

New World Order Neo-Colonialism: A Contextual Comparison of Contemporary China and European Colonization in Africa

by

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Abstract

This research argues that although past European colonialism of Africa and ongoing Chinese engagement in Africa share similarities in motivation and goals, there are significant differences in strategies. Hence, unlike the direct European colonial control of Africa, China has resorted to indirect modes of engagement such as bilateral trade agreements and investments. Third, externally, China is restrained by a new world order shaped by international norms and institutions that guards statehood and sovereignty. And further, it is argued that internally, China is restrained by its history/identity as a developing country, domestic politics and the lessons learnt from past European colonialism. Thus, China is a neo-colonialist entity devoid of unbridled territorial control and direct political and economic control of African nations.

Keywords: Colonialism, Beijing-consensus, neo-colonialism, Sino-Africa, Chinese-soft power, norms.

Introduction

This research attempts to answer the research question of “how current Chinese engagement with Africa compares with past European colonialism of the continent?” It achieves this via a historical comparison of European colonialism, using the British and French colonial models against the ongoing Chinese engagement in Africa. Thus, a critical assessment of the aforementioned factors, leads to the logical characterization of China’s engagement with Africa as neo-colonialism, devoid of the unbridled territorial control and its attendant direct political and economic control of African countries.

This is not because of Chinese altruism but rather a pragmatic response to a new world order shaped by international norms and institutions that guard statehood and sovereignty. Hence, a research perspective that is important because it puts the increased Chinese attention for Africa in a proper context to demonstrate that while the rationale for foreign interest in Africa has not changed, the circumstances and *modus operandi* of foreign power engagement in Africa has. And in this mix, this work provides a literature review about Chinese and European engagement in Africa; theoretical and conceptual framework; method; similarities and differences in Chinese and European engagements in Africa; observations, and conclusions.

Literature Review

Contrary to the current media narrative about China's engagement in Africa as a recent phenomenon, China has been engagement with Africa for centuries. Hence, Power *et al* (2012) debunks this "presentism" narrative and argues that contemporary Sino-Africa relations are anchored on a "longer history of interaction and cooperation". They also reject the portrayal of China's engagement in Africa as a recent and random opportunistic phenomenon. In fact, China's interaction with Africa dates back to over two thousand years ago via the indirect exchange of products when Chinese officials were first sent to Africa, and the latter welcomed an African magician.

Contemporary Sino-African diplomatic relations can be traced to the late 1950's with the signing of the first bilateral trade agreements between China and Egypt, Algeria, Guinea, Somali, Morocco and Sudan. This was followed up with a ten-country African tour by Zhou Enlai in 1963 and 1964 which culminated in increased Chinese economic, technical and military assistance to newly independent African countries and liberation movements (Muekalia 2012). The Bandung Conference of 1955 is viewed as the "seminal" moment" in Sino-African relations as it brought together China and newly independent African and Asian countries to establish the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in order to withstand the turbulence of the Cold War. This relationship shifted from that of equal partners to one based on power relations with the formation of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization which saw the beginning of Chinese economic aid to Africa (Achberger 2010:369).

The strength of Sino-African relations proved pivotal to African support for China membership and securing the United National Security Council seat in place of Taiwan in 1971 (Chang, 2006). The volume of trade between China and Africa increased 700% in the 1990s (Servant, 2005) and currently, China is Africa's largest trading partner, surpassing traditional Western trading partners of the continent (Chen *et al* 2015).

China's engagement with Africa has generated a polarizing binary debate among scholars and policy makers along the lines of the positive as well as the negative impact of the relationship. Oshodi (2012) terms this dichotomy as "Sino-Optimism" and "Sino-pessimism. On the "Sino-pessimism" front are scholars and major Western policy actors who talk of a Chinese colonization of Africa. These analysts argue that Chinese policies in Africa are set to economically and/or politically colonise Africa. China's engagement is seen as nothing but a second scramble for Africa's resources, and an eventual colonisation (Lee 2006; Nwoke 2007). Others such as Behar (2008) see a systemic transfer of Chinese citizens to Africa which will eventually lead to, or has already led to Chinese colonialism in Africa. Taking stock of Africa's history of dependencies and exploitations in his 2014 book titled, *Africa Rising?*, Taylor (2014) argues from a rather skeptical vantage point that BRICS (the association of five major emerging national economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are not contributing to the 'Africa Rising' narrative, but rather to a 'diversified dependency'.

