

# **Sino-Western Rivalry as a New Trajectory of Neo-Imperialism**

## A Critical Challenge for African Diplomacy and Development

Africa's underdevelopment and subservient status in the international political economy have often been analyzed as deliberate creations of Western influence, from the slave trade to neo-imperialism. But China's recent phenomenal forage into Africa, which seems to provide a veritable alternative for Africa's international engagements, is provoking rivalry from the West, whose traditional influence appears to be challenged. This paper examines the rise of China in Africa and argues that the Sino-Western rivalry, which the rise has provoked, implies a new scramble and trajectory of neo-imperialism capable of worsening the already critical condition of Africa's development. It concludes that, with China in the fray, Africa will only sink deeper into the vortex of a skewed international economic system, unless its leaders and people urgently design and use home-grown initiatives of thorough systemic reforms to develop their economies to a competitive level, which will, in turn, promote African states as respectable members of the international system.

## **INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW OF AFRICA SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

The attainment of independence by the colonially created African states between the 1950s and the 1990s enabled them to conduct external relations and implement foreign policies on the basis of their national interests. They were, however, sucked into the whirlpool of a complex international system which was (and still is) a contradiction of incompatible political economies. Basically, there are countries of the Global North and Global South. Thus, African states continued to be tied to their former colonial masters, particularly Britain and France. These developed countries of Western Europe and the United States (of North America) are the dominant West in the post-colonial political economy of Africa.

The last two to three decades have witnessed significant transformation in the patterns of Africa's external relations and diplomacy. While established ties to the traditional partners still continue, economic liberalization and inept leadership combine to make Africa vulnerable to the courtship of some new trading partners. One of such new friends is China, whose amazing emergence as a major player and new trading partner of Africa has been an issue of great concern in the Western circles. China ranks third after the United States and France as African trade partners, and has overtaken Britain in volume of trade and investment, as well as in number of operating companies in countries like Ghana and Sudan (Akosile 2006, 58–59; Emeje 2006, 33; Tamen 2009, 155–67). It is also competing well with the United States in Nigerian oil and extractive industries. Indeed, China-Africa relations, which is not limited to trading, is, if nothing else, a major platform that has triggered a redefinition of South-South diplomacy and a paradigm shift for African economies from the neo-colonial mooring. The implication of this is not lost on the West, thus culminating in an emergent Sino-Western rivalry, which, in turn, necessitates a contest of influence between China and the Western Powers, led by the United States of America, in Africa.

This paper is a historian's attempt to interrogate the nature and patterns of the Sino-Western rivalry as a new critical challenge to African diplomacy and development in the contemporary international system. Though situated in the historical context of post-colonial Africa, the paper focuses on identifying China (like its Western rivals)

as a purposive neo-imperialist and shrewd trader, not a benevolent partner. By way of a clearer perspective, the paper provides an overview of Africa's transition from decolonization to its post-independence history, explores the nature and dynamics of Sino-African relations, and unpacks some core elements of China's "Africa" policy. It concludes with a review of the chance of Africa to survive the intrigues embedded in the current realities of the rivalry, and a remark for African leaders by way of recommendations for the Continent to break even.

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The decolonization process in Africa can be generally situated in the aftermath of the Second World War, which initiated a chain of events that culminated in the disintegration of the European empires in Africa. The major military operations in North Africa and ousting of Italians from Ethiopia by the British and Commonwealth forces, as well as the America-led Allied Forces sweeping of the French, German, and Italian interests out of all North Africa, all combined to sharply break the continuity and sustenance of colonial regimes across Africa (John and John 2005, 872). On the other hand, the war severely undermined the will and capacity of the colonial powers to maintain their imperial holdings. Having stood against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the British people and members of resistance movements in Europe were inspired by democratic ideologies, anti-racism sentiments, and strident calls for freedom, resulting in more widespread opposition to any imperialistic tendencies.

Also, the major powers had, at the end of the war, suffered physical and economic exhaustion, while global leadership had passed to United States and the USSR. These two countries had been known for their rejection of colonialism—at least when practiced by others. This stance can be understood in the context of their histories. For the United States, its colonial history and pro-freedom sentiments, which have grown over time as particularly encapsulated in the Wilsonian internationalism in the post-First World War diplomacy, are quite apt for understanding its stance against colonialism. The influence of Wilsonian internationalism in shaping and molding American foreign policy has been so underscored that it offers a "better understanding of the highs and the lows of American diplomacy over these decades ... and a better understanding of the tragedies of American foreign policy

that are yet to come” (Yergler 2014). On the other hand, the USSR’s choice of socialism/communism against capitalism, which is seen as a critical bedrock of colonialism, illuminates its rejection of colonialism. This position had led to evolving proletarian internationalism, which was a social concept emplaced to unify working classes across nations of the world to work together for the defeat of capitalism as a global system.

The immediate import of this pervasive anti-colonial sentiment was that, by 1947, it was patently clear that decolonization was in full throttle in Africa, and a wave of independence swept across the continent shortly thereafter, such that by 1980, quite many African states were independent. A few examples include Ethiopia in 1941; Libya in 1951; Morocco and Tunisia in 1956; Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) in 1957; Nigeria, Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Guinea, and Senegal in 1960; Tanzania in 1961; Uganda in 1962; Kenya in 1963; Malawi and Zambia in 1964; Mozambique in 1974; Angola in 1976; and Zimbabwe in 1980 (John and John 2005, 862–71).

But sadly, there are sundry developmental challenges in post-colonial Africa. Democracy has fared badly, as over a hundred coups d’état had left more than twenty military regimes in power, with some of them transmuting to one party civilian government. While the quantum of its damage to the body politics in Africa cannot be easily gauged, military coup ironically was often justified on what the plotters would call leadership ineptitude of the political class. As Meredith (2013, 218–19) has argued,

Whatever their real reasons for seizing power, coup leaders invariably stressed the strictly temporary nature of military rule. All they required, they said, was sufficient time to clear up the morass of corruption, mismanagement, tribalism, nepotism, and other assorted malpractices they claimed prompted them to intervene and restore honest and efficient government and national integrity.

