

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONSHIP:
ITS IMPLICATIONS ON U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

by

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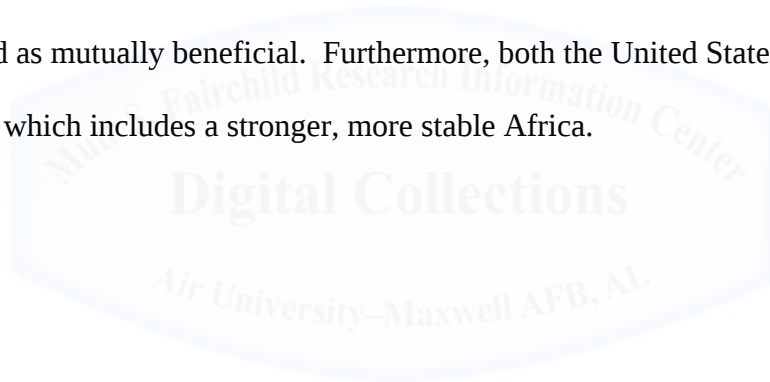
Biography

CMSgt Kimberly S. Vinson is assigned to the Air War College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, AL. She has served in a variety of positions as both a First Sergeant and in the Personnel career field. Her last assignment was at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph, Texas as the First Sergeant, Headquarters Air Education and Training Command. Chief Vinson entered the Air Force on 24 September 1996. She was originally classified as a Health Services Management Apprentice after graduating from tech school, but converted to a Personnel Apprentice in 1998. Chief Vinson has been assigned to bases in Maryland, South Korea, Germany, Nevada, Italy, New Mexico, Ohio, South Dakota, and Texas.



Abstract

The Sino-African relationship has been labeled the biggest development for Africa since the end of the Cold War. But during its buildup, China has continued to maintain its (controversial) stance of non-interference while engaging with other countries. Today, there are two broad scholarly views about the Sino-African relationship—Sino-optimist and Sino-pessimist—and both sides feel they are correct. Due to China's enormous growth, many declare that China is a “neo-colonialist predator,” and is only on the continent to dump its goods and suck up valuable resources. For some it is easy to be drawn into this viewpoint and only focus on this criticism, especially from a Western perspective. But the Sino-African relationship should be viewed as mutually beneficial. Furthermore, both the United States and China have similar interests, which includes a stronger, more stable Africa.



Introduction

“Let China sleep, for when she awakes, she will shake the world.”¹ Over the last 30 years, China has awoken and is now the second largest economy in the world behind the United States. But during its growth, China not only built up its economy, but also saw a strategic window of opportunity to continue building on its already established relationship with Africa. And because of the growth of both partners, the current Sino-African partnership has been labeled the biggest development for Africa since the end of the Cold War.² But during its buildup, China has continued to maintain its (controversial) stance of non-interference while engaging with other countries. (To the Chinese, interference can be defined as interfering with “internal affairs” such as: disrupting political or economic systems; undermining a state’s stability; using hostile propaganda; not respecting territorial integrity and sovereignty.³) And because of China’s enormous growth, many critics declare that China is a “neo-colonialist predator,” and is only on the continent to dump its goods and suck up valuable resources.

For some it is easy to be drawn into this viewpoint and only focus on this criticism, especially from a Western perspective. But I submit that the relationship is not opportunistic or predatory. Therefore, the Sino-African relationship should be viewed as mutually beneficial because there is a deep connection with advantages and opportunities not only for China and Africa, but also for the United States. To keep the relationship sustainable and credible, China should continue to review its non-interference policy within the region. Furthermore, the United States should not view the Sino-African relationship from a negative perspective, but should cooperate with China, where possible, to help support Africa’s need for a stronger economy. This paper will attempt to validate my thesis by explaining the past, present, and possibly the future of the Sino-African relationship and how the United States should respond to it. The following topics will be covered: Scholarly viewpoints; a short overview of the Sino-African relationship; Non-interference policy; Chinese aid to Africa; Forum on China-Africa cooperation; United States interests; Challenges and recommendations. To understand the current relationship, the current scholarly viewpoints must be covered first.