On the "Sino-optimism" front are scholars and African policy makers/leaders that reject the neo-colonization tag and instead see Chinese engagement in Africa as a welcome opportunity and a welcome departure from the zero sum game of past Western colonization. These optimists such as Naidu 2007; Anshan 2007; Le Pere 2007 have labeled Chinese engagements as 'partnership,' 'opportunity,' and "south-south" solidarity. Optimists such as Dollar (2008) argue that the shared developmental histories of Africa and China has better positioned the former to benefit from Chinese technology as well as adapt the Chinese development model.

However, Oshodu (2012) argues that this extreme binary divide, suffers from a fatal naiveté for two reasons. First, the optimist's linkage of Africa's development to the Chinese is demanding too much as it further reinforces the misconception that Africa is a basket-case at the mercy of benevolent advanced societies. Second, the pessimists fail to realize that Africa is not impervious to globalization and the interconnectedness between states. Oshodu also rejects the blame China chorus on problems emanating from Sino-African relations by placing the blame on African state managers as well (Oshodu 2012).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: Neo-colonialism

Historically, neocolonialism has been used to describe the situation whereby Western countries continued to wield influence in their former colonies via past and present economic arrangements and cultural dominance. Ghana's anti-colonial hero and first president is credited for coining the word neocolonialism. According to Nkrumah (1995) "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside."

Neocolonialism has several characteristics. First, in extreme cases, a foreign power may station its troops in a neo-colonial state and directly control the government. Second, the conventional form is for a foreign power to exercise neo-colonialist control over a developing country via economic or monetary means. Third, the neo-colonialist state could be restricted to solely serving as the market for the manufactured products of the neo-colonialist power. Fourth, the neo-colonialist power could control governmental policy in the neocolonialist state through financial contributions towards the cost of administrating the neocolonialist state. This could be supplemented with the provision of personnel for the Civil Service in order to drive policy, control over foreign exchange and also the creation and stewardship of a banking system (Nkrumah 1965).

Although, Nkrumah (1965) pointed out that normally, neocolonial powers tend to exercise their neocolonial power and influence in a former colony, it is not always the case. Citing the case of South Vietnam, a former colony of France, Nkrumah argued that “neo-colonial control of the State has now gone to the United States. It is possible that neo-colonial control may be exercised by a consortium of financial interests which are not specifically identifiable with any particular State. The control of the Congo by great international financial concerns is a case in point” (Nkrumah 1965). Thus, although China has never formerly colonized an Africa country in the traditional sense and formally granted independence to any African country, its vast financial and economic interests in Africa falls within Nkrumah’s categorization of neocolonialism.

Comparative Historical Method

Research has been conducted through the comparative historical research method, thus, the most appropriate method for this research because of its strength in providing practical and contextual dependent knowledge that allows a study to fully explore comparisons between the two historical events (Zainal 2007). The comparison between the Chinese and European engagement is fundamentally contextual because they happened in different centuries. In addition, the method is less restrictive. Furthermore, the research prefers the historical method because it does not allow for a subject matter to be covered in isolation but also via historical context. In addition, comparisons connect to events through similarities and differences.

European Colonialism: British and French Models

The British and French were the dominant empires in the 19th and 20th century and the dominant actors of African colonization which took place in the 20th century. The fundamental goal of both British and French colonialism was to exploit Africa’s resources for the benefit of their respective countries (Fenwick 2009, 2). The ‘scramble for Africa showed the imperialist agenda which the Europeans had for Africa. This imperialist agenda was driven by social, economic and political factors.