The overall economic lot of Africa is pathetic: twenty-nine of world’s thirty-four poorest nations are found in Africa; and there is an overreliance on foreign expertise, and an uncontrolled population growth rate (32 percent a year, over 40 percent in Kenya). It can be surmised that some African states are, by any economic measure, worse

off than they were as colonies, and some have appeared repeatedly on the FAO's emergency list (John and John 2005, 872). There is perpetuation of the colonially created artificial territorial framework, thus forcing post-colonial governments to grapple with the problem of creating and preserving national unity. Poverty, underdevelopment, and uneven distribution and under-utilization of natural resources are solution-defying problems of post-colonial Africa. Consequently, African states are always in the category of countries of the Global South, which, apart from some exceptions in Asia (e.g., China, Japan, India, etc.) and South America (e.g., Brazil), are largely poor and weak (Okajare 2008, 104–7).

The greatest challenge of post-colonial Africa is leadership. While it can be argued that indolent followership accompanies leadership, it should be noted that leadership bears the compass of any given society. Thus, it is imperative that leadership improves, so as to provide right focus for the society. The leadership crisis in Africa has been aptly captured in the following passage:

A tragedy is befalling Africa—the tragedy of insensitive, retrogressive and unintelligent leaders. It is almost as if it is not the same Africa that produced the likes of Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Nelson Mandela, among others. With the turmoil in Mali, the deployment of drones in Niger Republic and Burkina Faso, the likelihood of US-Africa Command, and the collapse of state economies, the continent . . . is being opened up for recolonisation. Sadly, African leaders whose poor judgment led them to recently accept the new \$200m AU [African Union] headquarters in Addis Ababa as a gift from China, have become inured to the dangers of external control which their incompetence and lack of foresight are engendering. (*The Nation* 2013)

The above is further supported by the following passage:

It is evident that the quality of leadership in the region, nay, in Africa as a whole has declined horribly. There are no brilliant and perceptive leaders conversant with their countries' histories, nor even keenly aware of the dangers of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism. The mediocre leaders

rule their countries badly and embrace desperate methods, including opening up their countries to harmful external influences, to mitigate the effects of their misrule. (ibid.)

The passages quoted above vividly describe the lot of post-colonial African states. Their leadership morass can be taken as an offshoot of Africa's colonial history, in view of the fact that the post-colonial African leaders inherited elitist leadership traits and tendencies from the colonial masters. They have consistently strengthened such traits and tendencies since independence.

Admittedly, some prominent leaders of the continent did well to struggle for the liberation of their different countries from the colonial stranglehold of imperial Europe. Their efforts culminated in the attainment of independence by their countries, and quite a good number of them led their countries in various capacities in the early years of the post-independence era. There are substantial proofs to conclude that they provided robust leadership and good guidance to chart the course of development and nation-building for their countries. Three examples suffice here. The first example: Julius Nyerere led Tanganyika to independence in 1961 and began to lead Tanzania, a union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar, from 1964, when the new Republic was created. He provided a very good example of incorruptible leadership and the doctrine of a free Republic in truth and in deed. With his radical foreign policy action condemning the British role in Rhodesia, his swift diplomacy in securing China's interest-free loan in 1970 to construct the Dar es Salaam-Zambia railway, and, more importantly, with the 1967 *Arusha Declaration*, Nyerere demonstrated that he was an unconventional leader of his time. The *Declaration* vividly captured his intent to block the pilfering of national resources and underscore people's ownership of their resources; it also cautioned leaders against bait from capitalist nations, and encouraged an austere lifestyle for political officials who should draw only one salary (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2010c). The second example: Seretse Khama led Botswana (formerly Bechuanaland) first as Prime Minister from 1964 to 1966, then as President from 1966 to 1980. After the first five years of independence, when the country had to depend on Britain for survival, Botswana began to play active roles in international politics, thanks to its steadily growing economy and strong financial muscle from the 1970s to 1980s. Today, Botswana is one of the few fairly stable economies and peaceful states in Africa and in the Third World, with

an outstanding record of effective management of the HIV/Aids scourge. It was the first African state to make free anti-retroviral drugs available to all its citizens (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2010a). The third and last example: That Nelson Mandela was the architect of modern South Africa is a universally acknowledged fact that bears no repeating here. From his multi-dimensional activism, his twenty-seven year confinement under the most harrowing experience in Robin Island, his emergence as the first black President of South Africa in 1994, to his statesmanly disengagement from office in 1999, and his becoming a towering father figure not only for South Africa but the entire black world—Mandela was able to carve an uncommon niche for himself, such that he remains a great reference point for emergent leaders in Africa and beyond.

But the trend has changed in recent times; Africa suffers from a leadership deficit. This deficit has culminated in the vulnerability of the continent to the manipulative tendencies of the leading powers of the contemporary international system. These tendencies are, at best, modern day replicas of the African experience in the periods of the slave trade and colonial rule, when some members of the African leadership elite collaborated with the foreign overlords to subjugate Africans. In turn, the continent has now become a theatre of Sino-Western rivalry, which is a new trajectory of neo-imperialism as will be shown later in this paper.

## **NATURE OF SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS AND ELEMENTS OF CHINA’S “AFRICA” POLICY**

It is a historical truism that Africa’s relations with the West—which began mainly with the slave trade across the Atlantic in the fifteenth century, and ran through trade in sylvan goods, company rule, missionary activities, and colonial rule, which ended in the twentieth century—has been well explored, and thus bears no repeating here. But China’s relations with Africa did not fit into the same remit as above. In the contemporary context, Sino-African relations may be taken to imply the political, economic, and cultural relations between China and Africa, particularly in the post-colonial epoch of the latter’s history. But it is important to note that Sino-African relations predated the contemporary time. According to Freeman-Grenville (1975), the earliest known mention of Africa in Chinese historical

sources can be found in the *Yu-yang-tsa-tsu* by Tuan Ch'eng-Shih, who died in 863 AD. In this collection of general exploration knowledge, Ch'eng-Shih writes about the "land of po-pa-li," which is today known as Somalia. He adds that "In 1226 AD, Chao Ju-Kua, commissioner of Foreign Trade at Guanzhou in the Fujian province of China completed his *Chu-fan-Chil* (Description of Barbarous Peoples). It discusses Zanzbar (Ts' Ong-Pa) and Somalia (Pi-Pa-Lo)."

