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THE CHINA MONITOR

2015 - Issue 1 and 2 | June

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The 'Fong kong' phenomenon in Botswana: a perspective on globalisation from below*

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Abstract

Made in China goods have received widespread criticism in Africa for their poor quality and negative effects on the local marketplace. They are termed *fong kong* (Barrett, 2007) goods, and in Southern Africa including Botswana, are regarded as cheap copies or fakes (Park, 2013a). In Botswana, *fong kong* is linked to Chinese merchants, bringing a negative image to Chinese businesses and triggering governmental restrictions on *fong kong* goods and Chinese businesses. However, surprisingly, *fong kong* goods continue to be sold in the local market.

This paper discusses how *fong kong* goods affect local people's lives. The research data presented is based on a ten-month field research in major cities and rural towns in Botswana. Data was collected using participant observation and conducting in-depth interviews with Chinese merchants, managers of South African chains, local

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customers and officials, and so on. After explaining details associated with the supply chain, this article describes local people's experiences of *fong kong* goods. The findings show that, despite the negative image attributed to *fong kong* goods, they have contributed to clothing the needy, initiated creativity and brought convenience to members of local society. Adopting low-end globalisation as theory, this article argues that despite wide criticism received and associated illegalities, *fong kong* goods have helped poor and middle class individuals greatly to improve their quality of life, thereby creating a more egalitarian society in Botswana.

Introduction

"*Fong kong*" is a term referring to something that is very obviously fake, plastic, or inauthentic. In areas of Southern Africa, including Botswana, Made in China goods are called *fong kong* goods. This connotes poor quality, and implies the products being sold are cheap copies or fakes (Park, 2013). It is also important to clarify that a copy is an imitation or reproduction of an original work using the original brand name; this differs from a knockoff, which is a copy of a designer product sold under a different name (Mathews and Yang, 2012). In this article, the phrase "counterfeit goods" refers to both copies and knockoffs. Since the 1990s, soaring numbers of Chinese merchants have migrated on a global scale, in response to the influence of globalisation and changes to immigration policy in China and its increasing role in the production of consumer goods. Chinese shopkeepers are now found worldwide. Such entrepreneurial migration is reflected by the opening of wholesale centres in Africa to supply retailers; both Chinese and native (Ma Mung, 2008:648-649). In many African countries, Chinese merchants are involved in the trade of *fong kong* goods. For the majority of the Africans cannot afford an authentic brand, *fong kong* goods sold at an acceptable price and of good quality is an ideal choice. Despite this, local media, branded companies and local government officials have denigrated these products (Gaotlhobogwe, 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Anonymous, 2010).

Thus far, research about *fong kong* goods is scarce. Key research to date was produced by Park (2013a and 2013b), and discussed the issue in the context of

African country's de-industrialisation processes. Most of the related research done in African countries portrays Chinese merchants as "dumping" cheap China-made products, and discusses their socio-economic influence on local society (Carling and Haugen 2004, 2005; Dobler 2009; Laribee 2008; Tanga 2009). Research focusing on Made in China goods mainly discusses manufacture and distribution systems, the process of counterfeiting in China, their negative influence on copyright brands and global society, and the importance of intellectual property rights (Chow, 2003; Lin, 2011; Swike and Thompson and Vasquez, 2008). Besides, due to the harm of counterfeit medicines (Wertheimer and Norris, 2009; Nayyar and Breman and Newton and Herrington, 2012) and counterfeit trading's relation with criminal activities (Hardouin and Weichhardt, 2006), researches suggest dissuading consumers to purchase counterfeits might focus on educating consumers about the adverse consequences of their purchases, in other words. criminal activity including drug trafficking, child labour, and terrorism is supported through the sale of counterfeits (Lee, 2008). However, this tendency to see only the negative influence of *fong kong* goods, neglects considerations of convenience and benefits to people living in developing countries. In most research to date, judgements have been based on the values of outsiders and the values of developed countries; therefore, the local perspective is lacking. Thus, a question arises concerning whether there is a distinct difference between the views of outsiders and those of involved merchants and local customers.

The aim of this paper is to identify the social influence of *fong kong* goods on Botswana's society through studying the local perspective. The rest of this paper is arranged into several sections, beginning with a general background to Botswana-China relations and 'fong kong' goods in Botswana. This is followed by research findings concerning local perspectives. Finally, by discussing 'fong kong' goods' social function in the context of Botswana's development and related legal and moral considerations the author attempts to challenge existing beliefs about fong kong goods.

Research data was gathered applying an anthropological method between September 2011 to November in 2014 (total 10 months) in retail China shops, China wholesale

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markets and South African large retail chain shops (for example *PEP, Ackermans, Mr Price*) in Botswana. To achieve balance in the qualitative data set, the researcher visited the randomly selected China shops repeatedly. Mandarin Chinese was used when speaking with the Chinese merchants and English for speaking to local people. The primary sources of data were the informal and in-depth interviews with Chinese merchants, the managers of South African large chain shops and local customers, concerning their attitudes towards goods made in China. Participant observations were conducted in the China shops during visiting time, concentrating on interactions between Chinese merchants and local customers. Furthermore, a document survey was conducted to reveal the voice of local media and governmental activities.

Overview of Botswana and its trading relation with China

Botswana is one of the most dynamic economies in Africa. However, according to the Botswana Economic Outlook[1], current unemployment stands at 17.8 per cent, and 18.4 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. Mineral extraction and diamond mining are the principal economic activities, although tourism is a growing sector because of the country's conservation practices and extensive nature reserves. The Mbendi information service (2014) states that the manufacturing sector in Botswana is relatively small, accounting for only an estimated 5 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP); this is due to the small domestic market, and the fact that South Africa supplies most of the country's needs. Aside from meat processing, Botswana has had no notable manufacturing activity at its independence in 1966.

According to Best (1970), for a considerable period, people originating from Europe and India occupied crucial roles within Botswana's economy, while the Batswana were relative newcomers to the trading community. Because of Botswana's inexperience and undercapitalisation, the country was highly dependent upon European and Indian wholesalers and transporters (1970:610). Even now, Botswana remains influenced by many South African investments, including supermarket chain stores such as *Shoprite, Pick n Pay,* and *Spar*, and clothing and apparel chain stores,

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examples of which are *PEP, Ackermans, Mr Price, Bata,* and *Fashion*. These chain stores can be found distributed throughout the cities' shopping malls, and, in some cases, even in medium sized towns. Therefore, despite Botswana having attained full independence from Britain some time ago, the influence of South Africa originating from colonial times remains.

Botswana established diplomatic relations with China in 1975. Since then, inter-governmental co-operation in the fields of the economy and technology has been a driving force in their relationship. China has provided a level of financial assistance to support the construction of its national infrastructure, offering grants and preferential loans (Embassy of China, 2008; Liu, 2010). In parallel, over the past decade, Chinese merchants have migrated on a global scale, distributing made-in-China goods (Ma Mung, 2008:648). Currently, it is estimated that there are approximately 1,000 China shops[2] distributed across the cities and rural towns. The spread of these shops to villages throughout the country has brought a great deal of convenience to consumers, particularly those living in remote areas; and Chinese products have also curbed price rises, especially in response to pressure caused by mounting inflation of the local currency (Bolaane, 2007:164).

The nature and supply chain of *fong kong* goods

According to field research, China shops in Botswana supply almost every daily need; from small things like needles, stationery, to cell phones, clothes, and TV sets. The majority are stocked by Chinese merchants from wholesaler markets in China, like Yiwu and Jinjiang. Some Chinese people obtain clothes and shoes from the wholesale markets in South Africa, since the clothes made there are better suited to their customers, in terms of size and colour[3]. From the Chinese wholesale market-*Oriental Plaza* in Botswana[4], merchandise is distributed to cities and towns across the country, through retail trading activities conducted by both Chinese and local retailers. The majority of local merchants and street hawkers prefer to buy clothes and shoes from Chinese wholesalers; however, a handful of them travel to South Africa and China to purchase unique goods in order to avoid direct competition with the Chinese merchants.

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The distinguishable *fong kong* goods sold in the China shop are goods like knockoffs and copies of brand named goods, and poor quality goods that are particularly notorious. The counterfeits found in China shops are usually of a high quality and have a contemporary design (this is particularly true of clothes and shoes), and so they attract many local customers. When regulations concerning counterfeits are at their strictest, few knockoffs and copies are available in China shops. This results in local street hawkers travelling to neighbouring South Africa to buy knockoff sports shoes from Indian and Pakistani traders instead of resourcing from China shops. Usually the same knockoff product is sold by street hawkers at a price two or three times higher than that offered by Chinese retailers. However, many local customers think the sneakers sold in China shops are fake but those sold in street are authentic although they are both fake. Nowadays, very poor quality textiles (expected to only last a few weeks) are gradually disappearing from sale in China shops, particularly in the big cities, because the locals have higher salaries and can choose to buy better products. As Mathews and Vega (2012:12) state, poor quality China-made goods are imported to Africa largely because the Chinese merchants in Africa focus on price as the primary determinant when purchasing. People tend to judge overall quality of China-made goods as a whole, while in fact China produces goods in different qualities.

Since the majority of *fong kong* goods are manufactured in China, the counterfeit manufacturing environment there, must be understood when considering the supply chain of *fong kong* goods. Lin (2011) maintains that the country's counterfeiting culture was fuelled by waves of Post-Fordism[5], and other trends in the global economy, such as consumerism, the culture of Chinese migrant workers, and the entrepreneurial spirit that arose in countless small apartments in various cities around China. However, much of the counterfeiting can be attributed to China's emergence as a world economic power. To date, counterfeit manufacturing in China has been the target of considerable criticism and pressure globally, especially from developed countries (Swike *et al*, 2008; Chow, 2003). However, counterfeit manufacturing has survived and even thrived in China over the years for a number of reasons. "Local protectionism" is considered one of its root causes; some government officials in

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China see counterfeiting as an opportunity to innovate, or view it as a product of democracy and popular culture, and thus support it (Lin, 2011:23). Furthermore, campaigns against counterfeiting usually deliver short-term results with raids carried out against individual counterfeiters and distributors to seize counterfeit products, ignoring the manufacturers (Chow, 2003).

Thus, Chinese merchants initiated the business of *fong kong* goods in Botswana, and they have become partners with Botswana local traders in the supply chain of *fong kong* goods over the years. In the current climate, *fong kong* goods will neither disappear from the manufacturing in China nor from Botswana market. However, we assume this mechanism is not simply driven by the pushing power of Chinese goods, but also the pulling power exerted by African consumers.

Theory of globalisation from below

"Globalisation from below", also called "low-end globalisation", can be defined as the transnational flow of people and goods involving relatively small amounts of capital, and informal, often semi-legal or illegal transactions. It is often associated with "the developing world", but is, in fact, apparent across the globe (Mathews and Vega, 2012:1). The "below" can be understood, as Mendieta (2001:23) states as: "the below of the poor and destitute, the below of those who are not seen, and do not register in the radar of social theory". Mathews and Vega (2012:2) argue that globalisation from below solves problems that globalisation from above cannot, because of inaccessibility. It provides cheap merchandise, and offers employment to millions of people who would not find it elsewhere. The links between globalisation from below and globalisation from above emerge clearly, when we look at the key players. Whether a trader or a banker, those involved share the same desire to become affluent; albeit with different limitations and access to capital.

Mendieta (2001) and Benton-Short and Price and Friedman (2001), in their research concerning immigrant cities, tried to look at the world from below, from the perspective of those who seemed to be more detrimentally than beneficially affected by the processes that comprise globalisation. Benton-Short et al (2005), argue that immigration is a powerful example of "globalisation from below"; adopting the view

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that globalisation from below forges a link between immigration and cities. Similarly, this article attempts to use globalisation from below as a theory to link Chinese merchants and Botswana traders with *fong kong* goods. This paper aims to clarify the "*fong kong*" phenomenon in Botswana society, by collating the voices of Chinese merchants and local people which represent the perspectives of "globalisation from below".

Findings

Despite its middle-income status, Botswana continues to grapple with significant social challenges including unequal distribution of wealth and unemployment (Kariuki and Abraha and Obuseng, 2014:2). Chinese goods are priced to meet the needs of the local population in spite of their limited quality. Therefore, the low-income group in society rely most on low-quality goods. By contrast, the middle classes usually purchase counterfeit clothes and pirate DVDs to fulfil desires that their economic situation would not permit otherwise. Rich people despise low-quality goods and counterfeits; however, they also visit Chinese merchants for Made in China goods that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Thus, China shops serve different needs for members of society according to their economic backgrounds. This section is divided into sub-sections according to the different social needs served by *fong kong* goods: low-quality cheap goods, counterfeit goods, and novelties goods.

Low-quality cheap goods

In the 1990s, on the arrival of pioneering Chinese merchants in Botswana, Chinese exports to Africa were typically low in price, and low in quality, in order to match local buying power. As a pioneering Chinese merchant said:

"Most local people went barefoot in those days. A pair of shoes could cost 300 Pula (1 Pula=US$ US 0.5 in those days) in white people's and Indian's shops, and local people's salary was around 200 Pula per month. The quality of Chinese goods was lower, because most were leftovers from factory, but at least local people could buy a pair of shoes for 10 or 20 Pula, even if they only lasted one month. Poor people would never spend 300 Pula on a pair of shoes, no matter how good the

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quality". (CEco158, 2014)

Therefore, although the quality of the textiles was poor, they effectively clothed local people, especially the needy on limited income. However, with respect to low-quality electronics the scenario is more complicated. During one interview, a Chinese merchant described replacing a TV set for a local customer who had bought it the previous day:

> *"The TV worked well when we tested it here yesterday, but today it doesn't work….Most of the TV sets sold in China shops are second hand inside, with new cases outside. Otherwise, how could it be so cheap! It is sold at 600 Pula (US$ 62). Nobody uses this kind of TV set in China any more. I assume some small factory managed to gather the old equipment together to generate business".* (CTco23, 2014)

Most Chinese merchants do not want to deal with electronics because the profit is low, and no warrantee of quality is offered by the factories in China. However, in response to the need in Botswana, the merchants do sell them despite the low profit and high risk. "Local people cannot afford a TV set that cost several thousand", commented a Chinese respondent.

Chinese merchants argue that they sell low-quality goods to match the buying power of the majority. However, this preference is the reason for the poor reputation of Made in China goods in Africa (Mathews and Vega, 2012:12). "Since Botswana is greatly influenced by Western media, local people believe that goods from western are good quality but from China are bad", said a professor at Botswana University. In response to recent changes in China shops, opinions concerning quality and price in China shops have split:

> *"Now when local customers come to buy a cell phone or a TV, they want to open the back of the case to check them! What do they want to see? Even if we sold high quality goods at our shops local people would not trust us. However, if the same goods are sold in a white person's shop, they would pay a lot of money to buy them and believe they are high quality".* (Chinese merchant, CTco34, 2013)

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"We are so thankful for the China shops. Because of them we have a TV to watch, and clothes to wear. Although some people say that Chinese clothes are smelly, not all of them are bad quality…. I think they are kind people and they sell goods of good quality as well". (Local customer, Pb178, 2012)

"The goods here are almost the same quality as in the China shop, but the China shops sell them cheaper. However, China shops do not display goods properly. Some goods in China shops are good quality if you know how to choose". (Manager of South African chain shop, FTbm102, 2014)

To keep pace with the development of Botswana's society, the majority of goods have improved in quality in tandem with price rises in China shops. However, the image of China shops remains the same: cheap, low quality, and disorganised. Besides, the failure of several Chinese construction projects also contributed to destroying the reputation of the whole Chinese community. This annoys some Chinese merchants, and their anger has a racial component: *"They call our goods fong kong because we are Chinese. The goods sold in South African chain shops are also made in China! The Chinese construction company did implicate us in blaming".* The infamy of China shops not only limits their business, but also opens up a loophole for local consumers, who claim for replacement goods stating the goods were of poor quality, even if they were at fault:

"One customer brought a satellite dish but did not know how to set it up. Then he brought the dish back to us and sworn: "Chinese bad quality." Then one of our local assistants set it up for him. I was angry and did not want to sell to him, but he insisted that he wanted it. Where else could he find a dish at such a low price?" (CTco22, 2014)

Thus, while low-quality goods have brought business to Chinese merchants, they have also contributed to improving the quality of life of low-income people in local societies. However, the increased presence of Chinese construction workers and shop -owners after 2000 created tensions in community relations, which attracted negative media coverage (Youngman, 2013:6). Local people are aware of the limited quality of the low-quality goods, however, some of them are quite rely on them due to their low buying power.

Counterfeit goods

Along with the arrival of China-made goods, competition among Chinese merchants grew fiercer, as China shops boomed. Meanwhile, local merchants and street vendors also benefited from the rich resources brought by Chinese merchants. Since "Chinese markets'' were founded in Botswana, many local traders and traders from neighbouring countries have been sourcing Chinese merchandise from China shops and Chinese wholesale markets, such as *Oriental Plaza,* before distributing them in rural towns and neighbouring countries. According to one Chinese retailer:

"Local street hawkers obtain great profits from selling counterfeits. One of them used to buy 20 to 30 pairs of fake brand shoes at my shop every time. I gave him 50 Pula (US$ 5.2) for one pair, and he sold them at more than 300 Pula (US$ 31). He nagged me for discount every time. It took him only three years to build a big house". (CTcof93, 2014)

A street vendor selling fake brand shoes reveals, "I used to get these shoes from China shops, but they cannot sell them now. So I go to South Africa every month to restock". Therefore, many counterfeits are distributed by local street hawkers who benefit greatly from conducting trading activities below the radar of local government; this is a typical characteristic of globalisation from below. Even when Chinese merchants are forbidden to sell counterfeits, the supply chain continues. Local street hawkers also sell other Chinese goods; however, their profits are much smaller than when selling counterfeits. Furthermore, in recent years many African traders have travelled to China as "suitcase traders", representing globalisation from below (Mathews, 2012). According to the interviews, a small number of Botswana traders travel to China and other Asian countries several times each year to restock unique designed clothes, in order to avoid competition with China shops and South Africa chain shops. Therefore, generally, street hawkers in Botswana are the main distributors of counterfeits nowadays, and they benefit from this business.

Although many anti-counterfeiting campaigns are conducted at governmental level, their policies towards counterfeits show some favouritism according to Chinese merchants, for the following reasons. First, the tightening of regulations has

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increasingly targeted Chinese merchants since 2008, and local officials have concentrated on sales of counterfeits in China shops (Gaotlhobogwe, 2009b, 2010). However, the government has not pursued local traders or street hawkers for their involvement with counterfeits. Second, local government is trying to empower locals to initiate business and manufacturing, instead of relying on imports (Ministry of Trade and Industry, 2011), through Economic Diversification Drive (EDD) and Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency (CEDA), which provides a holistic approach to the development and promotion of viable sustainable citizen-owned enterprises. When analysing governmental policies, many Chinese merchants argue that local government is playing a game of "local protectionism" with the intention of driving Chinese businesses away.

Regardless of tightened regulations, counterfeit goods continue to play a crucial role in Botswana's society. In recent years, given the increasing influence of television, considerable numbers of local people developed a taste for elite culture, aspiring towards a higher social status. In response to the fashion influences of neighbouring South Africa, branded textiles are available in almost every shopping mall, stimulating consumers' desire to buy. However many local people are unable to discriminate between counterfeit and genuine merchandise; the majority identify the quality of goods by looking at their prices. In fact, many locals do not care whether they are wearing a genuine brand or a fake one, as long as the quality is fine and the brand confers the social status they desire. Counterfeit goods are mass-produced to supply lower class consumers; the knowledge of luxury goods increases the referential value of both the counterfeit goods and the brand names (Lin 2011).

Counterfeits, despite the criticism, are products that answer lower-income and medium-income customers' needs and desires. It seems likely that the government approach balances their activities by being strict about some goods, while ignoring the majority; this is especially true since the global economic crisis in 2008. To date, the government's "Clean Sweep" activities have concentrated on counterfeits, with their actions directed by "outsiders", such as brand makers from the US and South Africa (Motllogelwa, 2007). A Chinese shop owner stated: "These days people from South African clothes factories are accompanying Botswana's officers to check

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China shops. Once counterfeit brand clothes are found, owners will be fined and the goods confiscated". Since most counterfeit clothes and pirate DVDs are copies of US and South African brands, it is unsurprising that these two governments are devoting considerable energy and attention to the problem. Although Botswana government's public attitude towards counterfeit merchandise is clear, its activities are in some extent directed by external forces.

Novelties goods

The variety of *fong kong* goods has increased quietly over time. Local government shows limited interest beyond counterfeit textiles and pirate DVDs; most likely because they are comparably easy to distinguish from genuine items. In response to the growing needs of local society, Chinese merchants have introduced novelties goods to the market, challenging the existing image of *fong kong* goods, since most of these novelties goods are of good quality. They are called *fong kong* only because they are sold in China shops.

Chinese merchants themselves also call China shops "baihuo dian (shops with assorted goods)" in Botswana and other African countries (Haugen and Carling, 2005). Some China shops sell as many as 1,000 product lines. When there is a requirement for a special item, local people ask the Chinese merchants for help. In some suit shops, customers can even order bespoke suits from China through the Chinese merchants. The demand for goods in Botswana has risen, and therefore the huge and varied market in China has become increasingly attractive to locals. In addition, Chinese merchants' willingness to help their local customers also contributes to the fascination of China shops.

Regardless of the various restrictions imposed on *fong kong* goods, novelties *fong kong* goods have survived and gathered popularity among local customers. In 2009, when the government tried to drive out China shops, some local people raised their voices in protest, arguing that China shops were a benefit to ordinary people:

"China shops cater for the masses….Batswana women are able to watch their favourite South African soapie 'Generations', thanks to the Chinese who

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provide the Philibao[6] decoders, which 'unblock' SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) channels". (Anonymous, 2010)

Fong kong goods, therefore, counter the rights of the SABC, as people are supposed to pay several hundred Pula every month for the service. However, local government did not take this threat as seriously as fake branded shoes. Some Chinese merchants were warned about the practice by the government; however, it was too difficult for them to refuse their customers who were optimistic.

Besides the needs of locals, novelty *fong kong* goods stimulated creativity and cultural awareness of Chinese merchants. In 2012, Chinese pioneers made baseball caps with the Botswana flag printed on them, and football T-shirts for the Botswana team, expecting these products would be popular during World Cup, which was to be held in neighbouring South Africa. As anticipated, the goods attracted many local people and even foreigners visiting Botswana. However, when the goods were circulated in the country they were instantly forbidden by local government, which claimed that the Chinese merchants used the logo of Botswana without its permission. The goods were quickly removed from the China shops, but the local street hawkers who had sourced them from the Chinese wholesale market were still selling them. Although the Chinese did not benefit, the cultural awareness and creativity of the Chinese had a huge impact on local society.

In order to make clothes that fit local fashion tastes, the Chinese not only import copies and knockoffs of brands, but also seek out ideas from local fashion shops. According to an owner of a fashion shop, some Chinese merchants observed the clothes and styles in her shop:

> *"We travel to Asian countries every year to find uniquely designed clothes that may be popular in Botswana…. Chinese come to spy our clothes. One Chinese lady was caught taking picture of our clothes in the fitting room.…We were told by customers that in China shops there was a dress with the same design of ours but sold at a much lower price with greatly inferior material".*(BTbo69, 2013)

A Chinese pioneer who sells formal suits and shoes states:

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"I observe what designs local people prefer, and order similar design from factories in China. My goods are of the same standard as those sold in white people's shops (representing good quality) regarding design and quality but at a cheaper price. If they sell the same goods as me, they are like a commercial for me. Since the materials of mine are even better than theirs, I manage to keep regular customers". (CTco104, 2014)

That local merchandise is being copied by Chinese merchants does not necessarily mean that China shops are in direct competition with local shops. The richest customers will visit branded shops to buy authentic goods, while medium earners and the poor will buy the products sold in China shops. Sometimes, copied goods can increase the popularity of fashion goods (Lin, 2011). On the other hand, Chinese merchants consider copying local fashions important, proving that they are integrated into the local Botswana marketplace. In addition, by moving from a *fong kong* goods distribution role, to creator of goods they may even have the opportunity to take a leading role in local business.

Discussion

The arrival of *fong kong* goods has afforded greater choice to local customers and, to some extent, reduced prices in Botswana, which has contributed to improved lifestyles for poor- and medium-level earners. In recent years, despite the limitations of counterfeit goods and the quality improvement of low-quality *fong kong* goods, local media and many local people have continued to criticise the Chinese. McNamee (2012) argues that *fong kong* goods are concocted by African governments and business people attempting to dent the reputation of Chinese traders, because they cannot compete with them. More recently, the political and economic strategy of Botswana has not supported China shops to the same extent as previously, since the government of Botswana has attempted to promote the growth of a vibrant and globally competitive private sector. Consequently, the anti-counterfeiting activities of local government are expected to reduce made-in-China goods and to the control proliferation of China shops. However, although the government is attempting to limit the push-power of *fong kong* goods, the pull of

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local needs cannot be controlled as easily as targeting local needs, since Chinese merchants import a huge variety of *fong kong* goods to maintain their businesses. Despite negative social influences, *fong kong* goods can be regarded as popular on a transient basis, whereas the local textile industry and its entrepreneurs are likely to mature.

At the state level, the fate of *fong kong* goods varies depending on the local economic status and local business strategies. Botswana's economy has benefitted from its diamond trade; however, as a land-locked country, it remains reliant on South Africa, despite its independence. Achieving a diplomatic relationship with China strengthened the negotiating power of Botswana, and gave the country a greater choice of imports. In the 1990s, low-quality *fong kong* goods with cheap prices were helpful to local people. However, because of economic development, *fong kong* goods have been derided by Batswanas, and China shops are considered a threat, especially following the issue of the Economic Diversification Drive (EDD). In this political and economic environment, *fong kong* goods, as well as the management of China shops, have been targeted by government inspections. Simultaneously, local media has played a crucial role in circulating information about governmental activities concerning Chinese businesses and projects, and has contributed to a more negative image of China.

Fong kong goods, especially counterfeits, raise legal and moral issues. However, the boundary between legal and illegal can be vague, depending on one's perspective. Mathews and Vega (2012:9) argue that it is fair to say that legality is nothing more than something designated as such by the agents of globalisation from above (in ither words customs and copyright offices). Making copies of brands is a morally ambiguous activity, particularly when both buyer and seller are aware that an item is a fake. In Botswana, the streams of "globalisation from above" and "globalisation from below" conflict at both the social and individual level. Local society propounds, and the media are broadcasting, a forecast of "high technology" and a "gorgeous life style". On the other hand, issues such as poverty eradication, currency devaluation, and growing youth unemployment need to be addressed domestically. At the individual level, on a monthly income that can barely feed a family, some

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people expect to enjoy meals at the Hilton and drive Mercedes Benz cars or Land Rovers. These aspirations, to some extent, increase people's appetites, and create a market, for *fong kong* goods. Therefore, as Mathews and Vega (2012:9-10) emphasise, morality needs to be debated beyond the perspective of globalisation from above alone. *Fong kong* goods can be beneficial, in that they provide the poor of the world with a taste of the goods bought by the rich, and enable hundreds of millions of people across the globe to make a living. Lin (2011:70) concludes:

> *Counterfeiters are not simply imitating high society; they have become producers of meaning and cultural innovators. We might observe that in some way human culture has always been characterised by an endless series of imitations.*

However, perhaps one day, Chinese merchants may source Panda cell phones from Botswana manufacturers.

This research has contributed to an understanding of nature and people's experiences of *fong kong* goods in Botswana, enabling a comprehension of local views concerning *fong kong* goods and their social influence. On the other hand, it challenges existing research concerning "globalisation from below" by applying the theory in an African context, where people are struggling to resolve the gap between "globalisation from above" and "globalisation from below". *Fong kong* goods, despite their negative image, have helped low-income people in Africa to sample the benefits of "globalisation from above", while also creating a more egalitarian society in Botswana.

Endnotes

1. (Available: http://www.afdb.org/en/countries/southern-africa/botswana/botswana-economic-outlook/)

2. Both the local population and the Chinese merchants currently operating in Botswana employ the term "China shop." Approximately 99 per cent of China shops in Botswana are Chinese owned and generally sell goods made in China to African customers.