The primary goal for African colonization was economic factors. Europe had experienced industrialization a century earlier and was looking for markets and new sources of raw materials. The British bourgeoisie fundamentally supported colonialism (Ekeh 1975, 95). The management of such huge territories required effective colonial strategies. The British governed through the policy of indirect rule that seemed practical and was applied in certain countries such as Kenya. The indirect rule meant relying on African elites to govern their people. Unlike the French, the British were not interested in changing the culture of the local people. The British were not interested in the type of integration that the French engaged (Kervinen 2007, 13-18).

French colonial policy involved assimilation of colonized people into the French culture. The French had the opinion that their culture was superior and that any African who learned the language and adopted the culture would become a French citizen (Fenwick 2009, 10). The principle of French assimilation was based on the policy of expanding the French culture to the colonies. Hence, African people who were colonized by the French were promised rights and duties as French citizens. In addition, the French wanted to use assimilation to spread their culture to different parts of the world. The French used this policy in order to create loyalty in the same way the British favored African elite in order to get loyalty. Both strategies were used to make it easier to manage the colonies. In other words, they were governance strategies that served the interests of British and French colonial powers. The French used assimilation to make African people obey to French interests while the British used indirect rule to make African traditional leaders follow their interests (Fenwick 2009, 11).

Motivation and Similarities: Chinese and European Engagements in Africa

This section argues that both the European Colonialists and the Chinese share similar neo-colonial motivations in their African engagement which include: competition for raw materials, pursuit of international markets, desire for global influence and used similar rhetoric of altruism to justify their actions and policies.

Competition for Raw Materials

The competition for raw materials brought both the Europeans and the Chinese to Africa. They both needed more raw materials to sustain transformational economic growth. Europe is resource poor and European colonial powers wanted raw materials in order to sustain their industrialization. China now imports copper, nickel and timber from Africa. Europeans imported timber, ivory, horticultural produce, agricultural produce and minerals like copper from Africa. The Chinese and the European colonialists were pushed by international competition for raw materials in their engagement with African countries (Kurlantzick 2007:34).

Thus, Chinese unbridled exploitation of African resources is akin to neo-colonization. As Nkrumah (1965) observed about neo-colonialism, “foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world.”

Pursuit of International Markets

China’s foreign policy focuses on trade as a tool to seek more markets for its booming manufacturing sector just as the Europeans were motivated to trade with Africa in pursuance of markets for their products in the height of its industrial transformation. During the first part of the 20th century, Europeans were the first external powers to introduce a development agenda to Africa. They embarked on some infrastructural projects such as roads, railway and communication channels. In addition, they attempted to educate some African people so that they could use them as a colonial administration resource. Similarly, backed by state financing, the Chinese have also provided billions in loans to African governments to fund infrastructure projects which are usually contingent on the use of Chinese labor, technology and raw materials which ultimately boost Chinese exports in Africa. Therefore, both European colonialists and Chinese engagement in Africa sought expanded markets for their products, and thereby, their respective economies.

Desire for Global Influence/Prestige

At the turn of the 20th century the Europeans turned their attention to Africa just as the Chinese have done at the beginning of the 21st century. China also seeks more influence in Africa as part of its “peaceful rise policy” and the pursuit of a multi-polar world. Thus, Chinese presence in Africa is part of China’s strategy of global influence (Large 2008, 46). One of the hallmarks of great power status is its ability to project power beyond its regional sphere of influence in order to pursue its national interests, unhindered by other great powers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the European powers such as Britain and France backed by their naval superiority were able to project power and influence beyond their shores and region to eventually amass several African colonies. While economic factors were the main driving force behind the European colonial enterprise, the associated prestige was also a major attraction as evidenced by that fact that less economically advanced European countries at the time such as Portugal and Belgium also scrambled for Africa. Thus, Africa, just as for the European, offers China a soft spot to test its great power credentials. As part of Chinese global charm offensive aimed at bolstering its international prestige, the Chinese President in a 2015 address to the UN General Assembly, pledged 8,000 Chinese soldiers to a stand by peacekeeping force, \$1.1 billion towards a China-UN peace keeping fund and military assistance for African peacekeeping missions (Huang and Chang 2015).