It would seem that the information derived from the previous quote about Africa eventually stimulated the hunger for exploration and the desire to know Africa among Chinese officials' circles about two hundred years later. Of course, it is to the voyages of the fifteenth century from China that we can trace the actual origin of Sino-African contact. This began with the series of voyages by the Chinese fleet called "Star Raft," commanded by Admiral Zheng He in the early years of the fifteenth century. In one of the voyages, Zheng He landed in the East African coast in 1418, and repeated the visit between 1421–1422 and 1431–1433 (Snow 1988). These voyages, even if brief, took place during the era of Ming Dynasty in Chinese history. They significantly marked the humble beginning of Sino-African relations, and were essentially intended to spread Chinese cultural attributes to Africa through gifts and titles from the Ming Emperor to local African rulers. This, in turn, led to the establishment of a broad tribute-paying circle from the Horn of Africa to the Mozambican Channel (Orngu 2009, 97). These voyages by Zheng are in, modern times, a major platform for Chinese diplomats in Africa to echo the age-long contact between their country and the continent. For example, in 2007, the Chinese ambassador to South Africa swiftly employed the visits to remind Africans of the trading relations between Africa and China, as Ayuba (2009, 131) notes:

Zhang took to the place he visited tea, Chinaware, silk and technology. He did not occupy an inch of foreign territory, nor did he take a single slave [unlike visitors from the West]. What he brought to the outside world was peace and civilisation. This fully reflects the good faith of ancient Chinese people in strengthening exchanges with relevant countries and their people. This peace-loving culture has taken deep root in the minds and hearts of Chinese people of all generations.



It should be noted that this statement was not intended to merely remind Africans of the age of Sino-African relations, but it was also a deft move to sway the Africans to the Chinese side. At that time, however, there was no official follow-up from China to formalize its relationship with Africa. As a matter of fact, the Vice President of China's Ministry of War burnt all the archival records documenting Zheng's voyages in 1479. This was apparently to delete any hint of past tendencies or interest in overseas territory, and to lay the foundation of China's isolationist policy. Other official policies that followed<sup>1</sup> did not encourage Sino-African relations until much later (Adama 2008, 11). In essence, it can be argued that the Sino-African relationship was largely spasmodic in the fifteenth century and remained cold until the era of decolonization and actual attainment of independence in African history.

The dynamics of the relationship can, therefore, be better appreciated in the context of the colonial experiences of China and Africa in terms of their subjection to foreign domination, their struggle for and attainment of independence, and their post-independence development challenges and the attached sentiments. Following the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter called CCP) in 1921, nationalism grew to become a major platform for unity and the unbending desire to create and develop a modern state of China, having benefited tremendously from the political doctrine of Sun Yat-sen, who had founded the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) in 1912. The doctrines are captured in Sun's Three Principles of the People, which included nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2010b). This growth of nationalism has also given a new impetus and a modern outlook to China as a country that was irrevocably set on the path of international integration, thus compelling the related need to seek overseas investments and promotion of foreign economic interface. However, it is pertinent to note that China's international integration agenda was not predictable given the circumstances, as it was shifting in nature and character. With the Soviet Union's assistance, it was easy for Sun's Nationalist Party and the CCP to join forces, particularly so because veterans (like Mao Zhedong and Zhou Enlai) of the latter had been active players in the former. Rivalry began between Chiang Kai-Shek and Zhedong after the death of Sun in 1925. Kai-Shek emerged leader of the left wing of the Goumidang while Zhedong led the CCP. From about 1949, the international integration of China implied bowing to the

whims of Stalin who, for example, wanted Zhedong to ensure survival of the Goumidang in South China. Zhedong's refusal led to frosty diplomatic relations between China and the Soviet Union. Eventually, Kai-Shek moved his forces and supporters to Taiwan and instituted a centrally planned and state-dominated economic policy, although with some measure of free operation granted to small-scale ventures. This decision stimulated the economic success of Taiwan (Wu 2005).

The Zhedong-Kai-Shek confrontation, as it played out in China's civil war, provided the root for the Sino-Soviet split of the Cold War years, which led to a further shift in China's international integration. All these combined to mark a fundamental change in China's foreign relations, encapsulated under the "open-door policy," which was initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, to open China to foreign businesses that wanted to invest in the country. This policy set into motion the economic transformation of modern China. It was carried out in two stages. The first stage covered the late 1970s and early 1980s, and included the decollectivization of agriculture, the opening of the country to foreign investment, and the permission for entrepreneurs to start businesses as its cardinal provisions. However, most industries remained state-owned. The second stage of the policy began in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. The main provisions were the privatization and outsourcing of many of the state-owned industries, the lifting of price controls and some protectionist policies and regulations. However, state monopolies were retained in sectors such as banking and petroleum (Yeh 1993, 124–51). Its ultimate aim was to fast-track economic reform by promoting a market economy, encouraging international interaction with the West, and thus stimulating investment flows into China and the exchange of technical know-how with the West (Zhu 2001, 1–2, 14). From 1978 until 2013, China's open-door policy resulted in

unprecedented growth with the economy increasing by 9.5% a year. China's economy surpassed that of Japan in 2010 as Asia's largest economy and became the second largest after the United States and is projected to become the world's largest economy by 2025. (ibid.)

This is what came to be known as pragmatic nationalism. While attempting to maintain and promote national independence and an ideology-based foreign policy in the process of international

interaction, the CCP promoted the use of nationalist sentiments to strengthen the people's sense of unity and stimulate a phenomenal power status for China, based on the traditional principles of harmony (Miller 2010). It will be recalled that the Opium Wars of the mid-1800s had inflicted on the people a strange mix of shame and pride, and thus led to an inferiority complex against the steadily advancing West. This became the launching pad of a new sense of nationalism in the twentieth century. Hence, pragmatic nationalism emerged after the open-door policy of the late 1970s, as a means to complement the Four Cardinal Values promoted by Deng Xiaoping to unify the people. These values included keeping to the socialist road, upholding the dictatorship of the proletariat, upholding the leadership of the Communist Party, and upholding Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zhedong's thought.

