The Africa-China relationship: challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

The dramatic growth in the relationship between Africa and China is one of the great stories of the twenty-first century, part of the profound transformations taking place in the global political economy. It has been greeted with excitement, consternation, and confusion. To its cheerleaders, it represents the enduring partnership between Africa and China, spawned by the historical affinities of struggles against Western imperialism and humanistic aspirations for development. To its critics, it is reminiscent of European colonisation a century earlier, in which Africa serves as a cheap source of raw materials, a lucrative export market for Chinese manufactured goods, and an outlet for its surplus capital. Rather than a development partner, some see China as Africa's biggest development competitor, whose explosive growth and insatiable quest for global markets threatens Africa's industrialisation and competitiveness. This paper
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outlet for its surplus capital. Rather than a development partner, some see China as Africa's biggest development competitor, whose explosive growth and insatiable quest for global markets threatens Africa's industrialisation and competitiveness.

The first narrative is popular among many Chinese and African policymakers. African academics and civil society activists tend to be more critical. Among Western commentators alarmist views, which are often as hysterical as they are hypocritical, often predominate. Needless to say, the analytical framings of the relationship vary among different specialists. As Steven Chan provocatively puts it,

views of China in Africa are often constructed by Sinologists who are not Africanists, or Africanists who are not Sinologists, or by Africanists and Sinologists who are not expert in international relations or international political economy, or international relations scholars who know nothing about either China or Africa. (Chan, 3)

The reality of Africa's relationship with China is of course a lot more complex, contradictory, and subject to changes that defy the singular narratives paraded in the popular media and some of the academic literature. The reasons for this are not obscure; four in particular stand out. First, it is a relationship rooted in a long history that has undergone several phases. Second, it is a multifaceted relationship as it encompasses economic, political, cultural, social and strategic dimensions. Third, it has developed in the context of major changes in the global political economy. Finally, it is a relationship between one country, China, and 54 different African countries, none of which remotely compares with China in size and strength. This not only makes it difficult to generalise about Africa-China relations; it underscores the inherent inequalities of China's bilateral relations with individual African countries.

In this paper, I explore the factors behind the development of Africa-China relations, especially its economic magnitude, and the challenges and opportunities it offers both regions. It is divided into three parts. First, I present a rather broad historical overview of the relationship by identifying some of its major phases. Second, I examine some of its key economic features by focusing on patterns of aid, investment, and trade. Third,
I provide an overview of the complexities and some of the main challenges facing the partnership, including how to manage effectively the diversity of actors, promises of mutual development, each other's diasporas, and the shifting global political economy.

II. The phases of modern Africa-China relations

Africa-China relations can be traced back to Phaoronic times. In the early fifteenth century there were the naval expeditions of Zheng He, followed by the importation of Chinese labour from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries into the burgeoning European colonies of Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and South Africa. In the first half of the twentieth century much of Africa was under colonial rule so that China's limited relations with the continent were confined to South Africa, Liberia – with which it signed a treaty of friendship in 1937 that came into force in 1941 – and semi-independent Egypt that established diplomatic relations with China in 1942.

Modern Africa-China relations only began to blossom following the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and African decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. They have undergone three phases. First, the formative period from the turn of the 1950s to the mid-1970s; second, the period of restructuring between the mid-1970s and end of the 1990s; third, the period of consolidation since 2000. Each period had its twists and turns, dominant trends, and ideological thrusts. During the first period, China and the independent African countries were preoccupied with reasserting their national identities and repositioning their international interests, while during the second era their political economies underwent major reforms, out of which emerged the third phase, characterised by the explosive growth of their respective economies and engagements.

From the 1950s, Africa-China relations were framed by the tumultuous independence and revolutionary struggles in Africa and Asia, the Cold War between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union, and the emergence of Afro-Asian solidarity sanctified at the Bandung Conference of 1955 that brought together 29 Asian and African nations.
Bandung Conference of 1955 that brought together 29 Asian and African nations. Anti-imperialism became the ideological glue in the burgeoning relationship between China and Africa. China sought to mobilise the newly independent African states in its enduring geopolitical conflict with the West, nationalist contestation with Taiwan, and ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union, while African states and liberation movements in their struggles to end European colonialism valued Chinese support.