While China officially has a “peaceful-rise” or “peaceful development” foreign policy, it has global ambitions to be an influential great power in world affairs. Its ability to challenge the United States and the West in Africa where the latter has dominated for years is a clarion call to global domination and prestige. As observed by Cordesma and Kleiber (2006, 1) operating under the ambit of colonialism enabled European powers to expand their influence to Africa, just as China is using Africa as a platform for its rise as a global power.

Rhetoric of Altruism

Both European colonialists and Chinese leaders use the same rhetoric to describe their engagement with Africa to indicate benevolent intentions, but the self-seeking results of economic extraction and unbridled opportunism belies this rhetoric. The Europeans’ couched their forays into Africa in moralizing terms such as embarking on a “civilizing” mission of African people as part of meeting the obligations of the “White man’s burden”. Part of this “civilizing” mission was the introduction of Christianity and Western education, all in an attempt to break African people from a perceive yoke of ignorance and cultural backwardness.

On the other hand, the Chinese cloak their African engagement in moralizing terms such as partnerships, win-win, non-interference, and south-south solidarity among others, all in an attempt to distinguish itself from European engagement in Africa, which they view as discredited. Buttressing this point Corkin (2014, 58) argues that Chinese political rhetoric in describing its African relations is aimed at achieving two major objectives, first that Beijing uses it in order to distinguish itself from Western practices in Africa and the developing world, and second, that it is a manifestation of China’s increasing interest in using “soft power” to cultivate “great power” status.

At the heart of Chinese discourse are “the Five Principles for Peaceful Co-existence” which includes mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence” (Corkin 2014, 58). In addition, China uses such carefully chosen phrases such as “common prosperity” to portray the notion that China and Africa are in a mutually beneficial relationship in order to dispel any notion of China as a donor country assisting a hapless continent. This enables China to convey a “win-win” relationship with Africa under the aegis of promoting south-south cooperation as a developing country (Corkin 2014, 58).

Contrasting European Colonialism in Africa and Chinese Engagement

The differences between Chinese engagement and past European colonization in Africa are shaped by an international world order dominated by state centered international institutions that guards the sovereignty of its members and promotes multilateralism. Thus, in a pragmatic attempt to navigate the norms of the international regime and without abandoning its multilateral commitments, the Chinese have adopted the following strategies that mainly shun overt colonial strategies used by past European colonial powers. This include: a policy of soft power instead of hard power, a no civilizing mandate, a “non-interference policy”, absence of political and administrative control, no direct development agenda, no settler policy and a respect for the African elite.

Chinese Foreign Policy of Soft Power in Africa vs European Colonial Hard Power

Conventionally, a country’s financial resources and economic power have been labeled as hard power because it enables countries so endowed to wield power over ostensibly less endowed countries in international relations. However, Nye has observed that “hard and soft powers are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behavior of others” (Nye 2004, 7). Thus, taking a cue from this thin dichotomy, China has adopted a soft power foreign policy towards Africa, unlike European colonialists who applied hard power in their colonization of Africa as it suited their stated national interests at that time. According to Paradise (2009), the Chinese have developed a soft power policy towards Africa in order to seek influence through trade, culture and financial aid. In addition, China seeks to overhaul the relevance of the west through soft power foreign strategies (Paradise 2009).

Furthermore, in the pursuance of a deliberate global soft power strategy, aimed at enhancing its image worldwide, and also to bolster its great power credentials, China is using its financial muscle to finance several soft power initiatives. According to Shambaugh (2015), it is evident that “Beijing is using the strongest instrument in its soft-power toolbox: money. Wherever Chinese leaders travel these days, and between them, Xi and Premier Li Keqiang visited more than 50 countries in 2014 wherein they sign huge trade and investment deals, extend generous loans, and dole out hefty aid packages.” Buttressing this point, Provost and Harris (2013) have observed that China in the past decade alone, has voted \$75bn for aid and development projects in Africa as part of an accelerated soft power “charm offensive” aimed at gaining political and economic influence on the continent.

One of China’s most consequential foreign aid to Africa is in education where “There are an estimated 12,000 African students studying in China with the support of the Chinese government. This is an astonishingly high figure, dwarfing scholarship programs offered to African students by any other country” (Allison 2013). The neo-colonial goal here is to shape and cultivate the next generation of African leaders who will be amenable to future Chinese policies.

