

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

China-Africa Relations: How Tight Are the ‘Strings’ Attached?

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Abstract:

Observers view the expansion of China’s relationship with African countries not only from its perspective as a multifaceted endeavour but also from the nuances extant in the academic and non-academic professional circles. The factors underlying the relationship have created debates across diverse academic disciplines including trade and finance, development, Peacekeeping and global security, diplomacy as well as in the areas of geopolitics and technology transfer. These discussions and debates emerged after China’s aid and investments in Africa increased with incredible annual surges; thus attracting global attention. Drawing on the background of those discussions, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing debate by producing the perceptions (pros and cons) of individuals unrelated to official voices and state policies with regard to China’s exploitations of African resources and the oft cited Chinese policy of ‘no strings’ attached.

Keywords: China-Africa relations, development, FDI, ‘no strings’, US, West

1. Introduction

The ideal is unattainable: the advantage will always be on the donor’s side... I hope we won’t become a class of brokers, interpreters if you will, between the majority of our people and the powers that be. – Ali Jimale Ahmed (1987).

From a political ideology of conservative communism and impenetrable economic system, China has in the past few decades reformed its investment policies to participate in global investments. With the West’s urge for globalization and market economy and domestic pressures in its growing industrial sector, China has reformulated the conduct of its strategies. As a result, it became among the leading countries that took unprecedented endeavours towards the fulfilment of enviable economic globalization in terms of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow and outflow. That success is evidenced from its penetration into the Western consumer economies and the acceptance of Western counter-penetration into the huge Chinese market. Additionally, an outstanding economic performance over the last few decades led to China’s emergence as an Asian giant and the second largest economy in the world, next to the USA. Despite the achievements and enthusiasm, critics have equated the Asian nation’s economic intervention and heavy investment in Africa to a new ‘scramble’, new ‘cold war’ and even ‘neo-colonialism’. With that discourse in mind, this essay discusses about the opposing opinions resulting from China’s investment in Africa, the Chinese policy of ‘no strings attached’, and how the impact of the relationship is perceived outside the official records.

2. Method of Study

In order to discuss the China-Africa relations and the phenomenon related to Chinese aid and investment coming into Africa without inherent conditions or “strings” attached, we used the qualitative method and adopted the interview as a tool for primary data collection. Our objective for conducting the study was two-fold: a) to obtain the “public perception of China” (Fook, 2010:549); and b) to assess the contending views regarding China’s “no strings” policy. To achieve that goal, we tried to seek the unofficial views and opinions of people who are neither involved in the formation of state policies nor have affiliation in state bureaucracy as employees. The intention for such selection was taken as caution to avoid the imposition of “an external theory on the subjective views of the actors” (Dooley, 2004:263).

The interviewed sample of population consists of 26 randomly selected individuals of African and non-African origin. They represent various social backgrounds including lecturers, small traders, self-employed individuals and ordinary people. They were interviewed on various dates in 2012 and 2013 in Kenya, UAE, UK, Ethiopia, Italy, and in China. While some of the respondents were interviewed face-to-face, others preferred to respond by email. All interviewees were given the following two open-ended questions:

- What is your opinion regarding the current China-Africa relations and Chinese investment and involvement in African countries?
- How do you compare Western relations with Africa to Chinese relations with Africa?

The study also benefited from existing secondary data acquired from various sources that include the internet, academic journals, and other relevant information in magazines and newspapers. In section 3 we produce a discussion of the contending views surrounding China-Africa relations. It will be followed by section 4 which will provide an account of the findings and discussion of the individual opinions. The 5th segment will focus on a discussion about China's 'no strings attached' policy, followed by section 6 as the conclusion.

3. The Contending Views

Like other contentious issues of global geopolitical concerns, the tremendous shift of China's political economy, particularly its entry into Africa, has received a great deal of criticism. The initiative has been reproached as "fresh neocolonialism disguised as South-South development" (Servant, 2005). Elsewhere it was described as a mission in pursuance of the exploitation of a "Hopeless Africa" (The Economist, 2000a) whose woes are blamed on "its present leaders" while some of the problems are attributed to "African society and history" (The Economist, 2000b); particularly "slavery and colonialism" what Eno and colleagues described as "the worst terrorism on Africa" Eno et al. (2012:9). This literature indicates how the move by China has prompted massive launch of attacks by Western media and intellectuals in a bid to demonize China.