The dramatic visit of Premier Zhou Enlai to ten African countries from 13 December 1963 to 5 February 1964 signalled to the world the emerging romance between the two ancient civilisations. During the trip he announced what came to be regarded as the foundational principles of the relationship, the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence”, pledging China's support for anti-colonial liberation struggles; peace, governments and backing revolutionary movements seeking to overthrow some of those governments. This led to tense relations with several conservative states such as Burundi, Malawi, Kenya, Cameroon and the Congo, where China supported regime opponents and so-called revolutionaries.

For China, the most momentous event was the Cultural Revolution from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, which profoundly affected the country's internal and external affairs. Africa-China contacts generally diminished. For their part, African states underwent violent political and ideological swings as the challenges, contradictions, and limits of independence became more evident, which affected their relations with China. For example, following coups in 1966 in Ghana, the Central African Republic, and Benin, embassy personnel from the People's Republic of China (PRC) were expelled from the three countries. President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was actually overthrown while on a visit to Beijing: “By 1969, four fewer African countries recognized the PRC than in 1965, trade was down moderately, and new PRC loans to Africa had dried” (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 37).
Ghana and Benin restored relations with the PRC six years later. As the fires of the Cultural Revolution subsided, China moderated its policies towards independent African states. The support of these states for China's admission into the United Nations (UN) proved crucial and was an important turning point in China's foreign policy and international politics. China's diplomatic offensive in Africa was increasingly characterised by pragmatism as it abandoned support for rebel groups and sought to maintain good relations with governments regardless of their ideological proclivities.

China promoted itself as an alternative development model to the West, a bulwark against the two superpowers, and a champion of the Third World. As trade increased, so did aid. Emblematic of China's enhanced engagement with Africa was the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia railway, which remains one of China's largest projects in postcolonial Africa. Between 1970 and 1976 China provided $1.8 billion in loans and grants to 28 African countries, surpassing the Soviet Union's $1 billion to 20 states (Shinn and Eisenman, 40).

The contours of the relationship between Africa and China began to shift from the late 1970s as both regions underwent massive restructuring of their economic systems. In Africa, structural adjustment programmes were imposed with fundamentalist market zeal by the international financial institutions as the continent's often beleaguered states reeled from the intertwined recessions of economic growth and political governance; in short, the crises of accumulation and legitimacy. In China, the excesses of the Cultural Revolution were denounced and two years after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, reformists led by Deng Xiaoping embarked on significant economic reforms and the introduction of market principles. Agriculture was decollectivised in the early 1980s, which was followed by the privatisation of industry from the late 1980s.

During this period, relations between Africa and China were in flux. To be sure, high-level visits continued, as did the rhetoric of Chinese support for African liberation struggles and independence, and South-South cooperation. But it became clear that the foci of relations were shifting from politics to economics, the ideological to the
the foci of relations were shifting from politics to economics, the ideological to the pragmatic, as evident during Premier Zhao Ziyang's visit to eleven African countries in late 1982 and early 1983. He announced “Four Principles on Sino-African Economic and Technical Cooperation”, which stressed equality and mutual benefit, achieving practical economic results, pursuit of diverse forms of engagement, and promoting complementary growth and development (Brautigam 2009, 43). But China was preoccupied with its own modernisation. Also, its rapprochement with the Soviet Union, as well as the detente between the two superpowers, seemed to lessen Africa's strategic importance to China.

At the turn of the 1990s, four momentous developments took place that presaged the next phase of Africa-China relations. First, the end of the Cold War simultaneously freed Africa from some of its debilitating conflicts and curtailed interest in the continent by the former rival superpower blocs. This reinforced Africa's need to cultivate new global partners and facilitated the opportunity for countries like China to do so. Second, the acceleration of struggles for democratisation across Africa heralded the possibilities of economic renewal and the construction of democratic developmental states.

Third, the winds of democratisation spread to China and Taiwan. The suppression of the Tiananmen protest in June 1989 provoked widespread Western condemnation of China. In the meantime, a newly democratic and invigorated Taiwan embarked on a diplomatic charm offensive across Africa. In the 1990s and 2000s, almost a dozen African countries recognised Taiwan. Both developments forced China to launch an aggressive campaign to contain the damage. It either bought or found receptive audiences in African political capitals that were keen to play off the two Chinas or had long tired of Western hypocritical human rights sermons.

