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CHINA'S RENEWED ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA: ANOTHER UNEQUAL EXCHANGE

FELIX IZIRIN UYABARA

Abstract

In our globalizing world, the art of nations and regions coming together for calculated political, economic and even socio-cultural gains is no longer strange. For the past two decades, China has been more visible, vigorous and strategically engaging Africa on many fronts leading to a growing concern from several quarters. In spite of a functional relationship with an obvious win-win deal for both parties, the benefits from the socio-economic interactions between the duo have been subjected to diverse opinions by scholars and analysts, with serious concerns raised over the seemingly lop-sidedness of the benefits in favour of China. While some Africans see this as a healthy engagement of South-south cooperation for mutual benefits, others feel uncomfortable with this renewed engagement. They consider it another rebranded unequal exchange not so different from colonialism and neo-colonial interactions that will further deepen Africa's dependence. It is against this backdrop that this paper investigates deep to uncover the ultimate gainers in this new deal especially from 2000 till date. The question for this research therefore is; what was the nature of China-Africa previous relations that is remarkably deferent from her current engagement that is generating this huge global outrage? The study is undertaken in the context of the realism and dependency theories. The paper is a qualitative study, where secondary data are sourced from works done by previous writers and analyzed to answer the questions raised. The paper concludes that this engagement, just like Africa's previous interactions with other nations and regions of the world, holds no real gains for the continent, at best, another unequal exchange in disguise.

Keywords: China, Africa, Engagement, Unequal Exchange, Ultimate Gain, Dependency, Dependence, Colonialism, Neo-colonialism.

Introduction

China and Africa have experienced a rather slow, sometimes disjointed but mostly cautious age-long relationship dating back centuries ago. However, since the end of the 1990s, the intensity in the dimensions of finance and economy in the relationship between China and Africa has sparked a

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debate about whether it is balanced in the sense that Africa is still home to most of the least industrialized and underdeveloped countries of the world. There exist differing arguments and viewpoints on whether this relationship is beneficial to Africa. The differing viewpoints concerning the Africa-China relations have been echoed both on the media and academic platforms where some are of the view that the relationship is indeed a timely one holding mutual benefits for all, while others see it as another unequal exchange Africa stands to suffer particularly in the long run.

The phrase neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism was coined as a result of this type of interaction, and it has become a popular topic of research for academics and analysts (Lumumba, 2011; Karlsson, 2020). The growing concern of this romance further compelled yet other groups of commentators to use a wide range of similar metaphors such as 'colonization', 'new colonialism', 'new scramble', 'dependency', 'Sino-capitalism',etc, as well as a 'mutually beneficial collaboration' in describing the nature of interaction between the two sides.(Kamal & Haroon, 2019).

China benefits from the investment opportunities and resource access that developing African economies provide. On the other hand, with substantial Chinese investments, African countries gain in improved infrastructure. However, many analysts believe that cheaper Chinese goods flooding the markets and Chinese contractors marketing Chinese labour and equipment and these projects cost African countries far more than they gain (Kamal & Haroon, 2019). This has led many to conclude that China is siphoning Africa's manufacturing potentials and draining its resources without repaying any meaningful benefits to the continent. Thus, China is blamed for Africa's underdevelopment and deindustrialization (Mlambo; Kushamba & Simawu, 2016).

Responses to the China-Africa relationship dilemma are majorly twofold. There are those who firmly believe that China's renewed interest in Africa is the best thing that ever happened to the continent since her interaction with the rest of the world. Jauch (2011) corroborates this by asserting that

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African countries usually respond positively to China's trade proposals, as well as its aid and investment. He added that many African governments prefer Chinese investments to the ones from the West because of the "no strings attached" approach, which satisfies African governments because there are no structural adjustment programs to adapt to. This 'no conditions attached' aid and loans diverted Africa's attention from the West including America to the Asian giant. By 2009, China had surpassed the United States as Africa's largest trading partner. Despite the fact that the United States remains the continent's largest aid donor, China is the major provider of financial support for infrastructural development (Muchira, 2018; Shepherd & Blanchard, 2018).

One of the most common complaints about China-Africa ties is that China is attempting to entice her investment subjects into debt traps through their frequent loans. China's expanding links with Africa have aided the continent in a variety of ways, most notably through efforts to address the continent's serious infrastructure deficits. At the same time, China has attempted to use its near-omnipresence on the continent to promote an alternative political model that favours state-led, illiberal governance (Green; Nelson &Washington, 2020). In the same vein, some argue that Chinese investments are neither debt traps nor have any form of colonizing effect. They consider them purely mutually beneficial transactions that carry a win-win deal for both parties. Chinese investments and loans are considered as an opportunity to help the subject state achieve long-term economic independence, and that the connection is a promoter of decolonization rather than a new form of colonialism (Jian & Frasheri, 2014).