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3. Clothes from wholesale markets in South Africa are also resourced from China. However, the Chinese merchants in South Africa make special orders that fit to the size and fashion taste of South Africans from China; while Chinese merchants in Botswana only bring clothes that were made for Chinese from China.

4. There are two *Oriental Plaza*s in Botswana: one in Gaborone, the other in Francistown.

5. The idea that modern industrial production has moved away from mass production in huge factories, as pioneered by Henry Ford, towards specialised markets based on small flexible manufacturing units.

6. Brand name

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Appendix A - Interviews cited

Interviewees have been coded and anonymized in order to protect their privacy and interests. The codes are chosen to provide the following general information about the informants:

C: Chinese business; B: Botswana business; F: Foreign business; T: Trade; E: External service provider; M: Middle Size Company; G: Government informant; S: Scholar informant; P: Pilot interview informant

0,1,2 etc. differentiates between respondents of the same affiliation:

> c: Chinese individual; b: Botswana individual; i: foreign individual besides Chinese; ex. Indian; Zimbabwean; o: owner; m: manager; e: employee

CTco22. Gaborone, 22 September (2014)

CTco23. Gaborone, 4 September (2014)

CTco34. Gaborone, 11 October (2013)

BTbo69. Gaborone, 13 September labou2013)

CTcof93. Gaborone, 8 September (2014)

CTco104. Gaborone, 3 November (2014)

CEco158. Gaborone, 26 September (2014)

Pb178. Mochudi, 27 January (2012)

From humanitarianism to trade promotion: the changing emphasis of Japanese development co-operation to Africa

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Abstract

It is only in the last 20 years that Africa has become a region to which Japanese official development assistance (ODA) personnel have attached significance. Until then, in its development aid programs, Japan long focused on Asian countries with which it has strong relationships, not only in terms of history and culture, but also economically and politically. As Japan became the top bi-lateral donor in 1989, it started to explore its unique approach of leadership in international development and launched the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which has convened every five years since 1993. The latest conference (TICAD V) was held in 2013. In this article, the author examines the diverse interests of stakeholders involved in the discourse on aid to Africa from business, diplomatic, and humanitarian perspectives. The background of these different motives will be analysed through published and unpublished documents, supplemented by interviews with people involved in the planning and implementation of TICADs, particularly those in 2008 and 2013. The paper find that while Japanese aid to Africa will likely be sustained at the current levels, the focus is likely to shift more toward pragmatic partnerships between African states and Japan economically and diplomatically.

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Introduction

It is only in the last 20 years that Africa has become a region to which Japanese ODA personnel have attached significance. Until then, in its development aid programs, Japan long focused on Asian countries with which it has strong relationships, not only in terms of history and culture, but also economically and politically. As Japan became the top bi-lateral donor in 1989, it started to explore its unique approach of leadership in international development and launched the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), which has convened every five years since 1993. The latest conference (TICAD V) was held in 2013.

In this article, I will examine the diverse interests of stakeholders involved in the discourse on aid to Africa from business, diplomatic, and humanitarian perspectives. The background of these different motives will be analysed through published and unpublished documents, supplemented by interviews with people involved in the planning and implementation of TICADs, particularly those in 2008 and 2013.

Due to the geographic distance, and hence less apparent historical connections than those between Europe and Africa, increasing Japan's commitment to Africa has always been a matter of domestic debate. At the same time, the change of macro-economic and diplomatic contexts has influenced the domestic atmosphere. The recent increase of attention to Africa is largely motivated by the steady growth of African economies and rivalry with China, which is increasing its political and economic presence in Africa. The supporters of humanitarian causes are facing the increasingly difficult task of mainstreaming their arguments, while aid to Africa, in general, has increased its share in the total amount of Japanese ODA.

Historical Development of Japanese ODA to Africa and TICADs

The history of Japanese aid provision after World War II can be traced back to as early as 1954 when Japan joined the Colombo Plan. It started as a form of compensation for the damage caused by Japanese occupation during the war. Therefore, in its earlier stage, the majority of ODA was directed to Asian countries. In the 1980s, the Japanese economy prospered on an unprecedented scale and the

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country became one of top economic powers of the world. At the same time, Japan and its companies were criticised as "economic animals", selfishly pursuing their own economic interests while neglecting the impact of their economic activities on the people of other countries and, as one of the most economically powerful nations, for not taking due responsibility for the welfare of the world. In response to this international pressure and to its internal drives for a leadership role in the world, the Japanese government rapidly increased the amount of ODA. The diversification of ODA resources to regions other than Asia also started around this time (Figure 1).

The TICAD was launched in 1993. TICAD is the conference which Japan co-hosted with UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSSA) and UNDP, African Union and the World Bank every five year, with the purpose of promoting high-level policy dialogue between African leaders and development partners. It is not a place to

Figure 1: Trend of Japanese Bilateral ODA by Region
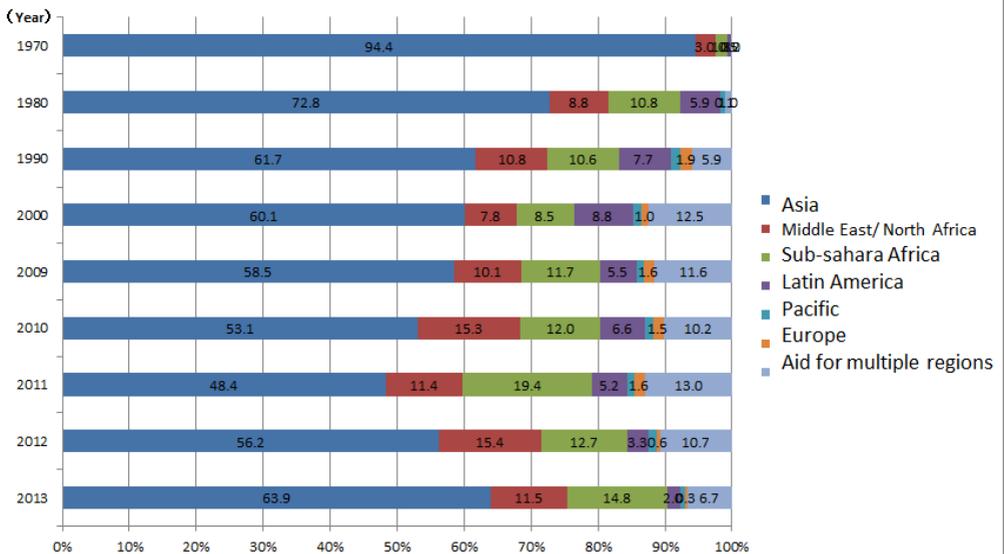
(Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015)

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discuss or pledge any specific aid programs. In reality, however, the speeches of the Prime Ministers in the past TICADs always suggested increased ODA from Japan to Africa. The early 1990s was also a time when the international community had lost momentum for aid to Africa. With the end of the Cold War, both Western countries and the former Soviet Union lost motivation to aid Africa militarily and politically. Japan saw this vacuum as a potential way to exercise its influence in the welfare of the world, and committed itself to organising TICAD to boost aid to Africa.

Between TICAD III (2003) and IV (2008), Japanese ODA to Africa quadrupled, and the share of Africa in total amount of ODA increased from less than 9 per cent to close to 12 per cent (Figure 1). This sharp increase was not only the result of a domestic drive in Japan, but was largely a response to the global initiative to give a "big push" to enable the economic and social development of African countries to take off. Japanese ODA to Africa sharply increased after the Gleneagles Summit in 2005, at which the United Kingdom (U.K.) government, the chair, strongly advocated bringing aid to Africa to the forefront of the debate. Meanwhile, trade between Japan and African nations had been constantly increasing. Japan-Africa trade rose at an annual rate of 18.8 per cent between 2002 and 2007, and in 2006 Japanese FDI to Africa stood at US$ 889 million (Ministry of Finance, 2009; see also Lumumba-Kasongo, 2010).

While Japanese trade with Africa increased, its pace of expansion was much slower than China. China's trade was about the same size as Japan at the beginning of the 2000s, but increased by 10 times in 10 years (Figure 2). China also launched a forum to discuss African development called the Forum on China–Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) in 2000. When Japan started TICAD in 1993, there was no major Asian donors involved in the discourse on aid to Africa. However, in the last decade, there has been a growing sense of threat among Japanese ODA officials and private companies that unless Japan makes unambiguous steps toward promoting trade with the vast African market and strengthening bi-lateral diplomatic relationships with African states, its appeal as a strong non-western partner will be lost to China. Such changes in international contexts also coincided with domestic pressure to allocate more resources to domestic matters and to be more accountable to tax payers. The

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total amount of ODA has shown a gradual decrease in the last several years, while the share of aid to Africa has been slightly increasing. Therefore, unlike the 1990s or early 2000s, when there were stronger drives for humanitarian aid and contribution to Millennium Development Goals, in recent years the emphasis of the Japanese government tends to be skewed toward more pragmatic interests in diplomacy and trade.

Figure 2: Trend of import in Africa by the country of origin
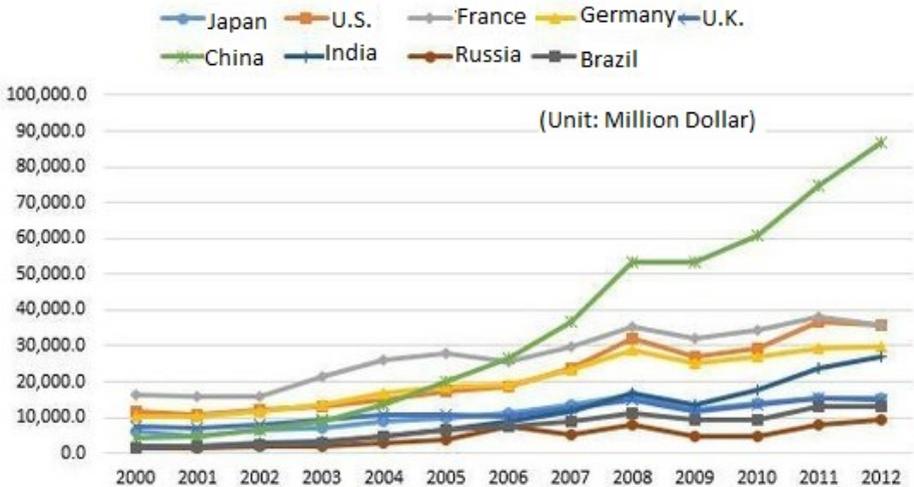
Source: IMF, *Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook*.

(*Source: IMF, Direction of Trade Statistic Yearbook*)

TICAD processes: a multiplicity of interests

As Table 1 shows, the first TICAD in 1993 highlighted the inter-regional co-operation between Asia and Africa. Along this line, there arose active discussion about the potential of Japanese developmental model to be transferred to Africa. As I will discuss later, this is one of the major drives behind the discourse on aid to Africa throughout the TICAD process. The emphasis on humanitarianism and aid for social

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development is visible in the earlier TICADs, while, in the recent two TICADs (TICAD IV and V), the focus is growingly shifting to economic growth, infrastructure building, and trade.

In this section, I will shed light on the diverse interests negotiated in the planning process toward TICAD IV and V.

TICAD IV in 2008 was a success in terms of the number of people mobilised. Representatives of 51 African countries, donors, Asian countries, and 50 NGOs participated. Three thousand people attended, excluding those who came to the side events. After five years, TICAD V had still more participants: representatives of 51 African countries, 31 donors and Asian countries, and 72 from international and

Table 1: Major themes of respective TICAD	
TICAD I (1993)	Transfer of Asian development experiences to Africa Aid for political and economic improvement Education/ training Environmental friendliness Partnership and co-operation
TICAD II (1998)	Improved development planning and good governance Conflict prevention
TICAD III (2003)	African ownership and international partnership
TICAD IV (2008)	Japanese political will and action plan for support for African development Doubled ODA and FDI to Africa
TICAD V (2013)	Transformation for quality growth Boosting economic growth with infrastructure development Empowering Farmers Promoting sustainable and resilient growth (Source: Aoki, 2013:2-3)

regional organisations. The total number of participants was as many as 4,500. At the end of each TICAD, a declaration of commitment has been announced. In the case of TICAD V in 2013, the Yokohama Declaration stated three pillars of assistance; (1) peace and security, (2) powerful and sustainable economic growth, and (3) an inclusive society, and announced the target of ODA to achieve them as US$ 3.2 billion over 5 years. Compared to TICAD IV, the emphasis was more clearly on economic infrastructure building and industrial human resource development. Japanese Prime Minister Abe also announced a new program called the African Business Education (ABE) Initiative, under which 1,000 African youths will be provided scholarships to pursue graduate-level degrees in Japanese universities. While there is growing influence from business sector to promote the Public-Private Partnership model of ODA to enhance investments and trade in Africa, there are various other actors involved in the TICAD processes and the discourse on aid for Africa.

Actors involved in the discourse on aid for Africa and their modes of participation

In terms of ODA and TICAD processes, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is in charge of setting the agenda and overall management. Of course, one ministry alone cannot plan TICAD because it has various diplomatic and financial implications and is also related to ODA implementation in Africa. Therefore, the interests of other ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, and of ODA implementing agencies such as JICA (the Japan International Co-operation Agency), are also reflected. In addition, since TICAD is co-organised by the Japanese government, the United Nations via the Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, UNDP (United Nations Development Program), and the World Bank, these parties are supposed to coordinate and plan together (Kidera, 2008). Furthermore, given the international trend to foster the initiatives of aid-recipient countries, partnership with and ownership of the African governments in the development process has been among the principles of TICAD since its second meeting in 1998. The representatives of African embassies argued that the Japanese government must hear their voices in planning TICAD (Mtango, 2008). Moreover, as discussed earlier,

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civil society organisations have become more and more active. Although MOFA was in the position of co-ordinating these different stakeholders and building consensus on the principles and contents of TICADs, in reality, as some of the anonymous interviewees from the embassies and civil society organisations pointed out, the messages from MOFA were lacking in consistency and clarity. This was partly because MOFA did not have a permanent office for TICAD. Each time TICAD was held, different officials were involved, and there was little effort to maintain the records and experience of earlier TICADs, which made the current person in charge start the process from scratch all over again.

Until the time of TICAD IV, there was a civil society organisation named the TICAD Civil Society Forum (TCSF), which ceased operation in March 2009. The TCSF was established in 2004, after TICAD III in 2003, and it was to focus its activities on influencing the TICAD IV process. According to Minoru Obayashi (2008), after TICAD III Japanese civil society organisations were criticised by their African counterparts for not playing enough of a role in advocating their perspectives in the TICAD. Without a permanent platform for co-ordinating the voices of civil society both in Japan and Africa, the influence on a conference like TICAD would be limited (Obayashi, 2008). At the earlier TICADs, civil society organisations sent representatives and made some appeals. However, such efforts were only made around the time of TICADs and there was little in the way of accumulated studies or systematic advocacy. Therefore, based on bitter experience and criticism from the African partners, after TICAD III, TCSF published the "Africa Policy Civil Society White Paper" annually until 2008, which evaluated Japanese ODA to Africa and made policy proposals (Obayashi and Ishida, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008). TCSF also made various efforts to raise public awareness and strengthen ties with the African embassies. A large part of the role of co-ordination among different kinds of stakeholders, raising public awareness, and leveraging the agenda-setting by MOFA, in which TCSF played a role until TICAD IV, were lost after its termination. Partly because of that, the advocacy from civil society was less vocal in the TICAD V process. Instead, the influence from the *Keidanren*, the Japan Business Federation, and other private sector entities has grown.

Another significant group of stakeholders in TICAD process is, needless to say, African governments. There is a group called the African Diplomatic Corps (ADC) in which all 35 African embassies in Japan participate. ADC has had monthly meetings with MOFA as a channel of collective diplomacy (ADC 2010). In 2007, ADC organised a TICAD Committee whose chairperson was the then-ambassador of Zimbabwe. The ambassador had worked in the World Bank and was knowledgeable about development co-operation and the language of discourse in that field. It was also partly at the urging of TCSF to work collaboratively to put pressure on the government.

There was yet another group of people who were intellectual "advisors" to the government. The membership of this category largely overlaps with that of civil society organisations. Some academics and vocal development workers took on roles to influence the TICAD process as commentators for the government, seminar panellists, interviewees, authors of articles, or members of advocacy NGOs.

There was no full consensus in any of the groups that participated in the discourse on TICAD. At the same time, in the effort to clarify their messages, civil society organisations, African diplomats, academics, and business sector representatives merged their opinions into a few major arguments. In the following section, some of the major issues raised by the stakeholders and made mainstream in the TICAD discourse will be reviewed. The issues reflect different perspectives on development in Africa and the role of TICAD in it. Such differences of perspective cut across the groups of stakeholders mentioned above. There were differences within civil society and among African diplomats and academics, even though they had prepared written proposals and reports unanimously.

Diversity of development ideas and interests brought to the scene

TICAD as a diplomatic tool

While TICAD is supposed to be a multi-lateral, norm-setting forum, the Japanese government has always been tempted to use it as a diplomatic tool to demonstrate its commitment to global welfare and African development. In fact, if it was truly

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multinational, Japan could have simply provided the funds to organise TICADs to the UN or any multinational body and pushed forward its agenda indirectly. However, what the Japanese government has done is to put itself in the front while hesitating to make its stance clear. Being a multinational forum for norm-setting, TICADs have not pledged any bi-lateral aid to African countries, although the Japanese government has announced a rough target amount of ODA to be provided to Africa in the next few years. This has created a mismatch between the expectations from and impressions of the international community, especially African nations, and the Japanese official position on TICADs.

Diplomatically, as much as it was for Africa, TICAD was also to demonstrate the Japanese presence to the G8 and the donor community. In particular, TICAD IV coincided with Japan's turn to host the G8 Summit, which was held in Hokkaido a month after TICAD IV in early July. Therefore, unlike the three earlier TICADs, special diplomatic value was attached to TICAD IV. The principle of environment and climate change in the TICAD Yokohama Declaration was a telling example of the usage of TICAD IV. In the TICAD planning process, there were few people who discussed the details of this principle. Of course, there are a growing number of specialists on environmental issues in Japan, but most of them did not put themselves in the TICAD discourse. This principle was, rather, a message directed to the G8 and industrialised countries, not necessarily to Africa, because the environment was one of the major themes of the Hokkaido G8 Summit. Aside from the stabilisation of the global economy and development in Africa, the Hokkaido Declaration included reducing CO_2 emissions by half by 2050 (Government of Japan, 2008).

The growing rivalry with emerging Asian powers, especially China and India, was another diplomatic driver. These emerging donor countries have increased their presence in Africa rapidly in the last few years. China started the FOCAC in 2000, and the most recent forum held in 2012 was the third. It was attended by national representatives of 50 African countries (Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, 2012). Some TICAD organisers claimed that Japan was more successful than China. However, some Japanese observers saw that the FOCACs, which were accompanied by various commercial talks and bi-lateral meetings to contract actual aid programs,

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sent clearer messages to and gained support from African countries (Takahashi, 2008). While there has been extensive criticism that the Japanese government failed to attract the attention of African governments, diplomatically, aid to Africa has also been considered as a way to get support from African countries in the international forum. For example, in 2005, when the U.N. Security Council was reformed, the Japanese government pledged an increase in ODA to many African countries so that these countries would vote for Japan to get a permanent seat on the Security Council. Regardless of its economic power, and having been defeated in World War Two, Japan has never been a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, although this has been a long-cherished hope of consecutive governments in Japan. There were some African diplomats who hinted that there was a competition between the Japanese and Chinese governments to "buy" the votes of African governments to either support or reject a permanent seat for Japan. It is also possible that African governments used their relationships to the two rivalling donors in front of each other as a means of negotiation. In any event, TICAD is as important for Japan to show its presence to African governments as it is to show it to international society.

Development of Africa through trade and investment

As some scholars have pointed out, regardless of the lack of historically-developed sense of relatedness between Japan and Africa, there has been trade relationship with South Africa, Nigeria, and some resource-rich countries of Africa from the 1970s (Ampiah 1997, Cornelisen 2004). In the 1990s when Japan started TICAD, the motive to demonstrate Japanese leadership in African development has surpassed that to promote trade. Therefore, in the earlier TICADs, the employed themes had more flavour of humanitarianism than economy. Still, there has always been the business sector interests at the undercurrent of the discourse.

In contrast to the diplomatic concern, the basis of which was narrowly confined to MOFA and researchers concerned with diplomacy, drives for supporting economic growth through trade and investment came from various groups. The business sector started playing a role in the TICAD III process, and became growingly proactive in the processes toward TICAD IV and V. They tried to gain the government's support

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to promote trade with, and investment in, Africa[1]. Given the economic growth in Africa in the first decade of the twenty-first century, foreign direct investment flowing into Africa has also grown steadily (Hirano, 2008). However, advocates for Japanese companies claimed that they could not proceed to Africa as quickly as their European and other Asian rivals because there was less support from the Japanese government. For companies to establish local factories and firms in Africa, they need favourable legal treatment, access to a workforce, materials, and markets, all of which require the official support of respective African governments. Such official support should be ensured through diplomatic channels (Sano, 2008; see also Miyaji, 2008). Also, Japanese companies have limited experience and information about conditions in Africa. Furthermore, the physical and cultural distance between Japan and Africa and political instability in some African states have made Japanese companies much more careful compared to investing in Asia (Yoshimura, 2008)[2].

Poverty reduction in Africa and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Concerns about social equity and the MDGs were expressed mostly by civil society organisations and some of the implementing organisations such as JICA. The concern for equity and poverty reduction was also the most visible and appealing frame of reference in the eyes of the general public. Publications and newspaper articles were often accompanied by pictures of children who are smiling but in need of help for schooling, women who cannot feed babies because of hunger, and so on. "Africa needing assistance" is an image which has been created and repeatedly confirmed in aid campaigns and awareness-raising activities in the last few decades in Japan. Although such campaigns by civil society organisations have been conducted from time to time, the period around TICAD IV and V saw unprecedented scales of media coverage on issues about Africa, which contributed greatly to raising public awareness. The mass media coverage of TICAD and Africa-related topics could not have happened if the process was kept exclusively among a few bureaucrats and business sector organisations. At the same time, their advocacy for MDGs and poverty reduction in Africa tended to create a rather simple image of Africa as a poor, conflict-torn continent. It should also be pointed out here that commitment to the MDGs was not simply an appealing message for the public, but

also considered as a way to demonstrate how serious the Japanese were in contributing to global welfare. There were academics like Motoki Takahashi who argued for the stronger link between the TICAD and the global discourse on poverty reduction and appealed for Japan to lead the international community in supporting the poorest of the world in Africa (Gaiko Forum, 2008).

JICA has identified human security as one of its principle activities since former president Sadako Ogata assumed office in 2003. Ogata has been one of the proponents of this idea of human security since she was the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (for example, Sen and Ogata, 2003). Human security is a wide concept and translated into practice in various ways. At its very core, it means protecting people from threats to their survival, dignity, and livelihood. In JICA's operations, this philosophy is often realised in the form of social service projects and programs for the disadvantaged. Social service projects implemented in the name of human security by JICA have also been presented as activities which contribute to achieving the MDGs because they minimise the risks of the disadvantaged and prepare conditions that lead to safe and healthy lives (Mine, 2007).

In the end, JICA pursued two directions under the framework of TICAD. On one hand, there were efforts to highlight poverty reduction and the redistribution of wealth. On the other hand, aid for economic growth was pushed forward. At TICAD IV, JICA organised a symposium on public-private partnership and economic growth, and Ogata chaired the session. However, given its historically accumulated experience of field-based technical co-operation and the principle of human security, JICA did not completely shift to trade promotion.

Transfer of Asian experience to Africa

In the TICAD planning process, there was much discussion about transferring Asian experience to Africa. Despite frequent references to it, there was no clear definition of what people meant when they talked about Asian models which were worth transplanting to Africa. The vague consensus would be that an Asian model is a public-private co-operation in development assistance, in which a package of infrastructure building and industrial skills training provided by Japanese ODA

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would encourage investment by private companies (mostly Japanese) and contribute to enhancing the foreign trade of the developing countries assisted by Japan. Shozo Kitta mentioned in a roundtable talk that in Asia, governments played active roles in the process of economic development, which was different from the neo-liberal economic theory dominant in the World Bank and some other aid agencies (International Development Journal 2008:20). In the same roundtable, however, Izumi Ohno shared her view that Asian development was achieved through a combination of rural development and industrialisation, which led to poverty reduction through economic growth. They were both talking about aspects of economic growth in Asia but somewhat differently. At the conclusion of the roundtable, three discussants—Kitta, Ohno, and Shinsuke Horiuchi—concluded that the creation of jobs would lead to economic growth, and vice versa; and such cycles of stable growth would lead to good governance. What was unique to Japan in its ODA and Asian experience was its prioritisation of job creation and nation-building[3]. In the same issue of the *International Development Journal* in May 2008, the month TICAD IV was held, there were many other opinions about the transferable Asian model, such as industrial clusters (Sonobe, 2008) and the "One Village One Product" movement (Yoshida, 2008).

There is a widespread belief among Japanese government officials that Japanese aid supported Asian countries to achieve miraculous economic development in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, Japan itself has had the experience of achieving rapid industrialisation, rising from the ashes after World War Two. These two experiences, successful foreign aid to Asian countries and Japan's own industrialisation, made many people claim that Japan could extend its experiences for African countries to adopt. The aid model of public-private co-operation in Asia has often been referred to by people in the business sector to support their demands for flexible ODA which encourages Japanese companies' participation in aid projects (Keidanren 2007). At the same time, this can be seen as a struggle on the part of the Japanese government to demonstrate the comparative advantage of Japanese aid over that of European donors, which have longer historical relationships with Africa, however controversial their histories may be. At the same time, it has been a several decades

since Japan achieved economic development from the 1950s to 1970s and the economic and political environments surrounding developing countries in Africa now are quite different from when Japan was in their position. Therefore, according to some analysts, what Japan itself can offer is less attractive than the first-hand experience of economic growth which emerging Asian donors such as China, India, or Korea can offer.

Still, African leaders were very keen on learning from the development experiences of Asian countries. Policy advice by former Malaysian government officials to Zambia and Japanese university professors' advisory service to the Ethiopian Prime Minister's Office were both activities funded by JICA but started with inquiries and initiatives from African governments. The sharing of experience between developing countries—so-called South-South Co-operation—has been mentioned repeatedly in the TICAD discourse as a mechanism that would be effective in transferring Asian experience to Africa. Japan has long been the promoter of South-South Co-operation, but its high potential for aid to Africa was reemphasised in the TICAD process. Atsushi Hanatani reviewed the history of research on transferring Asian experience to Africa in Japan, which recurred as TICADs have been held since 1993. As a JICA staff member who led the study group on Asian economic growth and its implications for African development before TICAD IV, he listed the issues to be considered, avoiding giving any particular definition of the idea of transfer. The points he promoted were: (1) to understand African needs before talking about Asian development models and experiences which are transferrable; (2) to foster mutual learning between Asia and Africa; (3) to relate Asian experiences with positive aspects of the conditions in Africa, instead of pointing out things that are lacking; and (4) to provide various cases, both positive and negative, of Asian experience, from which Africans can extract lessons subjectively (Hanatani, 2008:6-7).

Japan and Africa after TICAD V

The world economy has experienced a great crisis since TICAD IV was held in May 2008. Even the car manufacturing companies which have been the engines of economic growth in Japan experienced a serious decrease in profits, and have closed

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down factories and fired a large number of employees until it started to recover in 2013. The tax revenue of the Japanese government greatly decreased in FY2009, while expenditure to rescue moribund financial bodies, industries, and workers is enormous. In addition, in March 2011, the largest earthquake in the history of Japanese scientific quake observation and the tsunami following it hit north-Eastern Japan. They caused a massive loss of life and displacement of people. Given the acute domestic problems, the government has faced difficulties sparing a large sum of revenue for international ODA, which does not have demonstrable and immediate benefit for Japanese society and its constituents.

Under the initiative of the current government, which took power in 2012, the Japanese economy looks to be recovering from two decades of stagnation. In 2014 and 2015, major export-oriented companies have renewed their record of annual sales, although the picture is mixed among companies of different industrial sectors. This revitalisation of export-oriented companies and continued budgetary restraints resulted in the marginalisation of the appeals for Japan to play the conventional role of a donor nation. In contrast to the period when Japan tried to detach ODA from national interests and to improve its moral status as a humanitarian contributor to international welfare, it is now finding new roles of ODA, making it beneficial for people both in developing countries as well as in Japan.

