

# **CHINA IN AFRICA: A THREAT TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES?**

**Chien-Kai Chen**  
**Department of International Studies**  
**Rhodes College, Memphis, TN, USA**

## **Abstract**

China's growing presence in Africa has led to a debate about whether China is becoming a threat to African countries or not. While some argue that China is not posing any threat to Africa, others believe that China is not only a threat but also becoming a new coloniser. By exploring the existing literature, and the relevant information about China in Africa, this article demonstrates that there is an emerging contradiction in China's growing presence in Africa. This contradiction is manifest by the Chinese state's official policy toward Africa and the Chinese non-state actors' behaviour on the ground. While the former has long-term comprehensive interests in Africa, and therefore works toward building an equal and win-win Sino-African partnership, the latter, who in many cases are actually agents for the former to realise that partnership, have short-term 'for-profit interests' in Africa and therefore behave like an exploiter. This is one of the reasons why there are conflicting findings about China in Africa: while observers focusing on the Chinese government's official policy toward Africa tend to find that China is no threat to Africa, those who pay attention to the words and deeds of the Chinese non-state actors in Africa would find the opposite. The discussion of this contradiction is not only academically worthwhile but also practically important. In order to develop and maintain the 'constructive relations' with Africa, this contradiction in China's growing presence in Africa is arguably one of the largest challenges that the Chinese government has to deal with today.

# 1. Introduction

China is a rising power in the world today. Its influence can be observed not only in its relations with other major powers, especially the United States (US), but also through its interactions with those developing and underdeveloped countries outside the 'core'. With the expansion of China's global economic, political, and military presence, the debates about the so called 'China Threat' have spread from the developed core and the regions around China to those as far away from China, such as Africa. China's rapidly growing relations with African countries are among the latest indicators of the 'rise of China'. China's involvement in Africa has become more and more vigorous since 2000 when the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation was held in the Chinese capital city of Beijing where the Chinese leaders met with their counterparts from 45 African countries. The growing Sino-African relations since then are bringing the aforementioned debate over the rise of China to Africa to the forefront with some welcoming China's presence while others are opposed to it. Among those who are worried about China's growing presence in Africa are those who believe that China is becoming a new coloniser on the continent, repeating what Western imperialists used to do to Africa. This, given China's perceived effort to extract African resources and then dump the Chinese products back to the continent, all of which are for China's own economic development without caring about the African population's welfare.

Is China really becoming a new coloniser or threat to Africa? Several studies have been conducted to deal with this question, but findings vary. This article argues that the points for and against China's presence made by the existing literature are all valid to a great extent, and the conflicting findings are the result of the observers taking different units of analyses into account. More specifically, those focusing on the Chinese government's official policy toward Africa would find that China seems to have no intention to be a coloniser or threat of any kind while those exploring the Chinese companies' business conduct in Africa would find that China is behaving like a coloniser and posing a threat to the local population. By taking both of China's state and non-state actors into account, this article demonstrates that there is an obvious contradiction emerging between the former's official policy and the latter's behaviour in Africa. This contradiction in China's presence in Africa

would arguably damage China's reputation in Africa in general and strengthen the perception (or misperception) of China as a coloniser in particular, all of which would in turn cause damage to China's interests in Africa in the long term.

To make my case, I divide this article into four parts. I will first examine China's growing presence in Africa in terms of its economic, political, and military influences on the continent. Then, I will explore the debates on China in Africa. In the third part, I will demonstrate the contradiction between the Chinese government and other Chinese non-state actors in terms of their behaviour and attitudes toward Africa. Finally, I will conclude the article by summarising the findings and discussing their implications for Sino-African relations.

## **2. China's growing presence in Africa**

With its status as a rising power, China has more and more interests, whether they are economic, political, or military which it needs to secure. Therefore, in addition to the developed major powers in the West and those Asian countries around it, China has been trying to develop its relations with as many countries as possible in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. Among these new diplomatic frontiers, China has been the most active in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, over the past two decades (Sutter 2016: 305). Although it is far from being a hegemon in Africa, China's growing presence, compared with others', is capturing the attention of people inside and outside the continent.

### **2.1 China's economic presence**

China's expanding economic presence in Africa can be observed through the growing China-Africa trade. The amount of trade grew from US\$10 billion to US\$40 billion between 2000 and 2005, and in 2009, China became Africa's largest trading partner, surpassing the US and the European Union (EU) (Sutter 2016: 306-310). The amount reached US\$220 billion in 2014 and is expected to increase to US\$400 billion by 2020 (Forum 2016: 17). The key factor behind the growing China-Africa trade involves China's import of African oil, as well as other raw materials. Given its effort to diversify the source of energy that it needs for its economic development, China began to import oil from Africa in 1992. The quantity of African oil to China increased from 500 000 tons

in that year to 708 million tons in 2010, and China today imports at least one-third of the oil that it consumes from Africa (Wang and Zou 2014: 1114). Oil and other raw materials are playing such a large role in China-Africa trade that it is found that, in general, African countries with fewer resources tend to suffer trade deficits with China (for example, Benin, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, and Morocco) while those with rich resources tend to enjoy surpluses (for example, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, Angola, Libya, and Gabon) (Eisenman 2012: 806).