However, there are those who are uncompromising critiques of China's 'Africa must develop mission', and view every move of the Chinese in Africa with great suspicion. They raise the concern that, there are over 10,000 Chinese enterprises active in Africa, and between 2000 and 2014, the percentage of Chinese investments in the continent increased from 2% to 55%. The widespread investments and the growing number of enterprises arriving on the continent have raised concerns

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about what is driving this abrupt increase. When it comes to targeting investment on the continent, the Chinese government and its private enterprises have ignored political and humanitarian rights in favour of appeasing oppressive governments in order to gain in the relationship. (Pilling & Feng, 2019).

Similarly, Rich and Recker (2013) wonder if these Chinese investments actually benefit African people, arguing that little has happened in terms of benefits for African people so far. Furthermore, 70% of export items such as petroleum, metals, and other minerals are sold to China in 2014, whereas the majority of goods shipped to Africa from China are already finished materials (Chen & Nord 2017). China is targeting African states with increased foreign direct investment (FDI), but also provides loans, and that the external debt owed to China has climbed from 2% to 15% according to an IMF estimate (Karlsson, 2020).Because China's financial assistance to Africa is frequently in the form of long-term loans rather than grants, it has been criticized as a "debt trap" that China could use to gain strategic advantages on the continent, with the US and others warning Africa not to fall prey to China's "debt diplomacy" (Green, 2019). Some say that African governments who borrow from China risk losing important assets if they cannot repay their loans (Brautigam, 2019; Brautigam & Kidane, 2020; Sun, 2014). Chinese debt burden on most African states is gradually becoming a nightmare for governments and citizens (Sanny, & Selarmey, 2020). This condition is capable of further deepening already neck-deep Africa's dependence on China almost eternally. A fundamental criticism against China is that their relations with Africa are neo-imperialistic in character or involving elements of neo-colonialism on the weaker but resource-rich African states (Jauch, 2011). Neo-imperialistic or neo-colonial economic interactions between rich and poor countries always result in unequal exchange in favour of the rich countries as argued by dependency scholars.

Another perspective of criticism regarding China's increased control over commerce in Africa is to see it as a threat to both African and Western commercial relations and security. Traditional Western

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investment and assistance conditions are at risk due to China's growing influence on the continent. This was the position of the US Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs when he said that the United States is losing momentum and relinquishing investment and trade opportunities in Africa to competitors, (especially China). While the West continues to provide life support to weak African countries through development aid and trade, China is making significant investments in Africa and has captured the economic landscape. (Mlambo; Kushamba & Simawu, 2016). More radical critiques such as McNally (2012) classified China's economic system as Sino-capitalism. He defined Sino-capitalism as a hybrid form of capitalism that combines market-oriented and statist policies in a variety of institutional configurations. With the Chinese entering the global market, they have been further influenced by Anglo-American ideas, which have contributed to the Chinese market being influenced by market liberal forms of capitalism to a reasonable extent.

All said and done, we believe that China is engaging in Africa with clear manifestations of unequal exchange in almost all ramifications of her transactions in the continent. Despite the multidimensional character of China's renewed engagement with Africa, it is obvious to all keen watchers that Beijing has substantially shifted grounds from her Maoist patterns of ideological solidarity and cooperation with Africa to a more aggressive economic policy of Africa invasion (Inokoba, 2017). Many academics and analysts seriously agree that, considering the current wave of Chinese exploits in Africa, the Asian giant's activities are like the days of Western colonialism, making calculated incursions into strategic sectors of the Africa economy as a global economic power in line with the dictates of modern international capitalism with brilliant subtlety. Considering China's insightful, well-planned and already succeeding global economic take-over vision, the factoring of Africa into this mission could not be for anything else than ultimate gain. Thus, the paper concludes that this renewed engagement, just like Africa's previous interactions with other nations and regions of the world, holds no real gains for the continent particularly in the long run; at best, another unequal exchange in disguise.

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Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on two theories – realism and dependency. The adoption of these theories became imperative as no single theory can on its own sufficiently capture and explain all the dimensions of issues raised in this research as well as the complexities associated with China-Africa relations, especially as this study is geared at exposing the fact that China is the dominant partner and ultimate gainer in this relationship. While realism captures and exposes the length that African states are willing to go in achieving their national interest politically, economically and militarily in their interactions with other states in the international system with all brute and tactfulness in the way China's aggressive incursion in Africa currently portrays, the dependency theory on the other hand helps to uncover the true asymmetric nature of the relationship exposing what ordinarily will not meet the eye.