In February 2015 the cabinet adopted a new ODA Charter, building on the report of the Expert Council and reflecting the result of public consultation. The Charter sets the fundamental principles and framework of Japanese ODA, including that to Africa. It was first decided in 1993, the same year TICAD started, and went through some minor revisions in 2003. The subject of much debate, the current Charter, renamed the Development Co-operation Charter, includes emphasis on trade promotion, co-operation (particularly economic) through non-ODA channels, and proactive support to peacekeeping operations. While continuing to highlight Japan's roles in humanitarian assistance and poverty reduction, relative weight to humanitarian and social development is lessened in this enlarged scope. Rather, the emphasis is more on economic aspects of development which are mutually beneficial for the recipient countries and Japan. In this context, the direct reference to social

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services such as education and health is kept minimal, except for the industrial human resource development which is closely linked with economic co-operation.

Many critics point out that there is a drive for protecting Japanese comparative advantage in the international development scene behind the revision of the ODA Charter. On one hand, the rise of China, which seems open in its national interests and militarist goals for territorial expansion, intimidates the Japanese government (*Asahi Shinbun*, 2015). Before it loses the ground it holds now, Japan should also allow itself to use ODA for its diplomatic interests and the promotion of exports and investments by Japanese private companies. This is a characteristic attitude of the current Abe government of the Liberal Democratic Party. At the same time, the fact that Abe was re-elected with a great majority of support indicates that, after two decades of stagnation, Japanese constituents are tired of policy measures which do not promote the immediate improvement of their economic and living conditions, and it is more difficult to get their support for ODA programs which aim to contribute to noble but distant causes.

Japanese ODA to Africa is changing from large-scale projects whose cost has been fully covered by Japan to ones that facilitate and catalyse the developmental process based on its accumulated experience of field-oriented aid programs since the 1990s. The well-planned and devoted practices of Japanese experts on the ground reflect the Japanese manufacturing spirit that excellence should reside in the details. The experience of such careful operation of aid programs will be a valuable contribution in itself, which is worth sharing with African counterparts. There are also schemes to adapt the advanced technologies in engineering and agriculture available in Japanese universities and corporate laboratories for development in Africa. While Japanese aid to Africa will likely be sustained at the current level, the focus is likely to shift more toward pragmatic partnerships between African states and Japan economically and diplomatically. However, it is ironic to see that the pendulum is swinging back, after decades of great effort to reorient Japanese ODA away from being closely linked with national economic interests to be more detached and humanitarian in its focus.

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Endnotes

1. Nippon Keidanren (the Japan Business Federation) dispatched an Economic Research Mission to Africa in October 2007 and came up with a set of recommendations. One of the main messages was to establish stronger public-private partnerships. The public-private partnerships in this case include (1) supplementing projects by private firms with ODA (loans) to promote investment in Africa; (2) enhanced flexibility of ODA grant projects to encourage Japanese private companies to participate in the bidding; and (3) relaxed criteria of eligibility for Japanese ODA loans. Nippon Keidanren also requested coordination among ministries and governmental bodies so that the government would be more effective and efficient in its promotion of trade in Africa. It was also hoped that industrial human resource development (the skills training of African workers) would be enhanced by means of Japanese ODA (Keidanren, 2007).

2. Such barriers are sometimes called "Africa risk" and call for more governmental support for private sector investment (Ohno, 2007).

3. JICA also organised a study group on Asian economic growth and its implications for African development. The report of this study group (JICA, 2008) became the basis of the symposium organised by JICA as one of the TICAD events, whose title was "African development and Asian experience of growth: The roles of the government and private sector for sustainable economic growth in Africa".

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AU-China peace and security co-operation: RECs, CSOs, and think tanks for the win

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Abstract

Extant literature points at peacekeeping troops, financial support of the African Peace and Security Architecture, and promoting development to be the backbone of China-Africa security engagements. However, despite notable growth in each one of these aspects over the past few years, there are concerns over Chinese ambitions and African agency in conflict resolution and stability maintenance. This article addresses the role that the African Union (AU) can play in enhancing, guiding, and evaluating China-Africa security co-operation. By taking security to encapsulate not only military but economic, human, and environmental dimensions, it becomes more evident that negotiations that are based on project evaluation and follow-up mechanisms lead to a sustainable development-security nexus. However, AU officials have expressed structural challenges within the AU Commission that hinder an efficient participation at China-Africa summits and other multi-lateral platforms.

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Consensus-building which is vital for a unified agenda as well as lack of means to set up follow-up mechanisms for development projects across over 50 member states are the big roadblocks. In brief, as a way to go around these two challenges, this study identifies the regional economic communities (RECs), Civil Sociecty Organisations (CSOs) and think tanks as the key allies of the AU to maximise its potential at the negotiations table.

Introduction

"*We believe that development is the foundation for peace in Africa (...) If Africa is to achieve durable peace and stability, it needs to speed up economic and social development*". (Chinese foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, 2010. Remarks made at Second Round of Ministerial Political Consultations Between China and Africa)

Peace and security are now part and parcel of China-African partnerships, evidence of which can be found in the Forum on China Africa Co-operation action plans (FOCAC). The first explicit mention of official co-operation on peacebuilding a at FOCAC summit meeting was in 2006 in Beijing. It was then reinforced in the Fourth Ministerial Meeting in 2009 in Egypt, stating that China:

"*will strengthen co-operation with countries concerned in the UN Peacebuilding Commission and support countries in their post-war reconstruction processes*".

Moreover, in the Fifth Ministerial meeting of FOCAC held in Beijing in July 2012, China's engagement in African peace and security was made even more substantive with the establishment of the China-Africa Co-operative Partnership for Peace and Security. During this fifth summit, then President Hu Jintao, announced a five-point plan in which he vowed to:

"*Deepen co-operation with the AU and African countries in peace and security in Africa, provide financial support for the AU peace-keeping missions in Africa and for the development of the African Standby Force, train more officials in peace and security affairs and train peace-keepers for the AU*". (Hu Jintao, FOCAC V, 2012)

Likewise, FOCAC VI is expected to emphasise even closer co-operation on Peace and Security both bi-laterally and multi-laterally strengthening AU-China and Africa-China co-operation on this front. It is evident that the AU has a strong role to play in guiding China-Africa conflict resolution and stability promotion given the expertise of the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) in African conflict resolution as well as other organs that contribute to long term stability through enhancing development, trade, education, and so forth. Additionally, with the formal inclusion of the AU as a member in FOCAC and the recent establishment of a Chinese dedicated diplomatic mission to the AU in March 2015, along with multi-lateral co-operation between China and African countries via the AU shows that the relationship has entered a more formalized phase.

There is an increasing body of China-Africa literature addressing different aspects of security co-operation. These include: the examination of the contribution of China to peacebuilding efforts and how that reflects on norm-making and norm following (Alden, 2014; Alden and Large, 2014); China's role in peace negotiations in South Sudan (Anthony and Hungkun, 2014; Large, 2008, 2009, 2015); discussing the non-interference principle in China's security motivations in Africa (Wu and Taylor, 2011; Wang, 2013; Xu 2012); debates over China's reaction to the Responsibility to Protect and the crisis in Libya (Garwood-Gowers, 2012); and looking at the controversial Chinese arms exports to sub-Saharan Africa (Lynch, 2012; Hauauer and Morris, 2014). There is also a fair amount in the literature to highlight Beijing's advantages in having a clearly articulated Africa policy and that the lack of reciprocity of an Africa policy for China weakens many African states' negotiating capacities.

However the bulk of the existing literature talks about China-Africa security co-operation from a bi-lateral scheme and there is a gap in addressing the multi-lateral platform with the AU as a voice for African agency. To be sure, scholars such as Van Hoeymissen (2010) have tackled the role that Beijing plays in providing financial and technical support to African regional organisations[1]. However it remains to discuss the challenges that confront multi-lateral co-operation between China and African states. Thus, the goal of this paper is to build on existing works

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by filling in the gap of addressing the potential role of the AU in promoting China-AU-Africa peace and security co-operation. The paper does not stop at the conclusion that Africans need to have a stronger negotiating voice or that the AU has to come with a co-ordination plan for a more effective presence at FOCAC. Instead, this article explores the potential of AU-China peace and security co-operation by 1) giving an overview of the ways in which China contributes to African peace and security issues, 2) examining the role of the AU and the challenges it faces in exercising better agency in China-Africa co-operation, and 3) suggesting ways for the AU Commission to improve its negotiating capacity. Finally the article will conclude with a general discussion on the upcoming FOCAC summit.

Overview of Beijing's security engagements in Africa: development–security nexus

Beijing and the Commission of the AU seem to share a broad understanding of security in terms that are not strictly defined within a traditional paradigm implying military security, but more in-line with economic and human security. To be sure, the Joint Statement on Comprehensively Deepening China-AU Friendly Co-operation which followed Li Keqiang's visit in May 2014 consisted of twelve points of agreement only two of which directly mentioned peace and security. Yet, the entire document implied an emphasis on regional stability and promoting (non-traditional) security through actively improving the continent's food security with better agricultural co-operation, achieving socio-economic developmental goals as well as other Agenda 2063 items[2]. Additionally, the joint statement committed the AU Commission to actively contribute to "China's endeavour to build a moderately prosperous society in all aspects and achieve the Chinese dream" (African Union, 2014). As summarised by Bill Bishop (2013) the Chinese dream is as a dream of "national rejuvenation, improvement of people's livelihoods, prosperity, construction of a better society and military strengthening" (China Insider, 2013). Evidently, Agenda 2063 and the concept of the Chinese Dream both seek the common goals of development and prosperity. By the same token, framing the joint declaration in terms of these two concepts of the Chinese dream and the AU's Agenda 2063 highlights the interest in a two-way partnership. However China's interest in

promoting development and fighting inequality preceded China-Africa and China-AU co-operation.

Beijing has historically been an adherent of the development-security nexus approach. Since Deng Xiaoping and the "industrial revolution era" of China (post 1970's), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had increasingly put a premium on enhancing development, reducing poverty, and providing jobs as measures to ensure relative stability in the country.

In addition, the concept of "new security" is based on a shift from understanding security as self-help to a more mutual/common security (China Report, 2002). Since the late 1990s China has embraced a progressive view of security (at least discursively) which was not based on a Cold War zero/sum mentality but instead on common and mutual security based on diplomatic dialogue and a win/win mentality. The Chinese Defence White Paper from 1998 is one of the earliest official documents that explicitly stated that security cannot be guaranteed:

> *"by an increase in arms, or by military alliances. Security should be based on mutual trust and common interest. [...] We should solve disputes through peaceful means and strive for common development." (*Chinese Defence White Paper, 1998)

Furthermore more recent versions of the "New Security Concept" (*xin anquan guandian*) hone in on the non-traditional humane security which views threats as not just military or political but also environmental, epidemiological, diaspora-related, and so forth. As expressed by President Xi Jinping the New Security Concept means that "development is the greatest form of security" (People's Daily Online, May 21—see also China Brief, May 23)[3]. The concept focuses on the importance of achieving a collective win-win security model that is based on a harmonious co-existence rather than hegemony and an arms race[4]. Indeed, a Chinese official position paper confirms adherence to a two-sided approach to security in which mutual development, trust, and win-win are central[5]. The latest document on China's military strategy (released on May, 25th 2015) equally echoes Beijing's commitment to peaceful development but also adds an emphasis on the need to protect China's interests abroad (be it nationals or economic investments)[6].

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Furthermore, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasised a continuation of this development-security nexus when he stressed that to build security:

"we need to focus on development, actively improve people's lives and narrow down the wealth gap so as to cement the foundation of security. We need to advance the process of common development and regional integration, foster sound interactions and synchronised progress of regional economic co-operation and security co-operation, and promote sustainable security through sustainable development". (Xi Jinping, 2014)

This way of thinking about the relationship between security and development is also reflected in Chinese foreign policy and its stand on what peacebuilding strategies in Africa should be like. As put by the Chinese Foreign Minister (2013):

"when conducting diplomacy, we must be fully committed to development, which holds the key to numerous problems in the world". (Wang Yi, 2013)

Such strong emphasis on the efficacy of economic development in achieving peace and stability reflects Beijing's practices domestically whereby the CCP, partly at least, draws some legitimacy and stability from providing satisfactory development rates and progress. However, when it comes to understanding the Chinese government's extrapolation of this development-leads-to-security internationally, Alden and Large (2013:23) view this as an expression of China's partaking in the "formative process of 'norm making'". Alden and Large argue that these norms (including economic development priority over democracy; facilitating the implementation of African home-grown solutions to African problems; and state centrality in the international system) are guidelines shaping China's alternative approach to peacebuilding (ibid: 24). Contrary to what could be described as a traditional "Western" liberal model for peacebuilding which rests on a firm belief that good governance via liberal democracy is the foundation for human rights and security, China has rather emphasised the priority of development over good governance[7]. Indeed for Chinese scholars like Li Anshan, China's support of development projects such as providing clean water supplies and enhancing local African food security are China's ways (albeit indirect) in reducing conflict and

establishing security. In addition, Liu Hui and Xuejun (2005) much like Li Anshan, have argued that "development, stability and harmony is more attractive" than "democracy, freedom plus market economics for Africa" (Xuejun, 2010).

Along similar lines, Wang accounts for China's peacebuilding contributions by asserting that:

"development can be tied to post-conflict reconstruction measures", and that in fact, "China participated in the post-war reconstruction of many African countries, including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Angola, Congo (DRC), and so on. The process involved the Chinese government, China Development Bank, large-scaled SOEs at state and provincial levels as well as private businesses"[8](Wang, 2013:80)

Hence, development goes hand in hand with peacebuilding efforts. Channelling such discourse about the priority of development and stability over democracy and other Western liberal ideologies, the Chinese government follows up with practices including but not limited to deploying peacekeeping teams that consist of engineers, doctors, farmers, and other non-combat troops. Many times the missions of these non-combatant troops include providing drinking water to the population, building basic infrastructure, and setting up small medical facilities for rural populations. Further illustrations of these missions, for example taking on a project to build several hundred housing units designated to lodge military families in Eastern Africa, are also framed as contributing to African peace and security[9]. Although this initiative does not mandate Chinese peacekeepers to be involved in conflict directly, it does provide support to the local forces by building necessary housing units or by financially contributing to related expenditures. Caring for the well-being of African populations by ensuring basic development goals, then, implies for the Chinese foreign policy, providing and improving security.

This is of course not to overlook important other initiatives that are less directly related to development than to a more material military security. The debates around a potential base in Djibouti, the naval presence in Somalia as well as the variety of Beijing-sponsored (technical and logistical) training programmes for African

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militaries are some examples of Beijing's wide interest in Africa's security concerns, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

However, this approach of viewing security enhancement as an implication of a multitude of development projects and foreign direct investment in Africa is not without negative consequences on stability. Indeed development empowerment without paying attention to governance and peacebuilding might entail the risks of governments using financial ties with China as leverage against their own citizens. More generally, development projects that are not inclusive of all concerned parties and that marginalize some groups at the expense of development, fuel discontent and instability[10]. Moreover, concerns related to land grabs and food security –although better if not exaggerated– could potentially fuel more conflict and grievances. Other risks of creating conflict as a result of implementing mega infrastructure projects can be illustrated in certain development projects sponsored by China Ex-Im Bank which ended up proving to bare negative consequences for indigenous populations. Examples of this include building a huge Dam in Sudan which caused the displacement of no less than 50000 people, and also *Dam Gibe 3* in Ethiopia which caused further impoverishment of ethnic (and highly armed) groups along the Turkana lake[11]. Easier flow of traded goods between Chinese and East African ports has also facilitated the expansion of illegal trade in Chinese-made weapons and armaments often used in conflicts that Chinese foreign policy puts a great effort into solving (Attree, 2012; Leff and LaBrun 2014). These examples show that there is a need for a better co-ordination and evaluation mechanisms to determine the potential risks and benefits of implementing big investment projects. It is the argument of this article that the AU has an important role to play in co-ordinating evaluations and follow-up mechanisms.

China's creative engagement in Africa's security

The Chinese government is willing to improve its expertise in handling security issues in Africa and that it is developing new strategies to cope with situations as it goes (Benabdallah, 2014). There is, in other words, no evidence to support the existence of a military grand strategy for China-Africa, but there is most definitely

strategic thinking in terms of playing a bigger role in African security issues. Necessarily in the absence of a grand strategy, then, there is a need for conducting foreign policy on a case by case approach and a great deal of monitoring and adapting to individual situations. Wang Yi developed the term "creative involvement" in security issues to describe a pragmatic and innovative approach to foreign policy practices (Duchâtel, Bräuner and Hang, 2014:9).

Some examples of such creative strategies in Africa entail a military diplomacy presence with sending permanent military attaches to eleven countries (so far quite modest but it could expand) and welcoming 28 African defence attaches to Beijing (Shinn, 2014). Another innovative strategy is sending peacekeeping troops that are trained to cope with armed conflicts to the conflict zones that are home to large Chinese investments. This was seen when in September 2014 China added some 700 combat troops to its contribution to UNMIS in South Sudan in order to carry out the UN mandate and at the same time provide security for Chinese investments and assets in the country. In a press conference given by China's Defence Minister in late September 2014, Spokesperson Geng Yansheng was asked whether the infantry battalion was just sent to carry out the humanitarian mission or to protect Chinese interests, his answer emphasized China's respect of the UN mandate but did not reject the possibility of this battalion being involved in protecting foreign nationals in need. However given the fact that the Chinese government is concerned with trust building *vis-à-vis* its relation to African states as well as the international community, it is cautious not to mix humanitarian interventions with having "boots on the ground" to protect its national interests on African soil. Even the alleged talks about establishing a Chinese military navy base in Djibouti have taken a "responsibility to protect economic interests" spin in order to maintain Beijing's commitment to respecting African sovereignty and differentiating its initiative from existing United States of America (USA) and French bases in Djibouti[12].

Beijing's recent efforts to participate in African peace and security through promoting post-conflict reconstruction projects are indicative of its willingness to promote its own model of development based on a broad adherence to the development-security nexus. Indeed until recently, as expressed by Alden and Large

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(2013), "China has been mostly a footnote in the burgeoning international attention towards post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding," but the situation is changing gradually. One of the main reasons of China's marginal performances in peacebuilding is related to China's history of adherence to the non-interference principle. Consequently, traditionally China's peacekeeping co-operation with African states has been more prominent than peacebuilding because the former is less controversial and reasonably reconcilable with China's non-interference policy. However, as Alden and Large argue, China's participation in debates on financial contributions to the UN Peacebuilding Fund and other similar mechanisms is a teller of China's willingness to be more proactive on this front.

Lu Shaye, the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) Department of African Affairs, has argued that Beijing adopts the tactic of "constructive involvement" on the basis of non-interference (Duchâtel *et al*, 2014). In his analysis, Lu Shaye makes the case that Beijing's adherence to the non-interference principle cannot remain rigid but has to become flexible. The concept of "constructive involvement" which he puts forward is based on two aspects: first, getting involved in security crises following UN guidelines and host country's agreement; second, and this is the innovative part, getting involved in a constructive way means playing a positive role in African security issues instead of taking a domineering role as traditional powers usually do. According to Lu Shaye, Beijing has been constructively involved through these main channels: participating in direct conflict mediation, supporting UN or African regional organisation-led peace talks, supporting regional peacekeeping missions, and participating in maintaining peace and stability through development projects (Duchâtel *et al*:2014). Indeed as noted by Alden (2014:4), China was a traditional sceptic about peacekeeping missions and has been known for vetoing and resisting multi-lateral collective action mechanisms. However, since 1990, which is China's first contribution to peacekeeping, its position has changed from blocking the missions at the UNSC to actively participating in many and in fact to topping the UNSC in terms of contributing with largest PKO teams. As expressed by Li Keqiang in his speech to African Union staff in Addis Ababa, "China has contributed more personnel to UN peacekeeping

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operations in Africa than other permanent members of the UN Security Council, and Chinese peacekeepers are serving their duties in multiple hotspot areas across the continent. The solidarity and mutual trust between China and Africa serve not only our respective development but also peace and progress of the world" (China Daily, 2014). Chinese peacekeepers have indeed participated in nine out of the current 15 UN peacekeeping operations around the world. While the number of Chinese peacekeepers worldwide is much smaller than that of Bangladesh (10,757), India (8,919) and Pakistan (10,656), China currently ranks as the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations among the five permanent members of the UNSC. With regards to Africa, since the 2006 FOCAC Summit, China's deployment of peacekeeping troops and police to Africa has totalled 6,281 person-time, with 1,629 Chinese soldiers and police officers remaining in service in six UN peacekeeping missions in the region. As the chart below shows, China's participation with peacekeeping troops has been increasing since the early 2000. However, is contributing with peacekeeping troops enough to achieve the level of stability and security co-operation that FOCAC agendas aim for?

AU-China security co-operation: no more than marginal?

Alden argues that Beijing faces a three-fold risk with regards to non-engagement in security issues in Africa. A reputational risk to China's image abroad as a responsible emerging power due to engaging with unpopular regimes, a risk to its business interests in less stable regions, and a risk to its nationals living across the African continent in areas that are prone to conflict (2014:1). Hence, juggling demands and willingness to be more assertive on the international security scene with Chinese foreign policy principles of respecting state sovereignty often prove challenging. For this reason closer co-operation with the AU commission provides Beijing an opportunity to tap into the expertise of the African Union Pease and Security Council (AUPSC) and its knowledge of the intricacies involved in different conflicts. Effectively since the passing of Article 2 of the Constitutive Act in 2002 which transformed the Organization of African Unity into the AU, peace and security issues have been tackled under the auspices of the five-pronged system of The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) composed of the Peace and

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Security Council (PSC), the Early Warning System (EWS), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise, the Peace Fund and the designated regional economic communities (RECs). Besides, some of the functions included in the AUPSC mandate consist of preventive diplomacy, peace-making, peacebuilding, and humanitarian intervention (African Union Protocol, 2003). However, one of the main challenges facing this apparatus is the existential dilemma that is characteristic of most inter-governmental organisations; autonomy. The AU in general and the AUPSC more specifically relies on financial, equipment, and logistical contributions of member states to have an efficiently operating EWS, and skilled expertise for the ASF. It follows that the financial situation being as it is with over 90 per cent of AU's operating budget coming from Western countries, financial autonomy is a challenge. Indeed, the AUPSC holds closer affinities to EUPSC and UNSC with which it holds Joint Field Missions like the recent one to Mali in February 2015 mostly because of the contributions and expertise provided by the European counterparts. Likewise, even on a more symbolic level, the new Peace and Security building at the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa is commissioned and financed by the German Federal Office with a value of over € 27 million. The new building will be equipped with state-of-the-art equipment to enable a proper functioning of the Continental Early Warning System (African Union press August, 2012). For these reasons both Beijing and the Commission of the AU would benefit from furthering co-operation in Peace and Security. Necessarily, Beijing's willingness to participate with expert training for African Standby Force staff, as well as with equipment and armament is welcomed by AU officials. Yet by the same token, by putting security in the broader definition of development-as-security one can identify broader areas for China-AU co-operation and longer-term security goals.

FOCAC as platform to enhance AU-China security co-operation

The AU was admitted as a full member of FOCAC (Forum on China Africa Co-operation) on October 26, 2011. And as a matter of fact, Beijing played an important role in pushing for the AU to upgrade its status at FOCAC from an observing member to full status membership. This signifies China's interest in exploring multi-lateral co-operation in addition to bi-lateral tracks. It also sends

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signals to African counterparts that Beijing is being open to a more unified African agenda and willing to accommodate AU suggestions. Yet, China-Africa experts Alden and Large (2013:20) lament that despite FOCAC V being inclusive of the AU as a full member:

> *"the extent and nature of China's engagement with Africa's security and post-conflict peacebuilding institutional architecture, from the AU Peace and Security Council, conflict early warning system, Peacebuilding Support Facility or Panel of the Wise, to the facilities of the African Development Bank, NEPAD or the AU still remains unclear".* (Alden and Large, 2013:20).

Indeed, even towards the end of FOCAC V and well into FOCAC VI there has not been clear agenda on how China will engage directly with post-conflict peace-building architecture. In this particular situation, all necessary mechanisms for co-operation seem to be in place; the discourse of Chinese foreign policy is very encouraging for a win-win and equal relations, the platform of FOCAC is very consultative and open to communication, and the inclusion of the AU as a member tops all these mechanisms. Therefore, there needs to be a proactive role played by the AU to maximise African agency in China-Africa co-operation in general and to achieve security goals in specific. In what follows the paper examines the challenges that AU officials pointed out in a series of interviews conducted at the AU Headquarters (Benabdallah, 2015b). After going over these challenges, the article proceeds with recommending ways to circumvent these challenges.

AU's challenges in promoting African agency in FOCAC

During preparatory and brainstorming phases that precede each China-Africa summit, the commission of the AU gives mention of several ideas and proposals that are in line with its strategy. For instance, in preparation of the ministerial official meeting in South Africa for FOCAC VI, some of the key issues that are highlighted by the AU Commission's promoting Agenda 2063 are development goals including an emphasis on gender empowerment, regional stability, more investment in renewable energies and industrialisation (Benabdallah, 2015b). When these proposals have been put forward, the Chinese side sends a draft of the action plan to

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the AU Commission which forms a sous-committee consisting of 15 member-states (currently presided over by Chad). The sous-committee is in turn divided into working groups that will convene in order to discuss the action plan and make necessary remarks or suggest amendments. Then the office of the Permanent Representatives' Committee (COREP), which has a mandate to speak on behalf of all member-states, reviews and incorporates feedback from the working groups' reports and sends the action plan back to the Chinese side. Hence the AU is in a position to carry parallel communication channels. One is internal and goes to the representative missions of the member-states and the other is external and goes to different partners (China in this case). This structure of communication presents challenges to the AU which the next section examines in detail.

After having described largely how the process of crafting the FOCAC Action Plan unfolds on the African side, it helps to identify the AU's negotiations weaknesses. There are two key challenges that the AU has to overcome for a more efficient participation at FOCAC: consensus-building and follow up mechanisms. The first challenge is a concern mainly during the drafting of FOCAC agenda as the Commission of the AU has to survey different member states' voices and make somewhat of a coherent agenda draft. Managing as many diverse concerns into one platform or agenda was highlighted as a big challenge in my conversations with AUC partnership officials. Indeed, close to fifty African countries have formal trade relations with China and carry most of them bilaterally. For the AU to negotiate a strong and unified multi-lateral agenda and present it on behalf of its member states is indeed a challenging and lengthy process. Not the least because actual communications with all members is a time consuming challenge.

Meanwhile, the second key challenge which is perhaps even more pressing is related to the lack of having a mechanism in place to follow up on implemented projects or evaluate the cost and value of past or present deals. This is different from consulting on the values and risks of conducting business. Instead, follow up mechanisms are tasked with evaluating already implemented projects and assessing the extent to which they yielded expected results. The AUC, as it were, does not have effective ways of collecting data or evaluating for itself China-Africa projects to provide

insights on what has worked for the best interests of its member states and what needs improvement, amendments, or renegotiations. Instead, it relies on receiving progress reports from member states but is not mandated to oblige them to have or send said reports. Evidently, for the commission of the AU to be a proactive member of the preparatory as well as follow up China-Africa summit committees, it needs to have a clear sense of the status and effectiveness of development projects and other partnerships implemented through FOCAC platforms. Hence, maximising opportunity to realise Agenda 2063 goals through partnerships with China (as well other countries) is hinged upon evaluation and follow-up mechanisms. However, in conversations with several AU representatives, getting information about project evaluation reports remains challenging for the Commission. The AU as it stands does not have its own mechanisms or teams to lead project evaluation neither does it have enforcing powers to mandate member states to implement such mechanisms when they don't exist. It can suggest and raise issues to the attention of member states, it can also request reports but it's constrained to do more. For these reasons, and for financial autonomy challenges discussed above, the AU Commission (AUC) with its African Peace and Security department and its trade and investment sector would be better served being resourceful in getting data on partnership evaluations. The next section outlines some ways for the AU to circumvent these challenges and promote a proactive role in negotiations.

