

China's Presence in Africa: Reading the Debate Through the Tanzanian Experience

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ABSTRACT

This essay will present the nature of the China-Africa relationship by analyzing the debates of previous scholars concerning the West in Africa and China in Africa, alongside a historical review. I argue that China's relationship with Africa is different from that of other major strategic forces in the world today such as the United States and the European Union, countries which have long dominated African resources. In the beginning of Chinese-African interactions, China firmly proclaimed its non-interference stance. This meant that China would not interfere in African politics but only engage in fair trade and exchange in Africa. As a result, China's non-interference stance made its interaction with Africa less aggressive than that of the Western countries. China's investment allows Africa to have its own freedom of maneuver. Its economic contact with Africa facilitates the long term economic growth of African states.

Keywords: *China-Africa relationship, China's presence in Africa, South-South relationship, Tanzania*

1. INTRODUCTION

While much of the continent consists of predominantly agrarian societies, some African countries are highly dependent on exports of natural resources, minerals, and oil, while others are relatively more industrialized. As a result, the continent has experienced different forms and degrees of capitalist penetration and change. Africa's large production volume in resources is attractive to resource-consuming countries, and African markets are another source of interest. A third source of interest is development of African infrastructure. In recent years, the world powers have been competing to enter Africa. One main player is China. China and Africa have had frequent contacts through economic, political, diplomatic, military, cultural and resource exchanges since 1956. China has increased its engagement with Africa in recent years. There have been many studies on China-Africa relations that offer deep insight into China-Africa relations.

Scholars from all walks of life have analyzed and studied China-Africa relations and have come up with various theories and speculations. Scholars have proposed several theses to try to explain China's presence in Africa. One thesis states that China is a contemporary independent and hegemonic force that is

recolonizing Africa. They argue that China is now retracing the path of imperialism and scrambling for Africa's resources to facilitate its own economic growth. Another perspective is the opposite of this idea of Chinese imperialism towards Africa. This second view sees China's trade with Africa in recent years as a normal process of globalization and a partial manifestation of it. China's economic engagement and diversification of its markets has instead provided room for maneuver for African states, which have long been marginalized by Eurocentric domination. China's presence can thus be regarded as a beneficial external factor that helps the independence and development of African countries. A third perspective, linking to the first two theses, regards China as an element of a broader process of primitive accumulation on a world scale in a context of deepening crisis of capitalism. [1]

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interference stance made its interaction with Africa less aggressive than that of western countries. China's investment allows Africa to have its own freedom of maneuver. Its economic contact with Africa facilitates the long term economic growth of African states.

To establish the above, this essay is going to examine China's presence in Africa, focusing on Tanzania as the main example. Tanzania is the largest recipient of Chinese investment, so it can reveal the essence China's presence in Africa in a more accurate way.

This essay will present the nature of the debate on China and West in Africa by exploring the critical analysis of several scholarly contributions concerning China's motives to cooperate with Africa. It will go deep into the history and near history of the West in Africa. Moreover, it delves into a comparative study of the historical relationship between China and Africa, comparing it with the West's. At the same time, this essay will provide further insight into the history of China in Tanzania in particular. The last part of the essay will include some current policies of China in Tanzania.

2. THE NATURE OF THE DEBATE ON CHINA AND THE WEST IN AFRICA

Africa has increasingly become a major political and economic center due to its wealth in agricultural and other natural resources. African states, targeted by the West as places with infinite useful resources, have for that reason, long been dominated by the West. In recent years, Africa has become independent and developed in all respects at a steady pace. Along with the development of Africa itself, we have seen the emergence of several strategic players like China, focusing in infrastructure investment. The increasing presence of China in Africa challenges traditional donors, like the United States. Therefore, the motives behind the increasing engagement of China with Africa and its role in Africa have been under intense scrutiny by many scholars and policy-makers [1]. Many scholars have proposed different ideas concerning the reasons behind the increasing trade between China and Africa, and analyzing the role of China in Africa. In general, there are three major approaches to understand China's role in Africa.