In addition to accusations of huge environmental degradation, the West's condemnation is also focused on China's disregard for issues on human rights and good governance as contravened by the African leaders in whose countries it invests. Accordingly, the "tensions" (Grimm, 2013:11) emerging from the multi-faceted China-Africa relations have taken a centre stage, creating conflicting views among national and international development experts as well as in the professional and academic arena. On the one hand, whereas an accusing finger is pointed at China, on the other hand China's political approach of "soft-power" is regarded by many as a long awaited relief and an alternative to the continent's dissatisfaction with the "hard power" that characterises Africa's aid relationship with its traditional (Western) donors (Nye, 2004).

Brautigam (2010a) and Rotberg (2008) expand the discussion with an appraisal of the China-Africa relationship from multifarious viewpoints including development of infrastructure, economic aid in FDI and loans as well as China's commitment to endure the hardships and complexities involving the nature of Africa's business environment. Similarly, Versi (2007) raises no doubt in determining why China is suitable for the continent, regardless of the West's anxiety of the 'Dark Continent' slipping off the grip of their dependency.

The pro-Western think-tank constructed well articulated cases, lashing at China as an emerging power set for neocolonialism and exploitation which enormously favours its ideals despite evidence of the investment as trade and economic cooperation (Taylor, 2004 & 2005). From a different standpoint, a section of scholars foresee the strategic benefits African countries can garner to the economic enhancement of their countries (Van der Wath, 2004; Draper, 2006). In the same tutelage, experts such as Alden (2005) believe that China's investment will impact positively on the people of the continent in terms of technology transfer and other skills whose acquisition remains necessary for Africa's economic growth and development. Samy (2010) casts aspersions on the complexity of the Asian country's aid and investment regimes since real official figures are not disclosed and China's aid programs are difficult to distinguish from its wider trade and investment. In the same vein of argument, Sun's (2014) comment regarding "China's own policy actively contribut[ing] to the confusion between development finance and aid" supports Samy's analysis of the opaqueness inherent to Chinese involvement in the continent.

The critics' frequently repeated argument, among others, hinges on China's policy of "non interference" and respect for domestic sovereignty, in other words described by Taylor (2006) as a "sacrosanct nature of state sovereignty," and Servant (2005) as "moral qualm." Although China claims adherence to a principle of refraining from fanning fire in the internal political squabbles of its partners, the challengers of its policy portray this *neutrality* as an indifference and lack of moral commitment to hold despotic leaders accountable for aggravating human rights and undermining the democratic doctrine (Taylor, 2006; Servant, 2005).

Ilana Botha (2006:104) injects more fuel into the debate with a claim that "some so-called aid projects are in fact 'prestige' projects that appeal to the egos of African leaders," and therefore contrary to the ideals of effective economic development. Further elaborating the point, Botha draws the reader's attention to another dichotomy – that certain "aid projects are aimed at facilitating China's commercial interests," rather than ushering in a promising prosperity to the African people. The diatribe continues as Mhandara and colleagues (2013:84) similarly unveil that "China's ties its aid (sic) to using Chinese companies and procurement of materials in China," – hence a job creation for Chinese citizens rather than *wasting* the opportunity on Africans.

In a response to the critics, Deborah Brautigam (2010b) acknowledges the hypocrisy wrought in the part of the anti-China analysts on their silence over moral decadence as committed by Western institution. She highlights how Barclays Bank's and Royal Bank of Scotland's involvement in Angola remain absent from the academic concerns of those whose literature selectively condemns China for disdainful good governance and human rights. On a similar ground, Obiorah (2008:5) confronts the advocates of Western doctrine of good governance with the rationale that "China represents hope that another world is possible in which bread is accorded primacy over the vote." In the African context, Obiorah's argument articulates the prevalent dissatisfaction with over

“two decades of economic 'reform' supposedly adopted by African government (sic) but driven by Western governments, donors and the IFIs.”