Existing Scholarly Viewpoints⁴

The Sino-African relationship is wide and divergent according to scholars who have written on it, and there are four broad opinions about the relationship. First, the “Sino-optimist” opinion, which states that China is a beneficial investor and donor to Africa and is also contributing greatly to economic development.⁵ On the other hand, the “Sino-pessimist” feels that China is an opportunistic predator and similar to other Western states, solely focused on resource extractions.⁶ Third and fourth are the views from both the Chinese and African governments, though not scholarly, are very important to the context. These views relay not only how the relationship has changed, but also where they would like it to proceed in the future. First, the “Sino-optimist” view will be explored in depth.

“Sino-optimist”

The positive, or optimistic viewpoint, lists the Sino-African relationship as neutral and exclusively business focused. It provides African states an alternative opportunity since Western aid did not bring African states out of poverty.⁷ Furthermore, it is mutually beneficial for the two to continue the relationship because China needs resources to further its own economy, and Africa needs infrastructure financed by low-interest loans.⁸ The new roads, railways, and ports being developed by Chinese aid are filling a void left open by Western countries. Moreover, the increased interest in African resources has also brought competition, ultimately leading to increased revenue.⁹ And China has assisted Africa by using a liberal non-interference policy, providing loans without conditions and a “constructive engagement” policy.¹⁰ Or as Michael Kremer, a Harvard leading development economist states, “The policy discussion over China is simplistic. China is more people to do business with, their purchases create jobs, and their products create value.”¹¹ In other words, Chinese investment is “quite pure”¹² with no malicious intent. Next, the opposite view will be considered.

“Sino-pessimist”

The sino-pessimist view asserts that China is preventing Africa from reaching its fullest potential. Despite Chinese investment in trade and manufacturing capabilities on the continent, Africa cannot get past the point of being an export driven economy based solely on their natural resources.¹³ A state’s first

step in the development ladder is the ability to create industry through labor-intensive manufacturing sectors, and the current asymmetric relationship is preventing this practice from occurring.¹⁴ Furthermore, China's gigantic population and workforce, coupled with a lack of labor laws, means a large, cheap, and compliant workforce that African states cannot compete with.¹⁵ The mutual benefits of Chinese aid is also questioned by advanced African states, because small industries are being taken over by Chinese products, leading some business owners to being deprived of their livelihood.¹⁶ Lastly, some scholars state that China has increased its trade partnership with repressive regimes since autocracies mean fewer trade barriers. Or that the relationship is mixing tyranny with exports to further boost China's economic goals.¹⁷ Despite the scholarly views, what do China and Africa say about their relationship? A review of Chinese official reports, press releases, and government statements will be covered next.

Chinese Perspective

Beijing's official stance is its aid and foreign policy to Africa is neutral and it is focused on a non-interference position. According to China's second Africa policy paper, "China and Africa will be committed to mutually beneficial cooperation...adding new substance and injecting inexhaustible impetus to China-Africa relations."¹⁸ The two have also been "good friends," standing together for fifty years, trusting each other despite changes in the international community.¹⁹ Specifically regarding aid to Third World countries, China utilizes eight principles, which are centered on independence, equality, mutual benefits, and interest free or low-interest loans.²⁰ It also uses South-South cooperation agreements, through the United Nations, to provide "mutual respect, equality, and win-win situation."²¹ Overall, Chinese engagement in Africa follows business logic and many of their loans are packaged as a mixture of aid, commercial loans, and support for strategic investment. Statements from various African states have also echoed similar accounts.

Africa's Reaction

"African's had grown tired of democracy and other lectures from the West, they needed immediate solutions to basic needs such as unemployment, poor roads among others. These were all provided to Africans in record time, [by the Chinese] therefore pushing the traditional forces (U.S., U.K.,

France, and Germany) to the periphery.”²² This statement by Dr. Emmanuel Manyasa of Kenyatta University echoes the welcome that African government officials have towards Chinese investment on the continent in areas such as infrastructure and trade.²³ But it is not the only the government welcoming them, the public’s perception of China has also become more positive. For instance, the results of an opinion poll taken from 2014-2015 in 36 African countries, rank the United States number one and China number two for development models they would like their country to emulate.²⁴ It also shows that a majority of Africans polled (56%), feel that China is doing a “somewhat” or “very” good job of meeting the needs of their individual country.²⁵ The increase of African’s positive view of China on the continent can be attributed to many factors such as increased investment and partnership opportunities in both directions. In 2012, Africans had invested a total of \$14.2 billion in China, which was a 43% increase from 2009.²⁶ The world’s top selling beer (by volume), Snow Beer, is sold only in China, and is manufactured by South African Breweries, which is joint venture with a Chinese firm.²⁷ But even though there are various scholarly viewpoints about the current Sino-African relationship, in order to fully understand today’s situation a brief historical overview must be covered.