A pragmatic way forward

This study has so far established that collecting evaluation reports on China-Africa development projects that are completed or are in the realization process proves to be a particularly difficult endeavour because member states have different mechanisms for project evaluations. In some countries, it is at the level of foreign ministry that one can get data on development project evaluations, in others it is at the presidential office level, or in other decentralized governments it's at the level of local government offices all together. The same applies to AUC's calls on member states to share details about their bi-lateral security co-operation with China whereby the AU can only request information that member states will or will not volunteer. Thus, a question that begs to be asked is how to move forward knowing that AUC does not

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have a standard coherent follow-up mechanism to facilitate the aggregation of evaluation reports and data? This article proposes three ways ahead that could make the AU-China partnership more conducive to improving Peace and Security partnerships based on Agenda 2063 and the Chinese concept New Security.

First, one way to remedy for this lack is for the AU Partnership division to strengthen ties to African civil society organisations and entertain regular meetings with relevant representatives. Often times, civil society organizations have hands-on evaluation reports on different development projects and their impacts (positive and negative) on local populations, existing grievances and so on. Countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Senegal, and Cameroon among others have a wealth of resources and research conducted by civil society organisations which can be of use to inform the AU's negotiations with trading partners[13]. Indeed when it comes to developmental mega projects, and especially in light of the above-mentioned examples of the grievances caused by dam constructions in the Sudan and Ethiopia, civil society groups should be involved in the process of weighing in the benefits and risks of such big projects. Furthermore, civil society groups have a better idea on the way to mediate conflict in places where conflict exists and can be used as references when the AU is negotiating ways for Beijing to support conflict resolution projects in Africa. Local NGOs have the merit of being able to cater solutions that work for their specific context and have better chances at achieving targeted results than standardised (one-size-fit-all) solutions. Following Beijing's support of the slogan African solutions to African problems, one can see how civil society groups can be the right channels for the AUC to strengthen its negotiating capacity with parties interested in playing a significant role in African peace and stability.

Second, think tanks can also serve as a valuable resource for consultancy on development project evaluation for the purpose of gaining a good grasp of what is happening on the ground. The list of think tanks[14] that was recently released shows that Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Senegal, Egypt, and Uganda are leading African countries in having world class think tanks. By working in tandem with an AU partnership unit and advising on specific projects, there could be a valid way to make up for the lack of standardised and accessible follow-up mechanisms for the AU.

Furthermore, the already existing 10+10 platform of China-Africa Think Tanks which facilitates information sharing and collaboration between Chinese and African think-tanks can be a valuable resource for the AU commission to tap into.

Additionally, a few of these think tanks are based in Addis Ababa providing a convenient proximity to the AU for even closer communication channels. Relying on reports from these think-tanks has the potential of conducting solid need assessments and proposing development projects that are inclusive of all local and indigenous groups. This is vital for advising policies on executing mega development projects which may have large negative unintended consequences on food security, ethnic tensions, and indigenous populations' livelihoods. In addition to this, think-tanks such as the Institute for Security Studies are very active in holding roundtables that join both scholarly as well as policy professionals to discuss mediation processes and conflict resolution roadmaps for Africa. The AUC can definitely benefit from regularly cooperating with such channels for better information on how to negotiate ways for Beijing to be effectively supporting African peace and security initiatives.

Last but not least, another way to circumvent the lack of evaluation mechanisms is to further strengthen the AU's co-operation with Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the question of project evaluation. Indeed an additional way to go around the challenge of communicating with as many different member states and their progress reports is to convene a partnership with the EAC (East African Community), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The AU designated a total of eight Regional Communities through the AU-REC Protocol of 1998 but only five of them (those listed above) are active as the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) suffers strenuous relations between Morocco and the AU over Western Sahara, the Kaddafi-instigated Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN SAD) withered, and The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) did not make substantial progress. Indeed the RECs are viewed as the AU's key implementing force and development agents that promote inter-regional

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integration and facilitate trans-border social and economic co-operation. Yet, building on Van Hoeyemissen (2010, 2011) we propose here to view RECs as a valuable source of consulting on project evaluation and risk assessment. RECs trans-regional nature is conducive to permitting a smoother flow of information and co-ordination to get progress reports. In fact as Hoyemissen points out, "in 2005, China appointed representatives to SADC, ECOWAS and COMESA" (2011:57). At the very least, this signals Beijing's interest in carrying out its commitment in the FOCAC 2003 action plan to:

"provide, within the limits of its capabilities, financial and material assistance as well as relevant training to the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. In order to strengthen the capacity of African States to undertake peacekeeping operations, we look forward to the strengthening of China's co-operation with African states and sub-regional organizations in the areas of logistics." (FOCAC, 2003)

Again, it has been the goal of this paper to acknowledge important discursive moves to better the AU's role in channelling a strong and solid negotiations capacity with China as well as other partners, but also to move beyond rhetoric and propose concrete ways of improving the AU's efficacy in this regard. Thusly, more and regular co-operation venues need to be facilitated between the AU, China, and Africa regional organisations.

Arguably, the AU's partnership division can diversify its collaboration with non-state actors and organize consistent symposia inviting different stakeholders to the table, from think tank affiliates, to civil society activists and regional organisation representatives. Such encounters ensure that the AUC is debriefed on current projects' progress status and will definitely maximise the AU's follow-up reports and improve its opportunity to be efficient at FOCAC table. The advantage of FOCAC fora is that they are systematic and have been a consistent platform for over a decade. This means that there has been enough time to observe and conduct evaluations of the projects and partnerships which were agreed upon in the earlier FOCAC summits. Another advantage of FOCAC is its structure with pre and post-

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follow-up committees which invites for a mechanism of evaluation to be implemented on both sides. FOCAC's structure as well as Beijing's willingness and insistence on giving the AUC full membership at FOCAC (as opposed to observing member which was the AU's status prior to 2011) are conducive for a stronger and more assertive voice of the AUC. Thusly, by tapping into the resources of RECs, CSOs, and think tank researchers, the AU can be well equipped to take a proactive role in negotiating partnerships not only with China but also with other partners.

Concluding remarks: what role for the AU in FOCAC VI and beyond?

Recently, Beijing has opened a dedicated mission to the AU becoming the second country (after the US) to have such formalised close ties to the AU. The mere fact of having a Chinese ambassador to the AU will facilitate communication channels and closer partnerships (Benabdallah, 2015b) Contra bi-lateral agreements that China signs with individual countries in Africa, the multi-lateral MOU it signed with the AU, in tandem with Agenda 2063, aims at increasing intrastate projects and cross country railway construction, aviation, infrastructure, and poverty reduction programs. These are different from bi-lateral agreements in that the speed train construction projects that are negotiated at the multi-lateral level are mega-projects that involve crossing through multiple countries and therefore need a strong co-ordination from the part of the AU. Besides strengthening these multi-lateral projects, the AU is pushing for renewable energies co-operation, industrialisation and technology updates, trade in finished goods produced in the continent, and making sure the win-win co-operation principle achieves its full potential.

To conclude, this article has argued that necessary mechanisms for enhancing African agency and unity through AU-China co-operation are already in place. Yet they are underexploited and overlooked. This article has argued that both a discourse encouraging more African agency as well as policy designed to enhance the AU's role in China-Africa relations already exist. Indeed, being a full member of FOCAC gives the AU opportunities to undertake more unified and stronger negotiations with China. In order to fulfil this potential, three ways of improving evaluations and follow up mechanisms have been proposed here. Moreover, in general terms,

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engaging in better negotiations that are based on informed evaluation mechanisms and progress reports will in the medium to longer term achieve development potential in many conflict zones and reduce the risk of causing unanticipated grievances and instability.

Endnotes

1. For more on this refer to: Van Hoeymissen, S.2010. China's Support to Africa's Regional Security Architecture: Helping Africa to Settle Conflicts and Keep the Peace?. *The China Monitor*, 49:10-14.

2. Agenda 2063 (A Shared Strategic Framework for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development) is a fifty-year plan for socio-economic transformation and technological development. The strategy charts 50 years of growth and development following grand lines towards integrating African local and regional markets, achieving peace and stability, and sustainable development. (For more view: http://agenda2063.au.int/en//vision).

3. President Xi Jinping gave this speech at the Conference on Interactions and Confidence-Building in Asia on 20 May 2014.

4. China's (2002) Position Paper on the New Security Concept explains that "*under the new historical conditions, the meaning of the security concept has evolved....extending from military and political to economic, science and technology, environment, culture and many other areas*". (For more information view: http://www.china-un.org/eng/xw/t27742.htm).

5. (For more information view: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml).

6. (For more information view: http://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy).

7. In a speech at the Second World Peace Forum, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi reiterated Chinese diplomacy's position regarding the centrality of the development agenda: "*when conducting diplomacy, we must be fully committed to development, which holds the key to numerous problems in the world.*" (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2013. Exploring the Path of Major-Country Diplomacy With Chinese Characteristics [Online]. Available: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/ wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1053908.shtml (2015, June 29).

8. Wang (2013: 80) adds that "*the development of Sino-African relationship provided an important opportunity for China to promote and strengthen such an image. Through peacekeeping missions, counter-piracy operations and weapon proliferation prevention efforts in Africa, China not only contributed to Africa's peace and security processes, but also achieved quite a success in public relations*".

9. The Chinese government handed the project over in November 2014, providing 12,000 housing units constructed for Tanzania's military families, and took on a new project of building a military academy for Tanzania. (For more information view: http://www.independent.co.ug/news/news-analysis/9497-is-it-time-for-a-china-africa -command).

10. The author would like to thank her reviewer who suggested that there are examples of countries where GDP grows while conflict continues. The Sudan is a prime example of this in the sense that its GDP increased significantly due to oil trade with China, even though conflict has not withered. GDP size so to speak does not equal peace and stability and the relation between governance and development needs to be two-way and work in a feedback loop.

11. For more information on the concerns of food security threated by Dam Gibe 3 please view: http://allafrica.com/stories/201205140235.html. In addition, a series of analytical pieces can be found at: http://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/ id/00011237.html. For more information on the Sudan's Dam creating ethnic tensions please view: http://www.internationalrivers.org/blogs/227/new-chinese-dam -project-fuels-ethnic-conflict-in-sudan.

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12. (For more information on the implications of China's base in Djibouti refer to: http://africasacountry.com/what-does-it-mean-that-china-has-a-military-base-in-djibouti/)

13. (For more information view: http://www.unctadxii.org/Documents/ UNCTADXII/uxiidom_cso001_en.pdf).

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African soft power in China

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Abstract

This paper comprises an account of outstanding performance by some Africans living in China in the practice of their professions, in their studies, in public service, and in their general interaction with the Chinese people and the Chinese state. The paper argues that these activities, recognised as outstanding by the Chinese and widely reported in the Chinese and international media, constitute the building blocks of African soft power in China. The consequences of this argumentation include the fact that if the governments of Africa and China want to promote people-to-people relations in the third decade of 21st Century Africa-China relations under the aegis of the Forum for Africa-China Cooperation (FOCAC), more of such activities by diaspora Africans in China and diaspora Chinese in Africa must be recognised, promoted, rewarded, and institutionalised within the formal FOCAC framework.

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Introduction

After more than a decade (2000 to 2013) of intense co-operation between Africa and China within the framework of the Forum on Africa-China Cooperation (FOCAC), it is time to take stock of these relations and find ways to develop them further in the second and subsequent decades. In this paper, I shall briefly examine the role of Diaspora Africans in China and Diaspora Chinese in Africa with the aim of finding out if these diaspora groups can contribute to the development of Africa-China relations. There are now more than two million Chinese in Africa and half a million Africans in China; and many academic studies including journal articles, books and theses have already been produced on Africans in China (examples include: Bodomo 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013a and b, 2014; Bredeloup 2012; Bork *et al*. 2011; Castillo 2014; Cissé 2013; Hall *et al*. 2014; Han 2013; Haugen 2011, 2012, 2013; Lan 2014; Li *et al*. 2009, 2012; Lyons *et al*. 2008, 2012, 2013; McLaughlin 2014; Pieke 2012) and on Chinese in Africa (for example: Park 2008; Mohan and Lampert 2013; Sautman and Yan 2014).

These numbers are the basis of nascent diasporan communities on either side of the partnership; a Diasporan community being defined as a transnational or deterritorialised group of people organising themselves into networks or relating to themselves and to their host communities based on some common socio-cultural features and institutions like language, food, and clothing; and who have links, whether permanent or tenuous, back to their historical homelands. This diasporic presence on either side of the partnership is not without debate. What challenges do these Diasporas pose for their hosts and for general Africa-China relations? Do they play any positive roles and how can we further harness these positive roles to strengthen Africa-China cooperation? On the one hand there are media reports (for example CNN, BBC and SCMP) and academic analyses (for example Zhou, 2011; and Mathews and Yang 2012 for Africans in China; Mohan and Lampert 2013 for Chinese in Angola, Ghana and Nigeria; and Sautman and Yan 2014 for Africans in Zambia) that show that these communities indulge in activities that create negative perceptions, tensions and divisions and thus threaten the strengthening of relations between the two parties. There are, however, those that believe that diaspora

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communities on either side of the partnership have a major role to play in developing stronger Africa-China cooperation (for example Bodomo 2010, 2012; Bodomo and Ma 2010, 2012; Bodomo and Silva 2012; Sautman and Yan 2014). I continue to argue for this second position in this paper, showing that despite challenges posed by some members of the African Diaspora and some members of the Chinese Diaspora, these Africans in China and Chinese in Africa are playing positive socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural roles, even if sometimes unconsciously, towards strengthening Africa-China cooperation.

Soft power

These positive socio-economic and socio-cultural contributions by Africans in China may be seen as the basis of a nascent African soft power in China. Soft power is a notion that has become very important in the second decade of the 21st Century Africa-China relations. There are many definitions and conceptualisations of soft power (Nye 1990a&b, 2004; Bodomo 2009; King 2013). For instance, Joseph Nye, the scholar who first used the term, described soft power or co-optive power in the following terms:

"*The second aspect of power – which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what its wants – might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants*". (Nye 1990b:166).

It goes further to state:

"*Co-optive power is the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own. This power tends to arise from such resources as cultural and ideological attraction as well as rules and institutions of international regimes*". (Nye, 1990b:168).

In this study I conceptualise soft power a bit differently as being the *gamut of positive socio-political and socio-cultural influences a polity and its citizens have on another polity and its citizens without the threat of "gun-boat" diplomacy or even*

outright violence. This definition captures the original core idea of soft power, as a mostly, though not always, an asymmetrical system in which polities use alternative means other than traditional balance of power politics – as regulated mainly by military superiority – to positively influence other polities. It however puts the emphasis on ordinary African citizens consciously or unconsciously acting on behalf of their polities to promote positive views of their countries and continent. How and in what ways have Africans in China employed their positive contributions to Chinese society as a means to increase African soft power, to attain socio-cultural positive views and outlook of Africa in China?

Based on extensive fieldwork in China, using a mixed mode of qualitative and quantitative socio-cultural research methods, I draw on the theoretical notions of soft power and of Diaspora communities acting as bridges interconnecting host and source communities to illustrate this notion of positive Diaspora contributions to Africa-China co-operation. Section 2 sketches the challenges involved; sections 3 and 4 outline some contributions, with the latter focusing empirically on the contributions of two prominent Africans in China; section 5 makes some recommendations for FOCAC support of people-to-people relations; while section 6 summarises the points raised and draws some conclusions to buttress the argument made in the paper.

Africa-China relations: the diaspora challenge

On July 16, 2009, The South China Morning Post (SCMP), Hong Kong's main English-language newspaper, had on its front page a bold headline and a picture of Africans in Guangzhou demonstrating against police brutality on members of the African community[1]. This was one of the very first times, if not the first, that many people in China and worldwide came to the realisation that there now reside sizeable groups of Africans in Guangzhou and other cities in China such as Hong Kong, Macau, Yiwu, Shanghai and, of course, Beijing. Since then many more negative news reports (but also positive ones) have appeared in Chinese and International news media such as China Daily, CNN, BBC, CCTV, and The New York Times. Most of these reports centre on what has come to be known as the three immigration

illegalities (*san fei* in Chinese): illegal entry, illegal stay, and illegal engagement in employment. Alongside these media reports are academic writings (for example Zhou 2011) which, based on what are called "perception studies" or even "attitude studies", document instances of negative attitudes and opinions that Chinese have about their African hosts in cities like Guangzhou.

With respect to Chinese in Africa, the two most prominent instances of negative media reports come from Chinese in Zambia, with regards to the ill-treatment of workers by Chinese bosses[2] and Chinese in Ghana, with regards to illegal immigration, illegal stay, and more prominently, illegal employment activities in the mining sector as reported in several international news media[3]. Besides these prominent cases on Chinese in Africa, there are numerous other reports about Diaspora Chinese indulging in other negative activities such as selling fake medicines, poaching, and undercutting prices to outcompete local businessmen.

If one were to stay with these scenarios of negative reports and their academic analyses, one would find that our target Diaspora communities serve as great challenges and indeed a huge distraction for building more harmonious relations between Africa and China. However, this picture of negativity is far from complete, as we see in the next section of the paper.

Africa-China cooperation: the diaspora contributions

Diaspora communities, given the definition as presented above and by most prominent scholars of global Diaspora studies throughout the world (for example Vertovec 1997), if presented with the right conditions, have often served as vital links between source and host communities. In several works (Bodomo 2010, 2012; Bodomo and Ma, 2012; Bodomo and Silva,2012), I have developed a theoretical framework showing that Africans in China serve as link points between Africa and China. Africans in Africa and Africans arriving newly in China learn about the Chinese in large part through Africans already in China. Chinese, for their part, learn a lot about Africa, whether negatively or positively, through their interactions with Africans in China. In the same vein, Africans in Africa learn a great deal about China and the Chinese by interacting with Chinese in Africa, and Chinese in Africa

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teach their fellow Chinese in China a great deal about Africa and indeed serve as some of the first points of contact for newly arriving Chinese in Africa. In short, Diaspora Africans in China and Diaspora Chinese in Africa function as bridges interconnecting Africa and China in many respects. We may outline three main perspectives to illustrate this bridge theory of migrant-indigene relations: socio-economic, socio-political, and socio-cultural.

Socio-economic contributions

Socio-economically, Diaspora Africans and Diaspora Chinese serve as prominent actors in cementing economic relations, frameworks, and platforms between Africa and China. They serve as traders, investors, and remitters.

Many of the Africans in China are traders. They know more than most people what their people back home in Africa need, so they select and source out the most appropriate goods from Chinese factories for the African market; some of them have graduated into investors, starting up their own shipping and even manufacturing companies, sometimes in conjunction with Chinese businessmen to manufacture goods including textiles, household utensils, and farm equipment for the African market and worldwide. Africans remit a substantial amount of money back home to their families in Africa. Says the Chairman of the Guinea Association in Guangzhou:

"Hi Professor, the amount sent home is often a function of many factors: how much the person is getting here on average, how the person's family is organised back home, etc. In general, an adult [male] Guinean in GZ [Guangzhou] has a wife (or wives) and kids back home in Conakry, the capital (or another big town), and his parents and other relatives (his and his wife's/wives' relatives) staying in the villages. It is normal for all these people to be supported by the adult living in GZ. Moreover, it is the ambition of each Guinean in the diaspora to build a house (where he can return) and start a business (shop or plantation, etc.) while still abroad. So, a guestimate for average remittances between 25000Rmb and 150000 Rmb per year is in place".

If all the half a million Africans plying their business in China were doing this,

Africans in China would be sending anywhere between five and 50 billion yuan a year or more – and this doesn't even include the value of all the merchandise that they buy from China and send back to Africa for sale, which even if not countered as remittance, still constitutes a good contribution from Diaspora Africans in terms of trade. Worldwide, the global African Diaspora sent back to Africa 52 billion dollars in 2010, according to the World Bank, far more than the 43 billion dollars of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa in that year. Indeed the African Union (AU) recognises and defines the global African diaspora in terms of the contributions it expects it to make to African development (Edozie, 2012).

Though the focus of this paper is on African soft power in China, it needs to be mentioned for comparative purposes that Chinese in Africa are also performing similar functions as their African counterparts. Much of the Chinese presence in Africa in terms of trade is undertaken by private Chinese businessmen resident in Africa, and many scholars have reported on small scale Chinese enterprises dotted all over the 50-odd African countries- be it in Lesotho, Gabon, Nigeria or Senegal. In terms of investment, many private companies are being started up throughout Africa by individual Chinese resident in Africa. Chinese restaurants are dotted throughout Africa; these private businesses complement the government businesses led by the top 10 Chinese investment companies in Africa including Sinopec, China National Petroleum, State Grid Corporation, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, China Railway Construction, Sicofor (Sino Congo Foret), CITIC-CRCC, China International Fund (CIF), China State Construction Engineering Corporation Limited (CSCEC), and Federated Steel (Bodomo, 2013).

Socio-political contributions

In performing these economic activities, Diaspora Africans and Diaspora Chinese also invariably perform socio-political functions. A number of African diplomatic personnel have told me at informal meetings and gatherings how essential some prominent members of the African communities in China are in helping them perform their official consular duties away from Beijing in places like Guangzhou, Yiwu, and Hong Kong. For instance, the office of the Chairman of the Nigerian

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Association in Guangzhou was a *de facto* consulate for many Nigerians and even other Africans during much of the period of my field research in Guangzhou (2008 to present). African community leaders have met there to strategize and resolve immigration problems involving their fellow Africans. Many visiting political and business leaders have sought out established members of the African communities in Hong Kong, Macau, Guangzhou, and Shanghai for support to perform their duties. Some African community members have served as consultative and advisory committee members at the ruling Community Party meetings in Yiwu and other municipalities.

Chinese community members in Africa, while generally shying away from overt dealings with the political establishment in their country of residence and even with their own embassy and government back in China, are mediating political contacts between their members and African governments, especially in times of crises. The situation needs to be investigated more closely in each country. For instance, in the case of Ghana, when a group of alleged illegal miners were arrested and faced deportation, community leaders emerged from their ranks to mediate with the Ghanaian government ministries involved and also to galvanise their members into a pressure group demanding that their Embassy and their government back in China intervene to resolve the problem in their favour. Some members of the Chinese Diaspora continue to develop socio-political links with Africa even when they are back in China. A case in point is a one-time Honorary Consul of Ghana in Hong Kong (the late Jonas Wu) who lobbied to be appointed to the position on returning to Hong Kong from an extended stay in Ghana.

Socio-cultural contributions

Socio-culturally, Africans in China and Chinese in Africa serve as cultural ambassadors, whether consciously or unconsciously, to showcase and promote their cultures in the societies in which they live. Africans in China and Chinese in Africa are learning each other's languages and ways of communicating. Africans in China are becoming more and more proficient in Chinese and even in the various local dialects of the cities in which they live, such as Cantonese in Guangzhou, Hong

Kong, and Macau. In a survey of more than 700 Africans throughout China (Bodomo 2012) more than 50 per cent considered that they spoke Chinese at least only 'a little', with more than 10 per cent being confident that they spoke it very well. We need more of such sociolinguistic surveys to ascertain the levels of language proficiencies in these Diasporas. Two interesting linguistic phenomena that I noticed in Guangzhou are that Chinese who trade and interact with Africans in various ways are beginning to speak English with quite audible African accents and African ways of structuring their vocabularies and communication patterns. A second salient way, described at length in Bodomo (2012) is the phenomenon of *calculator communication* in which Africans and Chinese who do not share a specific lingua franca like English and Chinese communicate together with the help of a calculator.

Beyond matters of language, Africans in China are creating cross-cultural spaces like ethnic restaurants, barbershops, football clubs, and small quasi-religious groups for worship and social networking, and are organising cultural programmes to showcase African culture like music, drumming, and dancing.

Chinese in Africa are also beginning to learn the official languages of the countries in which they live, like English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic, along with prominent local lingua franca like Swahili, Hausa, Zulu, Amharic, Yoruba, Akan, Bambara, and Wolof. What is needed are comprehensive sociolinguistic surveys among members of the Chinese communities to get more specific linguistic profiles and repertoires to gauge the level of acculturation going on among Chinese communities in Africa, just as done in Bodomo (2012) for Africans in China. Beyond linguistic issues, Chinese in Africa are instrumental in getting Africans to have a taste of Chinese culture through their business activities in matters of cuisine and health, among others. Chinese restaurants are now dotted throughout the cities and towns in all the 50-odd countries of Africa. The African middle class is beginning to consume Chinese medicinal products, such as herbal tea, and awareness about Chinese culture is likely to increase because of the increasing presence of Chinese in Africa and also because of the spread of Chinese media like CCTV and China Daily.

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Case studies

Many of the over 500,000 Africans in China have lived exemplary lives, some have even excelled in various ways to the extent that they have been recognised by the communities in which they live as deserving of awards. In this case study, I focus on two African males. In terms of methodology towards collecting and collating this data, I searched many internet fora and selected these two as Africans that have been broadly acknowledged by their communities. Then I contacted them and they kindly agreed to have me administer questionnaires to both of them; I followed up with a face-to-face interview with one of them on the side-lines of a conference in Paris in May 2014, and did email chatting with the other one to complement the information I collected from the questionnaire[4]. I shall in the following sub-sections summarise the profile of each of these two African *soft power brokers* in China, as one may call them.

Dominique Saatenang: an African Bruce Lee

Dominique Saatenang is a Cameroonian by nationality and was in his late 30s at the time of my interview. He says that the Chinese call him the African Eagle, the Europeans call him the Black Chinese while the Africans call him the African Bruce Lee. Equipped with an MBA degree, he considers himself as primarily a businessman and a Wushu master, having trained at the Shaolin Wushu Temple in China[5]. He is quite multi-lingual, mentioning French as his native language and other languages spoken as Chinese, English, and Bamileke. Dominique has lived for eight years in China at Defeng, Zhengzhou (Shaolin Temple), and in Beijing (at the Beijing Sports University).

In terms of goodwill and charity, activities that have attracted attention to him are his excellent performance in sports at the Shaolin Temple and the Beijing Sports University. He lists a number of prizes and achievements to his credit, having won many exceptional medals in Wushu practice, including the 2006 Double Vice-World Champion award in Wushu organised in China. He mentions that in 2009, he won a UNESCO medal for his exceptional activities in Wushu; and that in 2011, he won a World Prize for his movie "Bring Charm to China"; and that in that year he was

officially named Wushu ambassador of the Shaolin Temple by the Spiritual Chief of the Temple. As charity activities, he mentions that he has brought 10 Africans to study in China for free during his five years at the Shaolin Temple. Asked if he had any ideas about how good African image can be promoted worldwide, he said: "We must just ty to be the best for what we come to do in China in our chosen activities".

Adam Musa: an African Lei Feng

Adam Musa was a 29-year old PhD student in International Relations at Central China Normal University in Wuhan Hubei Province, China at the time of my interview. He is a Nigerian national and his mother tongue is Hausa, and he lists languages such as English and Mandarin Chinese as other languages that he speaks. Altogether, he has spent six years in China and outside Nigeria. Adam has excelled in many charity events, including blood donation for three years at the time of the interview, visiting houses for the elderly to help them, visiting orphanages, and volunteering as a teacher for migrant workers' schools since 2010. He mentions that he has also been involved in many environmental protection exercises code-named "Keep Wuhan Clean".

Adam is a highly decorated community activist. To the question: "Have you won any prizes or been recognised in any way by the community or local authorities?", he provides the following impressive list:

2011 Central China Normal University Excellent student Award

2011 Hubei province University Students Excellent Award

2012 Hubei Province Excellent Social Work Award

2012 China Youth Volunteer Excellent Award

2013 Central China Normal University Excellent Talent Award

2014 International Cultural Exchange Friendship Award

Indeed, Adam's work has been widely recognised and talked about in the community, and he has been featured in many Chinese media such as the China

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Daily[6].

When it was his turn to answer the question if he had any ideas about how good African image can be promoted worldwide, he said "[a] good African image can be promoted worldwide by Africans wherever they are being law-abiding, [and] they should respect and conform to laws of the society in which they find themselves. They should also engage more in the promotion of community development activities."