In addition to being one of the most important sources of energy for China, Africa is also a huge potential market for Chinese products (Wang and Zou 2014: 1114). The prospect of Africa becoming a huge overseas market for China is not only promoting China-Africa trade further but also attracting more and more Chinese investment in Africa with the Chinese government's policy to encourage Chinese companies to do business abroad (that is, the 'going out' policy since the late 1990s). There were around 600 Chinese companies in Africa with the total investment of US\$1.5 billion in 2004, and the number increased to 2 500 with the total investment of US\$2.5 billion after 10 years in 2014 (Sutter 2016: 307-310). Increasing Chinese investment in Africa can also be noticed with the burgeoning Chinese construction projects throughout the continent where there are more and more Chinese-constructed (or at least financed) roads, railways, ports, airports, and official buildings such as the headquarters of the African Union (AU) which was funded by China with US\$200 million and formally opened in 2012 (Zhao 2014: 1034; Lanteigne 2016: 195).

Simply speaking, due to the growing China-Africa trade and the increasing Chinese investment in Africa, the economic ties between China and Africa have become more and more significant. With the Chinese government's plan to build the so-called 'One Belt, One Road' which includes part of East Africa, this trend of expanding Chinese economic presence in Africa will undoubtedly continue.

## **2.2 China's political presence**

The expansion of China's economic presence in Africa is accompanied by the growth of its political presence on the continent. One of the major political objectives that China has been pursuing in Africa is to gain African support for its 'One-China Principle' *vis-à-vis* Taiwan (Wang and Zou 2014: 1116). Due to its successful economic reform initiated in

the late 1970s, China has since the 1990s begun to enjoy notable progress on its 'yuan diplomacy' to encourage Taiwan's African allies to shift their political recognition and endorse China's 'One-China Principle' (Lanteigne 2016: 194). As a result, China's political presence in Africa significantly expanded when South Africa terminated its official relations with Taiwan and established formal diplomatic ties with China in 1998. Today, all except three countries in Africa (that is, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, and Swaziland) politically recognise China instead of Taiwan.

China's expanding political presence in Africa can be seen in not only its diplomatic success against Taiwan but also its growing political influences over the policy-making in some African countries. There is evidence that China in Africa tries to use its political influences to protect its own interests under certain circumstances. For example, so as to secure the stability in Africa and to satisfy the expectations from other countries inside and outside Africa (both of which would serve China's interests in Africa in the long run), China in 2007 successfully persuaded the Sudanese government to voluntarily agree to allow the deployment of the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force to its war-torn Darfur region (Holslag 2008: 71-83).

Also, because of China's amazing economic growth as a result of its successful economic reform, the so called Beijing Consensus promoting China's development model on the basis of state capitalism is becoming more and more popular among African countries as opposed to the Washington Consensus which advocates the US-supported development model based on neoliberal capitalism (Mohan and Power 2008: 23). Here, the fact that many African countries are turning to China for economic advice seems to show that China, compared to other foreign powers in Africa, is gaining more and more soft power in Africa. Finally, in addition to the Beijing Consensus, the rich and unconditional aid and economic support offered by China throughout Africa would only make the Chinese diplomats more and more influential on the continent (Tull 2006: 459). The Kenyan government's decision in April 2016 to deport Taiwanese fraud suspects to China instead of Taiwan under the request of Chinese diplomats is one of the latest examples of China's growing political influence in Africa (Ramzy 2016).

## 2.3 China's military presence

In addition to its economic and political presence, China's military presence (though still not very large), is increasing. There are basically three forms of the Chinese military presence in Africa today: first, selling weapons to some African countries such as Sudan and Zimbabwe; second, participating in the UN peacekeeping missions in the region; and third, maintaining a naval force against the Somalian pirates near the Horn of Africa (Lanteigne 2016: 195; Sutter 2016: 310; Enuka 2011: 98).

Among these three, China's involvement in UN peacekeeping is the most significant. China began to contribute personnel to the UN peacekeeping missions around the world in 1992, and Africa now has become the destination for the majority of Chinese personnel stationed abroad for such missions (Lanteigne 2016: 195). China's military presence in Africa reached a whole new level under the rule of the current Chinese president, Xi Jinping (Sutter 2016: 310-311; Duchatel *et al* 2016: 1-6). China, which had contributed only non-combat personnel (such as doctors and engineers) deployed its first combat troops to support the UN peacekeeping missions for South Sudan in 2012 and Mali in 2013. Additionally, the naval force against the Somalian pirates has been used to evacuate Chinese civilians from nearby countries experiencing turmoil, such as Yemen in 2015.

The latest indicator of China's expanding military presence in Africa which is attracting the most attention is the establishment of China's first military overseas outpost in Djibouti, an Eastern African country located in a strategically important point near several regional flashpoints (Lanteigne 2016: 195). Given its strategic significance, Djibouti since 2002 has hosted the one and only US expeditionary base in Africa as well as several other bases belonging to France, Italy, Spain, and Japan (Braude and Jiang 2016: 1; Sun and Zoubir 2016: 111). Following these major powers, China is currently building its own base there, which is scheduled to be completed in 2017. The plan was officially announced by the President of Djibouti in January 2016 and confirmed by China's Ministry of Defense the following month (Igbinoba 2016: 1; Duchatel *et al* 2016: 4). This Chinese overseas military base is unprecedented and China refers to it as a "logistical support and fast evacuation facility". It will be operated for many different military purposes (Braude and Jiang 2016: 1; Duchatel *et al* 2016: 4; Orion 2016:

1). In addition to providing logistical support for the UN peacekeeping missions and the Chinese force against the Somalian pirates, as well as helping evacuate Chinese non-combats and civilians in the area, it will serve to collect intelligence, support future counter-terrorism operations, and protect the critical sea lane in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait for China. Securing this military base in Africa will undoubtedly increase China's military influence on the continent, and the Chinese military presence will arguably expand even further if the rumours about the proposals for more Chinese military bases in such African countries as Seychelles, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, Angola, and Nigeria are proved true (Duchatel *et al*/2016: 3).