China's rapid transformation from a developing country to a global economic power is a major source of attraction to many African countries desirous of such an accomplishment and thus eager to follow in China's foot-steps. According to Ramo (2004), China offers a different and attractive development model dubbed the "Beijing Consensus" over the much maligned 'Washington Consensus' with its 'one big, shock-therapy leap.' In contrast, the Chinese development model is adaptable to local exigencies with "ruthless willingness to innovate and experiment."

No Civilizing Chinese Mandate

Unlike the European colonial powers of the last century, China has no civilizing mission for African people. While the Europeans viewed "civilizing" the "dark continent" as a moral and cultural imperative, as evidence by the phrase "the white man's burden", China has no such compulsion or policy. Rather, it seeks to promote its culture as part of a broader strategy of cultural diplomacy aimed at enhancing its image among African people, which will ultimately inure to their economic benefit.

China has relative respect for African culture and does not seek to assimilate African people unlike some of the European colonizers, such as the French. The Chinese are using culture as a bridge of enhancing relations with Africa. China has stated that it does not want cultural or political hegemony, and thus, its "peaceful rise strategy" does not include the cultural assimilation of African people.

China's cultural diplomacy has enabled it to interact with Africa on a friendly basis and project itself as an extremely pro-African great power [38]. It has started with over nineteen Confucian cultural institutions all over Africa in order to increase cultural ties. In addition, African universities are now offering Chinese language geared towards boosting cultural ties in the future. Cultural interaction has enabled China to create an image of humbleness. The kind of soft power that has been applied to Africa will be hard to overcome, because the West now seems inflexible, and still maintains its traditional approach (Kurlantzick 2008, 8).

China Central Television (CCTV) is now in Africa thereby enhancing Sino-Africa relations. Xinhua, the Chinese news agency now covers 47 countries in Africa. China now uses the media to convey its good relations with African countries. Much of the content is about trade which is the most powerful soft power tool used by China to increase its influence in Africa. China wants to extend its power straight to the African people by demonstrating that it can change their lives through economic opportunities. The media is a powerful tool of creating that image and the increased media investment by China comes at a time when Western countries are cutting back on media related costs (Brookes 2007).

Chinese “Non-Interference Policy”

One of the major attractions for African governments and leaders is the long standing Chinese policy of “non-interference” in the internal affairs of African countries. Aidoo and Hess (2015, 110) posit that Chinese policy of non-interference has been in existence for over 60 years and is the cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy on South-South cooperation established under the aegis of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It is also part of China’s “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” policy which includes “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence” (Hess and Aidoo 2010, 359). This is in contrast with the Western colonial policies which destabilized and decimated pre-existing African political systems with dire consequences for the continent. Even after gaining independence, African nations have had to deal with Western conditionality that have proven to be a major source of irritation to African leaders amidst periodic protests from the latter of unwelcome Western interference, and in violations of sovereignty. In contrast to Western-African relations, Chinese engagement with Africa via investments and economic aid come with no strings attached (Hess and Aidoo 2010; Clapham 2006).

However, there are signs that China’s “non-interference policy” in Africa is facing some strains. According to Verhoeven (20014, 66), “China’s deepening material interests are forcing it to abandon the principle of “non-interference””. For example, China’s military supply to Sudan raises question as it has been criticized for supplying the Sudanese government with military supplies during the latter’s crack down on Darfur rebels. In addition, there have been reports of Chinese citizens serving as guards at oil installations in Sudan which raises serious questions about Chinese “non-inference policy” and their motives in Africa as a whole. Furthermore, in a major departure, China veered into peace keeping when in 2015 it “started deploying hundreds of troops to South Sudan...to bolster the UN peace mission in the country - the first ever Chinese infantry battalion to be sent on external peacekeeping operations” (Allen 2015). Further undermining China’s traditional “non-interference policy” is its recent acquisition of a military base in Djibouti. Nevertheless, this was obtained via mutually agreed bilateral agreement with a sovereign state, rather than by coercive means, as was the case under European colonialism.