Over the next three years the Chinese Foreign Minister went to seven African countries and the Chinese Premier visited another three, while sixteen African heads of state or government and numerous other officials were invited to China. Annual tours to the continent by the Chinese Foreign Minister became a feature of Chinese diplomacy, and by 1995 Qian Qichen had visited 36 countries. In the same year, three Chinese vice-
by 1995 Qian Qichen had visited 36 countries. In the same year, three Chinese vice-premiers visited a total of 18 countries and the following year President Jiang Zemin went to 6 countries and became the first Chinese president to visit the continent.

Fourth, there was the rising tide of globalisation both as a historical process and a project of global neoliberal capitalist restructuring. The compression of spatio-temporal distances and the intensification of the transnational flows of capital, commodities, cultures and even conflicts increased economic competition among countries and corporations. While Africa was dismissed by the post-Cold-War West as a “hopeless continent”, to quote the cover story of the influential British magazine, *The Economist*, 13 May 2000 (which it retracted in its cover story of “Rising Africa” of 3 December 2011), China saw openings on the continent for the globalisation of its economy and newly privatised and increasingly dominant firms. China's transition, in

Western divestment and realise the challenges and opportunities of globalisation. When China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in December 2001, Chinese companies were encouraged to “go global” by investing overseas, establishing factories, and buying assets. This was seen as part of the process of moving Chinese companies up the high-value-added ladder and enabling some of them to acquire global brand names.

The tone and substance of the rapidly growing relationship became more pragmatic and economic as it shed its earlier ideological lenses, although the rhetoric of anti-imperialism, mutuality, friendship, non-interference, and non-conditional assistance showed remarkable continuities because it remained appealing to the political elites in both China and Africa and their respective constituencies (Strauss 2009). In fact, it became even more imperative for China as its economic power rose and the country eventually emerged as the world's second largest economy. China needed to carefully modulate its expansion into Africa, lest it be seen as a new imperialist power, while
African leaders did not want to be dismissed as neocolonial pawns of China. The latter hailed its development under the concept of “peaceful rise” enunciated by President Hu Jintao in 2003, rebranded “peaceful development” two years later as China sought to distinguish itself even further from the rapacious imperialist development of the Western powers. African leaders trumpeted it as an example of South-South cooperation.

Some Chinese scholars maintain this was not an instrumental exercise in deception. Rather it reflected the cultural and moral underpinnings of Chinese policies and practices rooted in the country's age-old philosophical and political traditions. According to this view, Chinese management practices and business culture are guided by Confucian ideas of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust. In relations with the outside world, including Africa, in which China apparently sees itself as the elder brother, reciprocation becomes both a transactional mode of operation and an ethical responsibility (Chan; see also Duan and Gao).

A high-level organ was soon created to coordinate and consolidate the rapidly growing Africa-China relationship, the Forum on Africa-China Cooperation (FOCAC). The first FOCAC conference was held in October 2000 in Beijing, attended by the Chinese President and Premier, four African Presidents and the Secretary-General of the Organization of Africa Unity (OAU), as well as more than 80 ministers from China and 44 African countries, representatives from numerous regional and international organisations, and business people from Africa and China. The second FOCAC conference was held in Addis Ababa in December 2003, and attended by the Chinese Premier, six African presidents and three prime ministers, the heads of the African Union (AU) and the UN, and more than 70 ministers from China and African countries.

In November 2006 came the glittering Beijing Summit and Third Ministerial Conference of FOCAC, which was attended by the leaders of 48 African countries, from Egypt to South Africa. It was China's biggest diplomatic jamboree ever. The fourth FOCAC, held in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in November 2009, was attended by the Chinese Premier
and the heads of state or governments from 49 African countries. Foreign and economic affairs ministers from China and 50 African countries and the Chairperson of the AU Commission, the successor to the OAU, attended the fifth FOCAC held in Beijing in 2012.