Summary

These case studies have illustrated – by concentrating on two Africans widely recognised in Chinese society as extraordinary members of the community – that Africans are contributing to the promotion of socio-cultural relations between Africa and China. These two and many other Africans located in many places in China including Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, Yiwu, Shanghai and Beijing are emerging as agents of African soft power in China.

Discussion: an alternative hypothesis?

In this section, we address a few other issues that go to contextualise the case studies involving these two African individuals and then pose the question whether we are indeed dealing with African soft power or there could be an alternative hypothesis at work that claims that this is rather a manifestation of Chinese soft power[7].

The first issue is how the skills of the two individuals are related to conditions in China. Their skills including martial arts, volunteering, care for one's neighbours and proficiency at several languages all relate to the Chinese socio-cultural conditions, and are much appreciated by the Chinese as people. A second issue is what cultural framework the decorated individuals are seen to be excelling in. Even though they lived in China at the time of the study, I believe that they excel in both African and Chinese cultural frameworks, and even beyond. One of them got a UNESCO prize - these are individuals who have demonstrated universal values of charity and selflessness! It cannot therefore be the case that these individuals are influenced only by the Chinese cultural framework to do good. They are in China, so they have to

operate in this framework, but it is not only the Chinese who are appreciating them, Africans are also appreciating them - one of them brought 10 Africans to study in China; these individuals surely appreciate that gesture. A third issue also has to be raised as to what specific benefits Africa is getting for the excellence these Africans are demonstrating in China. This must be seen, not in terms of monetary gains, but in terms of enhancing Africa's image in China. Africa's image is very often gutted in China by the frequent tensions and clashes between Africans in China and mostly law-enforcement authorities and these specific positive contributions by the Africans would go a long way to changing the mentality of some Chinese citizens about Africa. Fourthly, it must be mentioned that these individuals are not just demonstrating exclusively Chinese cultural values or exclusively African cultural values. Rather, they possess some important cross-cultural nuances or even universal values: hard work, generosity (in terms of giving out their money and time), a caring nature, valour, and so on! Finally, the question arises as to why we have limited ourselves to only two individuals. It is because these are case studies; the author is embarking on a series of articles on soft power and cannot document a throng of African individuals in one paper, even if their ethnographic profiles were readily available.

In sum then, many of the issues raised in this section may lead to an alternative hypothesis that postulates that these individuals, rather than being conduits of African soft power in China, are indeed demonstrating that they have been imbued with Chinese soft power; in other words, that it is Chinese soft power, rather than African soft power, that is at play here because the Chinese are somehow only appreciating these Africans as a way of infusing Chinese soft power in them, rather than having a positive view of Africa because of the activities of these individuals.

Several issues may be at play here that do not in any way negate the hypothesis of African soft power as argued throughout the paper, and must therefore be teased out.

First, it is plausible that the Chinese admire these individuals for learning Chinese culture and speaking the Chinese language very well - but so do they do with regards to other Africans who have learnt Chinese culture and speak the Chinese language

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fluently. It is not everybody who so integrates themselves into Chinese society who are awarded such high prizes. These individuals are bringing something else to the table, and that extra something is the basis of the African soft power as argued here. The two individuals (and many more that could be uncovered through further research) are excelling in terms of their volunteerism, kindness, generosity, valour at Wushu, and intelligence and the Chinese see many of these as attributes they brought from Africa and thus have a positive view of these Africans. This is clearly in line with aspects of our earlier definition of soft power as "...the positive...socio-cultural influences a polity and its citizens have on another polity and its citizens....". If we found Chinese in Africa of the same stature as these Africans in China, there would be no doubt that they would be seen as spreading Chinese soft power, so there is no reason to doubt that these Africans are spreading African soft power in China.

Second, it may be the nature of soft power such that when it is deployed in one direction, there could be a reciprocal effect; that is, soft power effects of entity A unto entity B may engender soft power effects of entity B unto entity A, though not always. Soft power can be symmetrical and bidirectional, unlike hard power, which is necessarily asymmetrical and unidirectional. Seen this way, even if the Chinese are preoccupied with trying to infuse Chinese soft power into these individuals, they are in turn getting infused with African soft power, as they cannot help but admire these individual Africans and the attributes they may have brought from Africa. So, the hypothesis of an African soft power, rather than being negated, is indeed strengthened.

Looking ahead: recommendations for a people-to-people approach

We have demonstrated in the above analysis that Diaspora African communities in China and Diaspora Chinese communities in Africa act as vital economic, political, and cultural links – bridges – between Africa and China, and especially that a good number of Africans in China are engaging in activities that go to form the building blocks of an emergent African soft power in China. This soft power building process may be occurring among Chinese in Africa and awaits a closer investigation. It therefore goes without saying that if we are looking for ways to strengthen Africa-

China co-operation, we must involve Diaspora Africans and Diaspora Chinese. I recommend that while the first decade of the co-operation was more of a government -to-government approach, which was necessary to create a solid base, the second decade should be dedicated to strengthening a people-to-people approach to Africa-China cooperation. A people-to-people approach involves creating avenues for different groups of people from each side of the partnership, like professional associations, academic groups, business groups, youth and student movements, artists, and sportsmen to interact more often. Diaspora community members can play a vital role in facilitating contact between all these groups mentioned, since they are indeed already doing this on their own and are sitting with a lot of experience about contacts at all the levels.

The 5th edition of the Forum on Africa-China Cooperation (FOCAC2012 in Beijing) did touch briefly on the idea of people-to-people relations, presumably based on the exhortations some of us scholars have already been making through our writings, but it did not actually stress it enough, and said very little about what we could do to achieve it. I recommend that the 6th edition (FOCAC2015 in South Africa) should dedicate a whole working session and theme on the role of the two Diasporas involved in the partnership to find out how we can enhance their formal participation in strengthening Africa-China cooperation if they so wish.

Two ways in which we can enhance their participation is, first, by streamlining immigration rules on both sides of the partnership. There must be clearer paths to permanent residency and citizenship for Africans in China and Chinese in Africa. Police and other security forces on both sides of the partnership must respect the rights of Diaspora members, including treating even those on the wrong side of the law, such as African visa over-stayers in Guangzhou or Chinese illegal miners in Ghana, humanely.

A second way is to create structures and incentives to get Diaspora Africans and Diaspora Chinese keenly interested in strengthening Africa-China cooperation. Funds can be set aside for competitive bidding by various Diaspora Community groups to be used in promoting cultural activities that go towards enhancing the intermingling of Africans and Chinese. It is now time for governments on both sides

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of the partnerships to start promoting Diaspora cultural festivals, Diaspora business meetings, academic conferences on the African and Chinese Diasporas, and Diaspora Sports festivals. There should also be reward and recognition systems to highlight excellence in service and leadership among Diaspora community members on both sides of the partnership.

Summary and conclusions

As Africa and China move closer to each other for mutual benefits, Diaspora communities will grow on each side of the partnership. Media and academic reports and analyses are documenting both negative and positive activities involving members of these Diaspora communities, suggesting that the communities that are the subject of this study can indeed be double-edged swords, in that their activities can pose both challenges and opportunities to the development of Africa-China relations. I have argued here that, after balancing things out, the Diaspora account is indeed in the positive digits since the communities in question play far more positive than negative roles in strengthening Africa-China co-operation. Many members of the African communities in China are indeed engaging in activities that may go to promote the good image of Africa in China, and may indeed be building the bricks for an African soft power in China. This may well be the case for Chinese in Africa, and this needs further investigation.

If the recommendations outlined above are implemented, Diaspora Africans in China and Diaspora Chinese in Africa can serve as agents of soft power that promote cultural diplomacy, and as useful links or bridges to the further development of Africa-China cooperation.

Endnotes

1.	The SCMP article was titled: "Africans protest in Guangzhou after Nigerian feared killed fleeing visa check" SCMP, July 16, 2009: http://www.scmp.com/article/686919/africans-protest-guangzhou-after-nigerian-feared-killed-fleeing-visa-check (accessed: August 19, 2014).

2. Lusaka News. 9 October 2010. *Ill-treatment of workers, disgraceful – ZFE* [Online]. Available: http://www.lusakatimes.com/2010/10/19/illtreatment-workers-disgraceful-zfe/ (2014, August 19).

3. BBC News. June 6, 2013. Ghana arrests Chinese for 'illegal mining' [Online]. Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22793659 (2014, August 19).

4. The criteria for inclusion were quite stringent: for anyone to be on my list they had to have won a recognition in the society in which they were operating. This is a case study and if the research is pushed further other individuals, including females, would show up.

5. A video clip of his activities as a Wushu practitioner can be viewed at this youtube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXGYsN-VLdY

6. China Daily has one of several reports on Adam Musa, the latest being an article titled: "Lei Feng's African brother" (Lei Feng being 'China's icon of selflessness' at this weblink: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-08/06/content_16874364.htm, China Daily Aug 6, 2013 (accessed on August 19, 2014)

7. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this alternative hypothesis.

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The effectiveness of Confucius Institutes as a tool of China's soft power in South Africa

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Abstract

The link between teaching Chinese as a foreign language and the role of China on the international stage has grown in importance since 2004 when the Confucius Institutes programme was launched. Despite the confusion that surrounds the categorisation of the relationship, Chinese circles increasingly consider the language institutes as a tool of soft power in "support of the rise of China". The paper analyses the meaning of "cultural" soft power and attempts to measure its effectiveness in support of China's foreign policy aims through the study of Confucius Institutes in South Africa. Based on fieldwork data, the paper unpacks the reality on the ground through a study of the process of attraction at the executive level as well as at the students' level. It concludes that Confucius Institutes, despite attempts by a number of Chinese actors to promote their presence and activities in South Africa, can only be partially effective tools of soft power. Focusing on the modalities, as opposed to the breadth, of the engagement provides a more accurate prediction of long-term outcomes. While the initiative's aim of exposing people to China, albeit briefly, is

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efficiently fulfilled, the project's ultimate aim to support China's rise is more dependent on the content of the interaction experience than is currently accounted for.

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) has become an important tool of Chinese foreign policy, not merely to "popularise Chinese language and culture throughout the world", but mostly "to enhance the friendship and mutual understanding as well as the economic and cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries around the world, and to elevate China's influence in the international community" (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China). From the 1980s onwards the economic development that led millions of Chinese out of poverty, together with the "Go Out" policies created in the late 1990s, made China look less alien in terms of business opportunities and more appealing in cultural terms. This stimulated increased demand for cultural exchanges, including language-driven ones (Chen, 2015).

The link between language and the role of China on the international stage became even stronger after 2004 when the project of Confucius Institutes[1] (CIs) was launched by the Hanban (China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) with the aim of "meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world" (Chinese Language Council International, Hanban). Born in the aftermath of Hu Jintao's (President of the People's Republic of China between 2002 and 2012) "peaceful rise" policy promotion (since 2003), the government-funded institutes are well-suited to the Chinese government's efforts to promote, through language and other tools of soft power (such as the media), a self-tailored image of China *vis-à-vis* not only the one that had long been shaped by others, but also the one damaged by practices of Chinese migrants overseas, uncontrolled by the state. Debates have raged over the type of image promoted and the modalities of promotion, with some arguing that a propaganda-based approach is adopted. This

criticism has only recently started to be grounded upon empirically based studies (Hartig 2010, 2012, 2014) as opposed to studies based on generalised definitions.

The question that this paper attempts to answer is the extent to which Confucius Institutes are *effective* tools of China's soft power. Ten years after their establishment it is still not clear whether they are fulfilling the initial foreign policy aims they were associated with, namely to spread language and culture overseas, support multiculturalism and a harmonious world and, through this, support China's rise. The analysis below takes into consideration the numerical indicators used to measure effectiveness and unpacks them in a qualitative fashion to explain the CIs' role and their success as tools of foreign policy. The paper first explores the link between teaching Chinese as a foreign language and the role of China on the international stage, including the birth of the Confucius Institutes' initiative and the foreign policy aims it was associated with. Then it elaborates in more detail on the link between Confucius Institutes and soft power, providing a brief overview of the Chinese understanding of this link and its evolution. It then discusses findings with particular reference to the case of South Africa. Despite the general nature of the argument, its articulation is based on an understanding of the subject through the specific lens of the case study. As a consequence, a number of propositions may not hold in other contexts. This is the reason why the paper emphasises the importance of context analysis.

The findings of the case study are based upon two field trips to South Africa between 2012 and 2014. Interviews were carried out with the executive, namely CI/CC managers (including the Chinese and local directors) and teachers, where possible. Although a limited number are cited in the text, interviews were conducted with at least one manager per CI/CC, and in most cases with more than one. The findings concerning students' perceptions are not based on systematic interviews but on information gathered through the executive. This is a limitation of the study that was dictated by logistical constraints. It could and should be overcome with further research.

The case study is not used as a means of making generalisations but as an

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empirically grounded example upon which the argument is constructed, with an awareness that more such cases are needed to be able to draw generalised conclusions or comparisons. The expansion of CIs in Africa is often considered more peculiar than in other regions due to the absence of Chinese language centres prior to the establishment of CIs and due to the arguably enhanced power asymmetry between any given country and China. South Africa was selected as a potentially significant case due to its hosting the highest number of CIs on the continent. While the argument below attempts to downplay the importance of numerical indicators as opposed to a qualitative reading of the phenomenon, the presence of a higher number of CIs was deemed important as a first logical selection to be able to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Language teaching and foreign policy

In the 1950s and 1960s TCFL "started to serve China's foreign diplomacy and build up international relations, mainly working with socialist countries and the Third World" (Yang X., 2010:91). The first teachers sent abroad to teach the Chinese language left in 1952 and the first language textbook to be taught abroad was published in 1958 by Beijing University. In the meantime, in China, Tsinghua University was the first, in 1951, to start a language course to teach Chinese to foreigners (Zhao and Huang, 2010:130). The period from the 1950s through to the 1970s was characterised by the promotion of revolutionary ideals at home and abroad and only limited openness towards the outside world. With Deng Xiaoping's (leader of the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1992) economic reforms, which started in the late 1970s, China started focusing on domestic economic and industrial modernisation while slowly opening up. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the first significant numbers of foreigners started to study Chinese in China.

In 1987 the Hanban was established as an office affiliated with the Ministry of Education with the aim of "meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world" (Chinese Language Council International, Hanban). The spectacular economic development witnessed throughout the 1980s within China

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increased its confidence not only domestically but also on the international stage. With the rise to power of Hu Jintao in the early 2000s, the new ideal of a harmonious society started shaping Chinese ideology domestically, and its foreign policy equivalent became the promotion of China's peaceful rise/development. In January 2006, Hu Jintao told the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group that the increase in China's international reputation and status "will have to be demonstrated in hard power as the economy, science and technology, and defence, as well as in soft power such as culture" (Li and Luo, 2013: 31). Along these lines, according to the Chinese Ministry of Education (2010):

"*Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) is an integral part of China's reform and opening up drive. To promote TCFL is of strategic significance to popularise the Chinese language and culture throughout the world, to enhance the friendship and mutual understanding as well as the economic and cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries around the world, and to elevate China's influence in the international community*".

The Confucius Institutes project, founded in 2004, originated and grew in this domestic and foreign policy context. Although CIs are referred to as non-profit public educational institutions (Chinese Language Council International, Hanban) they are governed by the Hanban, a body jointly run by 12 different ministries and commissions, which are, in turn, regulated by the State Council, an institution that is led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The Hanban has overall control of an area of Chinese education that includes not only Confucius Institutes, but also policies and development plans concerning Chinese language learning overseas, the development of language teaching material, teachers' training and dispatch, and Chinese Language examinations. CIs currently constitute a great share of TCFL and are strictly linked to China's political agenda as part of China's objectives for national development. The Chinese Confucius Institutes Online website reports that by the end of 2013, more than 400 Confucius Institutes and more than 600 Confucius Classrooms had been established. This stunning expansion provides a fertile ground for questions concerning, in particular, the effectiveness of these institutes in their contribution to China's foreign policy aims.

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In the case of Africa, King (2013) reports that "from 1954 up to 2003, there had already been some 150 teachers sent to teach Chinese in 15 African countries". He continues, stating that "even if there are in 2013 more teachers present in one year now than there were in total over a period of 50 years, the aspiration for them to play a crucial role in China's co-operation more generally was already present, but in a less structured way" (King, 2013: 47). The "structured way" he refers to was introduced in Sino-African relations – not only in education but more generally in all areas of co-operation, exchange and interaction – in 2000 with the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). The Forum institutionalised the foreign policies of China and African countries towards each other and guaranteed continuity of engagement in areas as diverse as education, healthcare, and security.

The first Confucius Institute in Africa was set up in 2005 at the University of

Table 1. Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms *aggregate* distribution			
	2012	2013	2015*
North America (USA and Canada)	80	491	485
Europe	106	298	302
Asia	83	143	147
Oceania	12	65	66
Africa	22	45	48
Latin America	21	42	43
Data gathered by the author between 2012 and 2015, based on the Confucius Institutes official website[4].			
* to the date the article was submitted, June 2015.			

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Nairobi. The establishment and management of Confucius Institutes became part of FOCAC's triennial commitments under the section named "Cooperation in the field of development " together with other areas such as medical cooperation, environmental protection, and tourism, to name a few. Educational and cultural cooperation also included human resources development, science and technology transfer, cultural and people-to-people exchanges and cooperation, and exchanges between academia and think-tanks. Within Africa there are currently 30 (16 in 2012) countries that host Confucius Institutes. South Africa has set up one Confucius Classroom and four Confucius Institutes[2], the highest number of institutes in one single country in Africa, followed by Kenya and Ethiopia with four institutes each, Tanzania with three, Egypt, Morocco and Nigeria with two institutes per country and twenty-three other countries with one institute each[3]. The number continues to increase, although in Africa the total is still relatively small compared to the total number of CIs/CCs set up in North America (USA and Canada) or Europe, respectively 485 and 302 in 2015.

Confucius Institutes and "cultural " soft power

Despite the fact that language teaching has reportedly become a tool of foreign policy, the link between Confucius Institutes and soft power is not, for many, readily evident. Debates have raged – and still do – over the ultimate aims of this project. Arguments for and against the institutes range from describing them as language institutes with no particular political connotation to presenting them as instruments of propaganda. What is interesting to note is an apparent lack of coordinated understanding even within the decision making organs in China of what these institutes are, what "culture " is, what aspects of it should be promoted abroad and what other sources of power become intertwined with cultural promotion. Clarifying these elements is a necessary analytical step for the evaluation of effectiveness, inasmuch as effectiveness is related to objectives and objectives are related to the way the initiative is conceived.

Understandings of the role of CIs

As mentioned above, in 2006 Hu Jintao highlighted that China's rise should be based on hard and soft power, such as culture (Li and Luo, 2013: 31). Five years later, Mrs

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Xu Lin, the Director-General of Hanban and Chief Executive of the CI Headquarters, declared that not only did culture and soft power belong to two distinct spheres, but also that Confucius Institutes had nothing to do with soft power or politics. She stated that:

"The CI has nothing to do with soft power. The Chinese culture is still a weak culture. So we go international in fact just to increase real face-to-face communication between Chinese and foreign cultures. I am against the term soft power. The CI has nothing to do with soft power. Indeed we go international in order actively to reflect and refresh our culture rather than export it. The purpose for CIs to go international is to let more foreigners know more about China. The most important thing is that CIs provide a platform without any distance to increase face-to-face real communication between Chinese and foreign cultures. There is no ideological element in the CI; it is completely cultural. Therefore the CI can't be called a kind of Mao Zedong Institute; it has nothing to do with politics". (Xu Lin, 2011).

This statement raised a few questions, in particular as regards to what culture is, what aspects of it should be promoted and if it can be fully detached from politics. To add complexity to the Chinese understanding of the institutes, and the connection between culture and soft power, in 2014 Peking University launched a centre dedicated to soft power, to help the government spread Chinese culture and values abroad. The Minister of Culture, Cai Wu, stated at the launch that:

"cultural soft power is beginning to offer strong support for the rise of China. The country must enhance its cultural strength in order to dominate the global contest for soft power" (Ma, 2014).

The implication of this statement is not only that culture and soft power are strongly related to each other, but also that they are supporting China's international relations agenda. However, it remains unclear how this support is measured. In turn, if Confucius Institutes are acknowledged to be a tool of support for the government in spreading Chinese culture, then Minister Cai Wu's statement contradicts King's thinking that CIs "have altogether a more modest ambition than global competition

for influence with the West" (King, 2013: 178).

The culture of CIs and the link to politics

The emphasis on "cultural" soft power brings us back to the discussion over what culture is, the extent to which it can be detached from politics – which is what the "cultural" attribute to soft power seems to be distancing itself from – and what parts of it should be promoted. The culture the Chinese government seeks to promote overseas generally revolves around traditional artistic expressions (calligraphy, medicine, martial arts and so forth), exchanges and business (Lo and Pan, 2014:11). Confucius as an ambassador of Chinese language and culture is not used to teach about Confucianism; indeed, as Lo and Pan suggest, he is barely utilised to teach about the contemporary meanings associated with Confucius' teachings – only "ideals of harmony, peace, stability and orderliness" (2014: 11). It is mostly used as an emblem of literary excellence. Mrs Xu Lin in 2011 stated that:

"All over the world, if someone has any culture at all, they know that China had someone named "Confucius ". Thus, all over the world, Confucius is recognised as an educator, a thinker and a philosopher. Also, he was a philosopher over 2560 years ago. So if we call this the Confucius Institute, foreigners will all immediately know that this is a cultural brand of China. It's because it's called the Confucius Institute that it was like it was given wings to fly very fast because many people are fans of this name".

Leaving aside the assumption that Confucius is really that well known worldwide, it is important to emphasise that the decision to focus on a few specific elements of Confucianism and the failure of the institutes to expose students to the breadth and depth of traditional Chinese culture or contemporary creations, is an example of how culture is forced onto restricted and simplistic notions of identity. Some argue that this is due to the difficulty, even for Chinese students, of understanding such elaborate cultural expressions, but it is also possible to argue that a given culture is often a reflection of political dynamics, and simplifying it downplays the importance of politics. Notwithstanding this, it would be an exaggeration to argue that this limitation equates to propaganda, like many fear, but it is sensible to think of it as a

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form of censorship. Yang suggests that:

"*there appears to be little factual support for the accusation for improper influence over teaching and research of CIs. The CI headquarters in Beijing does not dictate the curricular design of a language or cultural program. The teaching materials provided by Beijing have been designed to facilitate pedagogical needs and are not intended for propaganda purposes. The headquarters cannot control the contents of lecture series or the design of a festival program*". (Yang, R. 2010: 237-238).

But Hartig points out that "normally CIs tend to stay on the safe side by not engaging too much with "sensitive " issues" (2014:57). This self-censorship, which involves both a limited portrayal of Confucius – a portrayal that avoids emphasising the negative attributes with which he was associated during Maoism – and a consensual avoidance of "sensitive" issues at the ground level, is based upon the invocation of traditional values that intend to "soften the social impact of economic development on the citizenry at large" (Guo, 2008:8), domestically and internationally. Culture and politics are then more intertwined than it is at times suggested and the fast-paced economic development seems to enhance their amalgamation.

Other power sources

The economy-oriented attraction China exercises leads to the argument that it is the asymmetry in power relations that underpins the attractive qualities Nye asserts are part and parcel of soft power. Following on from Huntington's sobering rejoinder that soft power is dependent upon hard power, culture and ideology "become attractive when they are seen as rooted in material success and influence" (1996:92). Only the increase of hard power produces enhanced self-confidence and the belief in one's own cultural superiority, which in turn triggers an increase in its attractiveness to other people (Huntington, 1996:92). As it is no exception to this, in order to implement its soft power strategy, China leans on its hard economic power, namely trade, investment and its very economic development model, to raise the interest that underpins the increasingly diffused use of cultural means.

Especially in the African context the appeal towards China is more focused on China's contemporary development achievements and the material accoutrements this allows, *vis-à-vis* the industrialised North, for whom the appeal of the Chinese way of life is also largely based on a more romanticised depiction of Chinese culture and its historical artefacts, though also on a crass desire to understand and exploit its proverbial "one billion consumers ". However, in African contexts, the role played by Chinese culture in the sense of the arts seems to be minimal in exerting attraction. It can, though, be a complement to the main sources of soft power, in other words, economic assets. According to Lo and Pan this is problematic. They suggest that:

"if foreigners are attracted to learn Chinese language and culture for economic purposes, then any downturn in Chinese economic development would inevitably dampen its cultural attractiveness". (Lo and Pan, 2014: 15-16; Gil 2008; Barr 2011).

On top of this, the fact that beyond economic attraction, only simplistic and limited notions of cultural identity are shared with foreigners seems to reduce China's possibilities of having an impact in the long term.

Measuring effectiveness

Effectiveness is the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result. The ultimate desired result of Chinese soft power is to offer strong support for the rise of China. Support for the rise of China comes from different directions, but winning hearts and minds (soft power) has become a significant one and the promotion of language and culture has increasingly been recognised as an aspect of soft power in Chinese circles. CIs, by being mandated to promote Chinese language and culture overseas, are expected to contribute to providing support for the rise of China. But how to measure whether the support provided is effective? While the *breadth* of Confucius Institutes' diffusion is widely understood and often considered an appropriate measure of China's success in exerting attraction, focusing on the *depth* of such diffusion is less common, despite the relative advantage that an understanding of how much of China is appreciated can produce in the long term and for policy purposes.

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The breadth of CIs diffusion indicates that they have boomed in the US and Europe. It also indicates that within Africa, South Africa has the highest number and that they keep increasing worldwide. However, it does not provide satisfactory answers as to the logic behind the establishment or the negotiations between demand and supply sides, which seem fundamental elements in establishing whether and how, as tools of soft power, they contribute to China's rise. It is thus necessary to turn to a more qualitative approach to be able to answer these questions. King highlights that the quantification of targets, "the number game" puts China under great pressure to continue to increase the long- and short-term training awards, almost as if the mere numbers correspond to "development" (King, 2013:205-206). Moreover, as Lo and Pan point out:

> *"Hanban has failed to realise that the rapid expansion of overseas institutions that are monitored and regulated by an authoritarian political system [...] could raise suspicion and concern among foreign peoples, especially those academics who worry that CIs would interfere with academic autonomy and freedom".* (2014: 7)

In a way, it is possible to state that there is a clash of perceptions between the Chinese for whom high numbers mean success and foreigners for whom high numbers, in this context, can symbolize a frightening expansion and penetration.

In order to understand the outcomes of soft power – whether it is effective or not – understanding the context is key in acknowledging what is attractive, which is the resources of attraction or the assets that produce attraction, and what can be done to appeal more, which is the behaviour of attraction (Nye, 2004:6). According to Nye, soft power resources effectively translate into "the behaviour of attraction that can influence others towards favourable outcomes" (2012:153) only when the recipients' context guarantees that the culture promoted is attractive, when political values are consistent at home and abroad and when foreign policies are seen as "legitimate and having moral authority" (2004:11). Nye suggests that "with soft power, what the target thinks is particularly important, and the targets matter as much as the agents"(2004:34). In other words, the attractiveness of soft power resources, namely

cultural products and values, and China's domestic and international development discourses and performances, depends as much on how local agents perceive them as it does on Chinese agents (Nye, 2012: 153).

The case of South Africa

Nye's pre-requisites are analysed with reference to the case of South Africa so as to establish whether Chinese culture can be attractive to South Africans, whether Chinese political values are consistent domestically and abroad, and whether they translate into a foreign policy that is perceived as "legitimate and having moral authority". Following the analysis of pre-requisites, a study of the behaviour is presented to show how executive and student targets engage with CIs and if they impact on the fulfilment of CI aims.

Prerequisites

In order to understand what elements of Chinese culture can be attractive to South Africans, it is necessary to overview the structural and ideological elements upon which South Africa's cultural interests and divisions rest. One of a handful of middle income countries on the continent, the South African economy has diversified away from a sole reliance on resource extraction, and has developed a modest industrial base, a solid financial services sector and even a small IT sector. In social terms, there is a visible segment of society – that is generally of white and Indian (with some mixed race and black Africans) background, reflecting the racial hierarchies of privilege under apartheid. Their orientation has traditionally been towards Britain, Europe and the United States, reflecting the colonial heritage and the prevalence of English amongst this group. At the same time, the vast majority of South Africans are of black African origin and their cultural reference points are broad, ranging from traditional Zulu, Xhosa and Pedi/Sotho sources, to British and American culture – especially through African-American culture – which has also had an influence on music and ideas. This diversified and layered context presents an especially complex setting for the projection of Chinese soft power.