No Direct Political and Administrative Control

The Chinese are not interested in political and administrative control of African countries as the Europeans did. They recognize the fact that they are dealing with sovereign African nations which are recognized by the United Nations where China is an exalted permanent member of the Security with the power of veto. Political and administrative control is against China’s “peaceful rise” as a global economic power. China recognizes African countries as equals and insists that it is a developing nation. As As Hrituleac (2011) observed, the Chinese use diplomacy and soft power to gain influence, not political control.

Unlike European colonial powers such as England and France which established elaborate political and administrative controls in their various African colonies, China seeks trade and not political or administrative control. It wants increased bilateral relations and not hegemony. Aggression, occupation and political control would dent Thus, China's image as a peaceful rising power. China's soft power foreign strategy has given it more influence than an emerging power would normally have.

China does not view African countries as extensions of their mainland like the French did. The French had assumed that Africa was an extension of their mainland under their assimilation policy. They did this because they had political and administrative control of their African colonies. The One China Policy does not include Africa. China recognizes the sovereignty of African nations as expressed by its non-“interference policy” which expressly states that it does not meddle in the internal affairs of other countries for any reason whatsoever. Unlike the European colonialist such as the French who had an imperialist agenda, and in contrast, the “peaceful rise” of China does not include aggression or the territorial occupation of African countries, although the same cannot be said of China's policy towards some of its neighbors, where China is in territorial dispute.

European Colonial Direct Development vs Chinese Integrated Development

China does not have a direct development agenda for Africa in a similar manner that the European colonizers had. The European developmental agenda in Africa, if any, was disproportionately one-sided to the disadvantage of Africa. The little infrastructure that Europeans built such as ports and railways were usually to facilitate the exploitation and transportation of natural resources from the colonies to the European metropolis. These activities were superintended by colonial administrations that were directly in charge of the implementation of colonial economic policies, under orders from the metropolis.

Unlike past European colonizers, China has a more integrated economic engagement with Africa. This integrated approach includes trade, foreign direct investment in commodities, manufacturing, as well as foreign aid assistance. While Africa's vast mineral and natural resources continues to be a major source of attraction to China, the relationship is far more complex than it is usually portrayed by Sino-skeptics. Although China has been criticized for inundating Africa with cheap and inferior manufactured products, it is actively investing in the manufacturing sector of the continent as well. For example, “by the end of 2012, China's investment in Africa's manufacturing industry had reached US\$3.43 billion” (The State Council: People Republic of China 2013). However, the continent continues to suffer a trade deficit with China, just as other Western economic powers such as the U.S face, perennially with China.

Undoubtedly, infrastructural financing and construction in Africa is where China's integrated approach is most pronounced. For example, "development capital funding for African infrastructure totaled about \$328bn between 2009 and 2014, some \$54bn a year... with the Export-Import Bank of China having pledged \$1tn to Africa in the coming decade" (Johnson 2015).

Chinese Respect for African Elites vs European Marginalization of the African Elite

The relationship between China and African leaders is based on mutual interest and respect. Chinese leaders and African leaders share a common goal of seeking opportunities to raise the standard of living of their respective citizens, and thus amenable to be respectable towards one another. This is unlike the patronizing and paternalistic attitude of European elite towards the African elite where there was a deliberate policy by the former to diminish the authority of African elites, especially under British colonialism by sidelining the African elite.

In addition, Sino-African relations have been driven by the need to reduce Western influence in Africa. African leaders have made the decision to engage China because of a burdensome and indifferent attitude from the West. Diplomacy and trade have been used to woo African elites into increased engagement with China. Conversely, European colonizers used African elites as tools of control because it was convenient for them to have local-native administrators (Paradise 2009). However, China's respect for African leaders has not always translated into respect for the average African citizen. There have been several incidences of human rights abuses of African workers working for Chinese firms, environmental degradation, and land dispossession among others, which have sometimes been met with violent protests from local citizens.