These trends made a section of observers to juxtapose the common African citizen's distrust with the West to that of a migration from “Washington consensus' to 'Beijing consensus' based on the Chinese model of state-guided capitalism” (Cheru and Obi, www.worldfinancialreview.com). Therefore it is the argument of China's supporters that Africa's embrace of the arrival of China's FDI for development came as a blessing. According to this group of observers, the relationship must be seen as a needed intervention that decreases the anguish of the poor majority compared to the Western aid often ambushed by the privileged minority who constitute the ruling elite and the few around them. As a measure of diffusing the resilient accusation labelled against China, Professor Xiaoyang (2014) reminds the opponents to view China-Africa relations from the global perspective that enshrines capitalist systems of modern market economy. From that aspect, Xiaoyang suggests, we can understand the relationship as part of the general process; one that fosters globalization and extends beyond the mutual China-Africa cooperation (www.spp.ceu.hu).

Proponents on the anti-China platform of the debate bring attention to the dire consequences the African people are destined to face as a result of commodities imported from China at the expense of the local manufacturers and the skilled manpower that depends on locally produced goods for a living (Draper, 2006). But accusations of unbalanced China-Africa relationship do not seem to convince Bodomo (2009:176) who describes the issue of imbalance as a “largely exaggerated notion.” In their analysis, Mhandara et al. (2013:84) bring to our attention to “the complex nature” of what constitutes “China-Africa relationship which makes it difficult to generalize conclusions.” Thus, in order to avoid generalization in the demystification of the ‘complex nature’ of the cooperation between Africa and China, we produce in the next few paragraphs a section of the unofficial voice that is often absent from the discussions.

4. The Unofficial Opinion

Answering a question to one of the authors, Somali trader Abdullahi Elmi claims, “The West operated way out of focus by dumping large amounts of financial resources in unproductive projects like good governance, regime change, structural adjustment, and democratization.” Another respondent and IT security expert, Ali Mohamud Osman, shares the same adversary sentiments and extends the argument into another facet: “These imposed programs [Western sponsored projects] are undertaken in accordance with the instructive formulae of Western domination, without accommodating African culture and environment as enriching components towards the realization of effective African ownership.”

Wycliffe A. Onyango convincingly commends the Chinese initiative: “The average African wouldn't need to employ complex statistical analysis to comprehend China's approach to win the heart of the people.” He draws a practical example very common in Kenya:

Just look at the infrastructural development and other projects the Chinese are undertaking in various areas in Kenya and other parts of the continent. These will impact the common African who has been eager for such development but could not attain through decades of Western aid.

Onyango's compatriot, Jane Z. Achieng, makes her point with a comparative clarification of the Western and Chinese donors and their African beneficiaries: “Western aid has benefited the top leaders with powers to siphon the aid funds back into the West for acquisition of properties, while China's projects in the continent take to the heart the needs of the ordinary citizens who live from hand to mouth.” A young West African in his late 20s who is a student in China has the same opinion as his North African college mate: “Which country has ever given anything free to any country without underlying interests? Both China and the West are interest-driven. Whoever can buy those who call themselves leaders will survive the exploitation game.” His Moroccan friend adds, “These days they [Chinese] are so many in my country. They say they came to help the people to develop, but they are taking everything”

Yohannes Haile Michael sounds to be satisfied with China's arrival. He describes the scenario as “just a tip of the iceberg as far as the emissions of deplorable sentiments towards the West is concerned”. Yohannes then explains his point:

Africa's development has long been doomed by Western policy, high interest loans, lack of technology transfer and imperial dictatorship under the cover of democracy. But Africa had no one to turn to for its gripe because things were in the tight fist of the West. Our appreciation of China's arrival is one of the ways we can show our bitterness towards Western policy. They exploited us until they made us poor of the poorest and a society synonymous with failure.

Through these sentiments, Africans are sending a message of displeasure, a reality that China's investment is alluded to healing; a form of communal consolation over a long despised situation of dominance by a single player in the field. Hussein Abdul Chiwanuka, an expatriate in the Arabian Gulf, comments:

We have been long at odds with American and Western mistreatment, but we had no otherwise. We had to abide by their rules of the game. Our reaction to that bad policy is visible from Africa's overwhelming embrace of China. It is neither scramble nor slavery, nor exploitation. I see this relationship as a win-win partnership.

