



## At Issue ezine



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### Vol. 6 (August-November 2007)

## CHINA IN AFRICA

### No. 4 - November CHINA AND ZIMBABWE: IS THERE A FUTURE?

*By Obert Matahwa* Zimbabwe and China have relations dating back to the 1970s, when China provided both arms and training to the black liberation struggle. In recent years, through its "Look East" policy, Zimbabwe has greatly strengthened this relationship. While seeking to circumvent international isolation and bolster its failing economy, it has become heavily dependant on China. So will the relationship remain strong? As Obert Matahwa shows, there are signs of strain already.

### No. 3 - October "WE ARE JUST TRYING TO DO SOMETHING GOOD": CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS

*By Teke Ngomba* China's renewed interest in Africa has been demonstrated on such a massive scale that many view it with a mixture of fascination and fear. In this article, Teke Ngomba probes beneath the surface to see whether or not China's vigorous engagement with the world's 'most resourced continent' is economically and socially beneficial, politically benign, environmentally responsible, or, indeed, any better (or worse) than that of the West. Despite China's undeniably different style, what emerges is a very mixed picture ... with the longer term outcome largely dependent on the quality of African leadership.

### No. 2 - September CAMEROONIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHINESE INVASION

*By Ivo Ngome* Along with many countries in Africa, Cameroon has witnessed a large influx of Chinese citizens, goods and money in recent years. In this article, Ivo Ngome explores what Cameroonians from all walks of life and different parts of the country make of this. Although he discovered much suspicion and some outright hostility, there were also significant positive assessments of China's economic contribution. From the mixed reactions of the people, a majority felt that the China-Cameroon relationship should continue - but not without carefully considered conditions.

### No. 1 - August EDITORIAL: CHINA'S CRUCIAL ROLE IN AFRICA

*By J-P Thompson* China is pursuing an aggressive economic agenda in Africa. As J-P Thompson shows in this editorial, despite China's portrayal of itself as a leader in South-South cooperation and as a partner that does not meddle in African states' internal political affairs, its over-arching goal is to access the continent's natural resources - and it will go to great lengths, both positive and negative, to do this. Africa must be just as vigilant with China as with the West. After only a few years of massive investment and engagement, it is already clear that Africa's leaders and civil society groups will have to be less compromising and more united if they are to forge a genuine, long-term win-win relationship with Asia's emerging superpower.

## CHINA AND ZIMBABWE: IS THERE A FUTURE?

by *Obert Matahwa*

Zimbabwe and China have relations dating back to the southern African country's 1970s liberation struggle when Beijing provided arms and training to the black nationalist movement fighting the white minority government of Ian Smith. The friendship was rekindled when President Robert Mugabe, shunned by former friends in the West over the political crisis in his country, adopted a "Look East" policy forging stronger ties with

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**UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon meets President Mugabe in September 2007: 'shunned by former friends', the UN Headquarters is one of the few places Mugabe can go in the West.**

© UN Photo/Mark Garten

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Battling international isolation by the West and a creaking economy, Zimbabwe, like other countries in Africa, has warmed up to China as a possible way out of its present economic crisis. A number of African countries including Zimbabwe have gone through structural economic reforms which have left them with large debts to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. When Mugabe announced his "Look East" policy in 2003, it was followed by a flurry of loans, memorandums of understanding and weapons deals. It was supposed to herald a new alliance: China would gain access to Zimbabwe's mineral riches - chrome, gold and platinum - while

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In November 2006, about 50 African heads of state and ministers, including President Mugabe, were guests of the Chinese in Beijing. More than 2 000 deals were under discussion at the summit. Mugabe has welcomed the fact that China pledged to double its aid to Africa by providing US\$5 billion. China has said that unlike its Western counterparts, it has no political agenda.

This encouraged President Mugabe in his policy of gradually disengaging from countries in the North, like Britain and the United States, whom he accuses of harbouring a political agenda against his government. Every time Mugabe has an opportunity of addressing the nation, he accuses these two countries in particular of being interested in recolonising Zimbabwe and installing a government they can manipulate to reverse the land reform programme that accelerated the economic crisis in this southern African nation.

**China's impact on other Southern African countries**

But can Zimbabwe realistically expect anything different from China? Examples and warnings from other countries in the region would appear to indicate that it should heed South African President Thabo Mbeki's recent warning that Africa risks becoming an economic colony of China.

Other countries in the region have seen the negative side. When President Hu Jintao was in Zambia during his 12-day tour of Africa in February 2007, he was greeted with public disdain, and forced to cancel one meeting, even as he showered more than \$800 million in gifts and investments on the nation, one of the world's poorest. In Namibia, a decades-old ally of China, human rights activists and The Namibian newspaper attacked China's foreign policy as selfish and lacking morality. In South Africa, a major Johannesburg newspaper devoted a full page to a scalding critique of China's record on human rights and labour rights.

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In Zambia and elsewhere in southern Africa, local businessmen and workers are hurting. South African textile workers lost tens of thousands of jobs after the 2005 expiration of a global trade agreement allowed cheaper Chinese goods - including knockoffs of traditional African prints - to flood the country. Angry trade unions called for retaliatory boycotts of shops selling Chinese goods. Anti-Chinese sentiment has mushroomed in Zambia since 2005, when an explosion at a Chinese-owned copper mine killed at least 46 workers and spawned complaints of unsafe working conditions and poor environmental practices. In last year's presidential election, the populist

challenger to President Levy Mwanawasa based part of his campaign on a pledge to curb Chinese influence in the country. Recently, Mr. Hu cancelled a visit to Zambia's Copperbelt Province, in the nation's north, apparently because of the threat of protests.

This undercurrent of disquiet accompanied Mr. Hu's throughout his latest visit. It came not from heads of state, but from the people they rule, some of whom resent China's growing influence in Africa. "It's important to note the obstacles the Chinese are running into in Africa," according to Bates Gill, a leading China scholar at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "It has a lot to do with their unfamiliarity with working in countries that have a vibrant private sector and civil society. These guys in the Chinese Embassy, they don't understand that."

On the other hand, Mr. Hu has met with his share of flag-waving supporters. The official parts of his recent trip (the meetings and agreement-signings with heads of state) were a diplomatic and commercial success. Most African heads of state are positive about China, which supported many of their liberation movements when liberation was not fashionable. And they like Mr. Hu because his views on sovereignty, human rights and development are frequently closer to theirs than are those of Western governments. Amid growing international isolation the Mugabe regime is foremost among the flag-waving supporters. Unsurprisingly, it is desperate in its efforts to maintain and maximize its relationship with China regardless of the consequences.

**"Most African heads of state are positive about China, which supported many of their liberation movements when liberation was not fashionable. And they like Mr. Hu because his views on sovereignty, human rights and development are frequently closer to theirs than are those of Western governments."**

#### **Mortgaging the future?**

For nearly three decades China has demonstrated considerable political, economic and military support for the Mugabe regime. Chinese radio-jamming equipment helped silence anti-government radio stations during the 2005 elections. The Zimbabwean military train in Chinese-made fighter jets and trucks and use Chinese weaponry. A palace for Mugabe that was completed in 2005 was designed by the Chinese and the roof, a gift from China, would not be out of place in the Forbidden City. Bilateral trade between the two countries totaled US\$205million for the first half of 2007.

Despite the seemingly endless stream of goodwill from China, the cost to Zimbabwe is rising as the economic crisis deepens and President Mugabe continues to mortgage the country's resources to China to escape international isolation. Economic analysts say that Zimbabwe will ultimately pay a high price for its government's appetite for cheap foreign "loans" from so-called "friendly" countries like China. Shunned by the rest of the world for its governance track record, the Zimbabwean government has unreservedly accepted assistance from China and other Asian countries, with disastrous consequences for the economy. The bulk of such deals usually take the form of barter trade, where cash-strapped Zimbabwe accepts the assistance in return for ceding control of certain minerals or agricultural crops to the Chinese. "Zimbabwe is ultimately the loser in this case because the country has to forgo future foreign currency earnings because of this barter system," says University of Zimbabwe political scientist Anthony Hawkins.



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A feeding programme for children under six in Harare ... while somewhere nearby is a Chinese-designed "palace" for Mugabe.  
© WFP/Paul Gadenhead

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Often trade agreements are subject to much fanfare and exultation. However, it is not entirely certain how much of the promised capital Zimbabwe actually receives. What is clear is that Zimbabwe is heavily indebted to China. Necessarily, for immediate assistance Zimbabwe has promised future proceeds from its natural wealth. This mortgaging off of natural resources will impact uranium, platinum, copper, gold and not least of all tobacco.

### **The golden leaf**

Approximately 110,000 hectares in the areas surrounding Harare are committed to growing tobacco. Up until recently tobacco has been Zimbabwe's principal foreign export. Historically, it has ranked as one of the world's leading exporters of tobacco. Analysts say that Zimbabwe earned about US\$400 million from tobacco exports at the peak of production in the late 1990s. Also in peak times the industry employed nearly three-quarters of a million people. However, 2007 was the first year Zimbabwe dropped out of the top six exporting nations, cotton replaced tobacco as Zimbabwe's principal export. Much of this downward trend in recent years can be attributed to commercial farms being negatively affected by the issues of land reform. Additionally, the analysts believe Zimbabwe stands a better chance of pulling itself out of the economic abyss if it addresses its woes without mortgaging future production to the Chinese. "There is massive potential that the country can easily pull herself out of this mess and that is only if there is real commitment from the authorities to make conditions on the ground right," said an investment analyst with a Harare-based commercial bank who could not be named.



**"Fire-sale approach of the government": Chinese tobacco buyers inspect the golden leaf on the Tobacco Auction Floors in Harare.**

© STR New/Reuters

The analysts spoke as the Zimbabwean government met with a Chinese delegation that arrived in the country recently. The delegation came with the news that China was giving Zimbabwe a US\$58 million financing facility to be used to purchase farming equipment, implements and tools. The financing was related to three separate agreements on finance, agriculture and education. In return, Zimbabwe will deliver 110 000 tonnes of tobacco to China over two years. This flagrant undercutting of the tobacco industry by the Mugabe regime has two principal drawbacks. Firstly, the chaos triggered by Mugabe's land reform programme has slashed tobacco output from

more than 200 000 tonnes in 2000 to below 60 000 tonnes. The Chinese deal means that Zimbabwe could be forced to close its auction floors in the coming two seasons if its output of the golden leaf does not rise to a level that would leave enough to trade locally after giving the Chinese their share. Secondly, it provides further evidence of the fire-sale approach of the government, in that Chinese tobacco merchants can generate up to ten times the profit on the Zimbabwean tobacco being bought.

China has had an overwhelming economic interest in Zimbabwe in the past few years. In addition to at least 35 Chinese companies now operating in Zimbabwe according to Industry and Trade Minister Obert Mpofu, the government has been issuing business permits to Chinese shopkeepers and street traders like confetti. The government doesn't seem to realise or they do not care that its new policies have pushed many locals into bankruptcy. Furthermore, Chinese investment tends to be focused on Chinese companies on the ground and does little for long-term development or assistance in Zimbabwe. Attempts to dilute Chinese influence have been dashed. More and more delegations have been flocking in with the same end-effect: the Chinese promise but they do not deliver; they invest less money and spend less. Even in tourism, where Zimbabwe has the status of an authorized destination, Chinese tourists travel in droves and always pay a group rate. In the meantime, ordinary Zimbabweans have been complaining about working conditions in Chinese companies, the low quality of cheap Chinese imports and the destruction of jobs in the small-scale manufacturing sector.