First, realism is an international relations theory that places a premium on state sovereignty, national interests and security over ideals, social reconstructions and ethics. Realism is frequently associated with power politics. Realism's theoretical foundation is strongly laid on the premise that the primary actors on the global stage are nation-states, sometimes known as sovereign actors. Furthermore, realists like Hobbes, Machiavelli, Rousseau and Morgenthau believe that the world order is essentially a perpetual fight for power and interests, particularly political and economic power among nation-states as they all seek to maximize their own interests (Inokoba, 2017). These realists believe that personal morality has no bearing on the decision of a nation's national interest, because the nation-state is ultimately accountable for its own security and existence. Experts in this orientation tend to offer a bleak image of the consequences of state sovereignty. As a result, the international system is envisioned as a threat system in which states compete for security and interests at the expense of their neighbors. Inevitably, the interstate relationship is viewed as a perpetual fight for power, with states seeking to gain advantage over one another (Gros & Fung, 2019). Realists also

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believe that power is zero-sum in nature. That means, the more power a state gains in the international system results in less power available for other states. Therefore, maximum state power guarantees maximum state security and survival (Gros & Fung, 2019).

The question is; how is this theoretical viewpoint relevant to the topic at hand? The renewed China-Africa engagement cannot be fully understood without reference to realism's principles and postulations. China is unquestionably not in Africa to develop or transform the continent's people and states. They have come to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits that Africa can offer to help them further their industrialization and development initiatives at home. China's interest in Africa is primarily motivated by its fixation with natural resources, notably energy resources, and a large market for its manufactured goods, as well as profitable investment climate of the continent. Obviously, China is not oblivious to the added advantage these enormous opportunities in Africa provide to its competitive edge and capability in its competition and strategic rivalry with other economic, industrial, and military great powers such as the United States, European Union (EU) and Japan. Thus, the current upswing in Chinese interest and engagement in Africa can only be explained meaningfully via the theoretical lens of realism (Inokoba, 2017).

Furthermore, a natural extension of realism and neo-realism emphasizes full-spectrum security, which includes economic security. In neo-realism, the logic of conduct is power and (or) security, which is enabled by state capacities which include the size of a state's population and territory, its resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence (Waltz 1979).For scholars of this tradition, China's primary interest in Africa is to build her economic and military capabilities to further enhance her power position in the global power equation (Mearsheimer, 2014).Neo-realists would undoubtedly agree with Marxists that China is a capitalist state, and they would consider this important, but they would reject that market expansion is the

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driving force behind Chinese foreign policy. Rather, they would consider the Chinese state security interests a higher priority to its economic expansion (Gros & Fung, 2019).

Second, dependency theory is a product of two papers released in 1949 - one by Hans Singer and the other by Raul Prebisch - in which the authors argued that the terms of trade for developing countries compared to their developed counterparts had deteriorated over time due to the exploitative character of the relationship between the two worlds (Raji, & Ogunrinu, 2018).Dependency theory thereafter became popular in the late 1950s in response to worries about this growing disparity between rich and poor countries, as well as the fact that economic growth in highly industrialized countries did not necessarily lead to growth in poorer ones in their interactions (Sautman, et al 2015). As a result, dependency theory became a useful instrument for analyzing development and underdevelopment in the global political economy. (Caruso, et al. 2016). Dependency theory holds that resources move from a "periphery" of poor and underdeveloped countries to a "core" of prosperous countries, benefiting the latter at the expense of the former. According to dependency theory, poor states are impoverished and rich nations are made wealthier by the way poor states are incorporated into the global capitalist system. Dependency theory came up as the response to the theory of modernization, an earlier development theory that all societies have progressed through similar development stages, so that developed states of today at a time in the past, had the same conditions as those of today's underdeveloped states and thus the task of assisting under-developed states to escape poverty is to hasten them along this same common path of development through some form of assistance such as transfers of technology and closer integration into the global economic system. (Eme & Emeh, 2012).

The perspective of modernisation maintains that developing societies will eventually catch up with the developed societies of the world the more they are incorporated into the economies of the latter. The connections between African countries' indigenous social groups and the penetrating capitalist groups are seen to be functional and stable. With the spread of modernization influences to African

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nations, it is expected that they will exhibit similar characteristics to those seen in industrialized economies during their transition to modernity (Calabrese, 2016). It's no surprise that Karl Marx believed that developed countries only present the less developed countries a vivid picture of their own future (Olurode, 2017). However, dependency theorists rejected the modernization proposal, arguing that the exploitative relationship that has defined relationships between poor and developed countries from colonial times to the present day is what is creating underdevelopment in impoverished countries. Poor states are impoverished and affluent states are benefited by the disadvantageous way the former states are incorporated into the world system (Raji, &Ogunrinu, 2018). Dependency is thus a scenario in which the economic development and expansion of one set of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another, with the latter being subordinate. Dos Santos, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, and Claude Ake are the most prominent African proponents of dependency theory (Raji, & Ogunrinu, 2018).