### **3. Debates on China's growing presence in Africa**

While there is little doubt about China's growing presence in Africa, there is little consensus amongst the experts on Sino-African relations with regards how to interpret this phenomenon. The most contested issue here concerns the implications of China's growing presence for the world in general and Africa in particular. The views on China in Africa range from China as an African 'development partner', pursuing win-win benefits and providing Africa with a non-Western model of development, to China as a foreign 'economic competitor' in Africa, competing with other foreign powers over the rich African resources, to China as a 'new coloniser', trying to not only exploit African resources but also control their markets as much as possible for the Chinese products (Edoho 2011: 103-110). Simply speaking, while some argue that China's growing presence will have or is having a negative impact on our world in general and Africa in particular, others believe that the positive impacts outweigh the possible negative ones.

#### **3.1 Negative views on China in Africa**

There are concerns about China's growing presence in Africa. Many are articulated by those Western powers that used to have an unchallengeable presence on the continent during and even after the colonial period. These concerns, to some extent, reflect an increasing Western anxiety about the rise of China in a Western-dominated international

order (Hirono and Suzuki 2014: 455). The US decision to formally create the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in 2008 to respond to the "growing strategic presence of non-western actors" in Africa well demonstrates the aforementioned anxiety (Lanteigne 2016: 195).

The confirmation of the establishment of China's Djibouti military base in early 2016 would only make those Western powers, especially the US, even more concerned about China's presence in Africa. Many US commentators have warned that what China calls the "logistical support and fast evacuation facility" in Djibouti would actually be used to monitor the US communications processed through that country which is one of the key US intelligence hubs in Africa (Duchatel *et al* 2016: 4). Also, at a hearing of the US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs in December 2015, a US Senator, Chris Coons, in the discussion about China's military base in Djibouti, urged the US government to be "vigilant in the face of China's growing ambitions" (Braude and Jiang 2016: 2-3). Furthermore, in a joint letter issued in February 2016 to the US Secretary of State John Kerry and the US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter, three congress people from the US House of Representatives, Dana Rohrabacher, Chris Smith and Duncan Hunter, expressed their concern about China's military presence in Djibouti, saying that "our own strategic interests around the Horn of Africa, specifically our critical counter-terrorism operations, will be impacted by China's growing strategic influence in the region" (Braude and Jiang 2016: 5).

It is worth noting that while some are concerned about the negative impacts of China in Africa for Western powers' interests, there are also those who emphasise the threat posed by China to African countries themselves. One of such criticisms involves China's arms sales to Africa's conflict zones (Enuka 2011: 97-98 and 112-113). It is found that China continues to sell weapons to African 'rouge states' such as Sudan and Zimbabwe for economic gain. Also, many Chinese companies have been accused of smuggling illegal arms into African countries such as Liberia, Sierra-Leone and the Ivory Coast, where there are civil wars or severe domestic turmoil in general. Simply speaking, to those who have negative views on China's growing presence in Africa (despite China's participation in the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa), its legal and illegal arms sales to Africa are creating more conflicts, than peace on the continent.

In addition to China's arms sales, those who have negative views



on China in Africa argue that, in order to secure its interests for African resources, China has become a 'Patron of African Misgovernment', brewing corruption and supporting authoritarianism in Africa with its no-strings-attached aid to Africa. This is very different from Western aid which is conditioned on the recipient's efforts to build democracy, protect human rights, and pursue 'good governance' in general (Sautman and Yan 2008: 9; Schoeman 2009: 403; Hirono and Suzuki 2014: 444). For example, the US Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) published a report in 2006 on the US influence in Africa, where it warned of China's effort to increase its influence to counter the Western pressures on African countries to improve human rights and governance (Sautman and Yan 2007: 75-76). Also, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have complained that China's unrestricted lending and aid to Africa are undermining "years of painstaking efforts to arrange conditional debt relief" and is fostering corruption on a large scale (Campbell 2008: 92-93).

Finally, there are increasing arguments about the negative impacts of the growing Chinese economic presence in Africa on African people's livelihoods. According to these arguments, while the China-Africa trade and Chinese investment in Africa seem to economically benefit Africa at first glance these initiatives are actually resulting in economic 'underdevelopment' on the continent. For example, Chinese companies in Africa prefer to hire Chinese workers from China instead of local workers from African countries (Zhao 2014: 1043-1044). Therefore, many Chinese construction projects previously mentioned actually involve a large number of Chinese workers employed by Chinese companies in Africa. Furthermore, in most cases those projects are paid for by the Chinese government to the same Chinese companies' headquarters in China. As a result, African countries and their workers in particular get very little extra benefit from China's economic presence in Africa in the form of employment, working skills, technology transfer, and spending for local goods and services (Sutter 2016: 308). Also, there are arguments that it is not only African workers but also African businesspeople who would be hurt by China's growing economic presence in Africa. This is because more and more African business and factory owners are worried about the 'dumping' of cheap Chinese products such as shoes, clothes, furniture, electronics etc to the African markets (French 2007: 131).