**"In addition to at least 35 Chinese companies now operating in Zimbabwe ... the government has been issuing business permits to Chinese shopkeepers and street traders like confetti."**



It is apparent that China's interest in Zimbabwe, in particular, is driven by short-term interest in natural resources. "The Chinese may be a different breed of capitalists with the backing of their government," says exiled businessman Mutumwa Mawere, "and yet they are no different from any Western capitalists. Their advantage is that their former communist governments helped in financing the liberation project of Africa but the China of today may not have anything to do with the China that African leaders seem to want to embrace. If the China of today is more profit-driven than ideology-fixated, we find no evidence that Africa has any understanding of the complexity of China and the dangers of embracing a disguised monster." Indeed, Zimbabwe seems to lack a clear understanding that the "monster" is myopic in certain areas of their relationship.

### China's unrelenting support?

One reason China has been welcomed into Africa, analysts say, is it can serve as a counterbalance to American influence now that the Soviet Union has vanished from the scene and Russia is far less active in the region. For some foreign powers in Africa, snubs are part of the territory: both the United States and Europe are regularly in the line of fire for agriculture policies that are unfair to African farmers. But while popular dissent is old hat to Westerners, it is less so to the Chinese, for whom foreign relations and domestic policies alike are shaped by governments - not activists, lobbies or public opinion.

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Having claimed a bigger role on the African and world stages, Mr. Hu is now reaping the first bitter fruits of pretension to leadership. One major test is Sudan, where he must reconcile China's doctrine of noninterference in other nations' affairs with the outcry over the killings of civilians in Darfur. Mr. Hu's stop in Sudan, where China has extensive oil interests, reignited criticism that Beijing has helped shield its ally and oil supplier from global outrage over attacks on civilians in Darfur. It appears that China is feeling the pressure. While in Khartoum, the Chinese President gave Sudan a \$13 million interest-free loan to build a new presidential palace, but he also said it was "imperative" to halt the deaths in Darfur. Zimbabwe might learn something from Sudan's situation because China might not always find it suitable to remain a non-interfering partner or at least to be the kind of partner Mugabe wants.



**Outcry over Darfur a major test for China: this family in Otash camp, Sudan, fled from armed men with only the clothes on their backs.**

© WFP/Laura Melo

However, it is perhaps more the case that China is learning something from its relationship with Sudan and Zimbabwe. Indeed, the cost of China's relationship with Zimbabwe seems to be increasing both in terms of prestige and investments. China is very wary of its international reputation especially with the 2008 Beijing Olympics on the horizon. Visibly close connections with a regime past its sell-by date is seen as a growing liability for China that may be a hindrance to their other international goals. "The tragedy of all this is that the Chinese are never going to stand with Zimbabwe when it comes to international issues. If they were serious about helping Zimbabwe, the Chinese president would not have skirted the country on his eight-nation tour of Africa earlier this year," said another university lecturer Dr John Makumbe. Mr Hu Jintao avoided Zimbabwe in February when he visited Africa. The southern African leg of the tour took him to Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia.

Economically, as described above, China is happy to exploit the many natural resources Zimbabwe has to offer. However, reports have suggested that the Chinese have been reluctant with new investments because of the deepening economic crisis. During the early part of 2007 Mugabe went cap in hand to China for a \$1 billion loan but was turned down. At the same time, Angola received investments from China into its oil industry valued at around \$2 billion. Understandably, Zimbabwe has very little left to offer China from a business vantage point. Zimbabwe's annual rate of inflation stands at more than 7 000 percent, making the costs of doing business in the troubled nation unfathomable for even the most steadfast "friend".

**"2007 may mark a watershed in the relationship between the two countries. Whereas, Mugabe may continue to 'Look East' to survive, China does not seem to be as willing to return its gaze directly."**



**'Unfathomable': Zimbabwe's Minister of Tourism and Environment, Francis Nhema, chairs the UN Commission on Sustainable Development in 2007.**  
© UN Photo/Paulo Figueiras

On August 31st, 2007 the Daily Telegraph published a story claiming that China would no longer back Zimbabwe other than with humanitarian aid. This story was quickly refuted by both Chinese and Zimbabwean sources and various statements and agreements were made to publicly demonstrate that the two countries were actually as thick as thieves. However, 2007 may mark a watershed in the relationship between the two countries. Whereas, Mugabe may continue to "Look East" to survive, China does not seem to be as willing to return its gaze directly. Rather, China is becoming increasingly concerned about how it appears to the West. What is lost on Mugabe and other African leaders is that even the Chinese would admit that they wouldn't be an emerging giant without Western technology and markets. The transformation of China would have been incomplete. African leaders, especially Mugabe, should thus be wary about simply looking east. They should rather heed Kwame Nkrumah's observation that Africa needs to face forward rather than east or west for its development.

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**UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon meets President Mugabe in September 2007: 'shunned by former friends', the UN Headquarters is one of the few places Mugabe can go in the West.**

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Battling international isolation by the West and a creaking economy, Zimbabwe, like other countries in Africa, has warmed up to China as a possible way out of its present economic crisis. A number of African countries including Zimbabwe have gone through structural economic reforms which have left them with large debts to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. When Mugabe announced his "Look East" policy in 2003, it was followed by a flurry of loans, memorandums of understanding and weapons deals. It was supposed to herald a new alliance: China would gain access to Zimbabwe's mineral riches - chrome, gold and platinum - while providing Harare with financial backing that Mugabe hoped would leave the IMF with egg on its face.

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This encouraged President Mugabe in his policy of gradually disengaging from countries in the North, like Britain and the United States, whom he accuses of harbouring a political agenda against his government. Every time Mugabe has an opportunity of addressing the nation, he accuses these two countries in particular of being interested in recolonising Zimbabwe and installing a government they can manipulate to reverse the land reform programme that accelerated the economic crisis in this southern African nation.

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#### **The golden leaf**

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**"In addition to at least 35 Chinese companies now operating in Zimbabwe ... the government has been issuing business permits to Chinese shopkeepers and street traders like confetti."**

It is apparent that China's interest in Zimbabwe, in particular, is driven by short-term interest in natural resources. "The Chinese may be a different breed of capitalists with the backing of their government," says exiled businessman Mutumwa Mawere, "and yet they are no different from any Western capitalists. Their advantage is that their former communist governments helped in financing the liberation project of Africa but the China of today may not have anything to do with the China that African leaders seem to want to embrace. If the China of today is more profit-driven than ideology-fixated, we find no evidence that Africa has any understanding of the complexity of China and the dangers of embracing a disguised monster." Indeed, Zimbabwe seems to lack a clear understanding that the "monster" is myopic in certain areas of their relationship.

## China's unrelenting support?

One reason China has been welcomed into Africa, analysts say, is it can serve as a counterbalance to American influence now that the Soviet Union has vanished from the scene and Russia is far less active in the region. For some foreign powers in Africa, snubs are part of the territory: both the

# 'WE ARE JUST TRYING TO DO SOMETHING GOOD': CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS

by Teke Ngomba

## Introduction

Earlier this year, President Hu Jintao of China embarked on a remarkable 12-day tour to Africa, during which he visited eight countries, forgave debts and pledged loans. As he moved from Sudan to South Africa, both continental and international media reported extensively on what was seen as yet another manifest sign of Beijing's heightened interest in Africa. Amongst the reports published on President Hu's tour was one titled: 'In Africa, wary thanks for Hu', written by Michael Wines and published by the *International Herald Tribune* on 9 February 2007.

In his report, Wines highlighted the negative impact of China's increasing presence in Africa especially in the textile industry; he wrote of an 'undercurrent of disquiet that accompanied' President Hu's visit, as seen in 'anti-Chinese sentiments' that have 'mushroomed' in Zambia and the 'scalding critique of China's human rights and labor records' which came from *The Star* newspaper in South Africa.

A day after Wines' article was published, my classmate, Chinese born Ye Zhu read the article and was infuriated by it and since I was the only African in a class of 36 students from 19 different countries, Ye Zhu forwarded to me Wines' article with this brief e-mail:

Hey Teke,

See this new report from the *International Herald Tribune* about our president's visit to Africa.

I hate its tone and style, so anti-China and so biased...don't like it...

We are just trying to do something good, why don't people understand it?

Yours,  
Ye Zhu

In my reply to Zhu's e-mail, I told her that China's silence on issues of good governance in Africa, mixed with visible negative effects in the textile industry in Africa for example, give a confusing picture of a smiling dragon with arms stretched to Africa, at once welcoming, friendly and yet dangerous. In response to her question, I told her it was not as if people do not understand, but rather that people understand from a different point of view.

**"(China gives) a confusing picture of a smiling dragon with arms stretched to Africa, at once welcoming, friendly and yet dangerous."**

This discussion recounted above sums up in essence, a contemporary debate in the

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## Forum Discussion:

Teke Ngomba's article is fascinating and SO revealing to an uninformed American like myself... I believe that this subject is very current and relevant...

— *Lenny Graham, Los Angeles*



**'Beijing's heightened interest in Africa':  
Children greet President Hu Jintao's arrival  
in Liberia, February 1, 2007.**

© REUTERS/Christopher Herwig

circles of development studies and international relations: the impact of China's renewed interest and actions in Africa.

Through an overview of the key issues in this debate, this article seeks to identify the trend and nature of China in Africa, highlighting contending perspectives of its impact and drawing parallels between Western and Chinese approaches to Africa and its development. It will end with an encapsulation of the challenges facing Africa and its leaders as they negotiate the continent's future in the face of two competing options for Africa's development: the Western and the Chinese.

### **China and Africa: Old Friends, New Interests**

From the time China began cooperation with Africa which can be 'conveniently' traced to the Bandung Conference of April 1955 (Ismael, 1971:507); the relationship between China and Africa has undergone interesting phases in an almost cyclical manner.

Between 1960 and 1965, the era of wide decolonization in Africa, there was 'greater interaction' between China and Africa but this declined during the immediate post independence years (Yu, 1977). This low-level interaction persisted till the late 1980s and began fading away in the 1990s as a result of the support China received from some African states in the wake of the Tiananmen Square crisis (Taylor, 1998).

Since then, following the 'termination of super power competition and emergence of economics as a key determinant of foreign policy' (Payne and Veney, 1998:867), China has, over the years, changed its foreign policy from 'confrontation to cooperation, from revolution to economic development and from isolation to international engagement' (Muekalia, 2004:5).

In practical terms, what this has meant in relation to Africa is that China has embarked on a 'charm offensive' towards Africa (Chan, 2007:i), expanding its interests both in a 'mercantilist' way (Holslag, 2006:133) and at a 'breathhtaking pace', prompting 'malicious tongues' to call what is happening a 'new invasion of the continent' (French, 2006:127; see also Carmody and Owusu, 2006:29).

China's economic rise over the past two decades has generated 'ripple effects in the world economy' and its search for natural resources to satisfy the demands of industrialization has taken it once more to sub-Saharan Africa (Zafar, 2007:103). And so now, unlike in the pre-1990 years when China stood beside Africa ostensibly to combat colonialism, China's renewed interest in Africa has taken on a significantly 'profit-centered' outlook (Sautman, 2006:8).

**"Unlike in the pre-1990 years when China stood beside Africa ostensibly to combat colonialism, China's renewed interest in Africa has taken on a significantly 'profit-centered' outlook."**

### **China's Economic Muscle and Actions in Africa: A Brief Overview**

China today, according to Mahubani (2005) is like a dragon that is waking up after centuries of slumber and its awakening has been enigmatic, as Zakaria (2005) points out extensively:

'Every businessman these days has a dazzling statistic about China meant to stun the listener into silence. And they are an impressive set of numbers...China is now the world's largest producer of coal, steel and cement, the second largest consumer of energy and third largest importer of oil...It manufactures two-thirds of the world's copiers, microwave ovens, DVD Players, shoes and toys. It is the world's fastest growing large economy and second largest holder of foreign exchange reserves mainly dollars...China has grown around 9% a year for more than 25 years, the fastest growth rate for a major economy in recorded history' (pp.1-2).