At the end of each FOCAC conference lofty declarations were issued and new measures unveiled to deepen the relationship. The Addis Ababa Action Plan adopted after the second FOCAC promised to increase Chinese support for agriculture and infrastructural development, expand balanced trade by granting zero-tariff treatment to some commodities of Africa’s last developed countries, and promote investment in both directions. From the third FOCAC came pledges of $5 billion in concessionary loans to Africa, the creation of the China-Africa Development Fund (CADF) to facilitate

At the fourth FOCAC it was revealed that China would provide a $10 billion low cost loan, another a $1 billion special loan for small and medium-sized African businesses, write off more debt for some of the poorest African nations, construct 100 new clean-energy projects, undertake 100 joint demonstration projects on scientific and technological research, train 3000 doctors and nurses and 20,000 professionals in other fields, and increase the number of Chinese government scholarships to Africa to 5500 by 2012. At the fifth FOCAC China promised to provide a $20 billion credit line to African countries for the development of infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, and small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, it undertook to train 30,000 personnel in various sectors under the “African Talents Program”, offer 18,000 government scholarships, and build cultural and vocational skills training facilities in African countries.

III. The development of economic relations
The official discourse of Africa-China relations often relapses into the familiar language of foreign “aid” or “assistance” with its unfortunate and often incorrect connotations of charity. If the rosy proclamations of friendship, mutual benefit, and South-South solidarity beloved by Chinese and African leaders sometimes strain credulity, the nefarious claims by Western “China hawks” and some African critics that China is a “rogue” donor whose aid is exceptionally opportunistic, self-serving, and toxic are no less inaccurate. Such postulations betray Eurocentricism and reductionism that place “Africa as the subject of history and modernity” lacking agency, as a passive pawn of China (Power and Mohan 2011, 44). The reality is a lot more complex and contradictory. Africa-China relations reflect the intermingling of the agencies, subjectivities, and interests of African and Chinese actors.

Bräutigam (2009) has argued that while China gives aid to advance its foreign policy interests, as other countries do, Chinese aid policies in Africa differ in some ways from those of Western countries. Chinese economic cooperation practices reflect China's own development experience and realities as a developing country in a Western-dominated global capitalist world. Chinese activities in Africa represent an externalisation of domestic experiences, assumptions and contradictions as evident in the management styles of Chinese firms and the heavy costs that Chinese-style capitalism has exacted on labour, the environment, and political reforms.

China's heavy industrial structure and breakneck growth has entailed massive consumption and wastage of energy, severe exploitation of low-wage labour that is subject to high rates of industrial accidents, and the development of weak civil society (Jiang 2009). It is important to note, however, China has increasingly become aware of these issues and has committed to strengthening environmental protection and reducing inequalities, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have proliferated in the country (Power, Mohan, and Tan-Mullins 2012, Chapters 7 and 8). The Chinese are also hampered by what Lee (2009, 98) calls “pre-eminent logics of global capital flows – the pursuit of flexible labor regimes”, as reflected in the casualisation of labour in both Chinese and African economies following the introduction or imposition of ruthless regimes of neoliberal accumulation. In short,
unused to responding to the demands of labour, civil society and transparency at home, it is hard for the Chinese leaders and entrepreneurs to do so in Africa.

From the 1950s, China's official development assistance (ODA) policies in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World were an integral part of the diplomatic offensive to counter the influence of Taiwan, the Soviet Union, and the West. With regard to foreign assistance, China practised in Africa much of what it had learned as an aid recipient and host to Japanese and Western assistance and investment. Also, it exhibited the tendencies of the East Asian developmental state. China's ODA consisted “of grant (in-kind transfers of agricultural products and tangible goods, especially machinery, and occasionally cash), interest-free loans, and concessional loans with subsidized interest rates” (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 147). By 2009, it was estimated that Chinese ODA to Africa had reached $2.5 billion per annum including debt relief. China's aid to Africa tends to be sweetened by the symbolic diplomacy of building prestigious projects from stadiums to presidential palaces to the $200 million headquarters of the AU in Addis Ababa, which opened to great fanfare in 2013, the 50th anniversary of the OAU, the AU's predecessor.

After the aberrations of the Cultural Revolution, pragmatism buttressed by the policy of non-intervention became the bedrock of Chinese economic cooperation. As early as 1978, reports Bräutigam (2009, 42), “seventy-four countries were receiving aid from China, the largest group of them in Africa. By then, China had more aid programs in African countries than did the United States”. Chinese reluctance to impose the political conditionalities beloved by Western governments and NGOs on its African partners reflected its own history of vulnerability to Western sanctions after the 1949 revolution and the deployment of sanctimonious human rights discourse as a diplomatic weapon.