An overview of Sino-African relations

“China the biggest developing country in the world, is ready to join hands with Africa, the biggest developing continent in the world, to...march into the 21st century full of confidence”²⁸

The relationship between China and the African continent is more than 2,000 years old; some historian’s even remark that it started during the Han Dynasty era (206 BCE-220 CE).²⁹ While there are three distinct phases to the Sino-African relationship, the two that are most significant to the current state of affairs are the second and third phases. The second phase began with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.³⁰ It was focused on ideology and went from the early 1950s-1980s.³¹ This time period was most notable for China’s open competition with both the West and the Soviet Union³² and the continued Sino-African relationship. When the United Nations Security Council voted on whether the People’s Republic of China would take permanent member status from Taiwan in 1971, the African votes helped sway the outcome.³³ There were 76 favorable votes for the People’s Republic of

China, and 26 of them came from African states, or approximately 34%.³⁴ Shortly thereafter, the Tanzania-Zambia railway was finished in 1975. The rail line cost \$500 million and was the “flagship” for Chinese assistance in Africa at the time.³⁵

Later, from 1979-1989, Africa’s value waned as the Chinese leadership did not see any significance in the continent since China was receiving foreign aid from Japan and Western European countries.³⁶ Things dramatically changed, though, after the crackdown in Tiananmen Square. After the highly publicized incident, the Politburo asserted that China had been too close to the West and must reignite their friendship in the Third World and Africa.³⁷ This decision transformed the Sino-African relationship with the “reform and opening” policy,³⁸ which was not focused on ideology but on open economic changes and brings the relationship to the third phase.

The third and current phase began while the Cold War was ending, and Chinese ideology was replaced by economic diplomacy.³⁹ And while other states became less interested in the continent, China decided to focus in on Africa once again and began to heavily invest in the continent.⁴⁰ Later as the Chinese economy began to swell, so did its need for natural resources such as oil, which it became a net importer of in 1993.⁴¹ But the Sino-African connection is more than just trade for resources. China has long seen itself as a champion of Third World countries--not as an imperial power--but one committed to a relationship on even ground. China’s successful economic statecraft comes from its view that African states are not just underdeveloped and in need of assistance.⁴² Instead, African states play an important role in geopolitical engagement and are equal partners in the international community.⁴³ China capitalized on Africa’s political support and changed the relationship from an ideological one to a heavily economic focused partnership. In summary, the Sino-African relationship, and its non-interference policy, played a large role in China’s rise to becoming the second largest economy in the world. But as China’s economy has evolved, so has its non-interference policy.

Non-Interference Policy

China uses guiding principles when deciding how to develop a relationship with external states. *The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence* were developed in 1954 while the Sino-Indian negotiations

were ongoing over Tibet.⁴⁴ The principles are centered on: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in affairs; equality and mutual benefit; peaceful coexistence.⁴⁵ Later, Premier Zhou Enlai developed *The Eight Principles for China's Aid to Third World Countries* during a 2011 visit to Mali to help China focus on its new economic partnerships with the Third World.⁴⁶ These principles are similar to the previous five but include providing interest free or low interest loans and helping recipient countries become independent and self-reliant.⁴⁷ Together these principles can be more commonly referred to as China's non-interference policy.

The non-interference policy is often criticized by academics on the Sino-African relationship because the West does not utilize the same practice or belief. Pundits also argue that because China does not meddle in African affairs, China's trade practices help support tyranny and repressive regimes. Additionally, that China prefers to trade with autocratic regimes while undermining sanction efforts from the West by using China's UNSC veto power.⁴⁸ (Since becoming a permanent United Nations Security Council member, China has used its veto power 11 times.⁴⁹) But others have stated that China's non-interference policy is slowly changing.⁵⁰ For example, China supported the West's pursuit for security on the African continent, most tellingly when it did not veto the use of Anglo-French airpower to enforce the no-fly zone over Libya.⁵¹ When asked about the changes to the policy an anonymous Chinese ambassador stated, "Of course we are increasingly involved in the politics of African countries, we are being pulled in, we have no choice[s]. But do the African's really want our input? I don't know, it is not clear."⁵² The Chinese are not demonstrating a major swing in foreign policy change, but instead responding to changes in the geopolitical landscape, especially regarding security concerns.⁵³ And officially China states that it opposes external intervention, but the biggest transformation can be seen in its support for United Nations security missions.⁵⁴