On 19 July 2007, the BBC reported that despite the measures the Chinese government enacted in the first six months of 2007 to 'cool the economy which had grown 11.1% in the three months to March', new government figures released in July indicated that 'China's economy outstripped analysts' expectations during the second quarter and grew by 11.9% from a year before.'

With this historic economic ascendance, China has sought to take its relationship with Africa to unprecedented levels. Given that 'high level visits' are a central element of China's international diplomacy (Shelton, 2005) during the past three years, more than 100 high level meetings have taken place between Chinese and African



diplomats/envoys (BBC Monitor Newsletter, 2005 cited in Tull, 2006:459) with one of the recent meetings being the November 2006 China-Africa summit in Beijing which was acclaimed as the 'largest international summit ever to have been held within China' (King, 2006:1).



**Reorienting trade from the Global North to the Global East: Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and South African President Thabo Mbeki receive a salute in Cape Town, June 2006.**

© REUTERS/Mike Hutchings

Behind these meetings, real business is going on in such a way that for the first time since the era of the slave trade, African trade is reorienting from the 'Global North' to the 'Global East' (Clapham, 2005, cited in Carmody and Owusu, 200:1). Zimbabwe for one has, since 2003, officially adopted a 'Look East foreign policy strategy' in a bid to strengthen ties with China (Youde, 2007:3; see also Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, 2004).

China has established several 'investment trade centers' in Africa (Shelton, 2005) in addition to the 750 Chinese enterprises present in Africa by 2005 (Sautman, 2006). As a result of all these, trade between China and Africa in 2006 totaled more than US \$50 billion (Zafar, 2007:103) with more than 75%

of this being trade with South Africa, Sudan, Angola and Nigeria (Zafar, 2007:115). Also, nearly all African countries now belong to the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) founded in 2000 to entrench economic cooperation between China and Africa (Lafargue, 2005).

China is now the third largest trader with Africa after the US and France (Sautman, 2006:4). Its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Africa 'jumped to US \$1 billion' in 2006, a growth rate higher than Chinese FDI to any other part of the world (Zafar, 2007:123).

China is also 'rapidly becoming an important aid donor to Africa' and its role is beginning to overshadow that of many traditional western donors (Zafar, 2007:125). As an example of this, French (2006:127) points out that in 2006, while the World Bank committed US\$2.3 billion to all of sub-Saharan Africa, in the same time span, China committed US\$8.1 billion to Nigeria, Angola and Mozambique alone.

**"In 2006, while the World Bank committed US\$2.3 billion to all of sub-Saharan Africa, China committed US\$8.1 billion to Nigeria, Angola and Mozambique alone."**

By December 2006, US\$1.4 billion of debt owed China by 31 heavily indebted and least developed African countries had been forgiven (Xinhua News Agency, cited in Idun-Arkhusst and Laing, 2007:7, see also Kurlantzick, 2006:3).

Beyond these 'hard and pure economic/monetary transactions', China has embarked on an unprecedented peace mission in Liberia (Alden, 2005:6). It is working with African states to transfer its disease-fighting mechanisms to help reduce the economic burden of malaria in Africa, estimated at some US \$12 billion annually of Gross Domestic Product (Siringi, 2003:456) and has also been sending its medical personnel and agro technicians to Africa to develop these sectors (Sautman, 2006:21-22).

In the domain of education, even though Africans studying in China have, in the past, been victims of racism (see Sautman, 1994; Sullivan, 1994 for extensive discussions on these) in 2002, there were an estimated 1,646 African students (of 85,000 foreign students) in China. To improve cooperation in this domain, China provides 1,500 scholarships annually to Africans to study in China and by late 2004, an estimated 17,860 Africans had received one (Sautman, 2006:22).

### **Motives and Consequences**

The extent of Chinese involvement in Africa at the moment raises two key challenges in both policy and academic circles: understanding China's motives and the consequences of such cooperation.

With regards to the first challenge, even though 'intangible interests are often the primary shapers of a country's foreign policy' (Payne and Veney, 1998:870), most commentators are in agreement that oil is the main driving force for China's renewed interest in Africa (see for example Idun-Arkhusst and Laing, 2007:2; Taylor, 2006; Tjonneland, Brandtzaeg, Kolas and Le Pere, 2006: v; Zakaria, 2005:4; Zweig and Bi,

2005).

**"Most commentators are in agreement that oil is the main driving force for China's renewed interest in Africa."**

Kaplinsky, McCormick and Morris (2006: i) have however observed that it is important not to see contemporary Sino-African relationship as 'purely an economic phenomenon' but rather to look at it also as one with broader geo-strategic concerns for both China and Africa with the latter seeking 'alternatives to shun pressures exerted by Western governments and NGOs to promote more transparent and better governance.'

This then leads to the second challenge which is basically attempting to comprehend the consequences of such a diverse and intensive interaction between China and Africa. The question, as the editors of *e-Africa* asked in February 2005 is whether China is a 'dire threat to Africa or a dynamic partner' or as Lafargue (2005) put it more forcefully: Is China just an investor or also a predator in Africa?

I will briefly discuss the key points on both sides of this complex question at this level and take broader issues concerning the impact of China's interaction with Africa in the last section of this article when discussing the reaction of the Western world to the contemporary Sino-African relationship.

At first glance, China seems a dynamic partner: it has 'directly contributed to macroeconomic management in Africa by helping create large commodity booms that have resulted in ... inflows of capital into the continent' (Zafar, 2007:108) and principally as a result of Chinese trade and investment in Africa notably in the oil sector (with the US too), Africa registered a 5.2% economic growth in 2005 - its fastest growth rate ever (Pan, 2006). Further, Chinese business networks in Africa can be an important catalyst for local industrialization as they were in South East Asia (Brautigam, 2003:467); thus China offers Africa an opportunity to effectively 'reduce its marginalization from the global economy' (Zafar, 2007:103).

On the other hand, environmentalists, for example, worry about the environmental consequences of China's approach to harvesting Africa's timber and there is resentment against the 'parachuting' of Chinese labour to work on contracts awarded to Chinese companies in Africa. These have fused with China's indifference towards bad governance in Africa and the visible negative impacts of the importation of cheap clothes from China. (For example, the dramatic closing down of domestic textile industries in Southern Africa. For discussions on these, see Ngomba, 2005.) All these make contemporary Sino-African relations look more like a 'dire threat' to Africa than 'strategic partnership' - even though Beijing thinks otherwise, as will be discussed later.

Overall, it seems increasingly difficult to say with empirical certainty what the 'consequential picture' of contemporary Sino-African relations looks like. However, Tull (2006:459) has noted that while the 'economic consequences of increased Chinese involvement in Africa is at best mixed, the political consequences are bound to prove deleterious' (Tull, 2006:459).

**"Overall, it seems increasingly difficult to say with empirical certainty what the 'consequential picture' of contemporary Sino-African relations looks like."**

Tull's confident assertion with regards to the political consequences in Africa of contemporary Sino-African relations relies heavily on the fact that by turning a blind eye to bad governance in Africa, China is failing to use its 'soft power' to ensure democratic governance and political accountability in Africa, all vital to Africa's political future.

China's blind eye on bad governance in Africa contrasts sharply with the West's eagle-eyed attention to the issue. In the next section of this article, I will look at the reaction of Western countries to contemporary Sino-African relations; highlight the differences between their respective approaches to development and governance in Africa, as well as, strikingly, the similarities.

**China in Africa: The West is not amused**

China's recent actions towards and in Africa differ from, and yet resemble, to a significant degree actions of Western states and the Soviet Union. The differences are as subtle as the similarities are glaring.

To show that China has Africa at heart, in a 'symbolic gesture that carries much hidden weight, the Chinese foreign minister has maintained a policy of making his first official overseas trip each year to Africa' (Zafar, 2007:105). This puts China 'way ahead of the USA and any European or other Asian power in the African visits league' (*Africa Confidential*, 7 July 2006:3). For three centuries, for example, only four American presidents have made an official visit to Africa- Franklin Roosevelt in 1943, Jimmy Carter in 1978, Bill Clinton in 1998 and George W. Bush five years later (Lafargue, 2005).

The differences go beyond visits. While three-fourths of US FDI in Africa is in oil, 64% of Chinese FDI in Africa from 1979-2000 was in manufacturing and 28% in resources (Sautman, 2006:11). But as a result of the booming Chinese economy and mounting concerns about its energy security, China has begun tilting its FDI in Africa towards the oil sector. In 2004 for example, more than half of Chinese FDI went to extractive industries and primarily to oil and gas exploration (Kolås, 2007). China is actively strengthening its oil investments in Nigeria, Angola and Sudan. In 2005, a Chinese 'oil firm announced it was investing US\$ 2.3 billion in an oil and gas field off Nigeria' (Sautman, 2006:7-8) and that same year, China and Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer of oil, reached a trade agreement in which Nigeria will supply China with 30,000 bpd of crude oil over the next five years (Kolås, 2007).

China is altering some of the prevailing practices and parameters in development assistance (Zafar, 2007). Chinese aid to Africa has focused on infrastructure and human development. Chinese aid provides funding for highly visible and, to many minds, 'important infrastructure projects which Western donors have long since stopped financing' (Idun-Arkhusst and Laing, 2007:6).

Further, China's aid to Africa, while not exactly neutral, 'is not used as a political tool in the same way as aid from western political actors in Africa.' Unlike Western states, 'there is no evidence that China conditions its aid on adoption of a particular political or economic stance or alignment except that recipients must maintain full diplomatic relations with China rather than Taiwan' (Sautman, 2006:24). This particular condition has unleashed a diplomatic and economic battle for Africa between Taiwan and China (see Payne and Veney 2001; Taylor, 2007 and Yu, 1963 for extensive discussions on this).



Few aid conditions other than a agreement on Taiwan: Members of Zambia's ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) party wait to greet President Hu Jintao in Lusaka, February 3, 2007.

© REUTERS/STR News/Mackson Wasamunu

By offering aid without preconditions, China has presented an 'attractive alternative to conditional western aid' (Tull, 2006:459); this alternation has been gladly embraced by African countries, notably Angola, which dramatically shunned the IMF's conditioned aid package in 2005 in preference for unconditional Chinese aid (Kurlantzick, 2006:1).

As demonstrated in the earlier sections of this article, oil seems to be the driving force behind the intense Chinese interest in Africa recently. In the case of Western nations, their interests and motives in Africa, as Taylor and Williams (2004) noted, continue to remain diverse, selective and scattered.

The general assumption, however, has been that these external powers have been motivated by 'the pursuit of their own national interests and not by any intrinsic desire to promote the well being of African states, its leaders or peoples' (Grey, 1990:101-102). And this holds true for China as well (see Sautman, 2006:4).

As China makes impressive inroads into several African countries, the traditional OECD aid donors have observed China's new role and new engagement in Africa with a mixture of fascination and fear (Tjonneland et al, 2006:3) forcing some of these nations like Norway (Tjonneland et al, 2006) and the US (Brookes and Shin, 2006; Wilson III, 2005) to seriously rethink their policies towards Africa.