The first perspective views China as a contemporary independent and hegemonic force that is recolonizing Africa. This recolonization theory argues that China is now recolonizing Africa in a scramble for its resources for its own domestic growth without considering the well-being of Africa. This perspective merely regards China as an emerging strategic dominating force that is re-treading the path of imperialism's colonization of Africa. They have accused China of indulging autocratic

leaders who perpetuate human right abuses, corruption and so on. The recolonization thesis is widely spread by the media and is accepted by many African states' citizens, amidst rising concerns about the presence of the new strategic force. However, African states have been independent for over 50 years. They have evolved within the world inter-state system. Although African states' openness to an external capture of their resources entails a variety of forms of resource control, which has some similarities to those of other countries a century ago, the recolonization of Africa by China is a poorly supported theory which does not consider the conceptual basis of colonization. This theory has more or less conflated the current presence of China in Africa with the colonization of Africa by the 1844 Berlin treaty.

The second perspective views the Chinese role as a normal part of the process of contemporary globalization. This thesis regards China's presence as allowing "room for maneuver" for the African states. Chinese investment has so far allowed the African states to make their own decisions. It provides the African states room for their own strategic decisions to develop their own economies. This perspective regards China's investment as a crucial element that can help Africa's long term development.

The third perspective regards China as a "sub-imperial" force that participates in the group that aims to scramble for African resources. In this framework, there's no difference between the nature of China and other Euro-American hegemonies. In the context of a crisis of deepening capitalism, China inevitably shares the same traits with Euro-American countries. China, like those capitalist countries, is going through a rapid economic development phase which has given rise to insecurity of energy resources along with an increasing demand for raw material and energy. The theory proposed that these countries set their sights on Africa and see Africa as an infinite source thus scrambling for markets, land, natural resources in Africa in order to address their insecurity [1].

3. THE HISTORY AND NEAR-HISTORY OF THE WEST IN AFRICA

When it comes to face the facts of the European presence in Africa, most bourgeois writers would regard it as a "credits" outweighs "debts" relationship.[2]

In Rodney's book, he firmly referred to colonialism as a one-armed bandit. It's obvious to see why he concluded European colonization in Africa to be like this, when we delve into what the colonial government did or did not do in the interests of Africans and Africans' living standards after the onset of colonization. The colonial governments supposedly

built railroads, schools, hospitals etc. However, the aggregate amount of services that can be termed as beneficial to the African people were incredibly small.

At the very beginning of colonization, for about three decades, nothing was done for the African peoples. In fact, social services were only eventually built only because of political pressure.

Capitalism didn't bring many benefits to the native African workers during colonization. Most of the colonizing powers weren't doing any better than had been the case before colonialism, and some did much worse. Portugal is one example. That country asserted that Angola, Guinea, and Mozambique had been its possessions for 500 years. Portugal exploited these nation's resources as well as their native work forces. It controlled the so-called "possessions" as property owners. However, what these efforts contributed to the development of these countries needs to be questioned: "The Portuguese had not managed to train a single African doctor in Mozambique and the life expectancy in Eastern Angola was less than 30 years" [2].

Social services were provided, but not for African workers – rather, for white settlers and expatriates. For instance, in colonies like Algeria and Kenya, whites created an infrastructure to afford them leisure and enjoyable lives. This radical ordering was also true for the medical system. The infant mortality was 39 per 1000 live births among white settlers but it jumped to 170 per 1000 live births among Algerians [2]. Even more egregious, in some predominantly black countries, the British colonial government maintained segregated hospital services. They separated white people and Black people when offering medical care. The medical resources for whites were enough and even excessive but those for Black natives were limited. This meant that entertainment, medical, sanitation services were all oriented towards the well-being of the settlers but not in the interest of native inhabitants. The lower classes in Africa like peasants and workers knew very little about the supposed benefits boasted of by the colonial government. Even those pitiful facilities were built to help the colonists better plunder the resources of the colony. This is to say, those "mother countries" didn't give their brothers wealth and assistance outside the money economy.

Meanwhile, Africa and Africans proved to be exploited, not only economically but also politically and socially. African states inevitably lost their power, independence: "Those agents of foreign colonial rule were quite obviously nothing but puppets" [2]. Foreign political, economic, and military pressures have massive influenced states' governments so one can say that they had to bow before the colonial government. With respect to gender equality, colonialists in Africa paid lip service to women's education and emancipation.

However, essentially, women were losing their social, religious, constitutional, and political privileges and rights along with the loss of political power by African society as a whole.

In a nutshell, no matter which aspects of living standards and the national situation of Africans during colonization by Europeans which we examine, we can see that the exploitation was far greater than any existing benevolent assistance.