South Africans, especially in urban areas, have been exposed to Chinese culture

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since the late 1800s when the first migration waves from China to Southern Africa started (Harris, 2012), in contrast to most other African countries where the presence of Chinese migrants and investments only became visible in the past 20 years. With Africa's largest number of South African born Chinese, who belong to different communities, South Africa offers unique insights into the processes of integration, alienation, and influence on its fulfilment of foreign and economic needs (Yap, 1996; Park and Tu, 2010). While the diaspora has created important societal links with South Africans over decades, ranging from cultural to economic ones, the most recent migration wave, which started at the beginning of the 21st century, has given rise to "divided views on what being "Chinese means" (Alden and Wu, 2014:27) and has impacted on both relations with locals and those within the diaspora. Economic aspects have become the most visible contemporary form of engagement, as opposed to cultural exchanges. The South African population holds both positive (Smith and Van der Westhuizen, 2013) and negative (Ethics Institute of South Africa, 2014) perceptions regarding the economic dimensions associated with China's engagement with the country, mostly depending upon the sector of involvement, as noted by senior economist Tony Twine (Campbell, 2010). As Chinese migrants increase and their activities diversify, cultural attractiveness becomes increasingly connected and associated with the activities these actors engage in.

Beyond cultural attractiveness, the other element that Nye suggests is crucial in determining whether soft power can "work" in any given context is the consistency of political values. China's political values emphasise the importance of creating a harmonious society, where respect for authority is deep-rooted in people's mentality and economic development is the key to success. These values translate into a foreign policy of (attempted) non-interference with a strong focus on enhancing economic foreign policy and diplomacy. On the other hand, South Africa, considered by many a pivot between Africa and the rest of the world, has a complex and fragmented national identity that is anchored to historical events and has an impact on domestic and foreign policies. While China's call for harmony and non-interference is well received by a country like South Africa with a strong negotiation

preference vis-à-vis the use of force to solve conflicts, respect for human rights has become a fundamental element of the socio-political discourses and practices in South Africa and in the country's foreign policies, though it remains less problematized in China. As a consequence of this, China's current political values are appealing to South Africans to a certain extent only. Alden and Wu suggest that:

"there are elements of the South African experience – from its commitment to democracy and the diversity of its civil society to its own economic and political aspirations on the continent – that may suggest barriers to the deepening of ties beyond a certain point". (2014:27)

In other words, bearing in mind Nye's above mentioned prerequisites for soft power to be effective, while China's political values are consistent at home and abroad, its foreign policies are not thoroughly perceived as legitimate or morally acceptable. As such the soft power exercised may be irrelevant in a context where the content of such policies is not for all equally attractive.

Behaviours of engagement: targets and aims

The interests that characterise the engagement between local and Chinese agents vary in their overlapping and complementarity. By breaking down the process of establishing and managing a CI it is possible to identify different types of behaviour that help to provide a basis for more accurate qualitative measurements. At the executive level (composed of CI/CC Chinese and local directors, as well as managers) the engagement is characterised by persuasion from the Chinese side and by specific interests and concerns from the host institutions in setting up a CI. At the students' level, the engagement needs to be investigated more comprehensively through further research. Available findings, however, suggest that South African students are generally attracted to studying Chinese partly because of China's economic promises and partly because of a set of cultural attributes. CIs' aims, however, often do not take into consideration students' particular motivations and are rather more oriented towards a mass provision of language courses only partially supported by additional activities.

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Executive level

Starting from the decision to establish a CI, the Confucius Institutes By-Laws state that there must be "a demand for learning the Chinese language and culture at the applicant's location" (Chinese Language Council International, Constitution and By-Laws). The Chinese Embassy officials in South Africa also state that the Confucius Institute "is requested by African universities" (Officer at Chinese Embassy in Pretoria, interview, August 2012). Yet managers at the institutes in South Africa assert that the request mostly comes from China, or from business people deeply involved with China, or even the Chinese Embassy. The demand side of the equation was, in no case, triggered by bottom-up requests from students or staff; it was, rather, generally an executive strategy (CI Manager 2, interview, August 2012) put forward by the institutions' decision-making organs. This was generally a consequence of preliminary propositions by Chinese agents, including at times, invitations for future CI managers to attend CI conferences in China in order to exchange information concerning the challenges and benefits of setting up and running an Institute (interviews with CI managers, 2012, 2014).

The initial persuasion (at times supported by payments whose logic resides beyond the boundaries of soft power) is accompanied by both concerns and interests from the host institution's executive. Concerns mainly relate to a perceived uncertainty over the institutes' independence from the Chinese government, which is sometimes identified as "problematic" due to its poor human rights record and its authoritarian style, and feared to have potentially negative impacts on academic freedom. These concerns have, at times, translated into heated debates within the potential host institutions as, according to a few CI managers, the presence of China challenged South African institutions' relations with other partners, and institutions face the challenge of justifying their relations not only with China but with any other partner countries. One CI manager reported that:

"as an institution we have not decided why we partner with America, why we partner with Zambia. We never had political issues in our partnerships. But with China… it raises questions especially around human rights issues. And that was a

thing that challenged the rest as well: why do we work with America? It made the institution think about big picture issues". (CI Manager 2, interview, August 2012)

Similar concerns about the limitations regarding topics that are considered sensitive by China, such as the "One China Policy" or "Falun Gong", have sparked protests and withdrawal from the project in a few institutions across the world in light of academic freedom. This is not the case in South Africa. Most South African institutes have reported that the proposal they submit at the beginning of the year must be approved by Hanban in terms of budget, but that there are no clashes as far as the activities are concerned, although they are aware that certain topics are better avoided as sensitive. In South Africa most institutes do not perceive the limitation on the content as a reason to not run the institute, but rather as an element of Chinese culture that does not necessarily have to clash with language teaching. As one interviewee put it, the institute would not work if there was a particular push over the subjects of teaching "and the Chinese are starting to see it" (CI Manager 6, interview, August 2012).

The pro-active and regulatory approach is not equal to affirming that CIs spread propaganda content across the university. It is not equal either to stating that if it were not for persuasion there would be no interest in setting up the institute, but it does add complexity to what is described as a linear demand-supply phenomenon.

Beyond the persuasive behaviour, there are aspects of the engagement with China that are attractive at the executive level. This includes the expansion of connections with Chinese institutions; monetary, textual and human resources' assistance to set up and run the institute; prizes; links with other partners, including the private sector, and so forth. According to CI managers, one of the advantages in setting up an institute is the fact that "there's a shared credibility for you as a SA institution to be hosting an institute when you go and speak to other Chinese partners". Setting up an institute is seen as a "cornerstone for mutual understanding and broadening connections on which a lot of other initiatives could be built". It is also about "creating a network of friendships in China […], looking for collaboration and opportunities". It is believed, by some, that "if the government strategy brings us closer together, universities need to take that on board and think about ways that

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meet own goals" (CI Manager 2, interview, August 2012). Other interests concern opening an avenue for students to get funded, or the necessity of training students in Mandarin so that local organisations could benefit in their trading activities with China (CI Manager 3, interview, August 2012). In addition, the competition between the Chinese and other foreign actors provides South African institutions with more opportunities. According to a manager:

"[w]e have more offers [...] With the Chinese offering scholarships, the Americans are coming as well because of the competition". (CI Manager 3, interview, August 2012).

Then there is the attraction of receiving financial, textual and human resource assistance from the Hanban to set up and run the institute. Institutes and classrooms in South Africa receive between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of the annual funds from the Hanban to run the CI/CC. The budget submitted to the Hanban includes activities carried out throughout the year, including trips to China by staff and students. In other words, it does not only involve purely didactic, but also public relations' assistance. Despite the fact that the Hanban's support to foreign institutions should mainly be provided for the first three to five years, the institutes in South Africa still seem to be heavily reliant on the Hanban even after the initial phase. This aspect has been identified as problematic, especially if understood in terms of the sustainable development of the project. According to an interviewee:

"local universities do not see the opportunity of teaching Chinese, they are only happy because they get the money. They do not work hard to train local teachers and set up funds to pay teachers". (CI Manager 2, interview, July 2014)

This is, however, slowly changing in South Africa, with a couple of institutions starting to provide significant funding for the development of Chinese language curricula, whose reliance on CIs is reduced to teacher provision. The quality of teaching and teachers is also part of the current debate. The Hanban provides, through Chinese partner institutions, a Chinese director and Chinese teachers, most of whom are volunteers, often not fully prepared to teach Chinese as a foreign language and thus causing quality assurance concerns (Siow, 2011; Ren, 2012).

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Despite the fact that the training of local teachers would be advisable, there is scepticism concerning the Hanban's interests in letting host institutions develop their own teachers' body. According to an interviewee:

"even if we train all the teachers, they [the Hanban] would still send the director and the volunteers. I do not think it will ever develop into something independent because it would undermine the diplomacy". (CI Manager 3, interview, July 2014)

In this context of Chinese financial and human resource pre-eminence, the bureaucratic and day-to-day encounters between local and Chinese agents shape, from the bottom, the effectiveness of the institutes in support of China's rise. The trust that is built through exposure to each other and interaction varies and with it varies the commitment to deep and prolonged relationships. This trust is undermined when the Chinese quantification of targets, (in other words, the more the better), clashes with local expectations and practices, less concerned about the numbers than about the content. A South African manager pointed out that:

"the Chinese say there are 100 students, but they count double. There are 50 in the first semester and the same 50 in the second semester". (CI Manager 3, interview, July 2014)

When Hanban reports that the number of students registered at Confucius Institutes worldwide in 2011 was 500,000 doubts arise as to whether the figures are meant to seriously represent students' enrolment or, rather, to exaggerate the power of attraction. Similarly, incongruences between locals' expectations and CIs' aims, generate fears and suspicion or, at the minimum, confusion at the host institution's executive level concerning the behaviour that is appropriate within the state-monitored CI's structure. These fears, and the suspicion and confusion that comes with them, however grounded or not, may translate into a "stumbling block in the development of China's cultural diplomacy" (Lo and Pan, 2014: 7).

Students Attraction

Measuring the effectiveness of CIs at the student level involves, as with the executive level, an analysis of both the sources and behaviour of attraction. With

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students, even more than with the executive, although a quantitative approach is often deemed appropriate to evaluate the effectiveness of CIs/CCs, counting the number of students enrolled – especially if for the first time – is not a good indication of how effective the institutes are as tools of soft power. This is particularly so when the effectiveness relates to the support for China's rise. In fact, the (high) enrolment of students in Chinese language courses is not a guarantee of generalised positive perceptions towards China and, as a consequence, of support for the country's rise. Notwithstanding this, a quantitative measurement can be an indication of how effective the *sources* of soft power are, as an aggregate, in raising the appeal of starting to study Chinese language and culture. These sources range from the arts to business and from language to traditional medicine. Mostly diffused through the media, Chinese migrants, the internet and other globalised means, these sources of attraction are also utilised by the institutes at particular events to attract prospective students. But is the initial interest and curiosity in China, that which motivates students to embark on a language course, already a measure of success in supporting China's rise? Or is the positive outcome dependent on the type of experience they embark on? The argument is that, as with the executive, the content of the experience can be crucial in determining the success of the initiative.

To add complexity to this quantitative versus qualitative debate, the number of students per institute/classroom has not significantly increased in the past few years, while the number of institutes and classrooms set up in South Africa is increasing. In looking for an explanation it is interesting to look at the type of courses offered. The levels taught range from beginners to degree level, but especially in primary and secondary schools the courses offered are mainly introductory and do not provide a developed curriculum after the initial introductory level. At the same time, the degree levels start from beginners so that students in secondary schools who wish to continue their studies do not necessarily see an appealing opportunity at the university level to continue their learning process (CI Manager 2, interview, July 2014). In the words of a South African manager:

"We can't stick to have beginners beginners beginners. We need more first, second, third year. Students should progress. But they [the Chinese] don't get it.

They want to have Chinese in more schools rather than deepening it down". (CI Manager 2, interview, July 2014)

This focus on the breadth rather than the depth of diffusion could be the result of decreased interest among students, but also the cause of such decreased interest. It can also be an aim in its own terms, as in the desire to expose the highest number of students to Chinese language and culture with the belief that even a brief exposure can produce positive results for the provision of support for China's rise. This as opposed to a deeper exposure that presumably provides more understanding (though maybe unnecessary for the purposes of supporting China's rise through the attenuation of negative perceptions) but where the students' interest is more difficult to maintain.

The focus on the quantity of enrolled students as an indication of effectiveness over the depth and quality shows its shortcomings also in relation to the quality of texts and teachers. The textbooks used are problematic mainly for their intellectual simplicity vis-à-vis language simplicity:

"*the domestic Chinese scenes portrayed in the texts are alien to foreign readers, the materials go beyond their language mastery or acquisition abilities and the rote memorisation they require is too boring to arouse readers' interest (Confucius Institute Headquarters 2011)".* (Lo and Pan, 2014: 10)

These are, however, problems that do not only pertain to Confucius Institutes, but also to independent language centres as the books utilised to teach the language are often the same. This shortcoming can be addressed by integrating the language learning with cultural activities aimed at broadening the students' experience and understanding of China. In most institutions in South Africa these extra activities are part of yearly programmes. However, they are often one-off recreational events rather than scheduled as part of the academic disciplines. As for the teachers, the shortage of experienced teachers is a problem that is solved by sending volunteers abroad after they have received limited training that, in turn, causes quality assurance concerns, particularly linked to their inability to "develop or tailor teaching and learning resources and pedagogies effectively to meet the interests and

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abilities of local students" (Lo and Pan, 2014: 10; Confucius Institutes Headquarters, 2011; Siow, 2011). These negative attributes of textual and human resources seem to create conflicts between the tools used to project soft power and the intended outcomes by providing an image of China that can only have limited appeal, especially in the long run.

The last aspect to consider when analysing the effectiveness of CIs at the student level is the modalities of attraction through the promise and provision of scholarships. There are a number of initiatives put in place at the global level to guarantee students experience China first hand. Within the context of CIs these initiatives include the Chinese Bridge competition, summer camps, CI scholarship programmes, the annual CI conference and other specific scholarships for targeted groups, for instance singers. Payments, such as the provision of scholarships and the funding of summer camps, seem to be appealing to students, especially in contexts where the economic asymmetry between China and the local context is significant. Scholarships are often provided at the beginning of a students' engagement with the CI and are aimed at providing students with a deeper understanding of China. Despite these efforts, interviews with CI managers suggest that unless the course is taken for a full university degree – in South Africa only provided by one tertiary institution through the CI - only a small portion of students continue in years beyond the first. Student rates drop significantly between the first and subsequent years.

On the whole it seems that CIs' objectives *vis-à-vis* the students revolve around exposing the highest number to Chinese language and culture, not only through the courses at foreign institutions but also through visits to China. By providing a platform to experience China the institutes do allow students to broaden their (pre) conceptions about the country even when the limited time of study does not allow for a deeper understanding. However, more empirical research is needed to provide a picture of students' experiences in South Africa and China so as to unpack how their expectations are met. This is crucial in evaluating how their initial interest towards China, i.e. the motivation to embark on a Chinese language course, is maintained and grows to the point of benefiting China's soft power aims.

Conclusion

China is using a combination of hard and soft power in its foreign policy worldwide, including Africa. The domination of China's economic diplomacy in Africa has resulted in heated debates within and outside of African contexts as to the impact China would have in the social sphere. By observing their own transformation, Chinese leaders increasingly realised the importance of accounting for people's perceptions and reactions and started emphasising people-centred approaches. The Chinese language, often a tool of alienation from foreign populations due to its difficulty, has increasingly become a tool of foreign policy, a symbol of opening up. With the establishment of Confucius Institutes in 2004, language as a tool has become all the more important in acting as a medium to present a weighted image of China aimed, according to the Chinese, at counterbalancing the negative one produced by biased Western media, as well as Chinese migrants overseas. Critics have quickly jumped to portray the state-led educational centres as cradles for propaganda diffusion, accusing them of indoctrinating students. While these critiques have often overestimated the role of CIs, there has been little emphasis on the research front on providing accurate studies that move away from generalisations and take into consideration the *loci* of implementation.

Drawing on the findings of the South African case, it is argued that Confucius Institutes are only partially effective as a tool providing support for China's rise. While they are well able to attract institutions and students to respectively set up CIs and enrol, the *types* of behaviour involved vis-à-vis both the executive and the students can, at times, undermine the efforts. At the same time, the lack of proper evaluation mechanisms seems to suggest that the emphasis is not on how satisfactory and effective the educational experience is, but merely on providing such educational experience, as if the mere provision were sufficient to fulfil the project's aims. In particular, in relation to the executive, the confusion and suspicion over the bureaucratic system to which CIs are subjected and are part of, and the awareness that there exist norms of conduct when it comes to teaching content and practices, seems to translate into a nuanced trust as opposed to a complete trust, towards the Chinese management that could, in turn, act as an obstacle to further developments.

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In the case of students, the objective of exposing high numbers of students to language and culture is a strategy that can prove effective in terms of allowing students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of China, and in turn expressing positive, or at the minimum less biased, opinions about China. However, whether this is a good strategy to fulfil the objective of making CIs an effective tool supporting China's rise remains to be seen as the students that are briefly exposed to China may be positively affected, but not to the extent of advocating for it in their future personal and professional lives.

As a consequence, while the initiative's aim of exposing people to China, albeit briefly, is capably fulfilled, the project's ultimate aim of supporting China's rise may be more dependent on the type of interaction experience than is currently accounted for.

Endnotes

1. While this paper mainly utilises "Confucius Institutes", the concept generally also represents Confucius Classrooms, meant as a sub-category of CIs.

2. One of the four that was originally set up at Tshwane University was later shut down and a new one was set up at Durban University of Technology.

3. Burundi, Benin, Botswana, Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Eritrea, Ghana, Comoros, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

4. Although the website is only partially reliable, it is the only official source of information regarding the diffusion of CIs/CCs. Its partial reliability is due to the lack of precision in maintaining the list of CIs/CCs up to date as well as in providing overall numbers per region that are not always matched by the number of CIs/CCs per country. The Confucius Institutes' official website is available at:< http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm>

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Enduring silk ties

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Abstract

Due to China's growing energy needs that stem from its unrelenting drive for economic development, Beijing stresses the importance of maintaining a continuous supply of energy, particularly oil, to maintain its impressive economic growth. However, seeing as China's domestic resources are unable to satisfy its projected future oil demands, the Chinese government realise that, barring significant domestic oil discoveries, their dependency on oil imports, particularly from the Middle East, will continue to increase. As such, Chinese efforts to enhance relations with Iran have mainly stemmed from China's search for energy resources, an opportunity to create a diverse portfolio of overseas market shares, and the desire to exert political influence in the Middle East. Yet, not all credit can be given to Beijing for establishing links with Tehran as Iranian officials have, by advertising the country as a reliable energy source and key strategic partner in the Middle East, managed to gain China's attention and advance Sino-Iranian relations.

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Introduction

Chinese efforts to enhance relations with Iran have mainly stemmed from China's (People's republic of China, PRC) search for energy resources, an opportunity to create a diverse portfolio of overseas market shares, and the desire to exert political influence in the Middle East. Yet, not all credit can be given to Beijing for establishing links with Tehran as Iranian officials have, by advertising the country as a reliable energy source and key strategic partner in the Middle East, managed to gain the PRC's attention and advance Sino-Iranian relations. Additionally, aside from acknowledging Tehran's crucial role in the energy market, Beijing also recognises Iran's vital geostrategic location and its potential to be an energy transport base between the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe (Mackenzie, 2010:i). Due to the multi-dimensional and ever-changing nature of Sino-Iranian relations, it would be impossible to cover every facet of Beijing-Tehran ties in this paper. Therefore, my analysis will focus on the more prominent aspects of the relationship that ties Beijing and Tehran together despite the international pressure placed on China to implement measures to further isolate Iran for its overtly defiant nuclear activities. This paper will analyse the Sino-Iranian relationship from three points of view, namely: trade, energy and geostrategic reasoning. These three factors have been chosen as, based on the literature reviewed, they appear to be the "glue" that binds these two countries together.

Background: Sino-Iranian ties

The development of Sino-Iranian relations stems from a gradual expansion of ties between China and the Middle East. The birth of this relationship is traced back to the second century BCE when the Han Dynasty of China opened up the Silk Road and established trade with the Parthian Empire. Although official diplomatic relations were established in 1971, Iran kept China at a distance as the United States of America (US) pressured Tehran to limit its interaction with communist Beijing. However, before his overthrow in 1979, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi sought to improve relations with China as mutual concern over Soviet actions in Asia edged the PRC and Iran to achieve greater co-operation. Yet, relations with China were

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again strained when revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeni (successor to the Shah), in rebellion against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and US, supported a foreign policy that was, "neither West nor East." However, Khomeni's suspicions of China had to be revised as Iran's isolation and war with Iraq forced Tehran to cooperate a little more on certain issues with Beijing. The Islamic Republic had come to perceive that China could be used as a counterbalancing mechanism against the USSR and the US, thus providing Iran with much needed leverage on the international stage (Dorraj and Currier, 2008:68). Tehran's new outlook on China suited Beijing's global political agenda as it provided the Chinese with a gateway to pursue their territorial ambitions in Iran and, more importantly, the greater Middle East (Harold and Nader, 2012:3).

The endurance of the Sino-Iranian relationship is attributed to shared interests and similar international political outlooks. The survival of these ties illustrates that both these nations value political pragmatism, strategic thinking, and economic dealings (Douglas, Nelson and Schwartz, 2006:6). However, past grievances against Western hegemony have also played a part in shaping both nations' contemporary outlooks on global politics. With memories of "victimisation" and "vulnerability" at the hands of Western imperialists etched deep into their psyche, Beijing and Tehran continue to protest against Western imperialism and hegemonic behaviour (Baker, 2010:22). As a result, both countries distrust the US and frequently criticise Washington's policy of liberal interventionism as "imperialist" and "hegemonic" (Fite, 2012:7). By acknowledging their historical lineage of having once been "great civilisations", Beijing and Tehran draw inspiration from this narrative to reassert their great power statuses[1]. This essentially fuels China's, "foreign policy goals of a multi-polar world, free of US hegemony, where regional powers play the dominant role within their respective spheres of influence." (Baker, 2010:22). In this regard, Beijing and Tehran's ambitions have remained quite similar.

Even though the commonalities between China and Iran portray a grounded relationship, "when push comes to shove", Beijing has, on various occasions, demonstrated that it is willing to side-line Iran in favour of remaining in comity with the US. This was demonstrated when China acknowledged calls from Washington to

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abandon nuclear co-operation with Iran in 1997. Although Iran disapproved of China's actions, the Ayatollahs realised that it was still in Tehran's best interests to continue working with the Chinese on economic and political issues. Thus, it is by means of such flexibility that the Chinese and Iranians have created a durable, albeit limited, relationship that continues to persist under straining conditions (Baker, 2010:22).

Although the PRC views Iran as a potential partner for limiting US advancements in the Middle East, Beijing is not overly reliant on Tehran for its energy needs, economic development or national security. This is demonstrated by China's globally dispersed sources of oil as well as its substantial oil imports from other Middle-Eastern nations, most notably Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, because of Iran's small number of allies and shunning of the US, Tehran has come to rely heavily on Beijing for vital diplomacy, economic, military and technological assistance. Though China's dependency on Iran is minimal, Sino-Iranian relations have nonetheless enhanced Beijing's capacity to become a vital player in Middle-Eastern issues. Aware of how sanctions have heightened the Islamic Republic's vulnerability, Beijing is exploiting Iran by utilising its increasing isolation from the international community to demand Iranian oil at discounted prices. Despite such exploitive demands, Tehran is not willing to dismiss the PRC, as China provides the Islamic Republic with vital diplomatic cover in the international arena. Even though Beijing's relationship with Tehran (an international pariah) may tarnish its image as a "responsible stakeholder" and threaten Sino-US relations, China has nonetheless demonstrated an unusual support for Iran (Douglas, Nelson and Schwartz, 2006:2).

Trade

In 1979 both nations undertook drastic reforms that laid the building blocks for their present day economic and political relationship (Morris, 2012:2). For Iran, the Islamic Revolution and subsequent hostage debacle led to the deterioration of Tehran's relationship with the West as it was faced with economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Whilst Beijing, under Deng Xiaoping, implemented market-based reforms that were followed by a rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth

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which subsequently led to the ascendance of China as an international force.

Sino-Iranian economic relations have grown steadily. This is demonstrated by the level of trade between the two nations increasing from US$ 400 million in 1994 to more than US$ 36 billion in 2012 (Jun and Lei, 2010:43; Dickey and Ighani, 2014). Although economic exchanges were first limited to military purchases by Iran, trade exchanges between Beijing and Tehran have primarily advanced through general trade and dealings in oil-gas. Both nations have hosted various conferences that promote bi-lateral trade and economic co-operation. However, energy is, without question, the main pillar upholding Sino-Iranian economic ties. Due to China's energy demands, bi-lateral trade in fuel resources increased. In addition to rising energy trade, bi-lateral trade in other goods also increased – with the total of non-oil trade reaching US$ 13 billion in 2014 (Kredo, 2014). Aware of Iran's vast energy resource endowments, Beijing and Tehran have signed various energy deals worth millions of dollars. However, unlike China who mainly views Iran as an energy source and another market for Chinese goods, the Iranians highly value Chinese patronage. The PRC has come to be indispensable to the Iranian economy as it is considered to be an important energy customer, a source of technological knowledge, and a major investor in a variety of Iranian sectors (Gentry, 2005: 115).

Though energy trade dominates Sino-Iranian relations, it has become evident that both nations are interested in expanding economic dealings to incorporate various other sectors. In efforts to expand the Sino-Iranian relationship beyond energy, the two nations established the Chinese-Iranian Joint Commission on Economic, Trade, Scientific, and Technical Co-operation in 1993 (Gentry, 2005:114). This keen interest in diversifying relations became particularly evident in 2005 when Beijing expressed interest in strengthening labour ties between the two nations as well as the possibility of initiating co-operation with regards to aerospace ventures (Gentry, 2005:117). Furthermore, a signed aluminium deal worth US$ 1 billion significantly demonstrated China's interests in diversifying its relations with Iran (Gentry, 2005:114). China's desire to dabble in different Iranian sectors was again demonstrated at the 2009 Iran-China Economic Co-operation Conference, where many Chinese companies finalised negotiations and signed agreements to improve

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Iranian infrastructure and the country's mining and construction industries (Farrar-Wellman and Frasco, 2012). In the wake of sanctions issued against the Islamic Republic, China displayed its keenness to expand its interests in the country when Beijing signed a US$ 20 billion agreement in May 2011 to boost bi-lateral co-operation in Iran's industrial and mining sectors (Harold and Nader, 2012:10).

The Iranian market is considered to be extremely advantageous for China as its natural resources, massive market, strategic location and educated workforce are advantageous factors that have enticed Beijing to engage with Tehran (Vakil, 2006:54). This is echoed by the estimated 250 Chinese companies involved in a variety of projects or retailing in low-cost consumer products in Iran in 2006 (Calabrese, 2006:6). Moreover, due to the positives of trading with Iran, the two countries have announced that they plan to more than double their annual bi-lateral trade from US$ 30-US$ 40 billion to US$ 100 billion by 2016 (Harold and Nader, 2012:10). China's growing economic influence and the effects of sanctions have altered Iran's trading patterns – Tehran has become increasingly dependent on China both as a market and as a source of consumer and industrial goods (Salvin, 2011:1). This plays to Beijing's advantage in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI). Due to the Islamic Republic's strained relations with the West, Iran, in terms of FDI, offers China little competition. Improvements in Chinese-Iranian commercial dealings led China to surpass the European Union (EU) in 2009 to become Iran's largest trading partner, with a bi-lateral trade volume estimated at more than US$ 21 billion (Mackenzie, 2010:6).