Out of the five permanent council members, China has contributed the most troops to the United Nations peacekeeping mission.⁵⁵ As of August 31, 2016, China had 2,639 troops on missions as police and UN military experts.⁵⁶ China's first peacekeeping mission was in Mali in 2013 and it included engineers, medical, and security personnel who were tasked with repairing infrastructure, medical

treatment, and safeguarding the mission's headquarters.⁵⁷ Additionally in 2014, China organized its first humanitarian aid package by deploying a 100-bed treatment center to Liberia to assist with the Ebola virus response.⁵⁸ Interestingly, China sent in 115 infectious disease specialists as American, European, and Japanese aid group were pulling theirs back.⁵⁹ In addition, the People's Liberation Army Navy has supported counter piracy operations in the Indian Ocean and has also confirmed plans to set up a military resupply base in Djibouti.⁶⁰ However, one of China's largest humanitarian missions was not a United Nations mission, it was an evacuation mission. In 2011, the People's Liberation Army Air Force conducted its longest evacuation of 1,700 Chinese citizens out of Libya.⁶¹ Jakkie Cilliers from the Institute of Security Studies calls the change of posture a new "normalization," or "natural evolution" of China's role in Africa because of its economic interests and also because of terrorist attacks against Chinese citizens.⁶² (Chinese citizens were killed in Mali during a siege at a luxury hotel, and another was killed after the Islamic State held them hostage.⁶³) Nonetheless, China's non-interference policy is not the only approach that is criticized, scholars also find fault with China's aid policy.

Aid+Economics = "Aidonomics"

*"I have concluded that no one, including no one in China knows the answer" to how much Chinese companies and individuals have invested in Africa."*⁶⁴

As the quote above alludes to, it is difficult to determine exactly how much aid Africa receives from China because it does not categorize aid like the West does. Instead, China uses a mix of concessional loans, zero interest loans, and grants when it releases its figures⁶⁵ and these loans are then often tied to infrastructure projects.⁶⁶ The combination of aid, plus economic projects, can be termed "aidonomics" because the money (or resource) is linked to new or ongoing projects or ventures. Open source numbers list the mix as: concessional loans at 56%; zero interest loans at 8%; grants at 36%.⁶⁷ But official aid numbers are normally a "state secret"⁶⁸ and are not released. Some have remarked this is because average Chinese citizens do not view aid in high regard; the money should be spent domestically, not internationally.⁶⁹ The international community cannot report accurate numbers because Chinese aid does not fit into the agreed upon definition of aid by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

(OECD) and Development reporting system which China is not a full member of. (However, in January 2015, China joined the OECD's Development Centre—which follows China's changing disposition towards “normalization.”⁷⁰) Instead of following the lead of OECD members, China prefers to follow a loose definition of aid.⁷¹ It is because of the lack of transparency and standardized reporting that critics are incorrectly reporting that China's aid program is massive. In reality, African aid is estimated to only make up approximately .07% of the Gross National Income, which was \$14.9 billion in 2012.⁷² In comparison, the United States was the largest foreign aid donor worldwide in Fiscal Year 2015 with foreign assistance (defined broadly) estimated at \$48.57 billion or 1.3% of the total federal budget authority.⁷³ Yet even though many Western states criticize China's use of “aidonomics,” this is not a new phenomenon.

China's aid system mimics the pattern of engagement that was used by the West and Japan while providing aid to China in the late 1970s. After Chairman Mao passed in 1976, China welcomed foreign aid, loans, and investments once again.⁷⁴ While receiving this capital, the Chinese Communist Party recognized that aid could be combined with other forms of economic engagement to provide financial assistance.⁷⁵ By focusing on packages that emphasize mutual benefit, the agreement does not emphasize the “paternalism that has come to characterize aid from the West.”⁷⁶ Instead, China uses foreign aid as one of its many tools when utilizing its economic instrument of national power.⁷⁷ In addition, China also uses its aid to develop new trade partnership, build new multinational Chinese corporations, and enhance domestic firms.⁷⁸ Yet, there is still widespread criticism about China's need for resources and its “neo-colonialist” tendencies.