China is increasingly entering African oil markets traditionally dominated by US and European petroleum interests (Lafargue, 2005) and uncritically does business with nations shunned by the West (Zafar, 2007:118). As a result, China has come under intense criticism from Western (especially US and UK) political forces and media, which accuse China of protecting 'rogue states' like Zimbabwe and Sudan. China, with substantial support from African leaders, has mounted a 'spirited, if not always unfeigning defense.' In response to such criticisms, in 2006, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that China has 'forged a new type of strategic partnership with Africa that features political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural



**China accused of protecting rogue states: UN Security Council meets in Khartoum in June 2007 (Sudan's El Bashir at head; China's Wang Guangya at left).**

© UN Photo/Fred Ney

exchange' (cited in Sautman, 2006:1).

Ramo (2004) has termed this Chinese approach the 'Beijing Consensus' with the development of new attitudes towards politics, development and global balance of power. This involves cultivating friendly ties and offering financial and technical assistance to African countries with 'no strings attached.' Chan (2007:5) has criticized this model for reinforcing bad governance in Africa and for ignoring 'some of the foundations of equitable and stable growth.'

### **Similarities between Western and Chinese approaches**

Beyond these criticisms of China from within and outside of Africa, especially from the West, what is most striking, as Sautman (2006:4) observes, is the fundamental commonality of Chinese and Western approaches to Africa with regards to issues of its resources and development.

### **"Beyond these criticisms of China ... what is most striking ... is the fundamental commonality of Chinese and Western approaches to Africa with regards to issues of its resources and development."**

Both China and the EU, for example, are guilty of 'environmental abuses' throughout Africa (French, 2006:130) by being large purchasers of illegal African timber. Moreover, it is Western pharmaceutical companies that engage in biopiracy in Africa (Sautman, 2006:3). Long ago, US Congresswoman, Frances Bolton (1956:126) had criticized the West in general, for going into Africa for its resources 'rather ruthlessly, to get, rather than to give...'

Arguably, by virtue of its close links with its former colonies, France is one of the most cited European countries whose economic presence in Africa has been decried consistently for having a negative impact on the economies of its African partners (Grey, 1990:111-112).

France in particular (Chafer, 2005) and the EU in general, have been criticized for 'generally' lacking a 'serious commitment to democracy and human rights promotion in Africa' (Olsen, 1998:343) principally because the political actions of EU and other individual European states in Africa are 'driven more by self-interest than by the norms and principles of democratic governance' (Crawford, 2005:571). Given this dismal assessment, Guellal's (1964:11) poignant observation that 'Europe was not in Africa for Africa's health' still seems all the more valid.

As concerns the US, it has also shown less commitment to development assistance in Africa as seen in its shrinking foreign aid budget (Nye, 2002:242); as well, it has fuelled some of Africa's worst political instabilities. Volman (1993) has elaborately documented US involvements in the political instabilities in Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia and Chad. It has also supported undemocratic and tyrannical regimes such as Moi's Kenya and, alongside France and Belgium, supported Mobutu's Zaire (see also Gary and Reisch, 2005; Mills, 2002:102; Sautman, 2006:23, for additional discussions on US involvement in supporting tyrannical regimes in Africa, a charge levied now against the Chinese).

As evidenced from the brief similarities of the approaches towards Africa by China and the West noted above, one is left with the impression that the extensive criticism of China from the western media and political elites smacks of nothing short of hypocrisy. Sautman (2006) has even argued that the differing ways in which China's links have developed with Africa make it appear as 'the distinctly lesser evil in comparison with the West, particularly with regards to questions vital to Africa's development and African dignity' (Sautman, 2006:i).

In a similar argument, while pointing out regrettably that China is 'risking a lessening of Africa's commitment to good governance', Princeton Layman, former US Ambassador to South Africa and Egypt, recently acknowledged that 'China has its own interests in Africa both political and economic, just as other countries do. There is no reason to vilify China...' (cited in Idun-Arkhusht and Laing, 2007:23).



## Conclusion

Principally because Africa is the 'most resourced continent' in the world (Sautman, 2006:7) in comparative terms, 'the scope and depth of involvement of external actors in the political and economic affairs of Sub-Saharan Africa is extraordinary' (Tull, 2005:139). China is now the centre of attention and its renewed interest in Africa will only increase this trend.



**Criticism of China by the West over environmental and other abuses 'nothing short of hypocrisy': the World Bank financed Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline.**

© Greenpeace/Nens Kusters

Forty-two years ago, George Yu concluded his 'survey' of Sino-African relations by forecasting that given the developmental aspirations in Africa, China will in the future, 'employ its resources, however limited and utilize a wide variety of techniques to penetrate Africa' (Yu, 1965:332). Recent developments in Sino-African relations make this observation more or less prophetic and it will increase in validity in the future.

Chinese aid to Africa, according to Zafar (2005:125) will 'grow exponentially in parallel with the trade surge and will remain unaffected by any slowdown in economic growth in China.' China has pledged its continued support for Africa in its development aspirations; with President Jiang Zeming justifying such commitment in 2000 by indicating that both China and Africa ought to work together in this direction because China is the 'largest developing country in the world and Africa is the continent with the largest number of developing countries' (cited in Muekalia, 2004:8).

Given that China, as Zakaria (2005:5) notes, is 'simply the biggest part of a new world' which cannot be 'switched off', the increasing engagement between China and Africa requires a 'balance of the economic and strategic interests of both sides' (Alden, 2005:6) in the course of which African states ought to see China as 'as much of an opportunity as a threat' (Soko, 2005:12).

**"Faced with a new 'scramble' for Africa's resources, African leaders need to learn from the past and use their resources as a bargaining weapon to obtain the best deal they can from the West or East for their nations and peoples."**

This present era stands out as a determining period in the development trajectory of sub-Saharan Africa. It is often said: use what you have to get what you need. Therefore, faced with a new 'scramble' for Africa's resources, African leaders need to learn from the past and use their resources as a bargaining weapon to obtain the best deal they can from the West or East for their nations and peoples.

Beyond obtaining the best possible deals from China or Western nations, African states need to redefine their business relationship with China to the extent that economic partnership between Africa and China should not translate to economic suicide and environmental disaster for African nations.

Arguably, China's unconditional aid to Africa has stood out as the most controversial issue in contemporary Sino-African engagements. While one may support calls for China to change its merely rhetorical and ambivalent support for African institutions like the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (Tull, 2006:476), it is perhaps appropriate to note that China's unconditional aid to Africa stands out as a test of conscientious leadership in Africa.

As controversial as such a stand may appear, one can play the devil's advocate by asking if African leaders really need to be told again and again to be more accountable for monies meant for development and whether in the wake of the negative effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (which are part of 'conditioned' aid from the Bretton Woods Institutions) receiving unconditional aid isn't more in Africa's interest? Or worse still, 'conditional aid' was misappropriated anyway?

The point in all this is that in order to attain what Mkandawire and Soludo (1999) have called 'developmental democracies' in Africa, African leaders know for sure that there is a need to shun bad governance because it hampers achieving such objectives. Hard as we may try to point to exogenous factors for Africa's underdevelopment, it remains a regrettable fact that the nature of African leadership carries a remarkable portion of the

responsibility for Africa's dismal economic standing.

**"Hard as we may try to point to exogenous factors for Africa's underdevelopment, it remains a regrettable fact that the nature of African leadership carries a remarkable portion of the responsibility for Africa's dismal economic standing."**

No matter how far China goes to try to 'do something good' for Africa, as my classmate, Ye Zhu will argue, the onus is on African leaders to negotiate this change in Africa's history by designing a beneficial economic partnership for Africa and above all, by ensuring good governance in their respective countries. In 2005, then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, put this latter imperative more clearly:

'Good governance and sustainable development are indivisible. That is the lesson of all our efforts and experiences from Africa to Asia and Latin America. Without good governance- without the rule of law, predictable administration, legitimate power and responsive regulation, *no amount of charity will set us on the path to prosperity*' (cited in Singh, 2005:5 emphasis added).

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## CAMEROONIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHINESE INVASION

by Ivo Ngome

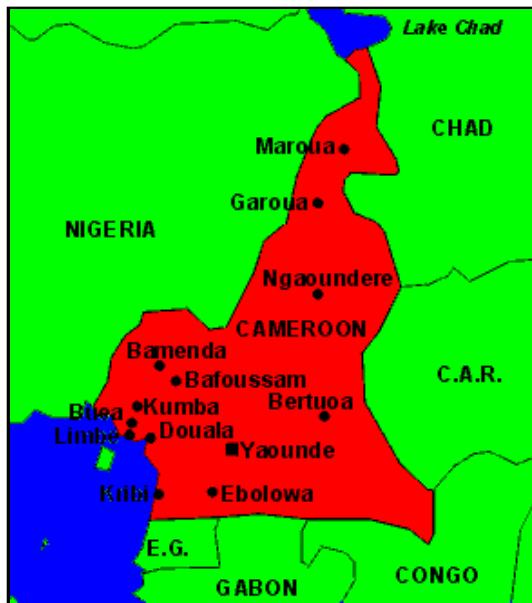
The influx of Chinese citizens, goods and money to Africa has been greeted with a lot of consternation and suspicion in most African countries. Cameroon has not been an exception. This article is based on a recent survey conducted in 10 Cameroonian cities concerning the flow of Chinese citizens and their goods into this peaceful West African country and the implication of this state of affairs on the country's economy and the living standards of her people. The survey interviewed 100 individuals representing every walk of life in each of the cities. This brought the total number of participants to 1000.

### Chinese immigration

Data analyzed from this survey revealed that practically all participants accepted that the number of Chinese citizens in Cameroon is on the rise. Most respondents resident in Cameroon's prime economic and tourist cities such as Douala, Yaoundé, Bafoussam, Limbe and Kribi emphasized that the rate of the Chinese influx into Cameroon is alarming and 70% of the respondents said they were disturbed by this apparently uncontrolled entry. Respondent D98, a security agent at the Douala International Airport, said, "There is a general complaint in the neighborhoods concerning the number of new Chinese faces people see each day in our streets. If some of our brothers in the quarters were working here at the airport, many would have killed themselves at the sight of literally thousands of Chinese faces entering the country every blessed day." However, not everybody shared this opinion; 25% of respondents said they liked the fact that Chinese are coming into the country and 5% said it did not matter to them.

Amongst those who hate the rapid increase in Chinese numbers in Cameroon, some simply felt threatened by this invasion. Most wondered why Chinese should massively emigrate from their country only to come and settle in a much poorer one. In other words, people echoed what respondent B77, a shopkeeper in Bamenda, said: "I hear China overflows with population, people everywhere. I fear they may be eyeing Cameroon to make it their new home." Other respondents assert Chinese do not come to Cameroon to help the economy. Instead, they come to exploit what the Europeans left untouched during the colonial days. Their argument is that the Chinese economy is not yet fully developed and their people are still very poor, so there is no ground for their pretending to want to help African states.

Yet another serious argument against the Chinese invasion of Cameroon is that it will increase unemployment. Respondents complained that Chinese have come and are competing and replacing Cameroonians even in such small businesses as frying and selling puffballs and other snacks in schools, playgrounds and open markets. Recently, inhabitants in Bamenda were taken aback as Chinese traders inundated the streets with what they call beignet Chinoise, doughnuts locally produced out of flour. This has threatened local doughnut sellers in Bamenda who grumble that most inhabitants in Bamenda have been enamored by the beignet Chinoise because parents buy in large quantities and take them home for their families to get the taste of "a white man's beignet". It is reported that Bamenda women who roast plantains by the roadside fear that if the Chinese are allowed to continue venturing in small businesses they would one



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### Forum Discussion:

The displacement of Cameroonians from commercial roles they can easily play seems harmful.