Although the Sino-Iranian economic relationship has evolved to become highly robust, China and Iran have, "yet to fully exploit their economic potential in various [other] spheres" as the regulatory framework underpinning this relationship requires substantial improvements (Jun and Lei, 2010:6). It has been suggested that the Sino-Iranian economic relationship could be enhanced with the signing of a customs agreement and the co-ordination of import and export regulations between the two nations (Morris, 2012:3). In addition, due to financial and banking obstacles hindering deals from moving forward, China and Iran need to establish a legal arbitration board for bi-lateral disagreements (Jun and Lei, 2010:43). Nevertheless,

Iran continues to be a key piece in China's foreign economic-energy puzzle.

Energy

As OPEC's (Oil Producing Export Countries) second largest oil exporter, Iran produces 3.7 million barrels of crude oil per day and is ranked as the world's fourth-largest oil producer (Fite, 2012:10). Furthermore, the country has oil reserves collectively estimated at 155 billion barrels and gas reserves at 33 trillion cubic metres (Fite, 2012:10). Thus, it is not surprising that energy driven China has developed a keen interest in Tehran's energy sector.

Although energy in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG) has provided a second energy link with Iran, Iranian crude is still the main attraction. Ever since China's first purchase of Iranian oil in 1974 under the Shah's regime, the PRC's oil imports from Iran have grown substantially. Iranian crude accounts for approximately 10-15 of China's total oil imports (Swaine, 2010:4). In 2009 the PRC surpassed Japan to become Iran's top oil customer and in the first half of 2014 it imported 630,000 barrels per day (bpd) – up 48 per cent from the previous year (Lai, 2007:525; Mackenzie, 2010:5; Dickey and Ighani, 2014).

Although the percentage of oil imported from Iran is miniscule when compared to Saudi Arabia and Angola, the Chinese have calculated reasons for importing Iranian oil. Crude oil from Iran not only assists in meeting rapidly increasing Chinese consumption demands, it also helps contain rising import expenses as the sour crude oil (sulphur-rich) found in Iran is comparatively cheaper than sweet crude oil (carbon-rich) (Calabrese, 2006:7). Moreover, access to Iranian oil is gaining importance as Iran provides China with an opportunity to access its oil reserves without competition from Western oil companies (Coskun, 2009:184). Iran is also one of the few Middle-Eastern states that permit China to carry out business in upstream sectors (Hongtu, 2010:50). By being amongst a few Middle East countries that allow Chinese NOCs (National Oil Companies). to carry out upstream ventures, this demonstrates that Tehran is using its energy reserves to strengthen its partnership with Beijing (Gentry, 2005:115-116). Chinese NOCs have also shown a strong interest in downstream developments with more than one hundred Chinese

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companies operating in Iran helping to develop the local metros, ports, airports, and oil and natural gas facilities (Chubin, 2010:65).

Despite Iran barring foreign oil companies from concession agreements and restricting them to "buy back" contracts, Chinese NOCs, unlike many other international oil companies, are not deterred by Tehran's approach to dealing with overseas energy firms (Chubin, 2010:14). China's increasing focus on the Iranian energy sector is demonstrated by the 166 Chinese companies that attended the Iranian Oil Show in 2011, as opposed to the one hundred firms that attended in 2010 (Harold and Nader, 2012:10). Moreover, aside from signing numerous energy agreements, Iran has also formed a joint oil and gas committee with China to advance energy co-operation. Apart from purchasing Iranian crude oil and gas, Beijing (after Japan's withdrawal from deals due to US pressure) has, by securing the massive Azadegan and Yadvaran oil and gas fields, become a formidable player in Iranian upstream operations (Harold and Nader, 2012:11).

Although China has acquired numerous Iranian fuel agreements, Iran's energy sector has presented Beijing with various challenges. Tehran traditionally restricts foreign ownership of its hydrocarbon resources and, due to this, China has been provided with limited opportunities to acquire equity in Iranian oil (Harold and Nader, 2012:22). Like its Western and Japanese counterparts, Chinese investors are prone to becoming frustrated with Iran's approach to drafting contracts and business dealings, as possible ventures usually involve continuous rounds of back and forth negotiations and unimplemented business deals (Harold and Nader, 2012:22). Nevertheless, such obstacles have not hindered China from filling the void that sanctions have created in Tehran's energy sector. By viewing the pull out of Western companies as an opportunity to gain a stronger foothold in the Iranian energy sector, the Chinese have seized this opening by signing various energy deals, particularly during 2005 to 2010, worth an estimated US$ 120 billion (Morris, 2012:3). Investments of note include a US$ 40 billion deal to update the Iranian petroleum refining industry, a US$ 2 billion Sinopec Group agreement to develop the Yadavaran oil field and an additional US$ 70 billion in assistance directed towards the development of the Yadavaran oil field in exchange for 10 million tons of LNG

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from Iran (Morris, 2012:3).

Despite fortifying Sino-Iranian relations with economic-energy agreements, due to Iran's outdated energy infrastructure analysts are still left with technical difficulties in terms of deciphering how successfully energy agreements are being implemented towards meeting China's energy needs (Budike, 2010:86). Stemming from the numerous energy contracts that have been initiated between the two nations, the Islamic Republic has subsequently been provided with cover to weather sanctions that target its energy sector. However, the "life jacket" that Beijing provides Tehran's energy sector can easily be revoked. Due to, the challenges and potential political backlash linked with conducting business in Iran, most Sino-Iranian agreements are in the, "form of non-binding memoranda of understanding which are easily revocable in the event of political, economic, or internal instability" (Morris, 2012:3).

Taking into consideration the damage that UN sanctions and uni-lateral measures have inflicted on Iran's economy, Tehran views Beijing as a lifeline now more than ever. China is considered to be a strong economic partner that is capable of providing the crucial investment and technology that is need for Iran's economic development. In 2014, China raised its budget for Iranian infrastructure projects from US$ 25 billion to US$ 52 billion (BBC News, 2014). Beijing's vested interests in Tehran's energy sector are vital as Iran lacks the necessary expertise and capital to modernise its declining energy industry, especially its oil refining capabilities. By appealing to its dominant energy beneficiary, China increased fuel shipments to the Islamic Republic and is aiding Iran with its refining expansion efforts (Harold and Nader, 2012:11). Assisting Iran has provided the Chinese with an opportunity to expand their foreign investment and a chance to enter Tehran's "good books" for securing future oil supplies (Baker, 2010:19). Since the Chinese are essentially keeping the Iranian energy sector afloat, Molavi suggests that the Sino-Iranian relationship seems to be more vital for Tehran than Beijing (Molavi, 2010:51). By playing on this asymmetrical dependence, Chinese firms have asserted that if there are hindrances that prevent China's Iranian projects from obtaining attractive profits, they will revert to a peripheral position in the country's energy sector (Lee and

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Shalmon, 2007:21).

Despite the seemingly anchored Sino-Iranian economic-energy relationship, major Chinese NECs (National Energy Companies) have been stalling the implementation of agreements in Iran in the face of sanctions. However, there has been no clear indication if the decision to delay the implementation of energy deals is a directive from the Chinese government or based on Chinese NECs' wariness of proceeding with energy plans in a high-risk environment. Harold and Nader suggest that firms are individually weighing up the risks to avoid a Libyan scenario, where analysts forecasted that a democratic Libya would potentially cost China US$ 18.8 billion in investments (Harold and Nader, 2012:12). While awaiting the outcome of the Obama Administration's deliberation regarding the possibility of sanctioning Chinese firms under the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestments Act of 2010 (CISADA), China delayed the implementation of an estimated US$ 40 billion in 2010 investments to revamp Iran's petroleum industry (Salvin, 2011:3). Thus, of the US$ 40 billion, China, in 2011, had so far only provided less than US$ 3 billion (Salvin, 2011:3). If a high risk business environment is behind Chinese NECs reluctance to implement decisions it can be assumed that, once Tehran gains a more favourable international status, China is likely to advance the implementation of agreements in order to avoid competition from other countries who may want to re-engage with Iran (Harold and Nader, 2012:12).

Geostrategic: countering US hegemony in the Middle East

In terms of geostrategic reasoning the Islamic Republic is of major importance to China. Iran stands out mainly because it is the largest and most populous Islamic country in the oil abundant Middle East (Jun and Lei, 2010:50). Moreover, due to its strategic location, geographical land mass and human resources, Iran is considered to be a regional power in the Middle East. The Islamic Republic is deemed to be geostrategically imperative because (Jun and Lei, 2010:50): firstly, Iran has a stretching coastline on the North Arabian Sea which dominates the entire eastern side of the Persian Gulf. Secondly, the Islamic Republic has lengthy borders with Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, Iran also borders on some of

the remaining republics of the former Soviet Union, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Lastly, towards the North of Iran, the country also has a coastline on the Caspian Sea and shares borders with states in the Central Asian region.

Taking these geostrategic factors into account and the country's potential as a regional power, in the 1970s Washington considered Iran to be a "strategic pillar" in America's grand strategy for Western Asia (Jun and Lei, 2010:50). However, with the ousting of the Shah in 1979 and the Iranian hostage crisis, the US revised its views of Iran and deduced that the country was to be considered a "strategic threat" (Jun and Lei, 2010:50). Over the years, Washington's aversion towards Tehran has been demonstrated by the numerous unilateral sanctions against the country and statements by American officials which deem the country to be a "pariah" state and part of the "Axis of Evil". As such, the Americans have strategically established an expansive military and naval presence in the Middle East in order to protect their oil investments, to insure regional stability and, most importantly, to serve as a warning to Iran via gunboat diplomacy. Such actions have produced significant changes in geostrategic alliances; this is particularly demonstrated by the strengthened Sino-Iranian relationship.

China perceives that America's policy towards the Middle East and its established military presence serves to bolster the US's dominance in the region (Cooney, 2005:6). Stemming from Beijing's desire for a multi-polar world and its opposition to the US's hegemonic influence in the Arab world, a part of China's foreign policy towards the Middle East is based on opposing American hegemony in the area. Beijing strongly favours multi-polarity because the PRC, "believes that a regional and international environment in which the US is obliged to accept the diversity of political and social systems best serves China's interests" (Garver, Leverett and Leverett, 2012:18). Such thinking could possibly stem from Beijing's anxiety over Washington's ability to control strategic global areas and its potential to cut off energy supplies to China in the event of a military conflict, possibly over Taiwan (Harold and Nader, 2012:2). Additionally, Chinese analysts are concerned with Washington's potential to utilise its hegemonic status to assert control over oil resources that could be used as leverage to coerce major oil consumers, since, "once

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you control the gulf, you control Europe, Japan and China, like holding the tap in your hands." (Jianxin, 2005:5). Thus, oil is more than just a fuel resource, it is a power tool.

However, without any strong historical ties or a longstanding strategic interest in the region, China's mission to "chip away" at American dominance in the Middle East is hampered. As such Beijing has avoided directly challenging the US's hegemonic position. Instead, the PRC is indirectly working towards minimising America's strong influence in the area by supporting or building relationships with regimes that have an aversion towards the US's presence in the Middle East (Cooney, 2005:7). In this regard, Iran is considered to be an ideal partner for China. Aware of the Islamic Republic's emergence as a regional power, geostrategic location, distaste of America's influence in the region and, most importantly, Iran's shared view of a multi-polar world, Beijing has sought to forge sturdy economic, diplomatic and military ties with Tehran to counterbalance US power in the Middle East.

Since American-Gulf alliances have established a security regime that is in line with the US's interests in the Middle East, China has been prompted to pursue substantial military and defence relations with Iran (Cooney, 2005:7). The Chinese strategically reason that assisting Iran with military improvements indirectly counterbalances US dominance in the Persian Gulf (Harold and Nader, 2012:18). Furthermore, there have been suggestions that Beijing may eventually propose to enter into a formal defence relationship with Iran but, due to the negative implications that such an agreement would have on China's relations with the US, the Arab world and Israel, a Sino-Iranian defence relationship seems unlikely (Harold and Nader, 2012:19). Nevertheless, this does not mean that geopolitical co-operation between China and Iran is stunted. On the contrary, geostrategic collaboration between these two nations can continue to advance, despite the absence of a formal defence agreement (Harold and Nader, 2012:19). Chinese analysts advocate that Beijing's efforts to strengthen ties with Iran could serve as a hedge to prevent Iran from succumbing to American influences in the future. However, China and Iran's diverging interests regarding the US limits the extent of their opposition towards Washington. Unlike Tehran who is almost entirely cut off from the US's economy and has to deal with numerous

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American-led international sanctions, Beijing depends greatly on Washington for its economic growth and the protection of its oil shipments along East Asian sea routes. Thus, China's desire to counter America's dominance in the Middle East is limited by its dependence on favourable trade and investment relations with Washington (Harold and Nader, 2012:21).

In sum, in spite of the imposition of international sanctions against Iran, Sino-Iranian relations have grown considerably. This is particularly demonstrated by the increase in trade between the two countries, as well as their shared interest in expanding relations to encompass non-energy related co-operation and investment. Nevertheless, energy (particularly the export of large amounts of oil to China) remains the cornerstone of this relationship – it is a significant factor that rationalises Beijing's maintenance of ties with the internationally isolated Tehran. However, as a result of a risky Iranian business climate, Chinese NECs have been stalling the implementation of energy agreements with Iranian suppliers. This has led to increased doubts over China's commitment to Iran in the face of Western calls for Beijing to distance itself from a nuclear-aspirant Tehran. Aside from Iran's alluring hydrocarbon assets, the Chinese also acknowledge the significant role that Tehran can play in keeping a check on US influence in the Middle East. Aware of the country's geostrategic position and its regional power status, Beijing has been motivated to forge sturdy ties with Tehran in order to counterbalance US power in the Middle East. However, unlike Iran, Beijing's economic dependence on Washington limits it from significantly minimising the US's dominance in the Middle East. Although Sino-Iranian relations have grown and strengthened over the years, diplomatic pressure placed on China to contribute to isolating Tehran may have influenced the Chinese to reassess their economic-energy interests in Iran. Nevertheless, even though the Islamic Republic is regarded as just another market and energy source for China, Beijing cannot be easily swayed in its decision to engage with Iran as it has come to play a vital role in shaping Chinese interest in the Middle East.

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Endnotes

1. The shared Silk Road heritage links China, Iran and the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, and serves as a historical basis for present day co-operation. – Gentry, "The Dragon and The Magi: Burgeoning Sino-Iranian Relations in The 21st Century," p. 111.

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Forum*: China's Silk Road Economic Belt: African perspectives and implications[1]

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Abstract

This forum piece seeks to probe the connection between China and Africa regarding the current Chinese concept dubbed the "Silk Road Economic Belt", variously referred to by such synonyms such as "new Silk Road", "Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road", "Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road" and "Silk Road of the Sea". What are the historical antecedents of the African dimension of this new Chinese zeitgeist? How is Africa featuring in the embryonic stages of this multifarious concept - one that has indeed been elevated to the heights of international relations policy levels? What are the historical, diplomatic, economic and cultural implications for Africa and what steps is China likely to take in the months and years

*Forum contributions are discursive and topical articles written by authors to encourage debate or share new information and ideas. Forum articles do not form part of the peer-reviewed section of the AEAA but contribute by extending the academic discussion beyond the limits of a review process.

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ahead? How will Africans, especially African leaders and policymakers, respond to the anticipated implementation of the concept? I conclude by posing a couple of forward looking issues including perspectives on how African leaders and policymakers might react to the Silk Road when its anticipated roll out in Africa begins.

Introduction

This forum piece seeks to probe the connection between China and Africa regarding the current Chinese concept dubbed the 'Silk Road Economic Belt, variously referred to by such synonyms such as "new Silk Road", "Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road", "Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road" and "Silk Road of the Sea". What are the historical antecedents of the African dimension of this new Chinese zeitgeist? How is Africa featuring in the embryonic stages of this multifarious concept - one that has indeed been elevated to the heights of international relations policy levels? What are the historical, diplomatic, economic and cultural implications for Africa and what steps is China likely to take in the months and years ahead? How will Africans, especially African leaders and policymakers, respond to the anticipated implementation of the concept?

To answer these questions, I first trace the historical background informing the African dimension of the Silk Road Economic Belt. This is followed by a discussion of the literature on the Silk Road with a view to understanding the thoughts it has elicited from the intellectual and academic communities in China, Africa and globally. The analysis inculcates content from Xinhua News Agency, purposefully selected as representative of Chinese media reporting on the topic. Xinhua is considered the most appropriate in these regards because, as the sole state-run wire service, it is known to set the pace for the articulation of the Chinese party-state's voice on key issues[3]. Indeed, Xinhua News Agency rolled out a media campaign to promote the concept entitled: "China's Initiatives on Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-century Maritime Silk Road" in April 2014 (Xinhua, 2014). It is worth pointing out here that my initial diligent search for overt coverage of the new Silk

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Road by leading African news media returned a blank on the topic, thus, we leave out African media. With respects to "Western media", I take the view that analysis would be critical in keeping with the long held view that such organiSations are inclined to pursue a less than rosy image of not only China but on occasion, Africa and even their own governments.

After synthesis of the literature, I assess to the implications which this new international policy has for Africa. I conclude by posing a couple of forward looking issues including perspectives on how African leaders and policymakers might react to the Silk Road when its anticipated roll out in Africa begins.

Background

Leafing through the flood that is China-Africa literature, it is nearly a given that any historical account on the topic must of necessity begin with, or at least take cognizance of the Ming Dynasty, Admiral Zheng He. He is lionized as a Muslim eunuch and intrepid leader of the Chinese expedition that made a pioneering foray onto the African continent. Such are his exploits that Life Magazine lists him as the fourteenth most influential man of the second millennium, even ahead of Chairman Mao Zedong, founder of modern China (Top 100 people of the Millennium, 2002).

The historical dimension of Zheng He's voyages are part folk yarn, part archeologically backed. Historical accounts indicate that his fleet of as many as 300 ships navigated by a force of 28,000 sailors, docked on Africa's east coast (Mogadishu and Kismayu in Somalia, Lamu and Malindi in Kenya) in 1418. This was well ahead of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator, who touched the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 – a fact that brings in competitive narratives between China and the West over the longevity of their contact with Africa. Pointed out with equal zeal by the Chinese side, has been the fact that the pioneering armada to East Africa came not to conqueror ill-armed local inhabitants but rather to seek trade links.

The trade dimensions of these early contacts are captured in the fact that the Chinese mariners brought porcelains, silks, lacquer ware, and fine-art objects. In turn, so goes

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the well worn narrative, they went back with items such as ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, rare woods, incense, medicinal herbs, pearls and precious stones. The symbolic perceptions are deciphered in the fact that on at least one such occasion, the voyagers conveyed zebras and giraffes to the Ming dynasty ruling elite. Artistic impressions and written accounts of these tropical mammals, so exotic to China's temperate climate, have been cited as evidence of China-East Africa contact eon upon eon ago.

As China's Silk Road initiative begins to take shape, it will without doubt build on resuscitating these ancient links. Over the past couple of years, evidence of such links have been vigorously explored. British archaeologist Mark Horton[3] excavated in the Kenyan villages of Shanga in Lamu between 1980 and 1986. He wrote a monograph; *Shanga: The Archaeology of a Muslim Trading Community on the Coast of East Africa* for the British Institute in eastern-Africa, which provided new information on the Chinese voyages. In 1996, an American, Louise Levathes[4], wrote a book entitled *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405 – 1433*, describing how the Chinese *bao chuan* (treasure ships) came to Malindi, Kenya. Another American journalist from the New York Times travelled to Lamu, interviewed residents and wrote an article suggesting that China and Africa had been in contact 600 years before (Bodomo, 2012).

In the early 2000s, a coin with East Asian features, probably Chinese, was discovered in northern Australia and thought to have originated from Kilwa, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Southern Tanzania (Live Science, 2013). In 2006, China erected a replica of Zheng He's treasure ship[5] at a shipyard in Nanjing, an indication that the admiral's sojourns in the Middle East, south-East Asia and eastern -Africa – the maritime Silk Road – were subject of China's penchant for historical icons.

Archaeologists and anthropologists investigating the matter were of the view that Shanga village, thought to be named for the present Shanghai city, was the place where one of the Zheng He's ships was wrecked nearly 600 years ago. Additionally, some local inhabitants had "Chinese characteristics", in other words, oriental

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physical features. This was bolstered by ancient tombs distinct from local Muslim burial graves and decorated with Chinese ceramics. In 2005, DNA tests irrefutably confirmed that a family in Washanga or Shanga village of Siyu islet, Lamu, bore Chinese genetic make-up traceable to Jiangsu province. Notable among them was Dr Mwamaka Sharifu – dubbed the "Chinese girl" by the media[6] – who has since become the modern face of these ancient events. She earned a Chinese scholarship and is currently studying for a master's degree at the Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Such past events add, from the present day vantage point, a potent people-to-people dimension to the modern project. In 2005, the Chinese government held the 600 anniversary of Zheng He's expeditions in Jiangsu, exemplifying the admiral as a bridge between China and East Africa.

With information about Chinese contact with the East African coast rapidly spreading through China-Africa scholarship and in the media, the Chinese and Kenyan governments signed an agreement in 2005 for joint archaeological excavation, which ultimately kicked off in 2010. The Sino-Kenya terrestrial and marine archaeological exploration project was a US$ 2.4 million project. Notably, this historical-cum-cultural project was funded by China's Ministry of Commerce.

Fast forward

The Ming Dynasty expeditions and therefore the maritime Silk Road are said to have been abruptly terminated for a variety of speculative reasons pieced together by historians[7]. In the 19th Century, contacts between China and East Africa resumed when some 2,000 Chinese workers were brought to Tanzania by colonial Germany to build the Dar es Salaam to Mwanza railway (1400 are said to have died) (Shinn and Eisenman, 2012). It is interesting to note however that the recent flurry of activity in the Silk Road formulation comes at a time when Chinese resources are being used for the construction of a railway between Mombasa, through Kenya and into Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan.

China has mobilised significant "soft power" out of her old connections with East Africa. These ancient contacts are today an important source of her diplomatic *raison d'être* in Africa. In 2010, when the former Chinese ambassador to Kenya, Liu

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Guangyuan received the so-called Peace Ark – a Chinese navy ship laden with medical personnel and equipment for free medical check-ups and treatment of Kenyans in the coastal city of Mombasa – he struck a historical chord by linking the ship to what he called "Giraffe Diplomacy", drawing on Zheng He's voyages in the fifteenth Century[8]. Standing with local and Chinese guests overlooking the Indian Ocean, the ambassador narrated how the Chinese voyager and his retinue had gone back to China with a giraffe that was then kept in the Ming Dynasty court as a symbol of luck. It is worth noting that in the recent past, in 2014, other such Chinese navy fleets have called on the coasts of South Africa, Namibia and Angola (Xinhua, 2014a; Xinhua, 2014b).

And just as Zheng's massive fleet of treasure vessels of the fifteenth century brought exotic oriental goods, the Peace Ark mission of 2010 equally wowed when it docked on the Kenyan shores: a rescue helicopter on board, 32 medical departments, 300 hospital beds and a wide range of diagnostic medical equipment. Kenyans in various states of indisposition flogged the ship for a week. It then glided away to the Dar es Salaam port and on to the Seychelles to bless other shores with its "good luck". The re-enactment of the earlier voyages via a navy-cum-medical ship sought to tie together conventional diplomacy, medical diplomacy, historical diplomacy and political diplomacy[9]. This is but one instance of China's skill in bundling symbolism with pragmatism in Africa since the 1960s - a skill which is likely to be deployed in discourses articulating China's Silk Road.

FOCAC as a shaper of the China-Africa Silk Road

From the foregoing historical account, it is evident that the Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road strikes deep symbolism in the relations between China and Africa. For instance, that Zheng He's exploits are of immense symbolic significance to China was evident at the July 2012 edition of the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). China's Director General at the International Affairs Department of the Ministry of Culture Ms Hou Xianghua announced that her country would build a park on the Kenyan coast and plant a sculptured bronze statue of Zheng He there (Wekesa, 2014). Indeed some have referred to activities of unveiling Zheng as

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"China's marine diplomacy" and "soft power at sea" one that could be leveraged to China's construction of the maritime Silk Road via the Mombasa port as indicated by the "Silk Road Economic Belt" maps (Holmes and Yoshihara, 2006:244).

Literature Synthesis

Zheng He's expeditions to the East African coast have in the recent past been pressed into the service of legitimising what is now known as the "maritime silk road". However, the polemics that are likely to be sparked by China's appropriation of the maritime Silk Road will elicit contestation about the dating of the Indian Ocean trade sea routes. If Zheng He's visits have been primed as having predated the colonial settlement of Europeans on the East Africa coast, the contestation would be that Marco Polo's thirteen century travels were much earlier and, in turn, maritime trade between Africa and other Asian regions had been going on for at least two centuries before Marco Polo (MacEgan, 2014).

The whole coinage of the phrase has become a contest in symbolism. In 1999 and 2006, the United States of America (US) Congress issued and updated *The Silk Road Strategy Act* to maintain US influence in Eurasia. In 2004, *China Daily* published an article outlining China's concept of its Silk Road as a Eurasian "land bridge" connecting China to Europe across the Eurasian continent (Lin, 2011). The connection here, as we saw above, is that 2005 is the year when the African perspectives of the Silk Road via Zheng He-related initiatives rose to prominence with East Africa as the beachhead.

In the immediate present, before the concept rose to the status of official Chinese geo -political policy, it had been used by US officials with a nearly similar road, maritime and air infrastructure vision – "The New Silk Road Initiative" – from 2011 onwards (Tracy, 2013). Indeed, former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton chaired a conference dubbed the "New Silk Road" in New York with 30 Asian nations, as one of her last Asia-focused diplomacy before retirement. This was in the context of the withdrawal of US' armed forces from Afghanistan. In what amounts to "who blinks first", it would thus appear that the Chinese authorities may have plucked the rug under the US' feet, at least in terms of deploying the phrase to its global geo-

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political intents. As far as Africa is concerned, it is likely to be same competitive "who blinks first" as the recalibration of global financial and political architecture gallops apace.

The point to note in undertaking a loose content analysis of Xinhua News Agency's coverage, is the sheer preponderance of the coverage of the China's Silk Road Economic Belt concept[10]. As explained above, Xinhua News Agency takes the cue from the Chinese party-state and thus, we can conclude that the Chinese Silk Road and Economic Belt is a product of a well thought out plan. Furthermore, we can conclude that the Chinese Silk Road and Economic Belt is part of China's grand strategy, as well as its Comprehensive National Power design. It is in this context that Xinhua's promotional special issue on the topic beginning April 2014 should be seen. However, it is evident that Xinhua reporting is heavily tilted towards the Eurasia and the South East Asia regions with only three articles focused on Africa for the whole period from April to December 2014. A perspective we nevertheless glean from the reporting is that the coasts of Kenya and Egypt will likely be the landing sites for the African Silk Road as they are focused on in three articles. Interesting absences in the literature are the Indian Ocean countries of Madagascar, Seychelles and Mauritius that – speculatively – seem to have been part of the ancient Silk Road!

The new Silk Road has been primed as Chinese economic diplomacy calculated to advance China's economic expansion to the world as a counter to the Western countries and supranational financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (Kemp, 2014). When the US$ 40 billion Silk Road Fund was unveiled in 2014, it was bundled with China's promotion of a new US$ 50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which South Korea and Australia declined to join ostensibly due to pressure from officials in Washington, which went all the way up to Secretary of State John Kerry and President Barack Obama himself (Kemp, 2014). The apprehension by the West is that war chests such as the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank could be used by countries not accessing funds from the West, this being a lamentation that African countries have long expressed.

The new Silk Road has been imagined as a challenge to the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) announced early 2014 by the Obama administration, aimed at creating a Free Trade Area in the Asia Pacific region with the exclusion of China and obviously, the preclusion of Africa. Geo-political perspectives can be seen in the deduction that the TPP builds on the US' pivot to Asia thought to be a scheme to encircle and contain China in its East Asian "sphere of influence". Africa has not featured directly in the pivot to Asia discussions. However as this balance of power manoeuvring gains pace, it is likely that Africa will be drawn in one way or another. For instance, analysts have linked the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to the BRICS US$ 100 billion New Development Bank to be headquartered in Shanghai. Africa is represented in the BRICS by South Africa and South Africa has often argued that it is not in the BRICS for its own national interests but as representative for wider continental interests. Still, there is a broken link between China and Africa in that China's own Free Trade Agreement for Asia and the Pacific (FTAAP) – as an answer to the TPP – equally and obviously precludes Africa. Notably, the Chinese authorities have invited all APEC member-states (in which Africa is geographically precluded) to join the FTAAP (Zepp-LaRouche, 2014), thus, African leaders would be interested in figuring out what avenues exist for their participation in this unfurling globalization 2.0. This is regardless of President Xi Jinping's words (in the context of the Silk Road and APEC) to the effect that he 'recognise(d) the positive actions both (China and the US) have taken in helping African countries (Zepp-LaRouche, 2014).