The independent opinions reveal Africa's need for pragmatic development capable of addressing the aspirations of the grassroots, as compared to the dumping of colossal funds in fictitious projects in the hands of “dubious NGOs and dishonest political leaderships,” remarks Ali Salem Hassan. But can Africa obtain such development without ‘strings’ (read it ‘interests’ or ‘conditions’ if you like) attached, as some critics advocate?

John F. Frymire, who has lived in both China and the West, explains how the West, as colonial power, “raped and pillaged throughout the Mother Continent” and how “colossal waste of funds” has damaged African economy and development goals. Contrasting the two competitors, John cautiously asserts, “China represents the lesser of evils, since the western powers tended to bloc together to promote their Euro- and Amero-centric platforms.” Richard J. Baltus, on the other hand, comments on China-

Africa relations as “short time gain and profit” in favour of the Asian country. His concern relates to “the cheap material” which China uses to construct road infrastructure in the continent i.e. in Ethiopia, which “some say won’t last long.” Richard concludes his brief discussion with fair remarks: “China’s interest is purely business focused and not at all altruistic. However, China has not set up aid agencies with programs that deepen Africa’s dependency on them like Western countries have set up.”

After noting the possible degrees of comparison, John Christopher Thomas notes, “Western relations with Africa stem from the roots of colonization while Chinese relations stem from a point of economic growth for China.” Although he thinks both competitors are motivated by own gains, he acknowledges that “the reverberations of African cultural influence throughout numerous generations are felt today in the West, while this cultural influence has yet to be reflected in China.” Godfrey Falola believes, “No one comes to build your house with his resources unless he sees a better prospect for doing that. When you look carefully at today’s materialistic world, both contenders may be the same although China has neither enslaved nor colonized Africa. But who knows what they will do next? There are already complaints of how they conduct business in Africa and their mistreatment of Africans in China.”

A unique opinion is shared by respondent Abderrazak Dammak who contextualizes his discussion within the realm of hegemony - politically, economically and militarily. In Abderrazak’s opinion: “Western relations with Africa are similar to Chinese relations with Africa. They are inherently entangled with power: the theory of the benevolent and the poor. It is an overlap of the same old characteristics of colonizer and colonized.” Mary Williams provides a very concise comment: “They are both exploiters, but China did not harm Africa as much as the West had done. But that doesn’t mean Africa shouldn’t be careful; because it’s all about African resources.” According to his point of view, Steve Williams states, “Considering that Western partnership has put Africa at the bottom of the world, Africa has a good reason to try the Chinese recipe.”

Alfred Njuguna Muigai sounds conscious of how “sometimes it is a big dilemma choosing between two [exploiters]; no matter which one you know better. But finally I would choose China because they are more practical in doing things than the so-called developed world.” A female interviewee who asked for anonymity responds ironically to the interviewer, “In Dar es Salaam, the Chinese are selling anything they can lay their hands on,” including small scale businesses which were to benefit the low income citizens. A middle aged African and a dealer of second hand cars accuses the Asian nation of “hunting African resources although they are giving something back to the people. I think there is no giving Africa something free without something in return. I don’t think that if we didn’t have the minerals they would invest so much money.” Mustafa Gameel views the situation as “give and take” because this is “exactly what the Chinese are doing in many parts of my country, Egypt.”

Nejib bin Othman Ali attributes China’s arrival in his country to various factors that include “staggering Tunisian economy, high cost of living, a fluctuating dollar and a mounting social unrest...rising unemployment, loose border control” as well as businessmen who recently started importing from China. Nejib pinpoints that although China provided Tunisia with “consecutive financial aids and loans,” the funds came as part of a program “attached to a larger package of long term economic agreements and potential investment in different areas of the Tunisian economy.” Other respondents gave more or less the same view as Halima Jama Ali; that the bone of contention was “African resources” and that China did not care much about “human rights” or “governance” as long it got the “minerals” and other commodities that persuaded its investment into the continent. Talking about China’s presence in his country, Abu Al Qasim A. Mohamed said, “The Sudanese market is dominated by Chinese products ranging from minor household products to heavy machinery.” He also elaborated that the investments were coming “as a result of the negative impact and influence of Western countries on the internal political issues of African countries.”