— Jim K., Toronto

Ngome Ivo in this article goes to the issues of the matter of the massive and disturbing influx of Chinese to Cameroon without putting his personal idiosyncrasy into the article. As a skilled researcher, he lays bare the multifaceted nature of the Chinese "invasion" of African countries, Cameroon being seriously hit by it. As a Cameroonian, I have questioned the wisdom of my Cameroonian leaders who have allowed such dumping to take place to the total disregard of home industries. Chinese have been involved in unfair competition with the ordinary citizens to the point of retailing products, selling puff puff and the like.

Well, I wish the leaders of my nation read such an article and take actions that will help the economy of the nation. They say "consumer cameroonais" but encourage such massive emigration, and almost if not entirely free imports of Chinese goods to Cameroon.

Bravooo!!! Ngome  
— Tem Martin, Buea, Cameroon





**A threat to small business: Chinese vendors sell 'puff-puff' snacks in Bamenda, Cameroon.**

- PostNewsLine.com

day join plantain roasters at roadsides. They blame the government of Cameroon for burdening Cameroonians with taxes while allowing the Chinese to trade freely.

**"Respondents complained that Chinese have come and are competing and replacing Cameroonians even in small businesses... They blame the government of Cameroon for burdening Cameroonians with taxes while allowing the Chinese to trade freely."**

But this discontent is not only among small traders nor is it limited to the city of Bamenda. Cameroon is overwhelmed by fierce competition between its local doctors and traditional healers from China. The country has over the past seven years witnessed an explosion in Chinese traditional medicine as many locals turn away from Western drugs and local traditional herbs. The explosion of Chinese healers, clinics, shops, and even mobile drug vendors has been amazing. Almost every town in Cameroon now has at least one traditional Chinese clinic. Bigger cities like Yaounde and Douala have about eight such clinics. Many patients who have used Chinese medication assert the drugs are effective, fairly cheap and the healers are more accessible than western trained doctors. But Western-trained doctors operating in Cameroon have not taken the popularity of Chinese healers lying down. They have described most of the Chinese healers and their associates as "quacks". Several times Cameroon's Medical Council, which brings together Western-trained and traditional doctors, has called on public health authorities to get tough on foreign healers by strictly regulating the health sector and exposing fake practitioners. But with a lack of clear-cut regulatory rules in the country's health sector, the council's calls have largely been ignored.



**Cameroonian women launch the Bangwa Mutual Health Organisation: health practitioners see a need to regulate traditional Chinese healers.**

- A. Ba / Abt Associates / USAID

### **Chinese goods – a great equalizer**

However, not everybody has something against increasing numbers of Chinese entering Cameroon. The few who welcome their coming said that Chinese generate employment opportunities in the land through the small businesses they operate. And it is not difficult for one to spot Chinese shops in many towns in Cameroon. These shops often recruit a few Cameroonians to serve as shopkeepers and advertising agents. A few respondents said the coming of the Chinese into Cameroon teaches practical lessons to Cameroonian youths in particular who think that the government must employ every graduate. These respondents said Chinese who come into the country do almost anything lawful to survive, even those things Cameroonians would not dare to do. For example, respondent Bu07, a lecturer at the University of Buea, said "The selling of puffballs has become an enviable business in the streets of Buea today because young men saw Chinese flourishing in Douala from this line of business and replicated it here. This was not the case a few years ago."

**"A few respondents said the coming of the Chinese into Cameroon teaches practical lessons to Cameroonian youths in particular who think that the government must employ every graduate."**

Every participant in this survey agreed that the quantity of Chinese products in Cameroonian markets is increasing every day. New Chinese shops crop up very frequently in almost every Cameroonian town and new brands of cheap Chinese products seem to be introduced regularly. A majority of respondents (81%) indicated they welcome Chinese products entering Cameroon. This group of respondents reported that Chinese products are very cheap and affordable even to the lowest class of Cameroonian citizens. They said certain commodities such as some electrical appliances, household equipment, clothes, office goods, decorations, farm implements, and kitchen utensils are no longer reserved for people of the highest echelon of society. Most households say they can now afford television sets, DVD players, kitchen utensils, clothes, shoes, etc that they could not have dreamed of acquiring in the recent past. They said, though generally of low quality, the relatively cheap products have removed the odious task of having to amass a lot of wealth to buy a single item that hitherto discouraged poor households from purchasing such goods. Respondent L43, a pensioner in Limbe, said "I have worked as a warder with the government of Cameroon for over 43 years but my meager salary could not allow me buy a television set. Today, with my pension allowance, I have bought a cheap Chinese-made television, which if I handle well will serve me for some time."

And indeed, this response is valid. Some years ago, it was normal for one to spot a huge crowd of people scrambling in front of the windows of rich people's houses simply to catch a glimpse of a football match on TV. Cameroon is such a football-mad country that it was also normal to hear of free-for-all fights at off-licenses that have TV sets because those who could not afford them normally crowded around these to watch the game. These odd scenarios are changing rapidly as almost every household can now possess almost every appliance, including TVs. The difference only surfaces in terms of quality, which translates into how long the products last.

### **On the road to employment**

But the biggest supporters of Chinese products entering Cameroon are those who regard them from the viewpoint of employment. These respondents affirm that the cheapness of Chinese products has made business ventures easy. One no longer needs a lot of capital to buy and sell Chinese goods such as clothes, kitchen utensils, household appliances and cosmetics. Their cheap motorbikes have been a source of employment and have changed the lifestyle of millions of hitherto unemployed youths. Success stories abound in this connection.

**"The cheapness of Chinese products has made business ventures easy. One no longer needs a lot of capital to buy and sell Chinese goods such as clothes, kitchen utensils, household appliances and cosmetics."**

Respondent K88, for example, is a young man in Kumba in his late twenties. He is the firstborn in a family of 10, having 2 sisters and 5 brothers. He, like three of his siblings, dropped out of school once they completed primary education because their parents could not pay their way to college. "We have been living hand-to-mouth since my father got partially paralysed after he was bitten by a snake on his farm in 1993" he said. Realising that Chinese-made motorbikes were inexpensive, this respondent urged his mother to borrow some money from her "njangi" (cultural associations where savings are made and loans granted), to purchase a motorbike for him. "Since I started doing bendskin [motorbike taxi] with my machine, we have never slept hungry in our house. It took me only 8 months to repay my mother's debt and buy a new bike for my younger brother who has now joined me on the streets." He concluded by saying that the living standard of his household has increased significantly thanks to Chinese-made motorbikes.

Many respondents were quick to acknowledge this contribution that Chinese products have made in alleviating unemployment in Cameroon. They said affordable Chinese-made motorbikes have been especially helpful for they have appreciably addressed the employment needs of the lowest level of Cameroonian youths, particularly school dropouts and people who are severely poor who had no hope for the future. A significant proportion of interlocutors (35%) said motorbike taxis have also come to reduce insecurity in Cameroon for they now occupy previously idle Cameroonian hands who took up armed robbery as a survival mechanism. Respondent K46, a law enforcement officer in Kumba, intimated that "...the coming of bendskin into this town has helped reduce the crime rate. Armed robbery has drastically reduced and those bendskin boys are helping us apprehend some thieves given that some of them were once thieves as well." In Ebolowa, Respondent E12, also a law enforcement officer, avowed, "These Chinese motorbikes are helping to occupy our children in the absence of something

better to do. This bendskin business has reduced armed robbery in Ebolowa even if it has also increased street accidents. Though injury and death are never good things to talk about, it is however, better to hear of injuries caused by road accidents than by armed robbery.”

### Weighing the pros and cons



**An influx of Chinese products: questions of durability, discouragement of local production.**

- USAID / R. Zurba

But not everybody is happy with the influx of Chinese products into our local markets. Some respondents said Chinese products are of extremely low quality and are only cheap at the time of purchase. Once they have been bought, users spend a lot more repairing them, which makes nonsense of why one bought them in the first place. Moreover, Chinese producers like counterfeiting original products, throwing those who still prefer durable goods into confusion. Some respondents expressed their frustration over the scarcity of durable goods in the market. They complain that Chinese goods which some describe as “good for nothing” are sometimes deliberately fabricated in the likeness of western-made products to deceive buyers who are looking for quality. Others complain that the invasion of Chinese products into local markets discourages home production and, given their giveaway prices, Chinese goods have an edge over homemade products in the free market.

The latter complaint was strongly resisted by a few respondents who wondered whether Cameroon produces anything that is currently imported from China. For example, Respondent Y97, a journalist resident in Yaoundé asked, “Does Cameroon produce TV sets, DVD players, motorbikes, sewing machines, battery chargers, glass tables and flower vases that we buy cheap from Chinese stores? Over the years the rich among us have been buying and enjoying these same products made in rich countries like Britain, France, and the United States. Now the Chinese have given the poor an opportunity to enjoy what the rich have been identifying themselves with. Why do people complain?” Respondent Be03, a bartender in Bertoua, said, “We do not produce consumer goods in Cameroon except agricultural products. Why should Chinese not bring theirs to help the poor amongst us?”

### **"A large majority of respondents (about 92%) accepted that China does help Cameroon's economy in one way or another."**

Despite the above claims and counterclaims, a large majority of respondents (about 92%) accepted that China does help Cameroon's economy in one way or another. They said Chinese businesses in Cameroon bring in revenue to our government through taxes, help alleviate unemployment by creating jobs, increase purchasing power of Cameroonians given their cheap products and also that the government of China is a significant donor to the government of Cameroon. The rest of the respondents were either unaware of Chinese influence on Cameroon's economy or thought it was negative for discouraging local craftsmanship.

Most respondents (87%) were able to identify at least one way that the China-Cameroon relationship has benefited Cameroon. They were quick to mention infrastructure that has been built or refurbished through Chinese assistance. This included hospitals, schools, sports complexes and the imposing Congress Hall in Yaoundé. Only last year (March 2006), General Zhongtong, Deputy Director at the Department of General Politics in the People's Liberation Army of China, who led a 10-member delegation to Cameroon, promised that Chinese military assistance to Cameroon, which before then centred on training of officials on the one hand and technical skills and material on the other hand, was to be diversified and strengthened. During discussions with that Chinese delegation, the Minister Delegate at the Presidency of Cameroon in charge of Defence, Remy Ze Meka expressed gratitude to China for modernizing Cameroon's military through capacity building, and technical and material assistance.

Still, a few respondents (8%) maintained that the China-Cameroon relationship harms Cameroon's economy, in that it seriously undermines local entrepreneurship by forcing homemade goods out of local markets.

Over three quarters of interviewees (79%) recommended that the China-Cameroon



relationship continue, but not without conditions: the government should apply caution in the number of Chinese citizens allowed to enter Cameroon because their increasing numbers is creating suspicion in the minds of people. Most people are unsure about the intentions of the Chinese as they flood Cameroon. People think they should be stopped before the unexpected happens. "We like their goods," Respondent D33, a nurse in Douala, said. "But we do not like their coming here the way they do. They can send their goods to our markets, not come here to harbour their overflowing population."

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### Who benefits?

Asked who benefits the most in this China-Cameroon relationship in Cameroon, about 70% of respondents said it benefits the government while 30% said it benefits the poor. The former group of interlocutors said the government couldn't afford to miss the huge grants that the People's Republic of China gives them every now and then. These respondents said the grants are donated in cash and kind and though the common Cameroonian often does not know what the government does with the cash, they at least see Chinese-renovated hospitals, playgrounds and schools serving the Cameroonian public. Respondents who said the China-Cameroon relationship mostly benefits the poor indicated that the availability of cheap Chinese products in local markets has significantly augmented the purchasing power of poor Cameroonians.