An aspect of this new Chinese foreign policy orientation that is of interest to the present study is the incorporation of long-term goals of social and economic development with strong emphasis on independence and peace (Shambaugh 1996, 205). China was, therefore, moving from the containment of the earlier years to an era of more robust engagement with the outside world. Essentially, the official mindset in China was that promotion of peaceful development was a means to achieve the national interests of industrialization and economic stability without compromising international objectives of global peace and harmony (Miller 2010). It was in such a context that President Hu Jintao launched the harmonious rise foreign policy dialogue in 2005, which in more ways than one, was a radical departure from some of the afore-noted Four Cardinal Values. Thus, this ideology of pragmatic nationalism rooted in the traditional principles of Confucianism was further modernized between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, amid the policy choice of selective usage of Confucianism and nationalist sentiment as a codifying ideology to secure continuous CCP rule. According to Miller (2010), it was "a logical choice for the Chinese political elites to look back to Confucian philosophy to keep the people unified under their rule because of its strong roots in Chinese history." The foreign policy behavior of China was radically transformed as China looked out for all-embracing engagement with both the developed and developing or under-developed countries of the world. As a matter of fact, one of the positive elements of Chinese nationalism was a Confucianism-based pragmatic approach to economic development, which manifests

in economic nationalism, a non-military and non-revolutionary approach, as well as the necessary confidence in nationalism for the purpose of attaining state's greatness and enhancing its increasing role in international affairs (Shambaugh 1996, 205; Oksenburg 1986, 505–9; Kokkinos 2012, 27). In other words, the CCP deployed positive nationalism in tandem with selective principles of Confucianism to determine the rules of international engagement and, at the same time, maintain a traditional appeal in the promotion of national unity and international harmony (Miller 2010).

Interestingly, some events within the global system combined to promote China's new-found ideology. For instance, the post-Second World War wider geo-political context, as manifested in the bi-polar power configuration and diplomatic fundamentals between the United States and defunct Soviet Union, opened a space for China to define its own position in the emergent world order. Against the backdrop of the depth of the Sino-Soviet relationship on the platform of communism, in which China and Soviet Union were the main communist nations of the world, it is easy to understand the impact of the Cold War in re-shaping the Sino-Soviet relationship, particularly from 1960 to 1989, when both states disagreed irredeemably on communism in the context of contemporary realities, thus leading to Sino-Soviet split. Indeed, the Cold War re-defined the geo-political context not only between United States and the Soviet Union, but also of the Sino-Soviet relationship—and in the binary offer of policy choice it implied, China decided to oppose the bi-polar power structure, and further chose to develop and strengthen relations with the developing and/or under-developed nations. A good example of demonstrating this was the granting of an interest-free loan to Tanzania in 1970 to build a railway line connecting Dar es Salaam with Zambia. The ultimate aim of this Global South relationship was to ensure joint opposition to the two hegemons, and to assist China in its opening process (Zhu 2001, 10). This latter aspect implies that, in foreign policy, China uses nationalism for diplomatic and strategic reasons in order to effectively promote social stability, which is fundamentally based on immediate economic imperatives (Lum et al. 2009, 9–10). This has manifested mainly in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, regions often referred to in as the Global South or the Third World<sup>2</sup> (Claudio 2013, 1–3).

In the case of Africa, the post-Second World War Sino-African relationship was kick-started in 1949 with the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since then, China has been developing and

strengthening diplomatic relations with Africa. The 1955 Bandung Conference represented a critical starting point of the new phase of Sino-African relations. It offered the first opportunity for China and some African countries to formally have direct diplomatic contact beyond the rhetorics of earlier years. For instance, during the conference, the Chinese Premier Zhou En-Lai entertained Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt as a diplomatic gesture to express desire for robust relations. En-Lai also met with diplomats from Ethiopia, Ghana, Sudan, Liberia, and Libya. Beyond this diplomatic routine, one major point of discussion that interested African diplomats was the issue of Soviet expansionism in Eastern Europe. While En-Lai shrugged off criticisms of communism, the conference, at least, reached a consensus in which “colonialism in all of its manifestations” was condemned, implicitly censuring the Soviet Union, as well as the West. But, unfortunately, the African diplomats lacked conviction in the use of their Pan-Africanism platform to maintain a loud voice against communism. It would seem that as emergent nations pre-occupied with the biting challenge of development, the African diplomats opted for caution. As events turned out later, some African leaders embraced the Soviet Union.

Starting with formal establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt on 30 May 1956, China has had formal relations with fifty-one out of the fifty-three independent African States, and currently maintains such relations with forty-five of them (China Embassy Report, 2013). There was a further shift in China’s foreign policy behavior from pragmatic nationalism to internationalism in the decolonization years. Recall that from 1949, the CCP had contended with the challenge of uneasy connection between Chinese nationalism and Communist internationalism. Ordinarily, the internationalism of the proletariat

reflects and expresses the international community and identity of the fundamental interests among the proletarians of the world in their struggle against capitalism and for the victory of socialism and communism, and as such it requires unity of action by the working class of all nations and countries. (Anghelov et al. 1982, 50)

To underscore the need for blending Chinese nationalism with Communist internationalism, Zhedong had written in 1938 that

Chinese Communists must therefore combine patriotism with internationalism. We are at once internationalists and patriots . . . Only by achieving national liberation will it be possible for the proletariat and other working people to achieve their own emancipation. The victory of China and the defeat of the invading imperialists will help the people of other countries. Thus in wars of national liberation patriotism is applied internationalism. (Zhedong 1938, 520–21, cited in Zhimin 2005, 41)

Predictably, this did not enjoy the endorsement of Soviet Union. But the Chinese leadership could not hide their true position for too long. As Zhimin (2005, 42) notes;

Obviously, Chinese leaders could not pretend that pursuing nationalistic agenda was equal to practicing internationalism after the PRC was founded in 1949. They had to integrate their nationalistic agenda with their commitment to socialist internationalism. This task was difficult, particularly because the Soviet Union saw internationalism as the unconditional compliance of other socialist states to Soviet policy. The CCP leadership tried to pursue this double objective in China's foreign policy.