There are many versions of dependency theory. Despite their intellectual differences, dependency theorists share the same basic beliefs, such as the belief that the world is divided into two parts, the center-industrialized countries and the periphery-underdeveloped nations, and that this structure also exists within a state. While they do not all use the term centre/periphery, their approach to understanding dependency is not contradictory (Olalekan, & Iwala, 2021).They contend that trade between the center and the periphery is characterized by unequal exchange, resulting in the periphery's underdevelopment. They agree that the expansion of the global capitalist system is linked to the underdevelopment in third-world countries.

The underpinning arguments of dependency theory effortlessly explain the dynamics in China-Africa relations. Despite the fact that Africa and China have collaborated for mutual economic gains, the relationship between the two is better explained by the dependency theoretical foundation, in which the trend of relations favours China as the senior partner in the relationship, a position she has been

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using to condition Africa's development pattern to produce the raw materials required for her industrial growth in exchange for Africa's dependence on imported commodities from China rather than manufacturing its own, resulting in Africa's balance of trade and payment problems (Raji, & Ogunrinu, 2018). Those who are jubilant about the Sino-African renewed engagement may never see the real and hidden motive in the heart of the Chinese in driving this invasion except they put on the dependency lens.

The dependency theory is central to this paper, because its fundamental reasoning is what is playing out in China's renewed engagement in Africa. Indeed, when weak and powerful economies interact, the weaker economies are bound to suffer at the expense of the stronger ones. This is the harsh reality of China's current relationship with Africa. This is why we have argued that it is a rebranded version of unequal exchange. It is colonialism repackaged from the East. On the surface of the China-Africa trade deal is the attractive cover of South-South cooperation for a win-win transaction; underneath the cover is the unpleasant reality of the invasion which is carting away Africa's only bride – her natural resources.

Historical Background of China-Africa Relations

China's connection with Africa is not a recent occurrence. The relationship is traced back centuries to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Chinese explorers travelled to East Africa during this time under the command of Admiral Zheng He, an explorer, mariner, and diplomat who made several voyages to Africa mainly to spread Chinese culture (Orngu, 2009). In fact, records show that there were China-Africa contacts through the Red Sea to Mardagascar for trade and cultural exchanges long before Zheng's voyages to Africa (Ayuba, 2009). However, the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 paved the way for more robust and progressive relations between China and Africa (Alden & Wu, 2017)**.**From the second quarter of the 1950s, China's relations with Africa started taking shape and was further enhanced by the fact that some African states were gaining or

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about to gain political independence from their respective European colonizers (Alden & Alves, 2008). These events provided Beijing with the opportunity to fully engage with African governments on a variety of investment options. While progress was being made here, the Bandung Conference in 1955 marked a watershed event in the development of these ties. This meeting which brought together 29 Asian and African nations as well as some Middle East countries, was hailed as a success and a perfect platform to further enhance Asian-African cooperation (Mlambo, Mlambo & Mubecua, 2018).

At the Bandung conference, former Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai had the opportunity to meet with African Heads of State and underlined the importance of Africa and Asia working together to better their level of development through economic, cultural and mutual advantages. In this respect, establishment of diplomatic ties and visitations became frequent following the Bandung conference, with Chinese delegations visiting a number of African countries. From December 1963 to February 1964, for example, Minister Enlai spent over two months visiting ten African countries to strengthen Africa-China relations through diplomatic missions. China in the process established bilateral agreements with six African states in the same year 1964 (Mlambo, Mlambo & Mubecua, 2018).

Diplomatic visitations by the Chinese Authorities continued when between December 1982 and January 1983, former Premier Zhao Ziyang visited more African states to further strengthen South-South cooperation (Mlambo, Mlambo & Mubecua, 2018). Essentially, the Bandung Conference gave China the opportunity to make significant advances into African territory (Alden & Alves, 2008). China and African countries have jointly developed pacts such as the China–Africa Joint Research Exchange Plan, China–Africa People to People Friendship Action and China–Africa Youth Festival over the years as tools for further strengthening of these bilateral relations (Eisenman & Heginbotham, 2018).

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Clearly, China-Africa diplomatic history has come a long way despite the fact that it has changed form and grown significantly since the Chinese economy's market-oriented reform and opening up took effect in 1978 (Thrall, 2015). As a result of this intermittent change of character and mode, Ayuba (2009) described China-Africa relations as episodic, with periods of involvement in the 1960s and early 1970s alternating with periods of neglect in the 1980s. In a similar spirit, Van de Looy (2006), asserted that the connection between China and Africa has changed significantly over the last six decades, with three distinct epochs: The period of early independence, the period in which China was granted a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971 and the post-Maoist period, which was marked by the liberalization and subsequent growth of the China's economy.