**Young indigent Cameroonians: only 30 percent of respondents said the China-Cameroon relationship was of most benefit to the poor.**  
- FAO / T. Janssen

Since a majority of Cameroonians are poor, perhaps it is logical to argue that Chinese products and the China-Cameroon relationship is beneficial to most Cameroonians. The negative effects of this relationship seems to be felt mostly by business tycoons who hitherto enjoyed a monopoly of importing and selling certain types of goods that needed high capital to access. But with Chinese goods appearing cheap, even average business people now talk of importing containers of goods for local markets. Many people have opened up shops where they sell Chinese goods and sustain their families. Some of the Chinese products such as motorbikes now serve as a veritable source of employment to millions of Cameroonian youths while Chinese-made appliances such as pressing irons, TV sets, DVD players, electric shavers, musical sets, sewing machines and all kinds of kitchen utensils have augmented the living standards of the masses and thus minimized the gap between rich and poor households. How will it benefit the poor if only high quality goods are sold that only the rich can afford? Instead, the availability of cheap goods alongside expensive durable ones gives space for alternatives and competition, giving the consumer an advantage.

The strongest argument against this relationship seems to be the seemingly uncontrolled flood of Chinese citizens inundating Cameroon and threatening to grab local jobs. If the number of Chinese immigrants into Cameroon could be checked, this relationship may one day end with a round of applause from most Cameroonians.

*Ivo Ngome is the Manager of ResearchTour Cameroon, an institution that provides assistance to researchers and tourist information to people interested in exploring Cameroon. He can be reached by e-mail at [ngomeiswell@yahoo.com](mailto:ngomeiswell@yahoo.com).*

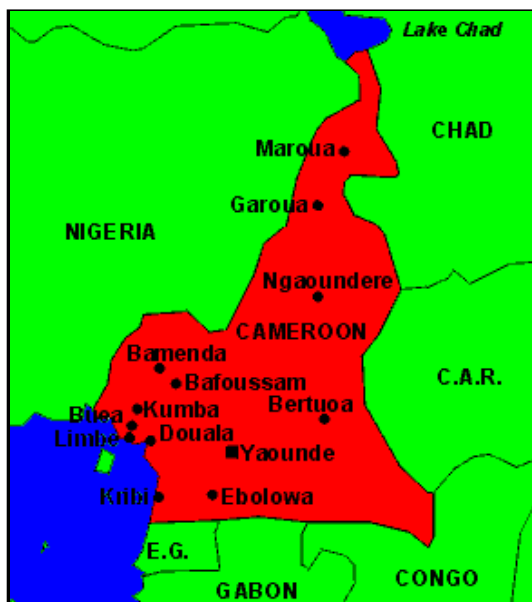
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Respondent K88, for example, is a young man in Kumba in his late twenties. He is the firstborn in a family of 10, having 2 sisters and 5 brothers. He, like three of his siblings, dropped out of school once they completed primary education because their parents could not pay their way to college. "We have been living hand-to-mouth since my father got partially paralysed after he was bitten by a snake on his farm in 1993" he said. Realising that Chinese-made motorbikes were inexpensive, this respondent urged his mother to borrow some money from her "njangi" (cultural associations where savings are made and loans granted), to purchase a motorbike for him. "Since I started doing bendskin [motorbike taxi] with my machine, we have never slept hungry in our house. It took me only 8 months to repay my mother's debt and buy a new bike for my younger brother who has now joined me on the streets." He concluded by saying that the living standard of his household has increased significantly thanks to Chinese-made motorbikes.

Many respondents were quick to acknowledge this contribution that Chinese products have made in alleviating unemployment in Cameroon. They said affordable Chinese-made motorbikes have been especially helpful for they have appreciably addressed the employment needs of the lowest level of Cameroonian youths, particularly school dropouts and people who are severely poor who had no hope for the future. A significant proportion of interlocutors (35%) said motorbike taxis have also come to reduce insecurity in Cameroon for they now occupy previously idle Cameroonian hands who took up armed robbery as a survival mechanism. Respondent K46, a law enforcement officer in Kumba, intimated that "...the coming of bendskin into this town has helped reduce the crime rate. Armed robbery has drastically reduced and those bendskin boys are helping us apprehend some thieves given that some of them were once thieves as well." In Ebolowa, Respondent E12, also a law enforcement officer, avowed, "These Chinese motorbikes are helping to occupy our children in the absence of something better to do. This bendskin business has reduced armed robbery in Ebolowa even if it has also increased street accidents. Though injury and death are never good things to talk about, it is however, better to hear of injuries caused by road accidents than by armed robbery."

## Weighing the pros and cons



**An influx of Chinese products: questions of durability, discouragement of local production.**

- USAID / R. Zurba

But not everybody is happy with the influx of Chinese products into our local markets. Some respondents said Chinese products are of extremely low quality and are only cheap at the time of purchase. Once they have been bought, users spend a lot more repairing them, which makes nonsense of why one bought them in the first place. Moreover, Chinese producers like counterfeiting original products, throwing those who still prefer durable goods into confusion. Some respondents expressed their frustration over the scarcity of durable goods in the market. They complain that Chinese goods which some describe as "good for nothing" are sometimes deliberately fabricated in the likeness of western-made products to deceive buyers who are looking for quality. Others complain that the invasion of Chinese products into local markets discourages home production and, given their giveaway prices, Chinese goods have an edge over homemade products in the free market.

The latter complaint was strongly resisted by a few respondents who wondered whether Cameroon produces anything that is currently imported from China. For example, Respondent Y97, a journalist resident in Yaoundé asked, "Does Cameroon produce TV sets, DVD players, motorbikes, sewing machines, battery chargers, glass tables and flower vases that we buy cheap from Chinese stores? Over the years the rich among us have been buying and enjoying these same products made in rich countries like Britain, France, and the United States. Now the Chinese have given the poor an opportunity to enjoy what the rich have been identifying themselves with. Why do people complain?" Respondent Be03, a bartender in Bertoua, said, "We do not produce consumer goods in Cameroon except agricultural products. Why should Chinese not bring theirs to help the poor amongst us?"

**"A large majority of respondents (about 92%) accepted that China does help Cameroon's economy in one way or another."**

Despite the above claims and counterclaims, a large majority of respondents (about 92%) accepted that China does help Cameroon's economy in one way or another. They said Chinese businesses in Cameroon bring in revenue to our government through taxes, help alleviate unemployment by creating jobs, increase purchasing power of Cameroonians given their cheap products and also that the government of China is a significant donor to the government of Cameroon. The rest of the respondents were either unaware of Chinese influence on Cameroon's economy or thought it was negative for discouraging local craftsmanship.

Most respondents (87%) were able to identify at least one way that the China-Cameroon relationship has benefited Cameroon. They were quick to mention infrastructure that has been built or refurbished through Chinese assistance. This included hospitals, schools, sports complexes and the imposing Congress Hall in Yaoundé. Only last year (March 2006), General Zhongtong, Deputy Director at the Department of General Politics in the People's Liberation Army of China, who led a 10-member delegation to Cameroon, promised that Chinese military assistance to Cameroon, which before then centred on training of officials on the one hand and technical skills and material on the other hand, was to be diversified and strengthened. During discussions with that Chinese delegation, the Minister Delegate at the Presidency of Cameroon in charge of Defence, Remy Ze Meka expressed gratitude to China for modernizing Cameroon's military through capacity building, and technical and material assistance.

Still, a few respondents (8%) maintained that the China-Cameroon relationship harms Cameroon's economy, in that it seriously undermines local entrepreneurship by forcing homemade goods out of local markets.

Over three quarters of interviewees (79%) recommended that the China-Cameroon relationship continue, but not without conditions: the government should apply caution in the number of Chinese citizens allowed to enter Cameroon because their increasing numbers is creating suspicion in the minds of people. Most people are unsure about the intentions of the Chinese as they flood Cameroon. People think they should be stopped before the unexpected happens. "We like their goods," Respondent D33, a nurse in Douala, said. "But we do not like their coming here the way they do. They can send their goods to our markets, not come here to harbour their overflowing population."

**"Over three quarters of interviewees (79%) recommended that the China-Cameroon relationship continue, but not without conditions."**

**Who benefits?**

Asked who benefits the most in this China-Cameroon relationship in Cameroon, about 70% of respondents said it benefits the government while 30% said it benefits the poor. The former group of interlocutors said the government couldn't afford to miss the huge grants that the People's Republic of China gives them every now and then. These respondents said the grants are donated in cash and kind and though the common Cameroonian often does not know what the government does with the cash, they at least see Chinese-renovated hospitals, playgrounds and schools serving the Cameroonian public. Respondents who said the China-Cameroon relationship mostly benefits the poor indicated that the availability of cheap Chinese products in local markets has significantly augmented the purchasing power of poor Cameroonians.

Since a majority of Cameroonians are poor, perhaps it is logical to argue that Chinese



products and the China-Cameroon relationship is beneficial to most Cameroonians. The negative effects of this relationship seems to be felt mostly by business tycoons who hitherto enjoyed a monopoly of importing and selling certain types of goods that needed high capital to access. But with Chinese goods appearing cheap, even average business people now talk of importing containers of goods for local markets. Many people have opened up shops where they sell Chinese goods and sustain their families. Some of the Chinese products such as motorbikes now serve as a veritable source of employment to millions of Cameroonian youths while



**Young indigent Cameroonians: only 30 percent of respondents said the China-Cameroon relationship was of most benefit to the poor.**

- FAO / T. Janssen

Chinese-made appliances such as pressing irons, TV sets, DVD players, electric shavers, musical sets, sewing machines and all kinds of kitchen utensils have augmented the living standards of the masses and thus minimized the gap between rich and poor households. How will it benefit the poor if only high quality goods are sold that only the rich can afford? Instead, the availability of cheap goods alongside expensive durable ones gives space for alternatives and competition, giving the consumer an advantage.

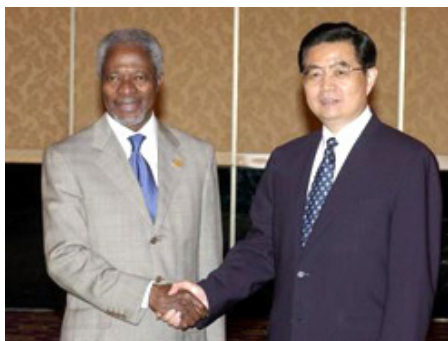
The strongest argument against this relationship seems to be the seemingly uncontrolled flood of Chinese citizens inundating Cameroon and threatening to grab local jobs. If the number of Chinese immigrants into Cameroon could be checked, this relationship may one day end with a round of applause from most Cameroonians.

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## CHINA'S CRUCIAL ROLE IN AFRICA

by J-P Thompson

Entering the 21st century, China has a global agenda. Its aim is to establish itself as a genuine super-power to rival the United States militarily, politically and economically. In the context of these ambitions over the past decade and a half, China has endeavored determinedly to develop an array of economic relationships, beyond its traditional trading partners of Asia, North America and Europe. In no uncertain terms, it is aggressively integrating itself into the economies of South America and, of course, Africa. The image China is cultivating around these relationships is one of a leader in 'South-South' co-operation; a concept focused on developing countries assisting other developing countries to improve their economic standing. It is also presented as a viable and preferable alternative to Western ties. Accordingly, China has willingly demonstrated largesse to African countries: for example, at the China-Africa forum in 2006 (box 1) and in President Hu Jintao's trip to select African countries in 2007. The most recent expression of China's economic focus on Africa is the launch of a billion dollar trust fund to help foster commercial ties between Chinese companies and African states.