While the African leaders might not necessarily embrace communism in its orthodox sense, the tone and persuasive impact of such a statement as above rubbed off on them, so that in the decolonization years, they considered such remarks soothing and a good source of psychological support. They have since then seen China as “a good friend.” From all indications, this influenced the nature and character of the Sino-African relationship in the 1960s and even beyond, in the sense that they felt China shared their pain and would be a better foreign partner in the long run. This impression of China paid off, as China appeared to blend anti-colonial radicalism with a strong, practical commitment to the principle of non-interference. The wave of decolonization that still raged in the 1960s across Africa made that decade significant in the unfolding history of China's relations with Africa. China offered generous psychological support for nationalist movements across Africa in their struggle for independence, beginning with its outbursts against colonialism in the 1955 Bandung

Conference. This predictably promoted a deep feeling of solidarity and shared sentiments between China and Africa. Sino-African relations in the 1960s peaked with the visits of Premier En-lai to ten Africa countries between 1963 and 1964, during which he articulated the five cardinal principles<sup>3</sup> that would govern China's "Africa" foreign policy (Adama 2008, 10). Accompanied by Vice Premier Chen Yi, En-Lai visited the United Arab Republic (now Egypt), Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia, between 13 December 1963 and 5 February 1964 (*ibid.*).

The following decade witnessed a thorough strengthening of the China-Africa solidarity and the reinvigoration of several aspects of their relations. China reaped the gains of its support for the African struggle for independence. With a good number of them already enjoying diplomatic recognition by and membership in the UN in the 1970s, African countries snubbed all Western threats and pressures, and supported China's quest in 1971 for the restoration of its legitimate seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Africa produced twenty-six out of the seventy-six votes in China's favor (Orngu 2009, 98). This marked a crucial turning point in the China-Africa diplomacy. Apart from this 1971 election, however, it should be noted that China's vibrant diplomacy in Africa was in a lull in the closing years of the 1960s up to 1982. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that was launched in June 1966 had telling impact, not just on the internal dynamics of China but also on its foreign policy. While details of this are under consideration elsewhere (Okajare 2014), it can be hinted here that the Revolution forced China to cut (or at least relax) diplomatic ties with most of the nations of the world. This was worsened by the economic revolution of the late 1970s, particularly under Deng Xiao-Ping, which foisted economic reform on China from 1978. While this would seem to have thawed the hard-line posture from the West, particularly the United States, it forced China off the African diplomatic radar up until the 1980s (John, and John 2005, 850–54).

The foregoing implies that from the late 1970s, the bedrock of China's foreign policy changed from pragmatic nationalism to internationalism, which was designed as a strategy to position China for greater international attainment. As already indicated, having secured citizens' patriotism on the threshold of nationalism, the internal dynamics of China, as a communist state, favored a further launch into internationalism. Tull (2006, 459–60) infers that China's



switch from a purely nationalist policy to a more internationally oriented policy direction, as well as its particular interest in Africa, are core elements of a larger strategy, tailored to achieve a more multi-polar and non-intervening global order and international cooperation on the platform of multilateral diplomacy. The drive is thus a product of remarkable development in China's foreign policy and its desire to be incorporated into the international system, along with the quest for a vantage position that can make China play a larger role on global politics. To a great extent, therefore, China's foreign policy has grown to be more dynamic, constructive, flexible, and self-confident.

The decade between 1980 and the end of the Cold War was marked by a substantial improvement in Sino-African relations. While there was continuity in China's relations with the developed world, China gave greater attention to its engagement with Africa and other developing countries. In 1982, China appeared to have shed the lull of the 1970s, as Zhao Ziyang, China's Premier visited Africa and announced the new form of cooperation that China wished to pursue with Africa. He added four additional principles to those earlier enunciated by En-Lai in 1963–1964. These included equality in relations, diversification in terms of cooperation for mutual development, effectiveness of aid for Africa, and a bilateral approach to the China-Africa axis (Orngü 2009, 98; and Adama 2008, 11–12). A close scrutiny of these principles would readily indicate that China's relationship with Africa was assuming an economic dimension against the international proletarianism, which was the old guiding principle. This major shift was to incorporate more geo-political and geo-economic interests than the previous strategy of working with Africa to boost Chinese power and create a "Third World Movement" coalition of less industrialized states (Mensah 2010, 96). In a similar vein, it has been observed that the renewed pro-Africa shift is a reflection of a change in China's international interests and diplomatic calculations from political objectives to that in which economic considerations predominate more than anything else (Yin and Vaschetto 2011, 45). This agrees with the common expression in diplomacy that self-preservation is the first law of survival. This can be understood within the context of China's fairly steady growth rate following the afore-noted 1978 economic revolution/reform. Such growth rate could only be sustained with an assurance of steady supply of natural resources, which are readily available in Africa.

China was also constrained to return fully to Africa by reason of the strategic need to roll back Taiwan's diplomatic gains in the years



of China's absence. This was a move to sustain the "One China" policy, which defines the view that there is only one state called "China," despite the existence of two governments that claim to be "China." At the diplomatic level, this means that countries seeking diplomatic relations with the PRC (People's Republic of China) must break official relations with the Republic of China (ROC) and vice versa. This came to a head in 1989 after the Tiananmen Massacre tragedy, which led to China's isolation by the West. China considered Africa a trusted old friend and ally to return to. This was more so in view of the pressing need for China to define its place and image in the contemporary international system, following the sudden end of the Cold War in 1989, which left in its wake the uncontested international hegemony of the United States.

State visits by a number of China's officials appear to be the main foreign policy instrument with which China pursued a vigorous, more active and all-embracing foreign policy of cooperation with Africa in the 1990s. The policy was still targeted at the aforementioned needs and at deepening the scope and intensity of China-Africa relations. In May 1996, President Jiang Zemin visited Africa and proposed a five-point agenda for strengthening the Sino-African relationship, which reflect and reveal the relationship's historical background and contemporary realities: to foster a sincere friendship and become each other's reliable, all-weather friends; to treat each other as equals and respect each other's sovereignty and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs; to seek common development on the basis of mutual benefits; to enhance consultation and cooperation in international affairs; and to look into the future and create a more splendid world (Orngu 2009, 113). These fundamental points were designed by China to prepare the Sino-African relationship for the new millennium, which was bound to witness a new phase of international engagements, particularly in view of the collapse of bi-polar power structure via the sudden end of the Cold War in 1989.