4. HISTORY OF CHINA IN AFRICA

Since the initiation of economic and political change reform and opening up, China has increased its contacts with Africa. China has given aid to Africa on the economic level on a large scale: "Beijing quietly made Guinea an offer of an interest-free loan of RMB 100 million (about 25 million) in 1960" [2]. Also, China has continually helped Africa financially. China sent medical teams to support local medical systems. It also helped Africa develop its infrastructure by assisting Africans to build bridges, roads, power plants, and ports. What China gave to Africa was even more than the assistance given by USSR. Most importantly, China's intention in offering help was different from that of capitalist countries. China's previous president claimed at a conference that China's intention was not to make Africans depend on them but free them from the control of capitalism. African development still needs China's help and China has simply been playing a guiding and supporting role on Africa's way to independence.

Indeed, many African countries regarded China as a development model in their own road to socialism. In 1967, Tanzania's president, inspired by China, tried to push forward collective farming and established a project of socialist cooperativization called ujamaa villagization. Although the result of the project was less than satisfactory, China as a socialist country with rapid development still played an important role in inspiring Africa's growth.

China's aid program to Africa was mostly done quietly but some famous cases, like the like Tan-Zam Railway, made other countries pay attention to China's aid to Africa. In a nutshell, China's aid can more accurately be described as a friend's support, pragmatically helping Africa. Its assistance, unlike that given by Western countries, was more from the perspective of "win-win."

5. THE HISTORY OF CHINA IN TANZANIA

Now, I will expand on my earlier remarks related to China's role in economic development assistance in

Tanzania. China had frequent contact with Africa as discussed above. Its aid, at the same time, figured prominently, especially in Tanzania. Tanzania received different kinds of aid from China, including financial support, technical assistance, and even professional human resources. It can be seen that China at that time treated Tanzania as a special case, in terms of its overall aid to Africa. Most of China's aid and investment in Africa was focused on Tanzania. After years of coming and going with China, Tanzania's political discourse was gradually showing an affinity for the Chinese socialist model. In 1964, China helped Tanzania construct a more effective army by assisting in training its soldiers. Increasingly well-trained soldiers give Tanzania's military strength a big boost. It was these soldiers who secured Tanzania's southern border which contributed to the future independence of Tanzania. By 1979, the Chinese continuously supported the Tanzanian military by supplying it millions of weapons. China also became the largest weapons supplier to Tanzania and the largest provider of training to Tanzania-based freedom fighters. Throughout the entire 1960s, Tanzania's international relations with China had naturally become an important link in Tanzania's foreign diplomatic relations, as well as Tanzania's main link with socialist countries. The connection was also the closest of China's numerous relationships with African countries. After 1960 China enlarged the scope of its aid and augmented the amount substantially: "In 1964 alone," for example, "China donated \$45.5 million worth of aid to Tanzania-nearly half of its total annual aid to the African continent" [5]. Meanwhile, Tanzania's leader Nyerere visited China many times as a diplomatic response to China's aid. After several visits to China, Nyerere was impressed and inspired by the approach used by the Chinese. Driven by appreciation of the frugal attitude of the Chinese, he led Tanzania to adopt the Chinese attitude and learn from the Chinese. This action also fit his previous thought about creating modern villages to facilitate administrative contact with rural citizens and add a bond of reciprocity and belief in hard work, a notion which originated in the traditional village. Nyerere's intention also included bringing the people in Tanzania out of poverty by adopting such an attitude. Over the course of the 1960s, Tanzania emphasized the concept of self-reliance. To pursue that goal, Tanzania broke its relationship with Britain. Tanzania filled the aid gap created by these diplomatic breakdowns by forging closer ties with the Chinese, who took the opportunity to position themselves as aligned with Tanzania's political agenda. China played a very significant role at this stage. China agreed to make a deal with Tanzania about the Tanzanian and Zambian request of investment when other countries rejected and refused to provide any assistance and investment to this project. As a result, the TAZARA railway was built

from 1969 to 1974. China's support took the form of physical capital, human capital, and technical assistance. This long-distance railway assisted the liberation struggle in Southern Africa and supported China's Third World credentials. Until today, this 1860.5 kilometers long railway still exists as a symbol of the relationship between China and Tanzania.