**China promotes its leadership in South-South cooperation: Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Chinese President Hu Jintao at the 2006 Asian-African Summit in Indonesia.**

UN Photo/Eskinder Debeba

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### Box 1: Chinese fortune cookies from the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2006

- [doubling its 2006 assistance to Africa by 2009](#)

- providing \$3 billion of preferential loans and \$2 billion of preferential buyer's credit over the next three years.
- increasing by over 100 percent the number of export items from Africa's poorest countries that will attain zero-tariff status.
- cancelling debt to heavily indebted poor countries via government loans that matured at the end of 2005

Despite many grandiose gestures, China's over-arching strategy in Africa is principally based on a finite goal: to procure the continent's natural resources. Therefore, it will only be willing to expend finite means to attain this goal. This calls for African elites to be alert to the fact that China is not necessarily the proverbial golden goose they seek. Yet, China's recent interest in African resources reinforces an important idea. In an increasingly competitive multi-polar world, African natural resources gain in strategic importance. These natural resources should be used as leverage to ensure that they act principally as an investment to revitalize African economies by enhancing the capacity of local industry and empowering local populations. Ultimately, this hands the initiative back to African countries to forge more equitable and sustainable relationships with trading partners. For this to happen, the pattern of elites on both sides of the equation being the sole beneficiary of Africa's resources must desist and not be replicated. The current situation provides a window for African civil society to create and maintain dialogue and put pressure on leaders to try and ensure the best deal from the scarce natural commodities for their population.

### A new scramble

China is making remarkable headway in Africa at the expense of the West which is gradually losing influence over the continent it once dominated so strongly. The West is burdened with its colonial past which still resonates. However, it is the more recent, gross economic mismanagement and discreditable aid conditionalities, governed in large part by the World Bank and the IMF, that have left a trail of development failures, debt and deeper poverty than even 50 years ago. Even the much lauded Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the debt forgiveness promised in 2005 are significantly behind schedule. At the very least, Western states must expect accusations of moral bankruptcy and continuing a neo-colonial agenda in Africa.

A revolution is required in the way the West perceives what the developing world needs; unfortunately, this may be a long time in coming. Despite this, an examination of trading figures (table 1) reveals that the West is still currently the principal economic actor in Africa and will fight to retain its supremacy. However, while it is beyond the scope of this article to offer full predictions, it is not difficult to imagine that within the next generation China will become the primary economic force on the continent.

**Table 1: The West still prevails ... but China is catching up**

Source: 'Africa's Silk Road' (Reference 4)

Region	Share of African exports: 1990	Share of African exports: 2005 (2004)	Average growth rate of Africa's exports: 1990-95 (1990-94)	Average growth rate of Africa's exports: 2000-05 (1999-04)	Share of Africa's imports: 1990	Share of Africa's imports: 2005 (2004)
USA	33%	29%	1.4%	19%	10%	9%
EU	48%	32%	1%	12%	63%	43%
Asia (China)	9% (-)	27% (11%)	15% (20%)	20% (48%)	23% (-)	33% (12%)

While some allowances have to be made for differentiation between comparative periods, the pattern remains clear. The West's share of exports and imports has decreased over time while Asia, driven by China, has considerably expanded its influence. Importantly, these figures do not take into account the fervent rapprochement between China and Africa since 2006. Given the choice of continuing to have faith in a system that has failed miserably for the last two generations, and is immersed in centuries of acrimonious history, or developing closer ties with the emerging challenger to the current global hegemony, it is to be expected that many African states will begin to 'look East', if they are not already doing so.

On the surface, China is the antithesis of the West. Firstly, there is no colonial history with Africa to scar relationships. In fact, China has successfully broken away from its own colonial shackles since World War II. Secondly, China has no democratically elected government and has managed to successfully industrialize and move its country out of extreme poverty for much of its population. This alternative model is proof to many African elites that democracy is not a necessary prerequisite for successful economic development. Thirdly, China seemingly shows little or no concern for the domestic politics of its partners, beyond asking for a strong stance against Taiwan. It has not been trying to impose economic and governance models on Africa. Moreover, it is not risk-averse when commercial opportunities present themselves. Finally, China strives to demonstrate to Africa that it is not the West by advertising itself as an avenue through which African nations may disentangle themselves from Western ties. This is shown in China's ability to provide financing on a scale the continent has not seen before and to take on and complete an array of infrastructure projects.

**"On the surface, China is the antithesis of the West...  
However ... the basic approach of China, resource  
extraction, is not that far removed from previous colonial  
enterprises."**

All of these attributes make China a particularly attractive alternative to the West. However, African nations should proceed with caution when forming economic partnerships with China. The basic approach of China, resource extraction, is not that far removed from previous colonial enterprises and Africa will need to be especially wary if it wishes to determine its own future. This calls for a closer look at China's approach to development in Africa, important for African elites and civil society alike.

#### **China's thirst for resources - incidental development**

China has experienced an industrial boom since the 1990s that requires a vast amount of raw materials. Before examining China's interest in Africa's oil more closely, it is helpful to view this in the context of other African exports to China. Table 2 identifies the top 10 African exports to China, excluding oil. Again, it is important to note that these figures do not capture data from 2005 onwards.

**Table 2: Top 10 African exports to China (excluding oil)**

Source: 'Africa's Silk Road' (Reference 4)

<b>Export &amp; share in total African exports to China (2002-04 average)</b>	<b>Leading exporting country &amp; total export value of product</b>	<b>Secondary exporting country &amp; total export value of product</b>
Sawlogs & veneer logs - 4.91%	Gabon - 41.17%	Rep. of Congo - 17.84%
Iron ore & concentrates - 4.59%	South Africa - 94.03%	Mauritania - 3.54%
Diamonds - 3.3%	South Africa - 99.27%	
Cotton (other than linters) - 3.28%	Benin - 21.54%	Burkina Faso - 17.26%
Ores & concentrates of other nonferrous base metals - 1.75%	South Africa - 30.95%	Rep. of Congo - 26.73%
Tobacco - 1.51%	Zimbabwe - 99.56%	
Iron or steel coils - 1.38%	South Africa - 100%	
Platinum - 1.34%	South Africa - 100%	
Manganese ores & concentrates - 1.31%	Gabon - 46.53%	Ghana - 25.87%
Copper & copper alloys - 1.26%	Zambia - 48.36%	South Africa - 29.24%

What is immediately apparent is the emphasis on natural resources. Indeed, in 2004, ores and metals (17 percent) and agricultural raw materials (7 percent) made up nearly

one-quarter of total African exports to China. Furthermore, although there is diversity among these natural resources, their respective shares of African exports to China are very shallow. Nineteen out of twenty exports account for a share of less than 5 percent. Despite certain increases in the coming years, this lack of depth is important because it calls into question the extent to which China will invest in helping to develop the value-added components of an industry beyond extraction. The pressing concern remains over the long-term sustainability of development aid being tied to a limited amount of resources. This finite quality intrinsic to these natural resources necessitates that they be used as the best possible long-term investment strategy. Observing China's approach to trade relations with Africa, there is no reassurance that this is presently occurring.

China's pragmatic approach to trade relations guarantees that the purported "win-win cooperation" is palpably loaded in China's favour. The gains African states stand to make tend to be short-term windfalls. On the other hand, the long-term benefits are less readily discernible. In fact, it is arguable that when potential social and environmental costs are taken into account the long-term disadvantages will far outweigh the current short-term benefits. Therefore, African states will fall short of maximizing the potential returns from this relationship.

**"China's pragmatic approach to trade relations guarantees that the purported 'win-win cooperation' is palpably loaded in China's favour."**

Meanwhile, China's affordable short-term investments will allow China to capitalize fully in the future; most notably, in bolstering their resource and energy policies. To this end, China's behaviour is mercantilist: defined as the promotion of competitive international trade but ultimately anchored and directed by the state's government. In this arrangement, companies are primarily extensions of their country's government. Currently, there are over 1,000 Chinese investment projects in Africa which are being operated by approximately 700 Chinese companies. The overwhelming majority of these are manifestations of a monolithic central government driven by the promise of economic and commercial expansion.

### **Exploitation in Zambia**

The case of copper-extraction in Zambia raises very real concerns that China's interest is purely exploitative. The Chinese state-owned, NFC Africa, part of the China Non-ferrous Metal Industry's Foreign Engineering & Construction Company, bought an 85 percent stake of the Chambisi mine in Zambia's Copperbelt region in 1998. At the time the \$20 million investment was viewed as saving the mine from closure. However, it was soon plagued by tensions between workers and owners that continue today. Primarily, these tensions are over poor remunerations and working conditions. The Chinese are accused of exploiting the local labour force by paying poor wages, as little as a \$100 a month, with little or no benefits and while Zambian workers labour in enclosed dark and dusty spaces with machinery and explosives, often without boots or protective clothing and equipment. A lack of safety provisions was blamed for an explosion at the mine that killed 49 workers in 2005. In 2006, riot police were brought in to quell demonstrations against these general conditions; they killed one person and hospitalized five others.



**Copper smelting works in Zambia: a pattern of poor remuneration and working conditions under Chinese ownership.**

*© African Studies Program, Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin Systems*

Besides the abhorrent neglect for basic human rights, there were further protests at the Chambisi mine against labour being imported from China to do work that Zambians could have done. This exemplifies another dimension of exploitation. External involvement of this sort stunts potential for local industry to evolve and develop the value-added components necessary to transform an industry. In this case, there is little evidence showing China is allowing Zambia to fully realize its potential as a world copper producer. It does not improve local resource-processing capacity or manufacturing and commercialization aspects that can diversify the economy.

Therefore, Zambia remains reliant on a quantitative, resource-intense trade and is unable to progress to more qualitative, higher-earning activities that can ultimately provide a better future for its citizens.



A further form of exploitation is to take advantage of this inability to diversify the economy. Locally produced goods and services are scarce and are prone to being undercut by imported goods because they are less expensive; this leads to further economic hardships in Zambia, and provides more tension as Chinese traders replace local traders selling cheaper goods, especially textiles. As a result, local factories are closed, jobs are lost and deep-rooted economic growth remains unattainable as the unfair competition controls the market.

This is reflective of a wider pattern of China's exports to Africa. In 2004, 87 percent of Africa's imports from China are manufactured or processed goods; textiles-based goods account for 36 percent. By comparison, African manufactured goods struggle to maintain a foothold in the Chinese marketplace accounting for only 13 percent of exports. Regardless of the supposed economic generosity that China exhibits, a picture can be construed of China giving with one hand while taking away with the other.

Despite this, China is keen on promoting itself as a benevolent primus inter pares in the realm of 'South-South' cooperation. This requires more than just controlling the well of the resources for exploitative purposes. Certainly, China does assist countries in ways such as knowledge and technical transfers— offering scholarships for African students and other intercollegiate exchanges, training African professionals in a variety of fields, providing agricultural and medical experts, building hospitals and malaria treatment centres and giving equipment to schools and universities. Coupled with their proven ability to build infrastructure, this demonstrates that China has contributed much to Africa. However, it has always been as a means to secure one raw material or another. Basically, China is willing to expand beyond its strategy of resource extraction when it best suits its purposes. This incidental development is no where more so apparent than in China's approach to Africa's oil.

**"China has contributed much to Africa. However, it has always been as a means to secure one raw material or another."**

### **The primacy of oil**

Foremost on China's agenda is their quest for oil (box 2). Africa accounts for approximately 7 percent of the world's known oil reserves. Not only is this oil still relatively untapped but new deposits are being discovered in countries previously thought of as dry, such as Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. In 2004, crude oil alone accounted for 62 percent of African exports to China. China will continue to pursue an aggressive policy towards African oil and this is likely to compound tensions with the United States. China is already a prominent investor in the economies of its principal oil partners in Africa—Nigeria (accounting for 3.07% of African oil exported to China), Equatorial Guinea (9.17%), Republic of Congo (13%) and not least in Sudan (24.66%) and Angola (46.80%). China's approach to the latter two countries offers valuable insights into the principal strategic directions it has adopted when dealing with African countries.