Christopher Blake’s observation of the phenomenon focuses on a wider perspective than China-Africa or West-Africa approach. He looks far into the interplay between the increasing number of Chinese residents in Portugal and other parts of Europe and the impact of their relationship with their Chinese compatriots in northern Africa as well as in southern African countries like Angola and Mozambique. As Christopher comments, since “Portugal’s ongoing recession needs to look outside Europe for investments,” it may attract Chinese nationals and companies in some of these African countries to shift base and take the opportunity to become European citizens. In a well articulated note Ibrahim Abu Al-Hana envisages that China, the African entrepreneurs and their “corrupted” regimes are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Chinese investments. Ibrahim emphatically underscores that “the poor and needy people will not feel the magic of these relations.” Ibrahim expresses, “Western aid is attached to conditions that support human rights” while comparatively “China is not concerned about such rights.” He also believes that “China only thinks about its own interests and is not paying attention to the ordinary African citizen’s rights or benefits.” However, Mubarak Taj Al-Sir has a differing view in that “The Chinese dominance is due to the arrogance of the Western companies which try to create and manipulate political situations so they benefit from Africa’s resources at very low rates, compared to their high interest loans and tangling conditions which further extend Africa’s vulnerability.” Mubarak praises China for “building infrastructure and recruiting manpower; something that Western countries would not do, presumably in order to keep Africans under evolving cycles of unprecedented dependency.”

The complexity that entails China-Africa are comprised of “often multiple hidden agendas unfolding simultaneously,” explains Arkiel Abdurashid Brown who also sees Africa as a “target for resource robbery.” Arkiel questions “China acting as a philanthropist at heart,” especially when it is staggering with a recently revealed hidden debt to the tune of 15 million Yuan, equivalent to \$1.5 trillion. He argues that “neither the West nor China is financially stable enough to adopt Africa without any agenda,” a matter which brings into focus the Chinese policy of ‘no strings attached’ or ‘without strings attached’.

5. Surveying Through the ‘No Strings Attached’ Phenomenon

In more instances than acknowledged, indigenous corporations cry foul over Chinese involvement in local entrepreneurship and its domination of previously established local markets. In that respect, it is seen as a rapacious newcomer and consequently finds its approach charged as “*capitalism gone amok*” – Wekesa, (2013:23). (Emphasis in original)

China has not won Africa's broad smile without pragmatic evidence. As an African analyst explains, "Instead of lecturing African countries on good governance in 'hard power' language, i.e. threats and ultimatums, China uses gentle language of mutually beneficial development cooperation and political dialogue in its discourse with African countries," (Mulikita, 2012). Adherent to that principle, the *Dragon* has strategically penetrated the continent by targeting the implementation of projects that lead to "real and noticeable differences in the lives of Africans all over Africa," (ibid.) and by deploying, in certain cases, its own experts to spearhead the projects and avoid prolongation of implementation period.

According to the findings of the primary data furnished above and the opinions expressed therein, we tend to disagree with Olusegun Akinsanya and other promoters of the concept of Chinese aid saturating Africa "without strings attached," (ISS Report, 2012). Rather, we postulate that China has not determined overnight to bring its enormous investments into Africa on an unprecedented charitable mission – without the prospect of targeting valuable commodities in return. We need to approach the phenomenon cautiously and beyond the euphoria of the Sino-African honeymoon and the ailing sentiments of Africa's distress with the West -- i.e. the pressures that led China to fast-track FDI of this magnitude into the continent and its disregard for what many consider as contrary to human morality.

Perceptually, the pale phrase of 'no-strings-attached' itself denotes a crafty rhetoric not so securely severed from the umbilical cord of opportunistic ideology or the theory of economic dominance. Said differently, 'strings' are really 'attached', and the African masses should not indulge so much in the empty predilection of Chinese philanthropism as often emphasized in the corrupted politicians' fantasy of 'no strings attached'. Rather, the African elite should interrogate the concept of the 'strings' from all possible perspectives, one of them being: *how tight are the strings attached?* Moreover, shall Africa be able to disentangle the Chinese knots easily in the event that a necessity to do so arises?