However, modern China-Africa interactions are traceable to the early1960s, through the efforts of Zhou Enlai as earlier stated. This period saw China's effort to build diplomatic ties with the continent for political and economic gains. The Peoples Republic of China's (PRC) connection with Africa during this period was primarily ideological and geopolitical, with the goal of exporting Maoism to counterbalance American's capitalist and Soviet's socialist influence. China engaged ideologies such as 'Third World Solidarity' and 'moral and material assistance' for African liberation forces, with Beijing displaying its anti-colonial posture to the rest of the world. Along with New Delhi, Beijing codified the five principles of peaceful coexistence in 1954, rhetorically championing an international order characterized by non-interference by foreign states in domestic affairs, support for self-determination, and mutual non-aggression. What both China and African countries had as their rallying point was their common history and shared perspective of Western oppressive and exploitative economic system (Inokoba, 2017).

The 1960s were a difficult period in China-African ties, as African countries gained independence and became new participants of the world political system. Most African republics had an ambivalent

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stance toward communist PRC during this early time of their independence because they were still firmly attached to the apron string of their former colonial powers. As a result, the newly independent African states had little choice but to pursue a non-alignment foreign policy in order to defend their nascent sovereignty. China, for one, attempted to build a powerful partnership with the non-aligned movement. To some extent, the bulk of African countries engaged China in international issues through this platform (Oseghale & Bartholomew, 2009).

Despite the aforementioned problems, the China-Africa relationship was characterized by some fundamental issues: To begin with, the number of African countries with diplomatic ties grew with time. China maintained 13 diplomatic missions in Africa in 1967, and by 1974, it had grown to 30 (Van de Looy, 2006). Second, China took the seat as a Member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971, replacing Taiwan, an event many African countries welcomed because their political relations with China had improved over time. Third, in the 1970s, China constructed the Tanzania-Zambia railway (the Tazara), which became the continent's largest aid project. Many other loyal African states benefited from infrastructural facilities, medical teams and students exchange programmes (Inokoba, 2017).

The 1980s Sino-Africa relations suffered a brief setback as China retreated from Africa due to domestic economic reforms and the adoption of a new policy by China with the rest of the World, particularly America and the West. This period lasted till the Post-Cold War era. The 1990s marked another period of China's gradual return to Africa which the 1989 Tiananmen Square Crisis helped triggered. Beginning with the fallout from the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, Chinese economic objectives have increasingly supplanted her earlier ideological and political ambitions as drivers of Chinese behavior in Africa. Over the last three decades, a series of economic and political events have represented China's economic dominance.

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However, the last two decades have experienced the longest consistent and consolidated mutual economic cooperation and development in Sino-African relations with the formation of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000. Today, China is Africa's biggest trading partner having surpassed the US since 2009.

China-Africa Renewed Economic Engagement

The year 2000 marked a significant point in China-Africa relations. As stated in the preceding paragraph, year 2000 till date has undoubtedly formed the most consistent and consolidated period in China-Africa cooperation.

China went from being an economic backbencher to the world's second largest economy with three decades of unbroken growth. The Chinese economy has increased dramatically in volume, reach and complexity over this period. In the three decades after Deng Xiaoping began the reform of the Chinese economy in the late 1970s, China has progressed from a Third World country to one of the world's most powerful economic giants with vast foreign reserves. China's economy has grown at 9.6% rate yearly on average, faster than the world's average annual growth rate of 3.3 percent. Furthermore, with a population of over 1.3 billion people, China has increased the global labour supply by bringing in more than 100 million workers. This has undoubtedly positioned China as one of the biggest actors in the global political economy (Inokoba, 2017).

Evidence of the spectacular increase in China's trade between 1980 and 2003 represented the country's economic transition and expansion. For example, China's proportion of world exports and imports increased from 1.2 percent to 2.5 percent and 4.2 percent respectively, between 1980 and 2002. Between 1993 and 2002, the volume of commodities exported increased at an annual pace of 17.3 percent. In a similar vein, her $366 billion in exports ranked fourth in the world, behind the United States, Germany and Japan. By May 2003, China's $323 billion in imports ranked sixth in the

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world (Emordi & Oaki, 2009). China's renewed engagement in Africa is in order to sustain this exponential economic and industrial expansion.

China's ubiquitous presence in Africa is mostly motivated by the latter's interest. China's economic interest is driving the current trends in Sino-African ties; it sees Africa as a lucrative zone for investment and a market for its industrial goods. Chinese manufacturers are well aware that their manufactured goods have a larger readymade market in Africa, where the economy is still nascent and underdeveloped in comparison to Western developed economies with diverse consumer preferences. Furthermore, China and its investors simply regard Africa as a rich source of natural resources, particularly crude oil that can be exploited. As a result, it comes as no surprise that China holds enormous influence over Sudan's energy sector, having invested $10 billion in that country. Similarly, China is said to have invested over $2 billion in Angola's infrastructural development, thereby putting Angola's oil sector under its firm control (Inokoba, 2017). Between 2000 and 2005, Chinese investors and government organisations reportedly spent vast sums of money on road construction in Kenya, a hydroelectric dam in Ghana, and a mobile phone network in Ethiopia. China has a Mandarin-language newspaper in Nigeria (West African United Business Daily) with about 50,000 subscribers, a community that is perhaps larger than that of the British in Nigeria during their colonial era (Orngu, 2009).