Some scholarly articles state that China has an “oil diplomacy” policy in Africa and are only on the continent to serve its need for resources. While it is true that resources make up 90% of the African exports to China, the United States and Europe have imported more oil from Africa over the last decade.⁷⁹ (Interestingly, critics often do not compare American and European resource needs while criticizing China's policies.) Furthermore, once Chinese state-owned companies receive their oil, they are not forced to export this oil back to China; they can sell it to whomever will give them the highest price.⁸⁰

This can mean that there is no strategic plan in Beijing to move the natural resources from Africa to China—supporting profit-driven behavior, not geopolitical behavior.⁸¹ Overall, there is “nothing inherently nefarious” about resource backed loans because this type of deal allows developing entities to utilize their abundant goods (resources) to obtain what they need (infrastructure).⁸² In other words, states have more leverage to develop an effective bargaining position because they can offer a good that the other side desires. Influential economist Albert Hirschman called the relationship of dependence and influence between states the “influence effect of foreign trade.”⁸³ The foreign trade market that China has opened up has now made Africa a more attractive trade locale to other foreign governments.

High-level leaders from the United States, Japan, Russia, and South Korea have made more frequent visits to Africa in the last decade.⁸⁴ These visits came after decades of minimal contact with African states. First, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s visit to South Africa in 2006 was the first visit by a Russian leader to Sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁵ (In 2010, South Africa was added to the list of the largest emerging market economies, also known as BRICS.) Then the president of South Korea also visited Africa in 2006, which was the first visit to the continent in 24 years by a South Korean leader.⁸⁶ Since that visit, a triennial Korea-Africa forum has also been formed, with the most recent also being held in 2015.⁸⁷ But Japan’s new relationship with Africa is the one that is eyed most warily by China.

The new partnership between Africa and Japan is only one of many issues causing flare-ups between Japan and China. Other issues include the build up in the South China Sea, the Senkaku Islands, and China’s rise in economic power. And now further exacerbating the relationship is Japan’s decision to also increase its presence in Africa—as a direct competitor to China.⁸⁸ After Japan pledged \$32 billion for an economic assistance plan, Prime Minister Abe visited Africa in 2014, which was the first visit by a Japanese prime minister in 8 years.⁸⁹ Prime Minister Abe’s trip ironically coincided with Chinese Foreign Minister Yi’s visit to Africa, and during the trip the two “exchanged jabs with each other.”⁹⁰ The Chinese media labeled Prime Minister Abe’s trip a “containment policy,” but Abe characterized Africa as a “frontier for Japanese diplomacy.”⁹¹ All of these visits have made it evident that other states have also realized the economic potential in Africa, but China realized almost 20 years ago that it wanted to expand

its relationship with Africa even further. So they created the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, which focuses on and promotes economic multilateralism, not just bilateralism. This conference has now become the new standard to further enhance economic relationships with Africa.⁹²

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is held every three years, and is described as a “multilateral, consultative mechanism...focused on strengthening cooperation.”⁹³ The first one was held in 2000 and the forum is also China’s way of interacting with the entire continent.⁹⁴ (It is easy to forget that Africa is actually made up of 54 individual states, since reference is often made to the continent as one large state.) The forum rotates every three years between a city in China and Africa and it hosts foreign ministers and heads of economic oversight.⁹⁵ The most recent forum was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 4-5 December 2015. Representatives from 50 African nations joined President Xi Jinping as they reviewed previous agreements and pledged their support for one another in the future.

The 2015 FOCAC was President Xi’s first summit since becoming head of the People’s Republic of China, and his keynote address highlighted a proposal to elevate the relationship to a “comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.”⁹⁶ He also announced major plans to be implemented over the next three years that included: offering \$60 billion in funding support which includes \$5 billion in free aid and interest free loans; vocational and educational opportunities in Africa to train 200,000 individuals in Africa and 40,000 in China; special programs for women and children; enhanced cooperation for agricultural projects; continuing support to United Nations peacekeeping missions and country capacity building for defense, counter terrorism, and riot prevention.⁹⁷ While President Xi’s pledges were impressive, there were both critics and supporters once he stopped speaking at his first FOCAC.