With all of the aforementioned negative views on China in Africa, there has been an accusation made by some people inside and out-

side Africa against China for being a 'new coloniser' in Africa that is greedily exploiting Africa for its own economic, political, and military interests at the expense of African people's welfare. During his 2006 trip to Nigeria, the British foreign secretary, Jack Straw, remarked that China in Africa today is very much like Britain as a colonial power over there 150 years ago (Mohan and Power 2008: 23). In addition, during her 2011 visit to Zambia, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, accused China of bringing 'new colonialism' to Africa (Zhao 2014: 1033-1034). Some African leaders have expressed similar concerns as well. For example, the South African president in 2006, Thabo Mbeki, publicly stated that Africa would be "condemned to underdevelopment" if China develops a "colonial relationship" with Africa such as that which used to exist between Africa and the West previously (Mohan and Power 2008: 23). Also, the president of the same country in 2012, Jacob Zuma, argued that "Africa's past economic experience with Europe dictates a need to be cautious when entering into partnerships with other economies" (Zhao 2014: 1033-1034). Similarly, in 2013, the governor of Nigeria's central bank, Lamido Sanusi, expressed his concern about the cheap Chinese imports by warning that there is always a possibility of China becoming as exploitative as those old colonial powers (Zhao 2014: 1033-1034).

### **3.2 Positive views of China in Africa**

The negative views on China's growing presence in Africa have been encouraging many other people inside and outside Africa to bust the 'myth' about China in Africa (Hirono and Suzuki 2014: 444-445). Many of those myth-busters have found that the Western powers in Africa today are actually no better than China in terms of their relations with African authoritarian countries and illiberal democracies: Western powers, especially the US, also tend to support or at least turn a blind eye to those corrupt, human rights-violating, and undemocratic countries not only in Africa but also in other places in the world whenever maintaining decent relations with such countries serves their national interests (Hirono and Suzuki 2014: 444-445).

Some of the myth-busters further argue that the critics of China, many of whom are from the West, are biased in the perceptions of China rising as a challenger to the West (Hirono and Suzuki 2014: 445; Sautman and Yan 2008: 9). Moreover, there are also others who be-

lieve that China in Africa is actually a 'lesser evil', if you really think that its growing presence is not necessarily a good one, compared to those Western powers. According to them, China's approach toward Africa is more Africa-friendly given its effort to build infrastructure, its sincere sympathy toward other developing and underdeveloped countries, and its insistence on the principle of non-intervention when it comes to international relations (Sautman and Yan 2007: 76-81). By contrast, in addition to supporting African authoritarian leaders whenever it sees fit, the West in general tries to impose neoliberal values on African countries through the IMF or the World Bank development packages and force their compliance with the West's foreign policies through conditional aid while at the same time imposing protectionism when it needs to protect its domestic industries against African exports (Sautman and Yan 2007: 93-94).

There are also people who go as far as to argue that China's growing presence in Africa will actually benefit or is benefiting the continent in general. For example, the infrastructure built or financed by China in Africa would help pave the way for Africa's economic development (Zhao 2014: 1034). Furthermore, in the long run, Africa would be able to reverse its economic marginalisation in the international economy during the era of globalisation with its exports to the Chinese market (Edoho 2011: 120-121). Also, politically speaking, China's growing presence in Africa would enable the continent to deconstruct its long-lasting asymmetric relations with the West, giving it more bargaining power to renegotiate a more equal relationship with the West (Edoho 2011: 120-121). Even China's military base in Djibouti and presumably in other African countries in the future would benefit those countries as well as their neighbours (Igbinoba 2016: 1-2). In the case of Djibouti, the country could collect, among other payments, an annual fee of US\$100 million from China for its rights to operate the military base while local people would be hired by the base for non-military tasks. Furthermore, in exchange for the military base, China has agreed to set up a US\$3.5 billion free trade zone with Djibouti as part of China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, which would bring about 15 000 jobs to Djibouti. In addition, China has worked toward a US\$590 million expansion in the shipment of Chinese containers from and to Djibouti's port while agreeing to financially support the construction of two new airports in the country at a cost of US\$600 million. Moreover, many of the other benefits resulting from the agreement between China and Djibouti on the Chi-

nese military base would be gained not only by Djibouti but also by its neighbours. For example, China has agreed to invest US\$4 billion in the construction of a railway connecting Djibouti and Ethiopia, which would economically benefit the latter a great deal since around 70 per cent of all Ethiopia's trade is processed through Djibouti's port. Also, China is working on transporting water from Ethiopia to Djibouti in the largest cross-border water project in Africa while planning to build a plant and export terminals for liquefied natural gas in Djibouti, which could allow Ethiopia to export the aforementioned gas to China through the pipelines which extend from Ethiopia to Djibouti.

Finally, it is worth noting that many of those who argue in favour of the positive impacts of China's presence in Africa actually believe that China in Africa, compared to the Western powers on the continent, is not only a 'lesser evil' but also some sort of moral existence (Campbell 2008: 99-100). According to them, there has been no such thing as Chinese colonialism, genocide, and occupation in Africa not to mention China's lack of involvement in the notorious transatlantic slave trade. Also, China since the end of WWII has helped facilitate the African decolonisation and liberation process through various political, economic, and military supports, and it has nothing to do with the impoverishment of Africa resulting from the long-lasting Western exploitation of the continent. Overall, to those who have a positive view (or at least a not-so-negative view) on China's growing presence in Africa argue that while the West in general sees Africa as a 'problem' to solve and tries to impose a solution from the outside, China sees Africa as an 'opportunity' to work with from the inside and tries to employ a policy of cooperation, solidarity, and mutual respect (Schoeman 2008: 405).