China's doctrine of non-interference has attracted a lot of critical attention. It is derived from the normative tenets of Bandung, Third Worldism, and South-South cooperation, although China periodically breached it in the 1960s as already noted. In recent years, China appears to have become more willing to encourage internal
recent years, China appears to have become more willing to encourage internal negotiations among some of its conflict-ridden partners, such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, in order to protect its interests and counter criticisms from African activists and Western critics. Indeed, claims Suzuki (2011, 78), “Chinese understandings of sovereignty and human rights are much more multifaceted than they seem”.

The practice of investment-for-resource swaps and “compensatory” trade that China developed in several African countries was copied from the Japanese model of resource-based concessional loans that it applied in India and China. Chinese companies signed countertrade contracts with firms from many other Western countries, including the USA – 140 in 1979 alone. This model became an important component of Africa-China relations. In short, China became willing, unlike the Western countries,

After the new millennium ... Angola would use oil; Congo would use minerals; Senegal, peanut oil; and Ghana, cocoa, to repay their loans. (Bräutigam 2009, 55)

This ODA regime in which cash flows tended to be limited had the merit of preventing aid from “easily being transferred to Swiss bank accounts” (Ussenbach 2011, 24). It also promoted local ownership insofar as China made strong efforts “to integrate this assistance within the context of the recipient government's stated developmental needs” (Alden and Chen 2011, 107). There were other differences in the patterns of economic engagement between China and the West in Africa. As Western donors became increasingly infatuated with NGOs at the expense of governments from the 1980s onwards and abandoned large infrastructural and industrial projects for the poverty alleviation of social welfare, China persisted in investing in such projects.

Equally remarkably, the Chinese increasingly turned aid projects into joint commercial ventures. This allowed the Chinese “to address three goals at once: a growing backlog
of loans, consolidation of former aid projects, and experience (and maybe profits) for China's new corporations” (Bräutigam 2009, 61). In contrast, typically among Western donors, once a project is completed, their involvement comes to an end. China's use of aid as an instrument to promote exports and help infant industries to expand overseas and develop global competitiveness was another important borrowing from Japan.

Thus, increasingly Chinese aid served as a springboard for investment. The bundling of aid, investment, and trade became a powerful locomotive of China's economic foray into Africa. China's strategy of globalisation and overseas cooperation encompassed three elements:

First, a major aid reform in 1995 created new instruments to link aid, trade, and investment together. Second, after 2000, Chinese leaders took on a much higher profile stance as promoters of “common prosperity” … Third, … Beijing redefined its portfolio of tools to aid its domestic restructuring by pushing its mature “sunset” industries offshore. A quiet decision to establish up to fifty special economic zones in other countries would become the most visible sign of this step. (Bräutigam 2009, 78)

The Chinese government encouraged state and private banks and enterprises involved in Africa to combine aid, mutual cooperation, and trade by promoting joint ventures, first, in manufacturing and agriculture; second, in assembly factories; and third, in mineral and forest resources. Western aid and investment generally avoided investing in manufacturing and industry. For example, World Bank loans to African industry and trade between 2002 and 2007 amounted to less than 5%, and those of the Western donor countries to less than 1%. China encouraged investment in manufacturing and industry through the CADF and other instruments. This included increasing the number of commodities given zero tariff treatment from 190 in 2005 to 440 in July 2007. Several economic zones were established in Mauritius, Zambia, Egypt, Nigeria and Tanzania, partly to quell African criticisms that China was only interested in the extraction of African resources and partly to ease trade frictions. Also, these zones
served as a way of exporting mature Chinese industries, increasing investment, and exploiting the preferential access of African countries to European markets through partnership agreements or to US markets under the Growth and Opportunity Act (Alden and Hughes 2009, 17).