Towards the above end, China began to re-enact African sentiments and solidarity in the dying years of the twentieth century to the year 2000, by projecting itself as a developing nation—at least to the African audience. Such portrayal was to underscore the quasi-natural convergence of interests between China, as the biggest developing country, and Africa, as the continent with the largest concentration of developing states (President Jiang, quoted in *People's Daily* 2000). China simultaneously asserted its superior international stature by

using its permanent seat in the UN Security Council to position itself as mentor to Africa and champion of Africa's interests. Consequently, China has called for fairer global trade, debt cancellation, enlargement of the UN Security Council, and support for Africa's reform-oriented initiatives, like NEPAD and AU. China has also been directly involved in peace-keeping operations in Africa. In 2003, for example, China sent 558 soldiers to Liberia, following the latter's severance of ties with Taiwan. China sent in about 1,400 troops to nine missions in Africa in 2004 (Tull 2006, 462–63). The new millennium phase of Sino-African relations was fully launched with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000 as an institutional framework to guide Sino-African relations in the twenty-first century. This forum provides for a triennial meeting to discuss issues of common interest and cooperation. It has been opined that FOCAC provides a framework for China's re-engagement with Africa in the twenty-first century, and openly states renewed and amplified intentions of multifaceted relations with the continent, based predominantly on trade and economic issue areas, but to the mutual benefit of China and the particular African countries involved (Enuka 2011, 190). This has continued under President Hu Jing-Tao and Premier Wen Jiabao.

On the strength of the above, it can be surmised that, from its active origin in the 1955 Bandung Conference, the Sino-African relations had a fairly lengthy and eventful history spanning many decades. Since then, China and Africa have maintained a good measure of consistency in their intercourse, save for the lull from 1966 to 1970. Therefore, the active phase of Sino-African relations grew from the stage of politico-ideological contact of the 1950s to a full-fledged economic engagement as we see it today. The Sino-African relationship has reached such an enviable peak that other major actors particularly of the Western extraction (particularly the United States), feel threatened, thus provoking a Sino-Western rivalry and emplacing Africa as the theater of the attendant intrigues.

Arising from the foregoing explication is that, following their attainment of independence, many African states began to formalize diplomatic relations with China, while a few others related with Taiwan. The nature and character of Sino-African relations as encapsulated in China's "Africa" policy have changed drastically since 1976, after the death of Mao Zhedong. This was in the context of China's open policy engineered by Deng Xiaoping, which embraced more robust and deep engagement with developing countries. The main elements of modern

China's engagement with Africa can be well understood on three planks, namely: trade and investment, foreign loans and aid, and debt cancellation. These three are deliberately designed to promote China's "strategic diplomacy, ideological values and commercial benefit" (Haroz 2011, 68).

A few instances suffice here. China's trade and investment in Africa, which recorded its first wave in 1981 and stood at about US\$660,000, rose exponentially to US\$24 million four years later. There was a steady growth throughout the last years of the twentieth century. The formation of FOCAC in 2000 became the final launching pad for the promotion of China-Africa trade relations. While China's trade with Africa stood at over US\$32 million in 2005, its foreign direct investment was well over US\$900 million in the same period. By 2006, annual African exports to China rose by over 40 percent (Kwesi and Delphine 2008, 41–42; Maxi 2007, 78–82). The trend has witnessed consistent rise since then, such that China forages into all major sectors of the economies of many African states and constitutes a major threat to the traditional Western hegemony.

China's economic diplomacy in Africa has equally manifested in the banking sector. This began with China's enlistment into the membership of the World Bank in 1980 and that of the African Development Bank (ADB) in 1985. This offered China the ample opportunity to bid on projects financed by these financial bodies. Its membership of ADB as a non-African state is particularly interesting as a strategic position to enable China to penetrate the economies of African states. This development has deepened China's economic engagements with Africa and facilitated the strengthening of a South-South economic collaboration to the discomfiture of the West. China also established three banks in 1994 as it was strengthening its financial sector by way of reform. They included China Development Bank, China Export Import Bank, and China Agricultural Development Bank. While these banks were under government control, according to Haroz (2011, 69), they were to make money. In other words, they had to operate as conventional banking institutions with the attendant shrewdness. There is also the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), which is arguably the world's largest bank in terms of market capitalization. In 2007, the ICBC indicated its interest to acquire a 20-percent stake in South Africa's Stanbic Bank, in a deal that would be the biggest foreign direct investment in post-Apartheid South Africa (Kwesi and

Delphine 2008, 42). For the most parts of China's trade relations with Africa since 2000, these banks have been the main vehicles that drive China's trade and investment.

In view of the pressing need of oil in the Chinese economy in recent years, China has had to forage into the oil industry in some African states, including Nigeria, Sudan, Angola, Chad, Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Taylor (2005, 45) notes that

China has been faithfully developing linkages with oil-rich countries in Africa such as Angola, Nigeria and Sudan. Since around 1995, China has pursued an "outward-looking oil economy" policy. This is for primary economic reasons as the average production cost of Chinese onshore oil is comparatively very expensive compared to African or Middle East oil.

In 2005, China was consuming about 60 percent of Sudan's oil and, in 2006, claimed to have acquired 45 percent stake in a Nigerian offshore oil and gas field. This trend has remained unabated since then. Today, it can be conveniently asserted that China has a multi-billion dollar investment in African oil and gas (Taylor 2006, 941–45). It goes without saying that this massive investment is a direct consequence of China's pressing need, which in turn is the primary factor underpinning the recent remarkable improvement in Sino-African relations. In the last two decades, China has grown to be a net importer of oil (mainly from Africa), while it had been projected earlier that this would be about 45 percent of its oil use by 2010 (Falola and Genova 2005, 72). This oil diplomacy is buffered by Chinese diversified heavy investment in developing African infrastructural facilities, like housing, schools, roads and rail lines, as well as telecommunications (Maxi 2007, 81).