#### **4. A contradiction in China's presence: State versus non-state actors**

The points in favour of and against China's growing presence in Africa which have been highlighted are all valid to a great extent given the evidence they have demonstrated. Therefore, it is fair to say that the economic, political, and military impacts of the 'rise of China' in Africa are mixed ones. Moreover, the various findings which seem to conflict with each other at first glance are, in many cases, the results of different observers taking different units of analyses into account when exploring

China's growing presence in Africa. While the observers focusing on the Chinese government's policy, attitude and behaviour toward Africa at a macro level tend to find that China is actually a 'lesser evil' or even a good partner for African countries, those keeping an eye on the Chinese companies and other Chinese 'non-state' actors in Africa at a micro level tend to find that China is not really concerned about the welfare of the African population. Most importantly, these various findings about China in Africa reveal an emerging contradiction in China's presence in Africa, that between the Chinese state's official policy toward Africa and its non-state actors' behaviour on the continent. In this section, I will first explore the Chinese government's official policy toward Africa and then examine the aforementioned contradiction by discussing the role of Chinese non-state actors on the continent.

#### **4.1 China's official policy toward Africa**

China's relations with African countries have been developed on the basis of China's 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' (that is, mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence). These five principles were first raised by China in 1954 to deal with its relations with India but eventually became the guidelines for China's effort to build and develop relations with all other countries, especially those in the so called 'third world'. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence became popular among the participants of the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Following this conference, China built its first African tie in 1956 with Egypt (Lanteigne 2016: 193). China's relations with Africa continued to grow afterwards. The Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, took an African tour from 1963 to 1964, and the Chinese supreme leader, Mao Zedong, made public his 'Three Worlds Theory' in 1974 when he met with the president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda (Lanteigne 2016: 192; Large 2008: 49).

After the Mao era, and during most of the Deng Xiaoping era, developing relations with Africa was no longer one of China's diplomatic priorities due to China's focus on its domestic economic reform. It was not until the 1990s that China began to pay attention to Africa again when it tried to consolidate as many foreign relations as possible after the international criticism against the 1989 Tiananmen Incident (Lan-

teigne 2016: 193). In addition, since then, China's growing interests in African resources, especially oil, for its own domestic development have played an important role as well (Lanteigne 2016: 193). Furthermore, China's effort as a rising power to promote a multipolar world order against US domination is arguably another reason for its efforts to strengthen its relations with Africa (Tull 2006: 459). In general, compared to its policy toward Africa during the Mao era, China has since the 1990s shifted its focus on Africa from an ideological one against colonialism and imperialism to a more practical one that serves China's own interests as a developing country economically and a rising power politically. However, it is worth noting that, although China's policy toward Africa today has become much more interest-oriented, the key elements of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' remain the official guidelines followed by the Chinese government when it comes to Sino-African relations.

The Chinese government, since the 1990s, when it began to place effort into Sino-African relations again, has been emphasising the idea of 'partnership' which promotes the equality between and the win-win benefits for the two sides (Lanteigne 2016: 192). For example, the Chinese president, Jiang Zemin, made public in 1996 his 'Five Points Proposal' for Sino-African relations, which included reliable friendship, sovereign equality, non-intervention, mutually beneficial development, and international cooperation (Lanteigne 2016: 194). Four years later, in 2000, Sino-African relations reached a new level on the basis of the aforementioned proposal when the Chinese leaders and their counterparts from 45 African countries met in Beijing for the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) during which the Chinese government, among other promises of aid and cooperation, erased US\$1.2 billion of African debt involving 32 African countries (Sutter 2016: 306). Following the Jiang era, the Chinese government during the Hu Jintao era released its first White Paper on Africa in 2006 and began to promote not only economic ties but also political ones through a series of exchanges between leaders and governments, coordination on international issues including those about security, and cooperation between China and the AU (Sutter 2016: 306; Lanteigne 2016: 197).

The Chinese government has become even more active in Africa since the current Chinese paramount leader Xi Jinping took power in 2012. Now, the Chinese government is not only trying to secure those African resources and build infrastructure to access them, but also ex-

panding various kinds of its activities in Africa including agriculture, telecommunications, financial services etc and building what it calls the 'three major networks' (that is, railway, road and regional aviation) (Xu 2014: 823; Sutter 2016: 310-311). Moreover, the quality and the quantity of the Chinese military activities are significantly increasing in the Xi era: As mentioned, China has deployed its first combat troops for UN peacekeeping missions to Africa and is establishing its first overseas military base over there. It is worth noting that, despite China's constantly growing presence in Africa from the Jiang era to the present day, the Chinese government's emphasis on China's equal and win-win 'partnership' with Africa remains intact. For example, the latest FOCAC was held in South Africa in 2015 where more proposals for cooperation were made public. In addition, the Chinese government released its second White Paper on Africa in the same year. According to the White Paper, the Chinese government will make efforts to support Africa's development in general and its industrialisation in particular with assistance on such issues as "human resources development, infrastructure, medical care and health, agriculture, food security, climate change response, desertification prevention and control, and wildlife and environmental protection" (Mthembu 2016: 1-3). As for its effort to build that "logistical support and fast evacuation facility" in Djibouti, the Chinese government has been emphasising the facility's role in promoting a win-win situation for not only China's security but for regional or even global security. According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the facility, once established, "will mainly be used for logistical support and personnel recuperation of the Chinese armed forces conducting such missions as maritime escort in the Gulf of Aden and waters off the Somali coast, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance" (Braude and Jiang 2016: 2).

In general, with its insistence on developing a partnership that focuses on equality and mutual benefits, the Chinese government has been trying to emphasise the so-called 'China's exceptionalism' when it comes to its relations with Africa as compared to other powers' relations with the continent. Actually, this idea of 'China's exceptionalism' is nothing new in China's foreign relations. The Chinese government during the Cold War already depicted itself as a partner of the 'third world' against the capitalist imperialists led by the US and the socialist imperialists led by the Soviet Union. To show its determination against imperialism/colonialism, Deng as the chairman of the Chinese delega-

tion to the UN in 1974 said at a special session of the UN General Assembly, "If one day China should change her colour and turn into a superpower, if she too should play the tyrant in the world, and everywhere subject others to her bullying, aggression and exploitation, the people of the world should identify her as social-imperialism, expose it, oppose it and work together with the Chinese people to overthrow it" (Mohan and Power 2008: 23).