China's exports to Africa increased from $4.4 billion to $56.3 billion between 2001 and 2011. Despite the fact that China still claims to be a third-world country, it has the world's second-largest economy (Raji, & Ogunrinu, 2018). China has a long history of trading with African nations. However, trade between China and African countries have grown at the fastest rate in the recent two decades beginning from 2000. Within this period, total trade between China and Africa has grown at a compound annual growth rate of 24.7 percent. In fact, this scenario has worsened the entire Africa's dependent on China for commerce (Miao, Yushi & Borojo, 2020).

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Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) also penetrated practically every African country, including those with no formal diplomatic ties with China (such as Sao Tomé and Principe). This suggests that Chinese FDI plays a significant role in China's economic interaction with a number of African countries. Furthermore, the close link between Chinese foreign direct investment and economic cooperation demonstrates China's importance in the economic arena among African countries. The majority of Chinese investment, however, is concentrated in a few resource-rich countries, with a sluggish expansion into resource-poor ones (Miao, Yushi & Borojo, 2020).

The essential question is why did China's stance toward Africa shifted so dramatically, despite a long history of contact until the late 1990s? The rationale for China's newfound interest in Africa is straightforward. Beijing must find new supplies of raw materials, particularly mineral and energy resources, as well as new markets for its manufactured goods, if its economic boom is to be sustained. China's rising demand for oil and other key commodities is the primary cause for China's enhanced African policy and revived diplomatic cum politico-economic push into the continent.

Fortunately for China, Africa was already ripe for her planned invasion. Africa in the 1990s was ready to look East due to trade difficulties experienced with her Western trade partners in terms stringent conditions attached to development aid. Talks went on between the two. China offered a "no strings attached" mutually beneficial trade terms as well as China's insincere claim of trade between equals. Finally, China succeeded in her quest to deepen her relationship with Africa with the establishment of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation FOCAC in 2000. Its Ministerial Conferences that hold every three years ha VE given China the much needed institutional framework with which to coordinate her activities with African countries. So far, this has worked out perfectly as it has afforded China the opportunity to impress Africa of her 'good' intentions.

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Evidences of Unequal Exchange in China-Africa Relations

The words of Patrick Bond aptly depict the continuous unequal exchange Africa suffers in the hands of her foreign partners when he said; "unequal trade and investment relationships are nothing new for Africa, although in recent years the world's attention was drawn to Africa's plight as never before" (Bond, 2007). The renewed China-Africa economic relation is perhaps to bear the largest share of blame for leaving Africa with this pathetic and embarrassing trade score card, especially in recent years. This is certainly the reason Sino-African partnership has been criticized by African and Western media, as well as various scholarly works , emphasizing that they benefit China only (Brookes & Shin, 2007; De Grauwe, Houssa, & Picillo, 2012; Mlambo, Kushamba & Simawu, 2016). China has been severally accused of expanding its footprint in Africa in order to profit from the continent's rich natural resources. The desire to exploit Africa's natural resources has been the main calculated driving force behind China's incursion into Africa (Adisu, Sharkey, & Okoroafo, 2010; Kolstad & Wiig, 2011). The argument here is that, China is plundering Africa's natural resources without providing any significant benefits to Africa, thereby contributing to the weakening of Africa's manufacturing base due to her cheap and substandard products. China is continuing the feasting of Africa's fast depleting natural resources almost the same manner its colonizers did. In this light, China is seen as a contributor to Africa's undustrialization, poverty**,** underdevelopmentand consequently a dependent continent (Mlambo, Kushamba, & Simawu, 2016).

Evidences abound that China is indeed feasting on Africa in a subtle manner that can be likened to what the West did and is still doing through colonialism and neo-colonialism. China's economic invasion of Africa is neo-imperialistic or neo-colonial in character and content. The s way Africa suffered, and is still suffering unequal exchanger elations in the hands of their colonial and neo-colonial powers, is the same ordeal the continent is passing through in the hands of China (Jauch, 2011; Inokoba, 2017; Raji, & Ogunrinu, 2018). It is common knowledge that neo-imperialistic or neo-colonial economic relations between rich and poor countries always results in unequal exchange

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in favour of the rich countries to the detriment of the poor nations as rightly proven by dependency theorists.

Today, China is not just the world's second largest economy, but also occupies an enviable place in the comity of superpowers in every respect (Olalekan, & Iwala, 2021), and therefore cannot claim to be a poor nation. Doing so in itself amounts to deception and lack of sincerity. If the world's second largest economy is a poor country, then no country in the world is qualified to be called rich, perhaps only one – the largest economy.