The growth of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, a part of China's “going global strategy”, was remarkable, although accurate data is hard to come by. According to Shinn and Eisenman (2012), China's cumulative FDI in Africa in 1990 totalled a mere $49 million, rising to $820 million by the end of the decade. By 2005, according to the estimates of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 2013), it had reached $1.6 billion, but the Chinese government put the figure at $6.27 billion. By 2009, it is generally agreed it had included Africa's largest economies and most resource-rich countries. In 2009, the leading ones were South Africa, Nigeria, Zambia, Sudan, Algeria, and Egypt, in that order.

For the resource-rich countries, the bulk of Chinese FDI went into resource extraction, particularly oil and minerals. For example, in the period 2001–2007, the World Bank estimated that China invested $4.8 billion and $2.4 billion in the Nigerian and Angolan oil sectors respectively. The dominant players were the China National Petroleum Corporation and the China National Offshore Company. During the same period China invested $3.1 billion in the mineral sector in countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Nigeria. The scale of some of the investment deals between China and the resource-rich African countries was staggering. In 2007, the China's Export Import Bank agreed to a $6.5 billion concessional loan, to be repaid in resources, to finance roads, railroads, education and health projects in the DRC. In 2010, the China State Construction Engineering Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding with the Nigerian Petroleum
Corporation “for $28.5 billion that will seek financing from Chinese banks to build three refineries and a fuel complex in Nigeria” (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 303).

Manufacturing continued to be a major focus of Chinese investment, although not as much as it was in the period from 1979 to 2000 when 46% of Chinese investment in Africa went to manufacturing. Between 2009 and 2012, $1.33 billion was invested in manufacturing. By the end of 2012 China's investment in manufacturing had reached $3.43 billion (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2014). For some countries, manufacturing claimed the lion's share of Chinese FDI. According to some estimates, “90 percent of Chinese investment in Cote d'Ivoire in 2000–2007 went into manufacturing, 66 percent in Ethiopia, 92 percent in Ghana, 50 percent in Sudan, 63 percent in Uganda and 87 percent in Zambia”. 1

services sector was $3.87 billion (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2014). Far less important was Chinese investment in African agriculture, although it provoked hysteria about China's purported “land grab” on the continent. Between 2009 and 2012, China's FDI in African agriculture grew from a paltry US$30 million to US$82.47 million (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2014; see also Bräutigam and Xiaoyang 2009).

More remarkable was the growth of Chinese investment and involvement in the African construction industry. The leading infrastructure projects included dams for hydropower, transportation projects, especially railroads and roads, and the information and telecommunications sector: “By the end of 2007, Chinese firms had won construction contracts in Africa worth around US$30 billion” (Dent 2011b, 10). In 2012, Chinese enterprises completed construction contracts worth US$40.83 billion in Africa, an increase of 45% over 2009, accounting for 35.02% of China's overseas
increase of 45% over 2009, accounting for 35.02% of China's overseas contract work completed. Africa has been China's second largest overseas contract market for four successive years .... Chinese enterprises have built numerous city roads, expressways, flyovers, railways and ports in Africa .... From 2010 to May 2012, China approved concessional loans worth a total of US$11.3 billion for 92 African projects. (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2014)

By 2014, 31% of Chinese investment in Africa went into mining, 20% into finance, 16% into construction, 15% into manufacturing, 5% into business and lending services, and the remaining 13% into other sectors. 2

The number of Chinese companies investing in Africa grew exponentially: “In 2006, China's Export Import Bank said there were about 800 Chinese companies in Africa, approximately 85% privately owned. By the end of 2009, the number had increased to 2,000; in 2011 China's vice minister of commerce reported 4,600” (Shinn and Eisenman, 129). Chinese businesses in Africa can be divided into four groups: large private enterprises with global brand names and close ties to the government; state owned enterprises (SOEs); small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and the swelling armies of independent Chinese entrepreneurs and petty traders.