In the case of Sino-African relations today, one of the major purposes for the Chinese government to emphasise 'China's exceptionalism' is to rebut the criticisms against China for becoming a new coloniser or a threat in general to African countries. For example, to convince the people inside and outside Africa that China is not and will never become an imperialist/colonial force, the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao pointed out in 2006 that "China was the victim of colonial aggression", and that "the Chinese nation knows too well the suffering caused by colonial rule and the need to fight colonialism" (Mohan and Power 2008: 23-24). In the same year, in a response to that CFR report warning against the growing presence of China in Africa, the Chinese government argued that China has a "strategic partnership with Africa that features political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange" while accusing the West of ignoring Africa's desire to have more equal relations (Sautman and Yan 2007: 76). To emphasise China's insistence on maintaining an equally and mutually beneficial relationship with Africa, history was re-called by the Chinese government when the story of Zheng He visiting East Africa in his fourth 'Treasure Voyage' from 1413 to 1415 is internationally advertised. According to the Chinese government, Zheng as a Chinese diplomat back then went there to trade and explore without, unlike Westerners, any intention to colonise people (Alden and Alves 2008: 55). Also, in 2013, following the announcement of the idea of the 'Chinese Dream' by Xi, which emphasises China's national rejuvenation, the Director-General of African Development from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs paired the 'Chinese Dream' and the 'African Dream', pointing out that both sides should work together to pursue their joint peace, development, and most importantly, rejuvenation on the world stage (Tembe 2015: 2-3).

To sum up, though becoming more practical (that is, China's national development) than ideological (that is, third world solidarity), China's official policy toward Africa today is still following those Principles of Peaceful Coexistence made public in the mid-1950s. The Chi-



nese government has been emphasising its effort to build a 'partnership' with Africa, which is based on political equality, mutual benefits, non-intervention, and win-win cooperation. Furthermore, it has been differentiating itself from other major powers that used to colonise Africa and that, according to the Chinese government, are still trying to maintain, either intentionally or unintentionally, hierarchical and unequal relations with the continent with their intervention in and conditional aids to Africa, all of which are for their own interests instead of Africa's (Alden and Large 2011: 21).

## **4.2 An emerging contradiction: Chinese non-state actors on the ground**

The discussion of China's official policy toward Africa that I have presented shows that the Chinese government today has no plan or intention to be a "new coloniser" or any kind of threat to African countries. Or, at least, it does not want to be seen as one by people inside and outside Africa, and therefore, it has been making many efforts, through several official statements, to propagandise 'China's exceptionalism' in Africa that focuses on building an equal and win-win partnership between China and Africa. However, while China at the state level, represented by the Chinese government, seems to pose no threat to Africa, China at the non-state level, represented by many Chinese non-state actors, is becoming a concern for some, if not all, Africans.

More specifically, there is a contradiction emerging in China's growing presence in Africa. On the one hand, China's lack of colonial legacy, as well as the so-called 'Century of Humiliation' it suffered due to Western and Japanese imperialism, has made Africans feel more intimacy toward China as compared to other major powers who used to be colonisers (Campbell 2008: 91; Lanteigne 2016: 192). Furthermore, China's official policy toward Africa, which emphasises an equal and win-win partnership, would arguably make China even more likable (Sautman and Yan 2009: 758-759). However, on the other hand, it seems that Africans' attitudes toward the 'Chinese' in Africa are not all positive with such complaints as "they are like the devil", "they do not respect us", "they are here to take everything from us", etc appearing all over the continent (Sutter 2016: 306; Michel 2008: 45).

Chinese business owners and workers are among the most criticised. As mentioned, Chinese business owners in Africa, including

those involved in the Chinese government-sponsored projects, tend to hire Chinese workers instead of local African ones. Take Zambia for example. Most of the workers, supervisors, and technicians on construction sites in general and at copper mines in particular are Chinese, and because of it, local Zambian people have protested and complained that "the Chinese are not here as investors, they are here as invaders" (Zhao 2014: 1044). Here, it is worth noting that, even when Chinese business owners hire locals, they do not treat their African workers well. There is evidence which shows that African workers' rights are largely violated by their Chinese employers who ignore local and international labour standards, apply despotic management tactics, turn a blind eye to workplace safety, discourage participation in labour unions, provide little pay and welfare, etc (Michel 2008: 41; Zhao 2014: 1043-1044; Sutter 2016: 313). In addition, there are accusations against Chinese companies for brewing corruption by bribing local officials in order to win the bid for official development contracts, as well as for polluting Africa with little or no attention to environmental protection (French 2007: 130; Zhao 2014: 1041; Sutter 2016: 313). Finally, there are also complaints about the Chinese being unwilling to immerse themselves in African culture at best or even discriminating against the local population at worst (Sautman and Yan 2009: 729; Wang and Elliot 2014: 1021). For example, it is a common scene in Africa that Chinese business owners and their Chinese employees live in separate compounds away from the local population (Melber 2008: 395).