Both optimists and pessimists analyze the promises and comments made at every FOCAC, and 2015 was no different. Critics of the statements said most of the money that is pledged is just rhetoric and referenced proclamations from previous FOCACs. Martyn Davies, managing director at Deloitte & Touche stated, “I think people are putting massive and flawed emphasis on the big ticket figures,”⁹⁸ and not digging deeper to see how much money is actually being received by Africa. For instance, that

money is still being “drip-fed” into Africa that was promised in 2006.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the Chinese government is sensitive to criticism so there have been noticeable changes to the verbiage in the most current plan. When compared to the previous FOCAC in 2012, the largest change has been China’s increased support for higher education.¹⁰⁰ For example, the most recent pledge to build five transportation universities and a “China-Africa Aviation School,” along with the numbers of individuals to train in Africa and China, is the biggest and most ambitious plan released thus far.¹⁰¹ Moreover, there is an undertaking to train and provide capacity building in every section of the Action plan: Energy, Oceans, Tourism, Trade, Agriculture, Medicine, Science & Technology, and Security.¹⁰² Obviously such a large commitment will take time to implement, and it remains to be seen what will result from the pledges and commitments made at the 2015 FOCAC. But, with such a large investment being promised other nations, especially the United States, should also pay close attention to the investments and opportunities that may become available.

United States’ Interests

The United States’ latest National Security Strategy states, “Africa is rising...We will increase trade and business ties...in what can be the world’s next major center of global growth.”¹⁰³ This statement suggests that the United States, just like China, understands the potential economic growth in Africa. But the United States’ interests in Africa are not solely based on economics. It wants to help Africa become more stable in all areas because stability leads to increased benefits not just on the continent, but worldwide. Solidifying the continent means an increased fight against terrorism and violent extremist organizations, one of America’s biggest threats today. Additionally, a stronger Africa means increased partnerships and investment opportunities, while promoting universal values worldwide. And despite the different approaches, the U.S.-Africa relationship does have some similarities to the Sino-African relationship. First, the United States and China would both like to see a stable African continent and enhanced relationships.¹⁰⁴ They would both also like more efficient production of natural resources and increased infrastructure to strengthen Africa’s economies, which could lead to increased export opportunities for both the United States and China.¹⁰⁵ But most of all, both countries understand the

importance of countering terrorism on the continent to ensure the safety and security of its interests. Yet as of now, this appears to be the extent of their similarities because commercial competition appears to dominate everything else.

Competing interests will continue to exist between the United States and China because both are interested in Africa's resources and an increase to their export markets.¹⁰⁶ But their different economic models exhibit obvious disparities to their investment decisions. For example, China's state-capitalism allows them to obligate more trade and capital than free markets are able to, making the quest to do business somewhat uneven.¹⁰⁷ And while this does provide some benefits for China there are also some increased costs, for example, they have a history of paying too much for equity in international oil ventures.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, allegations of the Chinese cheating during their economic transactions have increased tensions over commercial competition in Africa.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, this tension is not as widespread as it could be because the United States and China continue to focus on different industries within Africa—United States and Western firms majoring in higher technology ventures and Chinese firms focusing on the lower end.¹¹⁰ But focusing on different industries is not enough to fuel economic growth within the United States. To take advantage of different economic opportunities, the United States has increased its efforts towards the emerging African market and has debuted some new initiatives.

The United States Department of Commerce recognizes that businesses must take advantage of a flattened global economy and increased opportunities¹¹¹ to remain competitive. So over the last two decades, the last two administrations have made strides towards expanding U.S.-Africa trade and business partnerships because of the expanding market for American direct investment prospects in Africa.¹¹² Two of the biggest developments to date have been The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), enacted in 2000, and the U.S.-Africa Business Forum, which occurred in 2014 and 2016.¹¹³ First the AGOA, which has been extended to 2025, continues the western practice of mixing diplomacy with trade. In order to qualify for the AGOA, a country must be improving "its rule of law, human rights, and respect for core labor standards."¹¹⁴ Next the U.S.-Africa Business Forum, which is focused on private business

and industry expanding its “business, trade and investment ties in key sectors” throughout the African continent.¹¹⁵ Even though both of these developments support US-African interests, the Business Forum seems to signal a new approach towards the economic partnership.