No Chinese Settler Policy

China does not have a settler policy as the Europeans who encouraged the development of settler communities in Africa. The British had a stated policy of encouraging their citizens to relocate and settle in British colonies to assist in developing parts of colonized territories for the exclusive comfort of British settlers. This happened in Australia, New Zealand, the U.S, Canada and Canada. In Africa, there were large British settler communities in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

However some scholars such as Behar (2008) see a parallel between ongoing Chinese migration to Africa and past European settlements on the continent. He argues that "there are already more Chinese living in Nigeria than there were Britons during the height of the empire" and that each Chinese project in Africa creates "collateral economies" and "population monuments." Nevertheless, there are major differences.

First, Chinese citizens are moving to Africa either as laborers for Chinese government companies or individually in pursuit of economic fortune with no intention for long-term stay as the classical European settlers did. Second, while there were hundreds of thousands of European settlers in Africa living under the protection of colonial authority, China does not have control over all its citizens living in Africa. European colonizers had full control over countries where their people settled, but China does not. Third, European settlers were occupiers while the Chinese are immigrants in the countries where they relocate. This means that the Chinese have no citizenship rights and do not engage in political activity. European settlers had more rights than the locals, because their motherland was in control of the colony (Ndege 2009).

Neo-Colonialism in a New World Order

Unlike the unrestrained European colonization of Africa, China is restrained by some structural external and internal factors in its engagement with Africa as external constraints, domestic constraints regarding Chinese history and identity, lessons learnt from the European colonial experience, and domestic restraints on Chinese foreign policy.

Hence, as Nkrumah (1965) observed “Once a territory has become nominally independent it is no longer possible, as it was in the last century, to reverse the process. Existing colonies may linger on, but no new colonies will be created. In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism.” Thus the Chinese have had to engage African people under a completely different international political, economic and legal framework. This means that they have had to formulate strategies that are aimed at engaging sovereign African nations without blatantly violating international norms and regimes which frown against overt imperialism as practiced under European colonialism. The world has changed significantly since the era of European colonialism. More is expected from nations that seek to engage others. The Chinese have found it easier to apply a policy of “non-interference” which have attracted the attention of African countries, because their sovereignty has been eroded by western financial aid conditions.

In contrast, European colonialism thrived unhindered and unrestrained by an international regime and international organizations until the formation of the United Nations in the aftermath of WWII. However, the Chinese engagement in Africa is occurring at a period where the concept of statehood and sovereignty has been globally accepted and institutionalized whereby African people can voluntarily engage the Chinese without being coerced or forced as it was with European colonialism. Therefore, instead of having a summit such as the Europeans had in the Berlin Conference of 1844 to appropriate Africa among themselves, faced with the exigencies of the times, the Chinese organized the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation as a conduit to woo sovereign African nations and their leaders for mutually beneficial international economic relations.

Second, the domestic constraints of China is linked to Chinese history and identity; and thus, China's historical brush with Western imperialism and the ensuing legacy of that experience defines it today, and shapes its foreign policy. China has endured British imperialism which saw it fight the latter in the opium war and also loose Hong Kong for a century after being made to sign a humiliating treaty to that effect. Although, China was not colonized directly as their Africa counterparts, seceding Hong Kong to England for a century gives the former shared experience with Africa with regards to Western imperialism. In addition, unlike the Europeans who came to Africa when they were considerably developed than all humanity at the time and sought to directly impose their will on African people, China considers itself part of the fraternity of developing countries.

Thus formal Sino-African relations in the 20th century were shaped by mutual Western victimhood and a joint peripheral positioning on the global economic pecking order. This shared experience, enabled China to engage Africa in the 20th century as a partner rather than as an imperialist. Although, China has since made major economic strides compared to Africa, the relationship has shifted towards one based on power relations, with China calling the shots. Achberger (2010, 369) has characterized Chinese solidarity with Africa as a "form of strategic self-depreciation to align itself more fully with the third or developing world. This solidarity was on further display when China declared itself as the "world largest developing country" in the post Forum declaration of the 2006 China-African Forum held in Beijing." Thus, by playing the developing country card, China has successfully distanced itself from the existing international order (Wuthnow 2008, 8).