The aforementioned complaints, accusations, and criticisms against the Chinese non-state actors in Africa, who are in many cases actually agents for the Chinese government to build that equal and win-win partnership, are leading to the growth of friction between the Chinese and the local population. Here, the Chinese government did notice, as early as the Hu era, this emerging contradiction between the Chinese government's goodwill toward African countries and the misbehaviour of the Chinese non-state actors perceived by African people. To deal with this, the Chinese government under Hu constantly urged the Chinese companies in Africa to practice 'corporate social responsibility' and the Chinese people in Africa to promote Sino-African relations by keeping the welfare of local Africans in mind (Alden and Hughes 2009: 576).

However, despite the Chinese government's effort to resolve the aforementioned contradiction between the Chinese state and the Chi-

nese non-state actors, it is questionable as to whether the former really has the capacity to effectively and efficiently control the latter. It is found that while the Chinese government might be able to influence the behaviour of its large state-owned enterprises (SOEs) doing business in Africa, it is very difficult for it to regulate other small public and private Chinese contractors on who these SOEs rely on for their business in Africa (Xu 2014: 822 and 839-840; Grimm 2014: 1008). One of the key reasons for those Chinese non-state actors ignoring their government's concerns involves their economic interests in Africa (Mohan and Power 2008: 37; Wang and Elliot 2014: 1021). Simply speaking, while the Chinese government has long-term comprehensive interests in Africa, many of the Chinese non-state actors have nothing but short-term 'for-profit' interests. More specifically, the former has to take China's long-term economic, political, and military interests in Africa into account, and therefore it is promising to develop a Sino-African partnership to show goodwill and rebut criticisms. By contrast, the latter does business or works in Africa simply because 'it pays' (Xu 2014: 825-826), and therefore their goal is to make as much profit as they can in as little time as possible.

This contradiction in China's presence in Africa between the Chinese state and the Chinese non-state actors still exists in the current era of Xi, and the Chinese government, like that in the Hu era, is still working hard to resolve it (Zhao 2014: 1047-1048). For one thing, it continues to strengthen China's partnership with African countries by, for example, setting up new special economic zones (SEZs) on the continent and optimising the old ones it has developed over there. Furthermore, it continues to urge the Chinese business owners in Africa to localise their operation and the Chinese people in general to be more sensitive to local population's mental and material needs. This is still a work in progress, and only time will tell whether Xi might do a better job than Hu in this regard. However, it is fair to say that, unless the Chinese government can find an effective and efficient way to regulate those for-nothing-but-profit Chinese non-state actors in Africa and make good use of them as agents to develop that equal and win-win Sino-African partnership, the aforementioned contradiction in China's presence in Africa will only persist into the foreseeable future.

## 5. Conclusion

This article, by exploring the existing literature and the relevant information about China in Africa, has demonstrated that there is a contradiction in China's growing presence in Africa between the Chinese state (that is, the Chinese government) and the Chinese non-state actors (that is, Chinese companies, business owners, workers, and people in general). While the former continues to show goodwill to African countries with its official policy toward Africa which emphasises China's effort to develop an equal and win-win partnership with Africa instead of following the colonial path that other major powers used to take, the latter, despite being an agent for the former to realise that partnership, is gradually regarded by Africans as a threat to the African population and their societies as a whole due to its for-nothing-but-profit behaviour and attitudes toward Africa.

This is arguably one of the reasons why there are various, and at times conflicting, findings about China in Africa. An observer who focuses on China's official policy toward Africa would be more likely to find that China seems to have no intention to be a new coloniser or any kind of threat to Africa. By contrast, an observer who pays more attention to the words and deeds of the Chinese people in Africa would be more likely to reach a conclusion that China is behaving just like a coloniser and posing a real threat to African people.

Most importantly, in addition to causing confusion in the academic debate with regard to China in Africa, this contradiction in China's growing presence in Africa might actually cause damage to Sino-African relations in general and China's effort to develop that equal and win-win partnership with African countries in particular. Here, Africa's expectations of China matter a great deal (Grimm 2014: 993-1010). More specifically, China's official policy toward Africa, which underlines political equality, mutual benefits, non-intervention, and win-win cooperation, has created huge public expectations of China among the African population who are hoping (or actually believing) that China is an unprecedented type of foreign power in Africa that really cares about their welfare and is different from that "resource-extraction plus political-nanny" type of colonial powers (Wang and Elliot 2014: 1022). However, with that contradiction between the Chinese government's official statements and the Chinese people's behaviour on the ground, great ex-

pectations might eventually lead to great disappointments. Currently, due to that contradiction, Africans' perceptions about China range from love to suspicion or even worse. This phenomenon is well reflected in a private comment made by a Kenyan leader who points out that there is a "fundamental mismatch between Chinese approaches and African perspectives" (Wang and Elliot 2014: 1012 and 1022). To conclude, the Chinese state may have no intention to be a new coloniser in Africa, but what those Chinese non-state actors are doing on the ground would, however, make people inside and outside Africa feel the opposite. Therefore, if the Chinese government wants to see what it calls the 'constructive relations' with Africa continue to grow, that perceived misbehaviour of the Chinese non-state actors in Africa is undoubtedly one of the most important challenges that it has to seriously deal with.