Furthermore, another aspect of China's neocolonial economic strategy in Africa is based on the fact that, just like most neocolonial economic powers, China has direct and indirect firm control over global and multinational institutions that govern trade, economic and financial policies, as well as transnational enterprises. In political economic terms, neocolonialism works by investing in multinational firms that benefit only a select few or minority elite in the underdeveloped countries where they operate, while also forcing the underdeveloped countries to become more dependent. This form of investment can be viewed as a coordinated effort by wealthy countries to stifle growth in developing countries and keep them as cheap natural resource and labour hubs (Khodadadzadeh, 2017). The need for the developed economies to keep poor countries perpetually as centers for cheap natural resources, labour and ready market for their goods and services explains the tendency to enjoy unequal exchange at their expense. China is no exception in this global capitalist scheme.

China's unequal exchange transactions with Africa manifests in her trade with individual African states. For instance, Nigeria has the most Chinese bilateral economic agreements in Africa, including the purchase of a controlling stake in Nigeria's Kaduna refinery and a $2 billion deal in which China's offshore oil field company (CNOOC) will take a 45 percent stake in the Akpo oil field, which will produce 225,000 barrels of oil per day. Following the acquisition of four oil drilling licenses, the Chinese government suggested investing nearly $4 billion in the expansion of Nigeria's oil

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infrastructure (Tamen, 2009). This of course is another bait to trap Nigeria into heavy debt burden in order to control her oil industry. Many African countries such as Sudan, Angola, etc, have swallowed this subtle Chinese bait and are no longer in full control of strategic sectors of their economies.

Again, South Africa leads the world in platinum production (80% of total output and 90% of global reserves) and manganese (75%) as well as the world's second largest gold producer (overtaken by Australia in 2007). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the world's biggest cobalt producer (36%) and a major diamond producer, with half of the world's known reserves. South Africa, DRC and Botswana together account for more than half of global diamond production and 60% of known deposits. Regrettably, statistics show that all these countries despite their enormous economic potentials have continued to suffer unbalanced trade relations with China (Taylor, 2004; Ayuba, 2006; Orngu, 2009). For instance, South Africa had a $1.9 billion trade deficit with China in 2004. Without Beijing's imports of oil and other raw resources, Africa's overall trade deficit with China would have been unimaginable (Inokoba, 2017).

Now, China in order to enjoy market advantage projected that over the next few decades, the African continent will see significant population and market increases, particularly in the fast growing Sub-Saharan region. Africa's population is expected to be 56 percent urban by 2050, accounting for a quarter of the world's working-age population. By 2025, consumer spending on the continent is predicted to exceed $2.1 trillion, and by 2030, $2.5 trillion (Tiboris, 2019). As a result, the African continent offers vast commercial prospects. Countries who invest in Africa during this period of rapid population expansion will create a beneficial trading network for products and assure food and resource security in the future. In regard, China has overtaken the United States as Africa's greatest commercial partner to position herself to reap these benefits (Tiboris, 2019). This is the reality of China-Africa relations in trade, aid, FDI, loans, etc. While China is calculating both short- and long-term gains, Africa is content with just anything. Thus, in the end, the gains would never be equal. In

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the same vain, while Africa is calculating how many more loans and aid that may entrap her economic destiny, China is calculating in concrete terms what Africa will eat, drink, wear, drive, etc, to perpetually keep African's economic destiny in its hands.

The amount of Chinese productivity spillover and skill transfer to host nations is another unfair deal for Africans. Both Chinese government and private owned FDI in Africa result in little or no skill and technical transfer to Africans. Chinese FDIs are domestically focused in order to boost local productivity and production in China. As a result, technology transfers from Chinese FDI to host countries are almost non-existent (Yushi & Borojo, 2020). While Chinese businesses are scattered all over Africa and enjoy boom, there are very slim chances for the survival of African businesses in China, let alone experiencing a boom. This is even made worse by stringent visa and employment restrictions on Africans seeking to explore business opportunities in China (Ogunsanwo, 2018).

The truth is, China uses African projects to train her workers to perfection, while Africans suffer unemployment and poverty due to lack of technical skills. Africans suffer strict entrance regimes in China, yet, over 182,000 Chinese workers are currently scattered across the continent. If these were Africans, imagine the multiplier effect it would have had on African economy.

The reality of unequal exchange that characterizes the economic ties between China and Africa can also be revealed in terms of Chinese financial aid and loans to African governments. As of 2018, over 20 percent of Africa's external debt was owed to China. Furthermore, African countries made up half of the 50 most indebted countries to China in terms of percentage of GDP (Portelance & Landry, 2021). Several studies have been conducted on the motivations for financial aid (Dreher & Fuchs 2015), its impact on the African economy (Sun, 2014), and the link between Chinese aid, FDI and trade activities (Dreher & Fuchs 2015). However, empirical research on the relationship between Chinese financial aid and African countries' total factor productivity is limited (Portelance & Landry, 2021).