Again, we need to exercise more caution here since the nature of the strings also depends on our scope and illustration of what qualifies as 'strings' in the context of China-Africa relations, before our hasty consummation of the nature of the attachment. Does our view of the 'strings' allude only to China's lack of interference in the internal political affairs of the African countries it invests in? Or, are the 'strings' just about the image of the verbally moderated, politically accepted jargons that lead to the approvals of the concessions and their subsequent implementation – satisfaction of the top leaders?

Furthermore, can we conceptualize a larger scope of the phrase 'no strings attached', beyond its current metaphor, to encompass whatever damages (moral and material) China's activities may entail and their impact on the continent and the people claimed to be developed? Can we consider as 'strings' the conditions pursued to the approval process for the extraction of the African mineral resources, considering that China's projected trillions in FDI are flowing in as a *bait* at the same time when the extraction concessions and approvals are promulgated, and not before? Are the *stringless kites* (FDI & aid with no strings attached) flying into Africa as a coincidence and/or charitable monies to the poor without any costly disadvantages? What about the extensive economic leverage the funds create for the powers that be in their abuse of power, violation of human rights, and the oppression against the voices of democracy?

If the defenders of the 'no strings attached' doctrine refer only to China's sheer silence to internal political and/or human and environmental rights issues, there is more they need to consider that is germane to the 'strings' but currently undermined. There are disadvantageous issues often acknowledged though less emphasized in the debate and least implemented in protecting the African victims of the China-Africa concessions. For example, we cannot ignore the numerous types of social and environmental degradation and abuse of African biodiversity often neglected in the discourse immaculately weaved by the advocates of the 'no strings attached' dogma; a term which has now become the orthodox of every corrupt leader and his close associates who deal with China. Accordingly, we would treat the silence deemed to accumulation, bribery, money-laundering, indigenes' disenfranchisement, environmental degradation, trade imbalances, dumping of sub-standard and/or counterfeit goods, lack of transfer of key technology, and the compromise of human rights (all of which constitute key variables in the human and economic development of a nation) as *tough* but *unemphasised* 'strings attached'.

For instance, Maeresera notes indigenes' accusations of the Asian partner "hiring Chinese labour instead of locals when implementing projects in Africa," (ISS Report, 2012). The same charge is true of certain critics who suggest, "Even when it comes to job opportunities, in some instances China brings in teams of workers and technical experts," obstructing the Africans' key employment opportunity (Bayoumy, 2012). Maeresera's and Bayoumy's critical observations of what the 'no-strings attached' policy holds for the communities in the respective project areas, does not only deserve attention but also begs for a timely investigation and prompt solution for the affected. The situation of the indigenous population should be deemed more attention especially when denial to job opportunity is augmented to the denial of their share of royalty in compromises between the foreign investors (China) and the local authorities. In a discussion on such situation, Cerutti et al. (2011) unravel a real dilemma that in most cases "the redistributive system has not yet delivered on its most important objective, i.e. the improvement of rural people's livelihoods." Such pitfalls which undermine the development of the livelihoods of the hosts of the Chinese projects are what calls for effectual intervention before the situation drifts into turmoil, as it has already occurred in certain countries in the continent.

According to the ISS Africa Conference Report 2012, Dr. Omenya unequivocally elaborates on concerns in a situation where "the influx of cheap goods was forcing many African retailers and manufacturers out of business." Poor quality goods made in China, which do not conform to international standards, have become very common in almost all parts of the continent as exhibited in David Blair's (2007) comment: "Zimbabweans talk of 'zing zong' products – by which they mean exports from China which have a tendency to break in your hand." The dumping of varieties of sub-standard commodities, not seen as 'strings' per se, weighs heavily on the African consumers who are already staggering with the hardships of poverty and denial of human rights to remove leaders who are not of their choice. The silence to these anomalies and lack of action to stand for the rights of the consumer and the common citizen could be explained, in our viewpoint, as some of the most crucial 'strings' attached to China's cooperation

with Africa, specifically considering that such goods could never be approved for consumption in a majority of the Western markets or in any market where consumer protection laws are respected.