Closely connected with the above is China's policy on foreign aid and loans to Africa. This began as early as the 1950s when many African countries were still embroiled in their anti-colonial struggles, and still continues till the present time. Wenping (2008, 15–20) has categorized the periods of China's aid in Africa to two: 1956 to the late 1970s, which he sees as time of idealism and political drive; and the late 1970s to the present, a period of pragmatism and economic drive. It can be inferred also that the main features of China's aid in

Africa include non-conditionality, emphasis on bilateral aid projects, and focus on strong hardware projects (e.g., physical infrastructure). In addition, China has provided more favorable loan terms to Africa. In fact, China's aid and investment in Africa typify a bundle of grants and loans given at concessional and commercial rate interests. Such loans are subsidized through its aid budget and its granting of lower interest rates than those obtained in conventional commercial lending outfits. The Angolan experience suffices here for illustration. Chinese aid was provided for Angola at rates 0.75–1.25 percent, with a generous grace period compared to those of Western commercial lenders such as Standard Chartered Bank, which offered no grace period and required faster repayment (Brautigam 2010). Haroz (2011, 74) strengthens this argument by saying, "Although not all Chinese loans carry such favourable terms, many of them beat or match what is available from other sources."

The other leg of China's "Africa" policy is debt cancellation. While China appeared reluctant on debt-related initiatives at first, the whole content of China's financial policy was widened in the context of the establishment of FOCAC. At the first meeting of FOCAC in 2000 in Beijing, China made a commitment to cancel about 156 overdue African debts to the tune of about US\$1.3 billion in two years. More fundamental steps were taken in the 2003 and 2006 meetings of FOCAC.<sup>4</sup> Two of the direct consequences of the meetings are germane for note here: one, in 2007, China hosted the annual meeting of the ADB and announced the plan to provide US\$20 billion in infrastructure and trade financing for Africa over the next three years; and two, the China-Africa Development Fund was formally established. The trend appears to have been the same since then.

The foregoing represents a cursory illustration of China's deep infiltration into Africa. What can be surmised from it is that China has gained major footholds in areas that were traditionally reserved as exclusive spheres of Western influence in Africa. What is more, the trend appears unstoppable—at least in the foreseeable future, as China's presence in Africa is very pervasive. As Chan (quoted from Kwesi and Delphine 2008, 46) has pointed out;

The Chinese are not just about everywhere, they are in most places Western nations are not. The Chinese diaspora run everything from grocery stores and building material shops to restaurants and corner stores in even the most remote

provincial towns throughout Africa. Beijing has zeroed in on pariah states like Sudan where Western firms are either barred by sanctions or constrained from doing business because of concerns over human rights, repressive policies, labour standards and security issues. Chinese construction firms have been contracted to rebuild Nigeria's railroads, pave Rwanda's and Ethiopia's main roads, build Ethiopia's Tekeze Dam and Sudan's oil pipeline network, and reconstruct the continent's electricity grids and telecommunications networks.

Predictably, while the West is apprehensive and rattled to the level of paranoia, a good number of African leaders appear more accommodating and receptive to China's rising profile. Views of some African state officials suffice here to buttress this position. Mgidlana<sup>5</sup> (2008, 50–51) states that

The manner in which this relationship has developed is that it has resulted in less talk and demands for preconditions, to more support, trade and projects. It has been underpinned by pragmatism and mutually beneficial arrangements, namely, there would be a huge infrastructure project(s) that need to be delivered, a complete package offered, construction and skills transfer occurs. There is easier access to finances on favourable terms on terms that have as yet not lead [sic] to irresponsible and high indebtedness. Support to infrastructure provided a complete package that included the feasibility studies, construction and skills transfer and evaluation. These terms of engagement are mutually beneficial as China need the energy resources while Africa seeks to address key strategic priorities of development.

It was strategic for some African states to embrace China. A good example was Chad. As President Idriss Deby put it, "It used to be that when we had problems with our neighbours sending mercenaries to invade us that none of our complaints before the United Nations would pass, because China blocked them. Since breaking relations with Taiwan and opening the door to Chinese investment, we have been able to raise our concerns without taboo" (French and Polgreen 2007).

What feeds the West's fear of China's emergence most is China's dogged and unapologetic pursuit of its age-long policy of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of other states. This has manifested in the "no-string" aid and investment of China in some African countries that are long overdue for economic and political reforms. Liu Guijin, China's special envoy for Africa, put it succinctly: "We don't attach political conditions. We have to realise the political and economic environment [in Africa] are not ideal. But we don't have to wait for everything to be satisfactory or human rights to be perfect [before we engage with a country]" (Brautigam 2009, 284; interpolations mine). For this, China has been severely castigated, particularly by the West, and there is growing discontent between China and the West, whose donor agencies give grants and aid that usually come with strings attached, like the demand for imposition of strict fiscal austerity measures.

## **CONCLUSION: AFRICA IN THE VORTEX**

The aforementioned elements and others (not captured herein for want of space) of China's "Africa" policy have deepened the scope and intensity of Sino-Africa relations, and, in turn, have provoked a fresh Sino-Western rivalry, as it has been playing out in Africa in recent times. The sustenance of this trend implies a drastic decrease in the entrenched Western influence in Africa, as China has offered an alternative mutually beneficial political and economic relationship, forcing the United States and European Union to cope with the unpleasant reality of a new challenger capable of upturning the status quo. The alternative is one of binary dimensions, namely, as a development model and as a partner. Having liberated a greater majority of its huge population out of poverty in the last few years, China represents a good model and a platform of courage for Africa with similar experience of foreign domination. Also, it goes without saying that China's relationship with Africa is largely one of partnership and not superior-subordinate engagement, compared to Africa's experience with Western Powers and institutions. As Dowden (2009, 497) notes;

African leaders use China's very interest in Africa, and its tempting condition-free loans, as leverage against the



demands of the IMF, the World Bank and Western donors. Since the end of the Cold War, African leaders have had almost no foreign partners other than the West and no alternative model except the Western reform agenda based on multi-party democracy, free market and free press. Governments that are resistant to these reforms see China as a lifeline.