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Loans, foreign aid and foreign direct investments are some of the most effective tactics used by neocolonial powers to weaken poor countries. Many developing countries are not economically stable, and as a result, they have become financially dependent on wealthier countries. These wealthy nations employ these financial instruments to compel smaller countries to adjust their policies or economies. Donor countries will provide foreign loans or aids under various conditions and circumstances (Khodadadzadeh, 2017). These requirements may include demanding the recipient country to purchase goods from the donor country, signing economic cooperation agreements, granting donor states the right to secure specific firms, or providing them with low-cost access to critical natural resources and other items. All these conditions are designed to give the donor country more control over the recipient country's policies and the entire economy, making such recipient country more and more dependent on the donor country. Therefore, foreign aid in a neocolonial setting such as China-Africa engagement are instruments of domination and control, as it is never supplied without caveats and terms (Khodadadzadeh, 2017).

Conclusion

This paper has discussed China's renewed engagement with Africa in the recent two decades. Historically, China has long standing political and socio-cultural relations with Africa which date back to centuries ago. This history commonly described as episodic took official shape following the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. For the fact that the PRC was a communist creation, African countries trended the path to a possible friendship with caution so as not to offend their capitalist colonial overlords in the early days of the Cold War.

The Bandung Conference of 1955 gave China an initial boost to officially cement ties with African states. Without hesitation, China effectively used the opportunity provided by the conference to advertise herself to Africa. Ideology, geopolitics and Third World solidarity were the items of trade that drove their early relations.

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African states declared themselves non-aligned to demonstrate their neutrality in the Cold War. China assisted most African states in a show of solidarity in their independence liberation movements. Most Africa states achieved independence in the 1960s, and China's involvement with Africa and in the non-align movement was boosted in an attempt to use the platform to forge South-South cooperation where Beijing would be directing the affairs.

While the relationship between China and Africa aided the recognition of the former as a Member of the UNSC in 1971, the 1980s Sino-African relations suffered a setback as China retreated from Africa due to domestic economic reforms and the opening up policy that saw China engaging the rest of the World, particularly America and the West in a closer relationship. In the late 1990s, both China and Africa kind of hunted each other due to obvious reasons. Consequently, the last two decades beginning from 2000 marked a new dawn as the longest consistent and consolidated period of mutual economic cooperation and development in Sino-African relations with the formation of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000.

Apparent discussions in the huge literature reveal that China's new found love for Africa has generated a lot of contentious issues that have sharply split analysts and academics, as well as the media world into two major divides. There are those who firmly believe that China's renewed engagement in Africa is the best thing that ever happened to the continent since her interaction with the rest of the world, pointing out that the collaboration by the two sides has benefited Africa immensely through the provision of infrastructural facilities like loans and developmental aids to Africa with no strings attached. Those on the other side of the divide are unrepentant critiques who see no light at the other side of the tunnel in the current Sino-African relations. They believe China is re-colonizing Africa by a subtle means, accusing China of plundering Africa's fast depleting natural resources left by the colonialists when they feasted on the continent's resources.

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This paper, after a deep investigation of the two sides of the China-Africa economic imbroglio, consciously pinched tent with the latter divide. Arriving at our decision has been a herculean task as the dynamics of China-Africa current interactions are complex. However, the paper dissected issues such as the manipulation of loans to entrap African states to perpetually remain dependent. Development aid is another tactics of the Chinese to gain firm control of critical sectors of the economies of African states. The Chinese while strategically empowering their labour efficiency by engaging their workforce in African projects and refusing to engage Africans on such projects, are therefore, depriving Africans of technical skills. While Chinese businesses are scattered across Africa and enjoying boom, it is a near impossibility for Africans to establish businesses in China, let alone experience a boom. China's cheap goods have caused Africa job losses particularly in the manufacturing sector.

The paper relied heavily on both realism and dependency theories to argue that relationships such as China-Africa are interest-driven and will ultimately benefit only the dominant party, and in this case, China. For realists, China is in Africa in pursuit of national economic interest in order to enhance her global power position via the improvement of her economic and military capabilities. In the strength of dependency theory, China and Africa represent two worlds – core and periphery or developed and underdeveloped. Observations over the years through the dependency lens shows that, relationships between these two worlds always deliver maximum gains to the core/developed partner at the expense of the periphery/underdeveloped partner. Hence, the paper concluded that the current Sino-African relationship hold no durable benefits for Africa, describing it as another version of rebranded unequal exchange fashioned after the old brand of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

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Author's Profile

Uyabara Felix Izirin holds a Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) degree in Political and Administrative Studies from the University of Port Harcourt in 2001; a Master of Arts (MA) degree in International Relations from London Metropolitan University, UK, in 2009. He is currently a Doctor of Philosophy candidate in the Department of Political Science with International Relations (IR) as option in the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa state. The author is also currently a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Africa Toru-Orua, Bayelsa state. His email contact is felix.uyabara@uat.edu.ng