Despite the billions gained and the trillion expected over the next decade to flow in as Chinese FDI under the fantasy of 'no strings attached', a range of studies reveal the disadvantageous impact Africa is inheriting as the legacy of Sino-African partnership. Chinese companies investing in sectors like hydroelectric power, oil and gas, and timber extraction are blamed for causing massive environmental problems. The degradation occurs in many ways and places including "in areas that have so far been protected as national parks and in countries with weak governance structures," Bosshard (2008a). Most of such violations remain unknown due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the locations. For instance, various sources including Canby et al. (2008) and Cerutti et al. (2011) reveal the existence of persistent occurrences of Chinese companies' deliberate degradation of African forests and the great damage they cause in illegitimate harvesting as well as abuses against the biodiversity within the ecosystem of the project venues.

It seems, though, that insatiable greed has blinded not only China and the corrupt African leadership from the environmental hazards the new investor is causing to the continent's resources in every step of the dollar made in the partnership, but disappointingly also by the learned elite who advocate for the 'no strings attached' ideology without analysing the fundamental disadvantages. An example of these stark environmental violators is Chinese oil company 'Sinopec' which has been accused of causing environmental crimes, such as dynamiting a Gabonese nature reserve and construction of roads at inappropriate areas in the midst of the forest. The abuse has resulted in worldwide outrage and condemnation and Gabon's suspension of the company's activities in 2006 (Bosshard, 2008a).

The dilemma and damage is extended by the collusion of senior government officials in the devastation process, including unlawful timber trade often exported to China (Mackenzie, 2006; Milledge et al., 2007; Bossel and Norfolk, 2007). Although the Chinese authorities attempted to curb the indiscretion through the introduction of its Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management by Chinese Companies Operating Outside China, German et al. (2011) and Bosshard (2008b) report that much awaits to be realized concerning Chinese enterprises' compliance with the guidelines particularly when they collaborate with government officials who pave the way for the cancerous practice of malfeasance. A grisly situation of this nature, in which intervention is so demanding but little considered, raises questions about the efficacy of the AU and the African states in containing the problem. The problem is exacerbated by the huge paucity of information about the environmental degradation (Bosshard, 2008a), notwithstanding the wide enthusiasm by some elites for the no-strings-attached policy.

6. Conclusion

Despite the discomfort by China's severe competition, the West may be frantically reappraising the trends of its geopolitical approach on the basis of the evolving political economy and Africa's dire need for pragmatic development. The West has to come over the age-old racist/colonialist mentality and the plethora of demeaning terminologies of disgust, and deeply demoralising characterization of Africa as 'poor', 'underdeveloped', 'corrupted', 'lazy' and 'uncivilized'. US President Barack Obama's recent diplomatic move towards Africa is seen by a section of analysts as step in the right direction. It is, however, worthwhile assimilating China's approach of considering Africans as people with vast potential who own a resource rich continent that deserves attention for development in order to foster mutual partnership.

The difference is; whereas Western partnership is often based on the misperception of Africa as a continent irrevocably poor and allergic to development, the Chinese benchmark theirs on an Africa which, though "facing challenges," is nevertheless bestowed with "unprecedented opportunities for development," Prof. Yang Lihua (ISS Report 2012). Nevertheless, considering the multifarious aspects of today's global trade strategies and the sophisticated levels of behind-the-scene diplomatic counter-strategies of the competing nations, it would be a somewhat reckless oversight and indeed too simplistic of any African elite to consume China's narrative of 'no strings attached', or 'equal partnership' purely as presented.

Evidently, the Western criticism is also transpired by China's entry strategy not only due to Western disregard to develop Africa through its mineral potential, but indeed at a time when the traditional partners are facing very gruesome fiscal ailment and economic instability in their quarters. Consequently, when China revived with pragmatic assurance what the West had undermined as Dark Continent, the Asian dragon healed a long afflicted wound on Africa. However, instead of creating confronting West-China camps, both donors can conduct business with Africa in a friendly rivalry. That is to suggest that the West should invest in tangible development projects that impact on the ordinary citizen and not prioritize the few gatekeepers who can reinvest aid funds back in the West. To do so, a shift in focus should be exercised so that interests are reciprocally achieved on the basis of a win-win approach. In conclusion, hidden in the underbelly of the struggle for African resources are more phenomena than could be discussed within the limited space of this essay. The complaints and violations are sufficient reasons to suggest the conduct of detailed research focusing on the various perspectives of the relationships and their impact on the grassroots communities in the continent.

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