6. THE CURRENT POLICIES OF CHINA IN TANZANIA

China's frequent trade and exchange with Tanzania does not aim to interfere with Tanzania's own political choices. Indeed, its active participation in different aspects of Tanzania's development is a result of friendly diplomatic policy towards Tanzania and self-interest as a trader. China's current policies in Tanzania create space for the Tanzanian government's decision-making on long-term development.

China's relationship with Tanzania has continuously developed until today. It is undisputed that China and Tanzania relationship remains politically strong. However, the bilateral relationship between China and Tanzania is no longer like their relationship in the 20th century. As some criticisms from the elites of Tanzania have put it, Beijing and Dar es Salaam used to have a "one-way" relationship, one we can identify as marked by "structural asymmetry." These criticisms are now growing due to China's rise. At the same time, the economic environment has shifted to a new neo-liberal stage, which is different from that of several decades ago. The old "socialist friendship" didn't help Tanzania to adapt to this new economic environment. Nor has that conception of "friendship" played a crucial role in the development of the economic and trade relationship between these two countries over the last decades. Indeed, this and other factors have worked to convince Tanzania to take a step to rebalance its foreign relations in favor of other partners, particularly the US and EU.

The intentions behind China's frequent contact with Tanzania also changed a great deal during the recent decades. China initially started its cooperation with Tanzania with a marked eagerness to assist Tanzanian industrialization. However, since the 2000s, China has changed its view about their relationship. China intensified its relationship in a much more pragmatic and more self-interest-centered way. Despite many dynamic changes that have taken place, one thing that has remained constant is that both countries are willing to cultivate their bilateral relationship politically and economically as well as in many other aspects, like education, medication, culture, and social exchange. Therefore, it's useful to more closely examine China's current policies in Tanzania to discover a more ambitious blueprint behind China's presence in Africa,

since China has continued to engage with Tanzania in many aspects of national development, including manufacture, investment, medication, education, and culture. Let us consider a few of them in turn.

6.1. Manufacturing

China wanted to promote the industrialization of Tanzania. It encouraged Tanzania to increase export-intensive labor-intensive investment. The nominal labor cost in Tanzania was two to three times lower than in China. The labor cost of Tanzania is close to the labor wage of Vietnam. As there's a clear trend of appreciation of Chinese currency and a steady rise of the Chinese labor wage, this gap between the nominal labor costs will only increase. As result, Chinese enterprises will pay to employ the labor in Tanzania and invest in manufacturing there. China is taking advantage of the cheap labor force. Some scholars have, therefore, concluded that China is using Tanzania as a manufacturing hub.

6.2. Infrastructure

Chinese investment in Tanzania is mainly concerned with infrastructure construction. Since the last century, China has spent a lot of physical capital and human capital on helping construct Tanzania's infrastructure. The most famous case was the TAZARA railway. China's preference to invest in infrastructure has not changed. Actually, the Chinese government made several deals in the last two decades to develop various edifices, including ports, railways, buildings, road construction, gas pipelines, and wind power farms. In 2013, the Chinese government published its plan to develop the ports of Dar es Salaam, Marwari. The China Merchant at the same time proposed to build a large port, about 25 times larger than the size of Dar es Salaam in Bagamoyo. The port will be a huge trade station for Tanzania, slated to 20 million containers a year. The final agreement was signed in March 2013 by President Xi. This project will eventually make this port the largest port on the east coast of Africa. Dar es Salaam will become an attractive place for world trade with Africa. This will drive the local economy, and even the national economy to a large extent. Furthermore, China's investment in Tanzania infrastructure has not halted. They have signed several billion dollars deals in 2014. An investment worth more than US \$1.7 billion and grants worth US \$85 million were finalized in October 2014. These projects include plans to build a "satellite city" to solve the traffic congestion problem and a zero-interest loan from China for unspecified projects. According to data collection, China's total direct investments in Tanzania are more than US \$700 million in 2011 and US \$2.1 billion in 2012. FDI from China drives the economy of Tanzania. More

importantly, such infrastructures will provide long-run benefits to the whole country.

6.3. Education and cultural exchange

Among all fields of connection between China and Tanzania, education and cultural exchange can be regarded as special. China used to focus mainly on the hard power of Tanzania but lately, it has intensified its focus on soft power cultivation. The number of Tanzanian students studying in China has become larger since the late 2000s. According to the report, the number of Tanzanian students studying in China was 600 including 70 in 2008. As recent studies showed, in 2011 alone there were 2000 Tanzanian students studying a variety of subjects: language, technology, or medicine. Tanzanian students have more and more chances to study in China.