The second U.S.-Africa Business forum was held in September 2016 and was labeled an “incredible success,” with \$9.1 billion in trade and investment pledged.¹¹⁶ Various African leaders from 44 countries joined President Obama and hundreds of CEOs from both Africa and the United States in a venue that seemed very similar to the FOCAC. But even though all parties assured increased business investments, the United States acknowledges that there are challenges associated with investing in Africa.¹¹⁷ First, roadblocks are still evident on large infrastructure projects for such essentials as standards, procurement, taxes, and local partners needed for coordination.¹¹⁸ Second, in country support from embassies is needed to assist with legal regulations and customs in order to breakthrough the bottleneck of American investment in African projects.¹¹⁹ However despite these obstacles, American companies do recognize the growing demands from the middle class in Africa, and corporations such as Caterpillar and IBM have expanded African investment and skills training.¹²⁰ Before President Obama left office, he reaffirmed the United States’ promise to African partnership, for the long term, but with a new administration in place it remains to be seen if this posture will stay the same.¹²¹

Recommendations

“Africa is home to most of the desperately poor—a large share of the ‘bottom billion’ who have scant access to primary schools, clean water, sanitation and opportunity.”¹²²

The East and West continue to view each other warily and often through a biased perspective because of our different cultures and values. Optimists and pessimists abound and both sides feel they are correct, regardless of what is really happening. Or in other words, “where you stand is where you sit.” This expression is especially evident while examining the current Sino-African relationship. Yet no matter where you sit, it is hard to deny the massive gains that China has made in Africa. It is expected that Sino-African trade will be \$300 billion in 2015, compared to \$10 billion in 2000.¹²³ Whether this trade occurred because of its “aidonomics” or the ability to foresee an investment opportunity, China

became Africa's number one trading partner in 2009, surpassing the United States and the rest of the world. But, China's slowing economy and "One Belt One Road" initiative may change how it invests internationally. Additionally, its changing demographics of an aging population, and growing middle class, may change its domestic spending. But the opportunity for the United States and China to seek their own interests in Africa still exists.

The United States' new administration will mean changes to our national policies and focus areas. But the United States should not view the Sino-African relationship skeptically; instead, we should continue to explore ways to increase our trade and investment opportunities in Africa. By 2034, Africa will have the largest working-age population in the world.¹²⁴ The untapped potential in manpower and consumer good spending opportunities is enormous, but Africa needs more than just aid. As President Obama stated, Africans want "businesses...that will last and...will help build a great future for their continent."¹²⁵ In addition, Africa also needs increased infrastructure in basics such as electricity in order to grow its own industry. Because the infrastructure in Africa is still so poor, it makes it difficult and costly to move goods from the coast to inner cities,¹²⁶ limiting growth opportunity.

Over the last 10 years, the United States has provided the highest annual foreign assistance to Africa since the Marshall Plan, but the money needs to be distributed wisely.¹²⁷ Blindly handing out aid through government bureaucracies and government-hired contractors (who are often paid more than they should be) leads to corruption and inefficiency on both sides. There is enough global competition for the United States and China to compete. It will just mean less skepticism from both sides and allowing the "invisible hand" to guide the market economy to benefit the society at large. China's partnership with Africa has taken center stage in world politics, and has become an important strategic topic to other nations, including the United States.¹²⁸ It is time for the world to stop talking about Africa as a place for handouts and aid; in its place it should be recognized as a continent filled with enough growth and opportunities for both China and the United States.

Conclusion

This paper provided an overview of: Sino-African scholarly viewpoints; a short history of their relationship; China's Non-interference policy; Chinese aid to Africa; Forum on China-Africa cooperation; United States Interests. After reading information on these topics, whether individuals view the Sino-African relationship as the most important development for Africa, is a personal choice. However, there is no denying the investment and trade opportunities that have emerged and have driven "Africa's changing fortunes."¹²⁹ This paper only scratched the surface on the dynamic Sino-African relationship and there are different lenses from which to view it. An individual could view the relationship as a grab for resources, with China as a predator—ready to pounce on its prey. Or, it could be interpreted as a deep, lengthy relationship that has evolved over time, just like many of the United States' relationships. Finally, because economies change and opportunities continue to unfold, it remains to be seen how the Sino-African relationship will transform. Yet if history is an indicator, global economic possibilities will unfold, and a new leader may emerge because they saw an opportunity opening up in front of them when others did not.

Notes

- ¹ David H. Shinn, and Joshua Eisenman, "China and Africa: A Century of Engagement." Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, viii.
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