As relative latecomers to African markets long dominated by Western companies and interests, Chinese multinational companies often invested in previously neglected regions or particularly challenging sectors. They also sought to leverage their relative political, diplomatic, and economic advantages. These included their country's anti-Western ideological rhetoric and willingness to work with African leaders without patronising and hectoring them; willingness to work on prestige projects and provide assistance without Western conditionalities that African leaders often resent and find humiliating; and using low-cost bidding strategies for massive investment projects. These strategies often gave them a competitive advantage against Western and even local African enterprises. The labour, capital equipment, and managerial expenses of Chinese enterprises were typically lower than their competitors, and Chinese businesses and entrepreneurs also seemed more tolerant of slimmer profit margins.
To promote investment in Africa, as noted earlier, China created the CADF in 2007:

As of 2010, the CADF agreed to invest about $800 million in thirty projects in Africa and disbursed between $300 and $400 million. CADF opened offices in South Africa, Ghana, and Ethiopia; it plans to open others. CADF is one of the first Chinese funds to insist on an environmental assessment for its investment projects. (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 133)

In 2005, the Africa-China Business Council was also set up to help Chinese businesses and facilitate those seeking opportunities in Africa and welcome African business delegations to China. Other potential sources of investment funds for Africa included the China Investment Corporation, the country's sovereign wealth fund, and the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation, whose operations began in 2001 and by 2006 had provided $30 billion in insurance for Chinese businesses abroad. China also created banks to promote investment in Africa and elsewhere. They included the China Development Bank, China Export Import Bank, and the China Agricultural Development Bank. By the end of 2007, the Export Import Bank had apparently approved some 300 loans for African nations valued at $24 billion and concessional loans valued at $8–9 billion (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 147). For SMEs operating overseas, China created the Small-Medium Enterprises International Markets Development Fund. This recalled the experiences of Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, “who all used development finance to ‘pick winners’ in the globalization race” (Bräutigam 2009, 79). Besides domestic capital, Chinese enterprises became adept at bidding for projects funded by other donors, including international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank. They even succeeded in winning large shares of American-funded Millennium Challenge Account projects across the continent (French 2014, Chapter 7).

Notwithstanding their low-cost bidding strategies, profit maximisation remains a key motivation for Chinese enterprises. According to a survey of Chinese SMEs in Africa,
the reasons they are attracted to Africa include, in descending order, to gain access to local markets, escape from intense competition in domestic markets, transfer abroad excessive domestic production capacity, enter into new foreign markets via exports from host, take advantage of African regional or international trade agreements, gain access to raw materials, diversify risks, receive financial incentives provided by the government, and acquire advanced technology and skills (Schiere, Ndikumana, and Walkenhorst 2011, 21). For example, Chinese investment in BP's deep-water block off Angola may have been a way to obtain advanced Western technology and modern manufacturing techniques (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 129–130).

But the investment has not been one way. The volume of investments by African countries in China reportedly reached $14.24 billion by the end of 2012, 44% higher than in 2009 (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2012). The investments were concentrated in the petrochemical industries, manufacturing and processing, and wholesale and retail. The leading African investors in China were the Indian Ocean islands of Seychelles and Mauritius and Africa's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa. For example, for South African companies it was estimated that by 2014 “China will account for 45 percent of SABMiller's growth. Kumba Resources invested in a zinc smelter in China. South African mining companies, Gold Fields and Anglo Gold Ashanti, purchased shares in Chinese gold companies” (Shinn and Eisenman 2012, 142–143).

While impressive, China’s FDI in Africa lagged behind that of the major Western countries and some Asian countries. According to a report from EY (2014), between 2007 and 2013 China accounted for only 4.2% of FDI into Africa, compared to 12.1% for the United Arab Emirates, 10.7% for the United Kingdom (UK), 8.0% for the US, 7.3% for India, 6.5% for France, and 4.3% for South Africa. The report noted the rising momentum of intra-African investment from 8% in 2007 to 16% in 2009 and 23% in 2013, as well as investment in consumer-facing industries, which rose for technology, media and telecommunications from 14% in 2003–2007 to 20% in 2013, for retail and consumer products from 12% to 17%, and for financial services from 12% to 15%, while falling sharply for metals and mining from 13% to 2% and for coal, oil and
while falling sharply for metals and mining from 13% to 2% and for coal, oil and natural gas from 11% to 2% (EY 2014).