There is no denying that leaders and commoners in many parts of Africa share the foregoing view about China vis-à-vis the West. Generally, the nature and character of China's engagement with Africa are such that China is now a preferred friend in Africa, and indices for this pleasant Sino-African interface appear growing by the day. Yet, in view of their structural and functional weaknesses, African countries lack the diplomatic spine to frontally demonstrate their preference, thus leading to entrenchment of the Sino-Western rivalry. The implication for Africa in this rivalry is that a new trajectory of neo-imperialism has been unfurled on the continent. African states' power of negotiation is further depleted, while the whole gamut of its diplomacy is patently weakened. For instance, the Sino-Western interests in Africa have not considerably promoted African interest on a global space, like the UN. It has remained a situation of keeping the continent active only as supplier of primary products. Africa remains a land of endless conflicts, however, and thus remains at the mercy of the more powerful partners.

Africa, therefore, is deeply enmeshed in the vortex of intrigues of purposive neo-imperialists from both divides of the global geopolitics: the West from Global North, and China from Global South. Incidentally, both are running capitalist economies, with the former having a long history of capitalism and the latter with a capitalist economy in transition. Both are avid hunters for inexhaustible sources of raw materials and overseas markets for their finished products. The implications of this include (but is not limited to) the deepening expatriate hegemony on African economies, in which case, well-educated African engineers and other construction workers are employed only as subordinates to averagely (if not poorly) educated Chinese technicians who ordinarily cannot fit in to the Chinese economy. This is a continuity of the established Western tradition. Also, it widens the scope and deepens the intensity of skewed international economic order against Africa, and stifles any chance of African home-grown initiative for economic development.



Strategically, it is in the interest of both China and the West that this anti-Africa setting be sustained. It would seem that, while ordinary African folks grumble against the trend, they are incapable to make their voices heard. Equally, African leaders appear helpless with narrow latitude of choice. Between China and the West, it is a case of common fixtures and different approaches. These two classes of neo-imperialists share a common tradition of an unbridled hunt for African resources and the exploitation of African labor for their metropolitan economies, thus leading to thoroughly skewed international economic order and partnership. The only admissible difference lies in the nature of the relationship, the principles that underpin it, and the manners of engagement. While these are critical indices for any international relations issue, they are perfunctory and less fundamental if viewed in the context of the end-result of such engagement.

In the instance under review, China and the West have literally turned Africa into a theater of their rivalry, where they work assiduously to outsmart each other. For example, Africa has now become a region of high strategic stake not for its own reason but for the economic and diplomatic benefits of the world powers. The whole scenario depicts a thinly veiled scramble (Osei-Hwedie 2008, 80–90), a replica of which had played out among European powers in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Recall that the scramble was formally settled at the 1884–1885 Berlin “Africa” conference where Africa was sliced into colonial territories among European powers without consulting with Africans, thus preparing the continent for colonial rule.

African leaders are, therefore, expected to wake up to the reality that confronts the continent in its quest for development. It should be noted that whatever largesse that comes from either side—like the recent donation of a magnificent AU secretariat by China, or the generous support for peace-keeping, anti-terrorism war, and sundry purposes by the West—it is fraught with inherent strings, which, in the long run, will be against the overall interest of the recipient. There is no free lunch in international politics. If this trend continues, Africa, as currently configured in its political economy, cannot attain meaningful development in the sense that there will be continuous stifling of effective home-grown economic revival architecture. The continent will only be re-chained and forced to grow backward—a position akin to its better forgotten colonial experience. To avoid a repeat of the partition, African leadership elites have to look inward and address critical issues of corruption, poverty, inept leadership, diseases, inter-

ethnic tensions, and so on. This will reduce the level of vulnerability of Africa and position the continent on a favorable pedestal where it can establish a genuine framework and platforms of engagement with its partners, in order to properly address pressing development needs. It will also empower Africa to get increased balance of trade, thereby contributing to mutual development and reducing the continent's dependence on foreign aid, whether from China or the West.

On the other hand, Africa must strive to leverage the binary streams of offer for maximum benefit. This appears to be about the best opportunity Africa has had since independence to translate external support into overall welfare gains. Individual and collective approaches will be timely to take full advantage of this situation. Thorough political and economic reforms, involving all African leaders and peoples of different classes and persuasions, should be carried out where necessary. In other words, the human factor needs to be urgently purged in Africa as an ingenious means to fast-track effective functioning of other initiatives. This is in view of the unassailable fact that it is the human capital that drives all other mechanisms of development to work. This should be followed with a thorough re-positioning of the AU as the main continental architecture of African diplomacy and development. The AU should be well honed as a collective mechanism to address the biting challenges of development in Africa in the twenty-first century and beyond.

## NOTES

- 1 For example, new shipbuilding laws were introduced, which restricted vessels to smaller sizes. China's isolationist policy, which lasted for several centuries until the mid-twentieth century, has been attributed to China's policy to act as a peaceful international actor with no intent to acquire overseas territories.
- 2 China's policy in the Global South is being interrogated in S. T. Okajare, "China in Africa: An Example of Contradictory Solidarity and Internalised Neo-Imperialism in Global South," working paper.
- 3 In his dual capacity as Premier and Foreign Affairs Minister, Zhou En-Lai noted some key principles, including respect of sovereignty, non-interference in other nation's affairs, and support for Africa's development. But he clearly mentioned the five principles, which were sincere friendship, equal treatment in relations, working for common development, building on their cooperation and solidarity, and working towards a common future.
- 4 These two meetings were held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and Beijing, China, respectively. In the former, tariff-free concession on export was granted to some African countries, and financial assistance was stepped up for the African Human Resources Development Fund. Moreover, the first China-Africa Business Conference was held, where more than 500 African and Chinese businessmen negotiated and signed twenty-one cooperation deals to the total tune of US\$1 billion. The latter meeting was more remarkable, as the following were the main deals as announced by President Hu Jing-Tao: the doubling of the 2006 level of assistance provision of \$5 billion as preferential loans, the creation of the China-Africa Development Fund of \$5 billion to support investment of Chinese companies' investment in Africa, the

construction of a conference center for the AU, the debt forgiveness of over \$1.3 billion overdue by 2005, the increase of zero-tariff export items to China from 190 to 440 from LCDs, the setting up of three to five Sino-African trade and economic zones, the training of professionals for Africa, and the construction of thirty local hospitals and a hundred rural schools.

- 5 G. Mgidlana was Special Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer on New Partnerships for Africa's Development.

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