#### **Box 2: China's oil motivations**

- It is already the world's second largest oil importer after the U.S.
- China's oilfields passed their peak in 1999;
- 4 million cars are added to Chinese roads on a yearly basis;
- Production of petroleum derivatives in the chemical industry already claims 70 percent of the oil demand and is growing;
- Petroleum is increasingly preferred to coal for heating;
- It is estimated that by 2020, China will have to import nearly two-thirds of its oil.

### **China and Angola**

China has the wherewithal, the knowledge and the man-power at its disposal to embrace massive infrastructure projects and accomplish them with minimal fuss. In Angola, Chinese construction is significantly noticeable- railroads, schools, roads,

hospitals, bridges, offices and a fiber-optic communications network have all been built by Chinese companies. All of this was very necessary after the 25-year civil war that left hundreds of thousands dead and a decimated infrastructure. Furthermore, after the fighting stopped in 2002, China was able to expand its aid strategy in Angola by providing enormous financial support.

Despite strong links beforehand, based originally on ideological alignment, economic ties between Chinese and Angolan governments increased dramatically. Bilateral trade increased in 2003 and 2004 by 113 percent, to US\$4.9bn, and shows no signs of cooling. Since 2002, on the back of commercial credit agreements, trade agreements, interest-free loan extensions, investments and gifts, the World Bank estimates that China has funded Angola to the tune of nearly \$10bn. Furthermore, in early 2007, the Chinese vice-president signed nine co-operation agreements with Angola that would allow more to flow into Angolan coffers. These lines of credit that run into billions are allowing the Angolan government the space to move away from prescriptive IMF economic policies, much to the concern of Western countries.

The Angolan Government, the MPLA, is nominally a Marxist regime and has governed the country since 1976. It is highly corrupt and thrives on cronyism. It has continually refused to demonstrate any form of accountability and transparency with respect to oil revenue. This oil revenue accounts for 90 percent of total government revenue and is more than 60 percent of Angolan GDP. In 2005, Transparency International ranked Angola 151st out of 158 in its annual corruption index.

Furthermore, having a partner like China that does not attach demands of good governance to its vast support makes it easier for the MPLA to turn away from Western states and organisations.

Meanwhile, it continues to siphon off billions of dollars in oil-generated revenues through the state-run Sonangol oil company; whereas 75 percent of Angolans continue to live in extreme poverty. Despite the lack of good governance, rebuilding infrastructure and the massive investments provided by China will eventually have a bearing on efforts to alleviate this poverty. However, this impact is secondary, an afterthought, to the principal aim of ensuring that much of Angolan oil goes to its clients as efficiently as possible.

Angola's principal clients are American and Chinese companies who stand to gain the lion's share of the 800,000 to a million barrels of oil that are produced daily. The United States imports 50 percent of Angola's oil but China is catching up. Significantly, in the first half of 2006 Angola overtook Saudi Arabia as the largest oil supplier to China. Currently, at least 25 percent of Angolan oil is earmarked for China.

### China and Sudan

As mentioned previously, China's apparent policy of "non-interference" in the domestic affairs of other states is central to its appeal as a trading partner. By not tying investment to issues like, good governance or human rights, China stands to benefit from this arrangement as much as the regime in power. While the regime has access to funds with no strings attached, China attempts to fast-track economic expansion. Additionally, China has shown a willingness to risk investment in countries that others would probably avoid. Decades of civil strife, corruption, lack of political stability, and poor infrastructure rarely deter China from seeking commercial opportunities. This combination is perhaps best demonstrated when examining China-Sudan relations.

China has turned a blind eye to the internal chaos that has engulfed Sudan since the 1960's. However, since then, China has sold weaponry and facilitated the financing of purchasing military equipment to Sudanese governments and rebels. These weapons include helicopters, jetfighters, tanks, missiles, ammunitions, anti-tank and anti-personal mines, as well as an assortment of guns and rifles. In the past, this support has contributed to the conflicts that have raged between the North and South of the country, over religion, ethnicity and oil. These issues are still manifest today in the current situation.

More recently, in Darfur, China has been able to use its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to afford diplomatic protection to the Al-Bashir regime. It has clearly demonstrated this authority by vetoing recent efforts to send



**Searching debris in Luanda's harbour for rocks to sell as gravel: massive revenue from oil bought by China does not reach 75% of Angolans who live in extreme poverty.**

© ACT/Paul Geoffroy



**US and China envoys discuss a UN peacekeeping force for Sudan's Darfur region in August 2006: China has great responsibility given the power it wields through trade in oil and weapons.**

*UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras*

international peace-keepers to Sudan without consent from Khartoum. It is evident that Chinese support has sustained a nefarious regime and hampered international efforts to resolve the issue. All the while, Sudanese troops and government-backed militias continue committing human rights atrocities, using, in large part, imported Chinese weaponry.

The sale of weaponry increased significantly in the mid-1990s, coinciding with China's initial investment in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), through its state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). The CNPC now has a 40 percent stake in the GNPOC consortium. This is just one example of the extent of Chinese involvement in Sudan's oil industry. In fact, in all of its upstream aspects — exploration, excavation, pipelines, storage capability and refining — Chinese companies have an increasingly important market share. Although Angola provides China with the most oil, Sudan is China's biggest oil investment overseas. This would seem to indicate that they are

expecting even greater gains in the future than they presently receive. Considering that Sudan only began exporting oil in 1999, there is every chance that Sudan will surpass Angola in supplying China with oil in the future. Currently, roughly 60 percent of Sudan's oil is destined for China, making up 12 percent of Chinese oil imports.

The growing importance of oil in China's outlook towards Africa should not be understated. Africa is second only to the Middle East in exporting oil to China. Various estimates believe African oil accounts for between 26 to 33 percent of China's oil imports and have been increasing at a compound rate of 30 percent annually. Other resource-rich countries have also witnessed steady increases in exports to China and this trend will undoubtedly continue.

Naturally, under these present circumstances, it is a requirement for China to be viewed as an effective, results-oriented and rich development partner to endear themselves to African elites. It is precisely this quality of the relationship that gives resource-rich African countries greater bargaining power than is currently being realized when dealing with China. Chinese capital is creating a juncture that could provide many African countries with a real occasion to determine their own future. Fundamentally, it is a role of civil society to ensure their leaders do not waste this opportunity.

### **The role of civil society**

Realistically, African elites cannot afford to sell the "family jewels" for near-sighted and immediate economic profit at the expense of long-term sustainable and equitable development for their citizens. Obviously, this is currently happening and is in danger of continuing to do so indefinitely. Nonetheless, civil society must appeal to governments to be more hard-nosed at the bargaining table and to hold China responsible when its policies are less than mutually beneficial.

Of course this is not a given. However, as relations expand between Africa and China, it will help if stronger ties are also formed at the grass roots level between the two. As China progressively opens itself up to the world, it allows a space for its own civil society to develop. This civil society will increasingly concern itself with its government's action abroad. Needless to say, this will be a slow process. Grass roots organizations in both Africa and China tend to be hamstrung by their respective political environment but there are increasing linkages as they continue to engage each other in dialogue. For example, in January 2007, Chinese civil society organizations were present at the World Social Forum in Nairobi. Also, in May 2007, during a recent meeting of the African Development Bank, a parallel forum was being held among civil society organizations to examine China's impact on Africa. Importantly, there is space in this exchange for Western civil society organizations and social justice groups. More established, better funded and with considerably more freedom to act, Western organizations can nourish and facilitate this important dialogue and help cement relationships between Chinese and African groups.

Civil society groups can take heart from the fact that China's strategic approach to Africa contains flaws that can be exploited. The touted policy of "non-interference" in countries' domestic policies is an example. While China may argue that it does not meddle in the internal affairs of its partners, such is the ubiquity of its involvement that it actually

becomes a central element within the country. In these cases, Chinese intrusion is almost inescapable. Therefore, "non-interference" is Orwellian language for a malleable concept that is prescribed when it best serves China's purpose, economic gain. As well, it can just as easily be reneged upon when it is in China's interest to do so. Sudan and Zambia serve as examples.

**"While China may argue that it does not meddle in the internal affairs of its partners, such is the ubiquity of its involvement that it actually becomes a central element within the country."**

As previously demonstrated, such is China's "non-interference" in Sudan it is hoped that it may exert pressure on the Sudanese government over the Darfur crisis. China itself is not completely indifferent to its international reputation and image. Some civil society groups have been very vocal on this front in light of China's own human rights record and linking this to the upcoming 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Alongside diplomatic efforts, this increases the pressure on China to voice its endorsement that the Sudanese regime should comply with UN demands. There have been small steps made by China in this direction but it has the power to effect real change in Sudan. However, for now, it continues to balance its rhetoric and token efforts against its economic gains. China directs neither sufficient criticism nor action against Khartoum and the status quo is upheld. The question remains as to whether China can continue supporting the current Sudanese regime indefinitely, without further damaging its own reputation.

In Zambia, disapproval of Chinese actions has been voiced, reassuringly, at the polls. In the 2006 presidential elections, the leading opposition candidate, Michael Sata, ran on an anti-China platform. Many Zambians were gravely disaffected with the exploitation of copper workers by Chinese companies in the Copperbelt and the flooding of Chinese-made goods into their marketplace. Sata lost the election but polled an impressive 29 percent of votes. However, in a strong contradiction to the spirit of their foreign policy approach, China had threatened to cut all economic ties with Zambia if Sata won the election. Other African states should pay special attention to this case as it demonstrates that China has very little patience for internal politics that would jeopardize their economic interests— thus re-emphasizing the manner in which China manipulates "non-interference" as a policy that serves only its own interests. Despite, the anti-China candidate losing the election, civil society continues to put pressure on the government to fight for a better deal from China. Many Zambians protested President Hu's visit in early 2007, to the extent that he had to cancel a visit to the Copperbelt despite a personal pledge to improve the lot of mine workers.

As China continues along its current trajectory it will gradually become more susceptible to events in Africa and it will come into increasing conflict with civil society. Already, civil society is exhibiting signs of discontent with China: demonstrations against poor labour conditions, Chinese-made goods being boycotted, oil installations being attacked and oil workers being kidnapped; all hurt Chinese interests. An excellent prescription to alleviate disillusionment is to ensure that its capital is used to create greater capacity in all sectors of local economies. Moreover, for China to be swayed it will require a more uncompromising approach from African leaders at the bargaining table and a more concerted and unified effort from civil society to ensure the right bargains are being made.

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### Conclusion

There is a popular misconception that the Chinese character for crisis is composed of two characters representing danger and opportunity. In this word, "Wei ji", the second character, ji, does not represent opportunity; it symbolizes an incipient moment or a crucial point, a time to be especially wary. Nothing could be more pertinent in discussing how Africa needs to deal with China.

Unfettered, China's capacity to let its economic interests override all other concerns is very dangerous for Africa. Despite providing an attractive alternative to the West, it would be overly optimistic to believe that China's long-term resource agenda dovetails with Africa's requirement to alleviate the extreme poverty that blights the continent.



However, taking advantage of this new multi-polar competition for its resources is Africa's prerogative. Therefore, at this incipient moment, African countries are in a seminal position where they can negotiate better returns for their resources that may go a long way to lifting their citizens out of poverty for good. It is an important role of civil society to remain especially wary and ensure this comes about. Only then will the opportunity arise for Africa to be able to truly determine its own future; otherwise it will be perpetually in crisis.



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