The language courses are also accessible in locally in Tanzania. Mandarin is taught at the University of Dar es Salaam, though there's still much less interest in studying Chinese for Tanzanian students than studying Swahili for China's Africa experts or diplomats. To strengthen and expand the Chinese language teaching in Tanzania, in 2015 12 language teachers were sent to six secondary schools in the Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Dodoma regions. China attaches importance to language learning as the main part of cultural engagement. However, this language teaching goal still met some challenges as very few Tanzanians can teach Chinese.

China has also been engaged actively in the media. Beginning in the early 2010s, China Radio International established a technical team in Zanzibar preparing programs in Swahili and Chinese. Most importantly, in October 2011, Tanzania National Broadcast agreed to show Chinese TV programs, particularly Chinese soap operas that have been translated into Swahili.

6.4. Medication

China is famous for its Chinese traditional medicine. Chinese traditional medicine is one of the great treasures of China. Medical missions have long been a crucial diplomatic goal in China's activism in Africa. In 1968, the first medical team arrived in Tanzania. Since then, the medical personnel continuously came to Tanzania and served in the country to teach Chinese medical skills and help the local patients. There were around 1000 Chinese doctors and nurses serving in Tanzania c. 2008. Tanzania itself also has a very strong interest in learning Chinese traditional medicine. It passed a new traditional and Alternative Medicine bill in 2002. China was fully cooperative in the goal of teaching Chinese traditional medicine. China was aware of the difficulties and limitations of Chinese traditional medicine cooperation in Tanzania. As a result, China has enhanced its medical project in Tanzania. It

increases its aid in Western medicine, as well, to help to improve the medical level of Tanzania.

7. CONCLUSION

China has become influential in Africa. Its increasing interaction with the African state has attracted many scholars' attention. They have proposed different hypotheses about China's intention behind its action and the nature of this South-South relationship. Some liberal Western scholars believe what China is doing is recolonizing Africa as capitalist countries did before. They regard China as a contemporary hegemon that is trying to take control of Africa. This thesis ignores that Africa has been politically independent for over 50 years. At the same time, it doesn't account for China's statements concerning their non-interference policy in Africa. Other scholars argue China is the same as the Euro-American countries aiming to scramble for resources in Africa in order to end their insecurity about energy sources and raw materials. They analyze China and Africa's relationship in a context of deepening crisis of capitalism, thus referring to China as a "sub-imperial" hegemonic force that scrambles for resources in Africa. However, this view is non-comprehensive as it does not explain China's financial aid to Africa and several free interest loans granted to Africa. In this case, I argue that China's presence is different from any other preceding West-American countries that have close interaction with Africa. China holds its non-interference position when dealing with African affairs. Its presence allows Africa to have room for maneuver. At the same time, its large number of investments and exchanges in Africa facilitate Africa's long-term development.

The difference can be shown from the history and near history of the West in Africa and the history of China in Tanzania. During the colonization of European countries, Africa did not get much at all from its colonizer. Indeed, nothing was done at the very beginning of the colonization. Social services were built because of political pressure instead of building for the sake of African people. Most of the social services were not built for African workers but for white settlers. Capitalism didn't bring many benefits to Africa but continue its endless exploration in the name of it being a so-called "possession owner." Africa proved to be exploited not only in terms of resources but also politically. It lost its independence. The people in Africa, especially women, were losing their rights. The gender inequality problem escalated during the period of European colonization. It's clear that European colonizers did more exploitation than assistance. However, things are different when we examine China's presence in Africa. China aided Africa, with great

effort, to increase its economic level. It granted billions of interest-free loans and financial support to build infrastructure. China not only provided physical capital but also human capital. China sent several medical teams, and hundreds of engineers and teachers to Africa in order to assist Africa's development. When we specifically look into China's performance in Tanzania, we can see that most of the investment from China has had a positive impact on the overall development of Tanzania. Its current policies in Tanzania are all based on consideration for Tanzania's long-term development and their mutual relationship. In general, China's presence in Africa does more good than bad for Africa. It is a dynamic bilateral relationship that can benefit both sides. As for Africa, China's presence has, finally, provided a necessary foundation for future development.

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