Much as the new Silk Road details China's global protrusion, a review of the literature indicates that its objectives are currently best articulated with regards to transport corridors in the Eurasian region even though there are contestations here over the prioritisation of the western, central or southern corridors (Pradumna, Rana and Chia, 2014). Some have gone as far as lobbying for the pivotal role that some Asian countries would play in the structural development of the new Silk Road[11]. In the cartographic models that have been generated, Africa features not by road extensions but by a maritime route that touches Mombasa on the East African coast with a short dash to Nairobi and then extends via the Red Sea to Egypt. Egypt with

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its Suez Canal that links northern Africa, Europe and the Levant with Asia is crucial for the new Silk Road today as it was in the ancient times. Indeed, rather than the flow of traders coming from China or Asia to northern Africa, it is recorded that trading caravans escaping the expansion of the Roman empire established trade routes the other way – into Asia (Chaturvedy, 2014).

Much of the literature hardly accounts for the African dimension of the new Silk Road, mentioning it only in passing. It is worth pointing out that the ancient maritime Silk Road did not necessarily and directly extend to Nairobi. In this, we see the possibility that the Chinese framers of the new Silk Road are prepared to use the ancient Silk Road as the launch pad for newly minted Silk Roads! Nonetheless, it is not far-fetched to suppose that the African dimension of the Silk Road is currently a matter of conjecture rather than based on overt official articulations as happened in much of south-East Asia, south and central-Asia, eastern and central-Europe and in parts of western-Europe. Analysis seeking to factor in African perspectives would therefore need to consider where Africa stands in China's grand strategy. Some sources indicate that the grand strategy includes:

> *"Acquisition of comprehensive national power with an eye on global great power that is second to none, access to global natural resources, raw materials, and overseas markets to sustain China's economic expansion, pursuit of the 'three Ms': military build-up, multilateralism, and multi-polarity; and creation of a worldwide network of friends and allies".*(Chaturvedy, 2014)

Literature shows that China's interests in the Silk Road are more inclined towards economic considerations and geopolitical considerations only secondarily. In the specific African circumstances, security concerns such as those seen in the evacuation of Chinese nationals from Libya in 2011 and the anti-piracy activities by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Gulf of Aden, are motivated by securing economic interests there (Lin, 2011). But because China's military presence could be construed along the lines of the "China Threat" in eastern-Africa's Indian Ocean regions, it has been argued that the Zheng He narrative would help recall China's peaceful intentions in the past as in the present (Li, 2005), away from

the spectre of a rising, neo-colonial and aggressive power.

Vague as China's Silk Road Economic Belt may seem, scholars have seen a link between it and China's acquisition [of] controlling and operational stakes in various container ports across the Indian Ocean Littoral, Coast of East Africa, and the Mediterranean. On the East African coast, China is involved in the construction or revamping of seaports in Kenya (Mombasa and Lamu), Tanzania (Dar es Salaam and Bagamoyo) as well as interests in the ports and maritime transport shipping lines along the Red Sea and the Mediterranean (Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt). This is seen as a means of securing sea lines for trade and ferrying of natural resources as well as quelling sea-based crime and piracy (Anthony, 2013). It has also been indicated that China (in partnership with Thailand) has fashioned a "Strategic Maritime Distribution Centres (SMDC)" initiative that would see to the construction and servicing of 12 ports and Sea Lines of Operation on the continent although details on which ports these would be is still hazy (Eyler, 2014).

Analysis of the implications for Africa

Any number of implications can be ascribed to China's Africa dimension of the new Silk Road. To start with, the fact that China's immediate neighbourhood in Asia and central and western-Europe seem to have been the targets of the concept is unlikely to impress African leaders and policymakers. This is particularly so considering that we are living in an era where China is such an important player that whatever major policy initiatives it rolls out, they are observed with more than passing keenness globally, Africa included.

On the cultural front, it appears that the pledge, during the 2012 FOCAC ministerial meeting, for the erection of the deeply symbolic statute of Zheng He in Mombasa, has not been met. If, or when, it is constructed, it would join the tombs of Chinese TAZARA construction workers who died and were interred in Dar es Salaam. It would stand in the same city where Fort Jesus, the Portuguese relic still stands but with the reminder that China did not built any forts used for conquering Africans. In the same vein, the release of the findings of the archaeological investigations in Kenya by the Kenyan National Museum and China National Museums/Peking

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University that have been undertaken since 2010 would provide further "soft power" if China elects to promote the concept in Africa. Given that the promotion of the Silk Road in China and elsewhere in the Eurasian region has included artistic productions, the possibility of joint artistic endeavours around the ancient Silk Road – including China Central Television's (CCTV) documentaries[12] on the topic, to fully fledged films – is not altogether far-fetched. Indeed, there are ample cultural resources and initiatives available when it comes to the promotion of Zheng He.

A related cultural consideration could take a decidedly educational approach. Many Africans are well familiar with the historical contacts between their countries and Europe – born of centuries of contact. Few however have an understanding and appreciation of the fifteenth century contacts. This stands in contrast to the fact that most literate Chinese are well familiar with the Chinese *bao chuan* (treasure ship) voyages to the "seas of the west". Chinese and African educational officials could work together in the course of implementing the new Silk Road policy to insert these historical accounts into African curriculums.

Obviously, a question to be posed is whether China-Africa engagements have changed over the past 600 years since Zheng He's voyage. Then, China brought porcelains, silks, lacquer ware, and fine-art objects to East African – all these being "manufactured products". In turn, they went back with ivory, rhinoceros horn, tortoiseshell, rare woods, incense, medicinal herbs, pearls and precious stones – in other words "raw materials". This is largely the case today with lamentations – right or erroneous – being that China's trade relations with Africa are structured in such a way that Africa is a net importer of "finished" products and a net exporter of "unfinished" materials. It would be interesting to see how the African dimension of the Silk Road would address this conveyance of goods across the international waters. Would the Chinese authorities' magnanimous pledges to help Africa climb up the value addition chain be part of the "new" Silk Road relations? Would Africans themselves see the Silk Road as a means to step up to the plate and fashion a shipping of manufactured rather than primary goods rather than whining incessantly over the matter?

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It has been observed that the new Silk Road is a metaphor that finds its tangible implementation through free trade zones (the TPP for the US and the FTAAP for China) and financial vehicles such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank. This poses a challenge since – geographically speaking – Africa does not belong to any of these trade areas nor does it expressly qualify to benefit from the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank. The closest Africa gets to the proposed funds will be with respects to the US$ 40 billion Silk Road fund – although again, these funds seem earmarked for projects in China's littoral areas and toward Europe. Even the BRICS cannot be seen as directly beneficial to Africa notwithstanding South Africa's ostensible representation of the continent. Indeed, apart from South Africa's own economic challenges that distract it from effectively playing a financial support role for Africa, it (South Africa) has to reckon with competition from as such other continental rivals as Nigeria and Egypt (Wekesa, 2014).

Indeed, a dicey consideration in terms of the products shipped from Africa to China along the new Silk Road will be in relation to illegal wildlife poaching for products such as ivory and rhino horns. In the recent past, China (and other Asian countries) have been berated for their roles of omission or commission in these illegalities. Yet, latching on historical antecedents as the primer for the new Silk Road would bring to mind the fact that ivory and rhino horn were two of the valued products that Zheng He's ships conveyed to Ming Dynasty China. On a more potentially salutary consideration, African governments could use the fact that Zheng He's ships are said to have taken giraffes and zebras to the Middle Kingdom to donate just such wildlife to China. This innovation, if feasible, could come with lots of soft power for African nations. It would in a small measure demonstrate that, rather than being on a receiving end of Chinese largesse all the time, they can give something back.

A limiting factor in the African dimension of the new Silk Road is that it brushes the continent on the Kenyan coast and then travels via the Red Sea to Egypt. It can almost be anticipated that other African countries will feel envious of this exclusion. China does not have to strictly follow the ancient sea and land routes in constructing the new Silk Road. In these respects, an updated map linking the new Chinese-funded infrastructure on the continent could go a long way. In any case, just such a

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proposal – for construction of pan-African road linkages – was made by Premier Li Keqiang during his April-May 2014 tour of the continent (Xinhua, 2014).

Throughout capitals in the West, analysts and strategists must be burning the midnight oil fashioning a response to China's new geo-political tentacles. The Chinese Silk Road diplomacy is sure to trigger counter offers not just to the rest of the world but to Africa as well. Western powers already have a major naval presence on the continent. They would clearly be interested in upping their game. One positive picking for Africa – in what echoes the Cold War of yore – will be that western powers are likely to intensify their "return" to Africa if and when China clarifies its China-Africa Silk Road plans. A magic wand in China's arsenal however is that in the recent past, it has been involved in quelling piracy off the coast of East Africa within the wider context of China's contribution to Africa's peace building efforts. Does peace and security offer pathways in which China could smooth its African Silk Road?

Conclusion

Traditionally, Africa is the continent where Chinese leaders initiate new diplomatic moves every New Year. With China's Africa Silk Road still very much *tabula rasa*, the China-Africa academic community will be waiting to see if early 2016 will be a time for the moulding of an approach that can then be subjected to a more informed conversation. As things stand, much of the discussion will remain speculative. Whichever way things go, questions will be posed as to whether Africa will be spurned or not as China unfurls a major geopolitical plan into the future.

Endnotes

1.   This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the Overseas Chinese and 21st-Century New Silk Road Conference at Jinan University, China, 13 December 2014, organised by Jinan University and the Chinese in Africa, Africans in China Research Network

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2. The author acknowledges the support of the Wits China Africa Reporting Project housed in the Journalism Department, University of the Witwatersrand for continuing support in researching China-Africa issues from whence many of the perspectives in this paper are derived.

3. Professor Mark Horton of Bristol University is reputed as one of the foremost archaeologist on matters East African coast complete with a TV and documentary career in the field.

4. Levathes, a former National Geographic writer introduces her book with a dramatic tale of how each of Zheng He's ships were, "…the size of many houses…a city of ships".

5. As of July 2012, Xinhua News Agency reported that China was building a massive replica of "Zheng He Treasure Ship," that would debut sailing in 2014.

6. For instance In March 2012, CCTV Africa revisited the China-Lamu story and ran with the banner: *Zheng He's Peace Journey*.

7. The most plausible reason advanced is that the successor of the emperor of Yongle (who had been supportive of the expeditions) did not have time for the expeditions.

8. Guangyuan wrote in an opinion article in Kenya's leading newspaper, the Daily Nation drawing on the speech he had made during the event.

9. The political dimension was evident in the presence at the event of Kenya's former speaker of national assembly, Kenneth Marende and former Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka

10. Based on the author's wide reading of Xinhua's reporting from April 2014 to early December 2014

11. For more information see, Chulanee Attanayake, 2014, Sri Lanka; the Best Stop-over in China's Maritime Silk Road

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12. See video: joint dig of ancient Malindi, http://english.cntv.cn/program/cultureexpress/20120822/106754.shtml

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Forum*: African agency in the context of China-Africa relations

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Abstract

This short extract briefly draws together some of the research conclusions of my book *Uncovering African Agency: Angola's Management of China's Credit Lines* (Ashgate, 2014). After first providing an overarching context in terms of the importance of rhetoric as a lens through which China-Africa relations are viewed and interpreted, the extract touches on China's approach to foreign relations with African countries and how this has specifically played out in terms of relations between China and Angola. Some key aspects of the Angola's manifestation of "agency" within the parameters of this important diplomatic relationship are outlined.

*Forum contributions are discursive and topical articles written by authors to encourage debate or share new information and ideas. Forum articles do not form part of the peer-reviewed section of the AEAA but contribute by extending the academic discussion beyond the limits of a review process.

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Introduction

It is clear that rhetoric has shaped our views on China's relations with Africa. This is particularly evident when set in the global context of China attempting to balance its own foreign policy aspirations with Western fears that China's rise is irrevocably disrupting the international architecture. China has good reason to cultivate and maintain allies in developing countries, especially in the face of such suspicion from the industrialised nations. Consequently, Beijing has attempted to alleviate such tensions by projecting itself as a "responsible stakeholder" as conceptualised by the West, particularly with regards to development assistance, while developing "win-win" partnerships in solidarity with the global South.

The tension inherent in a dual role as both a provider of developmental assistance and an "equal partner" with developing countries is not viewed by the Chinese respondents interviewed as a contradiction. Indeed it was striking how many Chinese businessmen described the Chinese role in Angola couched in developmental rhetoric (Manager of private Chinese importing business, 2010), (Chief executive officer of a Chinese import-export company, 2010), (Secretary of the general Party branch, and administrative deputy general manager Beijing Construction Engineering Group, 2010). Generally this was emphasised more by representatives of state-owned enterprises (SOEs), but not exclusively. While the commercial opportunities in Angola were recognised, many insisted they were there to raise the standards of living of the Angolan people and help Angola rebuild itself. One respondent even said:

> *"Coming to Angola has many benefits, but we have also come across many difficulties: the government is very corrupt, the police give a lot of hassles, there are low levels of work ethic and the roads are not good. The living conditions here are very low, but this is a developing country, in order to serve others we must 'eat bitterness'."* (Chief executive officer of a Chinese import-export company, 2010)

The broader Chinese foreign policy rhetoric touts China's engagement with Angola as a successful form of South-South co-operation, and a concrete example of China's relationship with African countries bringing tangible development-oriented results to

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a country previously ravaged by a Cold War-fuelled civil conflict and subsequently ignored by the international community. China's growth trajectory is not conveyed as a model[1] in the sense of providing a blueprint for development, quite the contrary. Beijing offers an alternative to engaging solely with Western countries, and advocates formulating a development path according to a country's own specific context (Obiorah 2008:4).

However, it is clear that equality between China and Africa, difficult enough to substantiate in public rhetoric is not always upheld in personal views. In an illuminating metaphor, a senior official from China Exim Bank, in describing the triangular relationship between China, Africa and Western countries drew a parallel with a child giving a toy that he was tired of to his younger brother:

> *"After you have given it to your younger brother, it is not your right to tell the younger brother how to play with it"*. (China Exim Bank, 2010)

Without reading too deeply into the metaphor, it gives a piercing insight into the way China's relations with Africa are viewed and how passivity is attributed to Africa as a continent by this respondent, despite formal rhetoric of "equal partnership". At the very least China's rhetoric about its role in Africa smacks of *noblesse oblige,* implying a superior attitude to African countries. Furthermore, China's engagement with African countries is predicated on the need to alleviate its own pressing domestic problems; energy security, securing new export markets and poverty alleviation are far more important drivers of China's foreign policy than South-South solidarity (Cargill, 2010:37).

From a more institutional standpoint, as regards Chinese foreign policy, Li Ruogu, President of China Exim Bank has repeatedly emphasised what he sees as the unrequited success of Chinese firms in Africa, both commercially and as having produced results where Western assistance agents have failed. He sees China Exim bank for example as much more efficient than the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWI), particularly in the case of African countries.

Increased Chinese engagement on the African continent, while sparking reactions

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from the international community, has further led to confrontations regarding civil society within the continent and foreign non-state actors. Many international business groups have accused Chinese companies of low labour and environmental standards in their protests against market entry of Chinese companies. These allegations are often dismissed by the African host governments as "sour grapes". Furthermore, numerous examples of substandard environmental practices by Western companies have seriously diminished the credibility of Western-supported lobby groups for important issues of this nature, regardless of their saliency. Many Chinese commentators are dismissive of so-called Western standards, arguing that they are inappropriate for developing countries:

> *"You need one or two generations to sacrifice; don't believe the human rights advocates, they are simply put in the wrong time. They are forcing these things which are results of growth, not pre-conditions".* (Ruogu, 2010)

This has led commentators such as Richardson (2010) to suggest that China's engagement with Africa:

> *"... has gone beyond simply a relationship based on trade to a boom in investment that is challenging the classic development paradigms established by Western IFIs such as the IMF and World Bank".*

Circumstances differ in this regard from country to country in Africa. In the case of Angola, such claims are overstated. IMF's continued engagement with Angola has been encouraged by Luanda, not least to balance China's influence.

China´s foreign policy towards Africa is far from the "grand strategy" concept espoused by Pehnelt and Abel (2007:9). Instead, it is developed incrementally, largely on a trial and error basis and often as a dialogue between principles and agents, or in other words, the various government bureaucracies and state-owned enterprises themselves (Bo, 2010:81). Although Chinese foreign policy overtures to African countries have increased, this must be taken in the context of a more global outreach generally. As Cargill (2010:32) notes:

> *"There is huge interest in China's African involvement, probably*

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disproportionately large outside China compared to within it".

Nevertheless, Chinese diplomatic and commercial activity on the continent has increased dramatically from a very low base; despite Africa not being a foreign policy priority relative to other concerns.

An important reason for this, naturally, is China's need for natural resources, particularly petroleum[2], in which Angola, in terms of securing a long-term supply, has been instrumental. However, new foreign markets are just as important as a release valve for the excess domestic capacity present in nearly all China's productive sectors and Africa is a necessary terrain, to practice "going out" (Western construction equipment importer, 2010).

Africa is thus an important stepping stone in Chinese companies' internationalisation, providing crucial lessons in a less challenging environment than would be provided by other markets.

When put in historical context, it appears that China and Angola's hasty partnership dating from 2004 was a strategic action to address both states´ pressing needs at the time. China was experiencing a crippling energy crisis; this period also coincided with the "going global" policy having been officially endorsed by the top Chinese leadership[3]. The Angolan government's oil wealth, which was experiencing financing difficulties just at that time, may have seemed to present a perfect solution. From the perspective of Beijing, several years on the question has been raised as to whether such relations are sustainable as they currently stand (Chinese think tank, 2009). Far from serving as a kind of "model" for other resource rich countries' relations with China, it has been suggested that the strategic partnership forged between Luanda and Beijing was done so at an opportune moment of equal need, for financing and oil resources respectively (Chinese research institute, 2009). This speaks to Angola seizing a "window of time" (Habeeb 1988:34) which presented a unique opportunity.

Furthermore, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in view of previous involvement in Angola's history, may have felt it politically expedient to conclude a

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deal, overruling any reservations that that Exim Bank may have harboured (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009). The outcome of the arrangement, has, contrary to the expectations of some, not rendered Chinese oil companies greater access to Angola oil blocks, although supply of oil as collateral has been secured. Despite China providing Angola with substantial financing, this has not facilitated Chinese national oil company (NOC) entry into the oil industry. Chinese companies will continue to bid for oil blocks in Angola, but their progress has been slow. As regards the "going global" policy, China Exim Bank has so far had far more success in opening the door for Chinese construction companies into the Angolan market. China Exim Bank has largely accomplished market entry for a number of Chinese private and state-owned construction enterprises with guaranteed project contracts and procurement shipments totalling several billion US dollars. Chinese construction projects under the China Exim Bank credit line are continuing, with US$ 2.5 billion in projects reportedly having been executed as of June 2008 (the last formal report to date issued by the Angolan Ministry of Finance regarding process on Chinese-funded infrastructure projects) and phase III of the national reconstruction programme underway (GAT, 2008:2).

As of September 2014, in Angola alone, Chinese companies have cumulatively signed more than US$ 44.3 billion worth of new contracts, having effectively doubled the value of their project pipeline in five years, when it sat at US$ 22.6 million in 2009 (MOFCOM, 2014). Consequently, engagement in Angola could be considered a remarkable success as regards the China Exim Banks' mandate to promote Chinese goods and services. Larger state-owned Chinese companies have entered Angola largely on the back of the China Exim Bank credit line, as these state financing structures mitigated the risk that would otherwise have prevented these Chinese firms from entering the little known Angolan market.

Significantly, the oil repayments provide China with secure long-term supply of oil. Angolan exports to China have increased considerably since the China Exim Bank credit line agreement. This seems to point to the fact that the oil is indeed shipped to China, rather than resold on the international market. That the oil must be sold directly to the Chinese state (rather than to a Chinese NOC) is particularly important

for China to build up its strategic reserves. As Bo (2010:93) notes, Chinese NOC's oil equity is often not sent back to China, but sold on the international market at a higher price than can be achieved in China, where the price of oil is controlled. The arrangement between China and Angola thus bypasses the Chinese NOC, alleviating this strategic concern.

A key conclusion from this research is that while the Angolan government was remarkably successful in the negotiation of key terms of financing from China, the implementation of the projects, themselves has been less so. While there are arguably benefits from the physical infrastructure provided as a result of the Chinese contracts, the monitoring of the project execution is questionable. Furthermore, Chinese companies' interaction with Angolans on a commercial level is very weak, limiting opportunities for broader economic stimulation through the reconstruction process itself. This is due to a number of factors; the nature of the Chinese government loans which are specifically a mechanism to ensure that a large proportion of the procurement comes from China (thus reducing China's trade deficit with Angola) and attempted risk mitigation due to Chinese companies' lack of local market knowledge.

In many cases the Chinese companies' competitive advantage lies in their ability to deliver projects faster and cheaper than their competitors, encouraging quick builds to maximum cost and time efficiency. This leaves little room for local content development. Loans from foreign governments, linked to purchasing their national companies' goods and services, especially such as those from China, further reduces the ability of local firms to enter the value chain. A dire lack of training and capacity in a working population that has just emerged from more than three decades of civil war worsens the situation. However, this situation is exacerbated by Angola's weak institutional framework, lack of political will on the Angolan government's part, vested interests preventing local content policy implementation and lack of capacity in the local market.

The Angolan political elite has on the other hand leveraged its growing relationship with China on several levels: the international, the national and the regional. In the

past few years Luanda has acquired access to various lines of credit from a variety of different partners. This points to the Angolan government's successful strategy of diversification of finance sources, compared to its situation immediately following the end of the civil war.   The Angolan government, always fiercely protective of its sovereignty, eschewed an IMF structural adjustment package in 2003 for China's less interventionist financing. Considered a "quick-fix" at the time, Luanda continues to be wary of allowing Chinese interests to hold too much sway in the economy. The standby loan agreement drawn up six years later in 2009 between the IMF and Angola points not only to a rapprochement between the African country and the BWI, but is also a determined effort to balance China's perceived influence in the economy. It sends a clear message that Angola is willing to engage with other potential partners. Nevertheless, Chinese financing has been important. It is viewed in some quarters as having acted as a kind of catalyst in attracting financing from other countries (Senior official at Angolan Embassy, 2009).

Regionally, Angola is playing a more active and influential role in forums such at the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Weimar 2009:4). Despite Sogge's (2009:10) dismissal of Angola's interest in regional bodies such as SADC, he does point to Angola's resurgence of interest in the Nigeria-initiated Gulf of Guinea commission, now headquartered in Luanda. Dos Santos, as the region's longest serving head of state, and leader of the second largest economy after South Africa, is accorded new respect (Mangena, 2011). Furthermore, Angola became the President of OPEC in 2009, two years after becoming its newest member in January 2007.

On the domestic front, in the early years following the end of the civil war, China Exim Bank's loans provided the means to begin national reconstruction. Aside from its practical necessity following the destruction of the civil war, the MPLA government has utilised Chinese financial assistance to kick-start a state-building process through which the government, controlled by the ruling party, could consolidate political and economic power. It also lent credence to the narrative of national reconstruction employed by the government. This was essential from the perspective of political survival and proved successful, given the MPLA's landslide

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victory in the legislative elections of 2008. This is what Hodges (2004:169) calls "manufactured legitimacy". The ruling parties' continued control of the credit lines ensured a monopolisation of both the process and the economic rents it implies. Despite a rash of policies and public overtures concerning economic diversification and local participation, the economy's fundamental structural contradictions have not been addressed. Anti-government protests although only in their infancy, are appearing in unprecedented fashion. This underlines the weakness of the Angolan state. The Angolan regime has displayed remarkable political adaptability in navigating its internal and external weaknesses demonstrating significant "behavioural power" (Habeeb 1988:34). However, the political turn of events indicates that the Angolan government will have to further innovate or risk losing its grip on power.

A "strategic partnership"?

In evaluating the nature of the so-called "strategic partnership" between Angola and China, what emerges is a picture far more complex than previous analyses suggest. Given that Angola has been China's top African trading partner since 2007, there has been a marked lag in the level of China-Angola trade and the corresponding level of China-Angola investment, relative to other resource-rich African countries. In 2009, Angola ranked only 11th in terms of China FDI stock in African countries, with each of the top 10 African destination countries boasting more than double the Chinese investment of Angola's. However, by 2012, with US$ 392.1 million, Angola ranked 1st in Africa in terms of its Chinese FDI stock according to Chinese Ministry of Commerce official statistics. This seems to infer that five years ago, while Angola was considered an important source of oil, particularly within the West African region, Chinese companies did not regard Angola as a strategic location for investment, beyond acquisitions in the oil industry.

This may be explained by several factors. Firstly, Angola's investment climate is severely lacking. The African country is ranked by the World Bank's 2014 "Doing Business report" as 181 out of 189 (World Bank Group, 2015). According to this report, although ranked 67th for "dealing with construction permits", Angola has a

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ranking of 174 for starting a business and 187 for "enforcing a contract". The situation was much the same five years ago. There is little wonder therefore that most Chinese construction companies' entry into Angola's market has been through a tightly managed high-level bi-lateral agreement between the Angolan government and China Exim Bank or CIF. Furthermore, Angola, due to its relative lack of infrastructure and integration into the southern-African region, a legacy of decades of civil war, is not a strategic location of export-oriented manufacture, nor is it a particularly attractive market, relative to other options in Africa, with a modest population of only approximately 22 million, almost 80 per cent of which are considered to be impoverished. Chinese companies benefit predominantly from the Angolan government's oil-fuelled public investment programme facilitated by China Exim Bank. However, as evidenced by the marked jump in investment and with increasing interest from Chinese banking majors Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and China Development Bank (CDB), it appears that this has changed.

Primary interest in Angola for Chinese companies remains the oil sector. The Angolan government, which for decades has directed the Angolan oil industry through its parastatal company Sonangol, has been less open to Chinese investment in the oil industry than originally expected. As we saw, several blocks that various Chinese national oil companies had shown a keen interest in purchasing, were denied them. This may well be for pragmatic reasons; nevertheless, it sends a strong political message to Beijing, and points to shrewd management of the oil industry on the part of the Angolan government, whose management of increasing Chinese interest in the oil sector has been much more deft than Nigeria's (Vines *et al,* 2009).

African agency should be a key tenet in analysing Africa's international relations. As African actors do have the ability to carve out policy spaces despite the lack of a "level playing field" in international fora. Rather than attributing their current contexts to path dependencies, it must be recognised that the actions of African leadership are at least as important, and as a result, they must accept most of the responsibility for the outcome of such actions (Soares de Oliveira, 2007:124). Angola's political elite has proven adept in managing relations with China, and the Chinese government cannot lay claim to untoward political influence in Angola.

They remain as posited by Campbell and Chaulia (2009:44) "unequal equals". However, "win-win" is largely accorded to political elites in both countries, and business interests that form part of their patronage networks. One key distinction however, is that whereas the Chinese political leadership have arguably succeeded in large-scale poverty reduction[4] in addition to the success of state institutions and companies, in the Angolan case, at least for now, the accumulation of state power is done at the expense of the Angolan people.

Endnotes

1. Of interest however is that some countries see China as providing a kind of 'model' for their engagement with Angola. Japan, on whose original foreign aid methods China's own development financing is based, has announced a development assistance package for Angola similar to China's approach, albeit in smaller volumes. (*Angop* 2011)

2. Bo (2010:65) notes that from 1992 – 2009, 63 out of 208 investment projects took place in Africa, denoting the region's importance in terms of China's oil -related foreign policy.

3. As discussed by Bo (2010:41) Chinese NOCs had been engaging in overseas operations for more than a decade before the central leadership realised its importance to the economy and promoted it as a general trend for other sectors to follow.

4. According to Kiala (2009:314) China has lifted 400 million people out of poverty since the 1980's.

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