Third, in regards to domestic restraints on Chinese foreign policy, Chinese leaders as with other politicians worldwide are driven by political survival. Therefore Chinese foreign policy just as with many countries are shaped and constrained by domestic factors. For Chinese politicians, the stakes are much higher because although they do not have to worry about winning the next election, the very survival of the Communist party itself is at stake if they get a foreign policy wrong (Shirk 2012, 16). Hence, Chinese foreign policy towards Africa is no exception. The Chinese Communist Party risk a political revolution if its Africa's engagement is viewed as counterproductive to the economic aspirations of its citizens, and also viewed as vainglorious empire building enterprise by a disconnected elite. Thus, Chinese government officials painstakingly communicate to their citizens that the government is embarking on a "win-win" strategy in its dealings with Africa. This is backed by policies whereby the State finances and uses Chinese companies and labor in the execution of massive infrastructural projects. In deed, "keeping the economy growing by at least seven percent per year is considered a political imperative to create jobs and prevent the widespread unemployment that could lead to large-scale labor unrest" (Shirk 2012, 6). For the Chinese Communist Party, embarking on its current Sino-Africa policy offers one of the least politically risky alternatives towards achieving the desired economic growth needed to maintain power.

Fourth, China has had to improvise in its engagement with Africa by learning from the European colonial experience in Africa. While the Chinese just as their European counterparts have an insatiable appetite for Africa's natural resources, they are weary of the costs and perils in following the same path taken by Europeans to seek Africa's wealth. In addition, Chinese have supported several African national movements against colonialism and are aware of African antipathy towards colonialism to contemplate a similar disastrous path. Furthermore, it is financially more prudent for the Chinese to avoid the type of unbridled colonialism that the Europeans practiced in Africa, and instead adopt mutually beneficially bilateral agreements with individual African nations which could accomplish the desired economic goals on the cheap. As it has been observed, "China's investment in Africa does pay itself back in multiple ways economically: development and exploitation of Africa's natural resources, access to local markets, employment opportunities for Chinese labors and service contracts for Chinese companies infrastructure projects that China funds" (Sun 2013).

And last, the reality is that China is not a colonial power in the traditional sense, but it has a neo-colonial agenda in Africa. A serious assessment of China's foreign policy in Africa shows the use of economic and diplomatic devices that promote the fundamental principles of neo-colonialism which is indirect influence over a sovereign state for the benefit of a major power. Obviously this is a practical strategy because China's economy is highly dependent on exports and trade. Somehow, China has found a way to legitimize neo-colonialism through multilateralism and cooperation. China's pragmatism in pursuance of its goals of enhancing the state's military and economic power is borne out of the limitations that the international regime and its twin sacrosanct features of statehood and sovereignty has placed on its behavior rather than altruistic intent towards Africa.

Conclusion

It is instructive to note that although Europeans granted African nations their independence en masse, they never left Africa to its own devices or abandoned their thirst for its resources. They created a new system of engagement under the neo-liberal economic prism whereby they exerted indirect control over the newly independent African nations in order to achieve the same results. It is therefore not surprising that early African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah labeled this new engagement as neo-colonialism. The Chinese have not come to Africa to replace the European/U.S neo-colonialists and their neo-liberal economic model of engagement, but rather to offer Africa an alternative model in the form of the so called "Beijing Consensus".

China has found pragmatic ways to legitimize neo-colonialism through multilateralism and cooperation in order to navigate an international regime of norms and institutions that guards statehood and sovereignty. Thus, it has turned to trade and bilateral arrangements in order to enter Africa instead of entering via the barrel of the gun as the Europeans did.

However, this economic cooperation and multilateralism is meant to support its export-oriented economy, the basis of China's rise in the global political and economic order. Therefore, China has a policy of exploiting Africa's resources through trade deals that favor its trade surplus albeit with the consent of leaders of sovereign African nations in contrast with European direct colonization of Africa. Thus, China's rise to global power requires a correct interpretation of its motivations and methods. The motivations are similar to those of European colonialism, but its methods are strategically different, as trade advantage has been masked by aggressive multilateralism, disguised as mutually beneficially economic cooperation in a pragmatic attempt to navigate a norm driven international system and institutionalized world community.

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