## Bibliography

- Alden, C and A C Alves (2008). "The 'New' Face of China-African Co-operation", *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 35, No 115, pp 43-58.
- Alden, C and C Hughes (2009). "Harmony and Discord in China's Africa Strategy: Some Implications for Foreign Policy", *The China Quarterly*, Vol 199, pp 563-584.
- Alden, C and D Large (2011). "China's Exceptionalism and the Challenges of Delivering Difference in Africa", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 20, No 68, pp 21-38.
- Braude, J and T Jiang (2016), "Djibouti is Jumping", *E-Notes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute. (Available at: <http://www.fpri.org/article/2016/03/djibouti-is-jumping>, last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- Campbell, H (2008), "China in Africa: Challenging US Global Hegemony", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 29, No 1, pp 89-105.
- Duchatel, M, Gowan, R and M L Rapnouil (2016). "Into Africa: China's Global Security Shift", *Policy Brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations. (Available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Into\\_Africa\\_China%E2%80%99s\\_global\\_security\\_shift\\_PDF\\_1135.pdf](http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Into_Africa_China%E2%80%99s_global_security_shift_PDF_1135.pdf), last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- Edoho, F (2011). "Globalization and Marginalization of Africa: Contextualization of China-Africa Relations", *Africa Today*, Vol 58, No 1, pp 103-124.
- Eisenman, J (2012). "China-Africa Trade Patterns: Causes and Consequences", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 21, No 77, pp 793-810.
- Enuka, C (2011). "China's Military Presence in Africa: Implications for Africa's Wobbling Peace", *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Vol 2, No 1, pp 97-117.
- Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Johannesburg Action Plan (2015). (Available

- at: [http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015/focac\\_action\\_plan2016\\_2018.pdf](http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2015/focac_action_plan2016_2018.pdf), last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- French, H (2007). "Commentary: China and Africa", *African Affairs*, Vol 106, No 422, pp 127-132.
- Grimm, S (2014). "China-Africa Cooperation: Promises, Practice and Prospects", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 90, pp 993-1011.
- Hirono, M and S Suzuki (2014). "Why Do We Need 'Myth-Busting' in the Study of Sino-African Relations", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 87, pp 443-461.
- Holslag, J (2008). "China's Diplomatic Manoeuvring on the Question of Darfur", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 17, No 54, pp 71-84.
- Igbinoba, E (2016). "Economic Implication of China's Military Base in Djibouti", *CCS Commentary*, Centre for Chinese Studies. (Available at: [http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CCS\\_Commentary\\_Economic-implication-of-China's-military-base-in-Djibouti\\_19APR2016.pdf](http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CCS_Commentary_Economic-implication-of-China's-military-base-in-Djibouti_19APR2016.pdf), last accessed 20 September 2016.)
- Lanteigne, M (2016). *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction* (third edition). New York: Routledge.
- Large, D (2008). "Beyond 'Dragon in the Bush': The Study of China-Africa Relations", *African Affairs*, Vol 107, No 426, pp 45-61.
- Melber, H (2008). "China in Africa: A New Partner or Another Imperialist Power", *Africa Spectrum*, Vol 43, No 3, pp 393-402.
- Michel, S (2008). "When China Met Africa", *Foreign Policy*, Vol 166, pp 38-46.
- Mohan, G and M Power (2008). "New African Choices? The Politics of Chinese Engagement", *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 35, No 115, pp 23-42.
- Mthembu P (2016). "Reflecting on the Johannesburg Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: Where to from Here", *Global Insight*, Institute for Global Dialogue. (Available at: <http://dspace.africaportal.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/35588/1/FOCAC%20JHB%20Summit%20Policy%20Brief?1>, last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- Orion, A (2016). "The Dragon's Tail at the Horn of Africa: A Chinese Military Logistics Facility in Djibouti", *INSS Insight*, No 791, Institute for National Security Studies. (Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/196067/No.%20791%20-%20Assaf%20for%20web341692010.pdf>, last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- Ramzy, A (2016). "8 Taiwanese Are Deported to China After Trial in Kenya", *New York Times*. (Available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/12/world/asia/kenya-deport-taiwan-china.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/12/world/asia/kenya-deport-taiwan-china.html?_r=0), last accessed 10 September 2016.)
- Sautman, B and Y Hairong (2007). "Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa", *African Studies Review*, Vol 50, No 3, pp 75-114.

- Sautman, B and Y Hairong (2008). "The Forest for the Trees: Trade, Investment and the China-in-Africa Discourse", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol 81, No 1, pp 9-29.
- Hairong, Y (2009). "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links", *The China Quarterly*, Vol 199, pp 728-759.
- Schoeman, M (2008). "China and Africa: Whose Challenge and Whose Opportunity", *Africa Spectrum*, Vol 43, No 3, pp 403-413.
- Sun, D and Y Zoubir (2016). "The Eagle's Nest in the Horn of Africa: US Military Strategic Deployment in Djibouti", *Africa Spectrum*, Vol 51, No 1, pp 111-124.
- Sutter, R (2016). *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy since the Cold War* (fourth edition). Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Tembe, P (2015). "The Temptations and Promotion of 'China Dream': Calling for Africa's Home-Grown Rhetoric", *Policy Briefing*, Centre for Chinese Studies. (Available at: [http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CCS\\_PB\\_SA\\_FOCAC\\_PT\\_2015.pdf](http://www.ccs.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/CCS_PB_SA_FOCAC_PT_2015.pdf), last accessed 20 September 2016.)
- Tull, D (2006). "China's Engagement in Africa: Scope, Significance and Consequences", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 44, No 3, pp 459-479.
- Wang, F-L and E Elliot (2014). "China in Africa: Presence, Perceptions and Prospects", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 90, pp 1012-1032.
- Wang, J and J Zou (2014). "China Goes to Africa: A Strategic Move", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 90, pp 1113-1132.
- Xu, Y-C (2014). "Chinese State-owned Enterprises in Africa: Ambassadors or Freebooters", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 89, pp 822-840.
- Zhao, S (2014). "A Neo-Colonialist Predator or Development Partner? China's Engagement and Rebalance in Africa", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 23, No 90, pp 1033-1052.