forces. In previous eras, the global economy has been characterized by Western hegemony – a context conducive to colonialism. Today, the global economy is truly that: global. A relationship with China will only be as good as Africa can make it, lest it fall once again into the trap of imperialism. Time and time again, Chinese media rally that the Sino-African relationship is extremely “fruitful.” And for China, it has been. The worst thing China has faced as a result of its link with Africa is Western scrutiny and condemnation. African complaints have been far more numerous.

 But the recurring themes in African media suggest that perceptions of China vacillate. Clearly, Africans recognize the potential in the relationship. Yes, China’s actions demonstrate that it is self-interested (Brautigam makes a valid point when she asks “what country isn’t?”[[69]](#footnote-69)). But the continent is still benefiting from the externalities of this relationship. In the words of Friedman (2008), “Africa matters to China,” and just because “China acts in a self-interested way does not mean that poor Africans cannot be lifted out of poverty by Chinese economic policies.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Whether the latter part of that statement is true is arguable. But many democratic African states can utilize Chinese investments. It will take, as noted above, adoption of policies and adaptation of economies.

4.4 Positive potential

 African leaders have hailed the commitment China has made to their respective countries. And, as I mentioned above, public opinions of China are drastically more favorable than they are of the U.S. Most people view China’s growing economy as a good thing for their countries. The South-South dialectic between China and Africa has, by the looks of it, proven to be based on trust and understanding. In a world ruled by realpolitik, skepticism is inevitable. Nonetheless, if China wasn’t welcome, it wouldn’t continue making grand promises to Africa, and it certainly wouldn’t continue investing. China has pervaded several aspects of the African economy, including business and investment, resource extraction, agriculture, infrastructure construction and forestry.[[71]](#footnote-71) “Two-way Africa-China trade, which is growing at roughly 44 percent per year, is over $114 billion…”[[72]](#footnote-72) making China Africa’s second-largest trade partner, behind the U.S.

 There are fears that local African companies cannot compete with cheap Chinese imports – and they are legitimate concerns. But, to balance this, because Chinese goods are cheaper than African goods, more Africans can afford more things – amenities they’ve never had before.[[73]](#footnote-73) Further, China’s unconditional trade with Africa does indeed mean global human rights and democratic standards are undermined. But the PRC’s undemocratic methods have ensured efficiency in getting aid packages delivered.[[74]](#footnote-74) In fact, the Group of Eight pledged to forgive $50 billion in debt to 18 of the poorest countries of the world (14 of them in Africa) and to increase aid to the continent; but Wenping, writing in 2007, said those promises had not been fulfilled. China, however, “has taken action toward debt reduction and other commitments over its past six years of aid expansion in Africa.”[[75]](#footnote-75) China has forgiven or reduced 156 debts, totaling $1.4 billion from 31 poor and heavily-indebted African countries.[[76]](#footnote-76) China’s aid and trade is also packaged in infrastructural and development projects, most of which benefit the people. Max Rebol (2010) refutes the claim that China’s aid goes only where there are natural resources. He says that “China’s disbursement of Aid to the continent is relatively unrelated to natural resources, … it fills exactly the areas that Western aid has increasingly neglected: Infrastructure, industrialization and manufacturing.”[[77]](#footnote-77) The West supplies primarily basic human needs aid,[[78]](#footnote-78) and this aid has often been given at the expense of other program funding.[[79]](#footnote-79) Rebol (2010) observes,

“With the West de-investing in Africa’s industry and agricultural programs and instead focusing exclusively on social programs, African industrialization was increasingly neglected. Rather than looking at investing in long term growth, Western aid focused on Africa’s immediate short term needs.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

 What infrastructural development in Africa has China contributed to? The following list from the Institute of Developing Economies gives a clear picture as to what China’s “footprint” in Africa looks like:

* Dams – “Most dam projects undertaken by Chinese companies have a hydro-power dimension to them.” By 2008, the Chinese were financing 10 major dams in 9 different African countries.
* Power – China has more than $5.3 billion in cumulative commitments. Four of the 10 hydro-power dams will double the total electricity generating capacity within their host countries.[[81]](#footnote-81)
* Ports
* Railways – China has rehabilitated more than 1,350 km of existing railroads and constructed more than 1,600 km of new railroads. The largest deals have been done in Nigeria, Gabon, and Mauritania
* Roads -- Though a much smaller project than its others, China has been involved in the construction of over 1,400 km of road in Africa.
* Water and sanitation – Most of these projects are small-scale and focus on meeting “immediate social needs.”[[82]](#footnote-82)

 The Sino-African relationship needs work – the kind of work that requires African leaders to have a backbone. China has made it clear that it is a) in need of strong economic ties with Africa, and b) in Africa for the long run. This in itself means Africa has leverage. Thanks to China’s interest, Africa has been coaxed into the international arena. What the continent must use is its voice. Along with great problems, Africa has great potential. This potential is reflected in the fact that “six of the world’s ten fastest-growing economies were in sub-Saharan Africa” from 2000 to 2010.[[83]](#footnote-83) Once in the margins of the periphery, Africa, with the help of China, could finally take a step toward the core.

Figure 1.1



Blue – Core

Red – Semi-periphery

Green – Periphery

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