Altogether, in 2013 Africa received $52.6 billion in global FDI flows, representing 5.7% of the total, up from $44 billion in 2010 or 3.1%. During the same period, FDI outflows from Africa rose from $9 billion to $14 billion or 0.6% to 1.0% of global totals respectively. Much of this outflow represented intra-African investments led by South African companies, Angola and several countries in Central, North and West Africa (UNCTAD 2013, 8–41). A comparison of net FDI flows from China and the US can be seen in Table 1, which underscores the fact that China by 2012 had yet to match the US as an investor in Africa, although globally China had become the world's third largest source of FDI. 3

Much more important than Chinese ODA and investment was the phenomenal growth of trade between the two regions. Table 2 traces the development of Africa-China trade between 1938 and 2010. It shows that despite fluctuations, the volume of trade was rather limited until the end of the 1990s. Between 1950 and 1960 it rose from $25.4 million to $127.7 million and by 1970 it had reached $286.1 million. It was not until 1981 that the volume of trade between the two surpassed one billion, when it reached $1.6 billion. For the next decade it declined and the volume for 1981 was not surpassed until 1992, when it climbed to $2.4 billion. Over the next eight years it jumped by more than 415% to reach almost $10 billion. By 2005 it had more than quadrupled again to $40.9 billion. In the next five years it more than trebled to reach $128.5 billion.

Table 2 Trade between Africa and China, 1938–2010 US$ million.

CSV Display Table
In 2009, China overtook the US to become Africa's largest trading partner. In 2012, Africa's trade with China reached $198.5 billion in volume, of which $85.3 billion was Africa's imports from China and $113.2 billion China's imports from Africa. This represented 5.13% of China's total foreign trade and 16.13% of Africa's total foreign trade (The State Council Information Office of the PRC 2014). It is instructive to note that for much of the twentieth century, Africa accounted for a much larger proportion of China's total world trade than did China for Africa's trade. Between 1938 and 1992, Africa's trade with China exceeded 1% only seven times, all but one in the years between 1965 and 1972.

In contrast, during this period China's imports from Africa fell below 1% only four times, in 1938 and from 1951 to 1953. Until 1982, China's imports from Africa climbed to 4.4% in 2008, then dipping slightly to 4.3% in 2010.

Clearly, since the late 1990s China has become more important to Africa's total world trade than Africa has been to China's world trade. The growing imbalance was evident from 1994, when Africa represented 1.1% of China's trade and China accounted for 1.35% of Africa's trade. Ten years later, the gap had widened to 2.5% and 6.5% respectively. From 2008 China accounted for more than 10% of Africa's total world trade at 10.67%, rising to 12.43% in 2009 and to 13.31% in 2010.

What this data underscores is that from the 1980s China enjoyed much faster rates of economic growth than many African countries, which were mired in intermittent recessions and even stagnation. Also, African primary commodity prices fell precipitously compared to China's exports, which were increasingly comprised of manufactured products as its economy became the “workshop of the world”. In 1960, often dubbed the year of African independence, Africa's world trade was nearly four times larger than China's world trade ($14.8 billion compared to $3.9 billion). By 1970,
the gap had widened to more than six times larger ($22.963 billion to $3.576 billion). In 1980, Africa's world trade was still more than five times larger than China's ($213.2 billion compared to $37.6 billion).

By 1990, the gap had narrowed significantly, although Africa's total trade still remained larger, $197.69 billion compared to China's $116.79 billion. In 1993 China's total world trade finally overtook Africa's world trade, reaching $195.3 billion compared to Africa's $187.7 billion. The gap had nearly doubled by 2001 when China's total world trade reached $511.0 billion compared to Africa's $263.8 billion. Five years later it had almost trebled to $1.8 trillion for China and $682.0 billion for Africa. By 2010 Africa's total world trade was $966.0 billion (it had surpassed $1 trillion in 2008), while China's was about $2.974 trillion.

In this article

underscores the fact that Africa's exports to China remained concentrated in a handful of primary products, dominated by crude oil, which accounted for up to two thirds of the value of Africa's exports to China after 2000, followed by mineral products, base metals, precious stones, and wood products, which collectively made up to 90% of China's imports from Africa. In contrast, Africa's imports from China were more diversified, ranging from machinery to consumer goods including textiles that devastated the textile industry in many African countries.

IV. Challenges of the Africa-China relationship

The relationship between Africa and China is extraordinarily complicated because of its history and rapid growth in recent decades. Also, as is common in international affairs, it involves government-to-government, people-to-people, and sector-to-sector relations, including business, media, education, sports, culture, and civil society. For it
to deepen and thrive, the two sides will need to navigate effectively what I would call the challenges of diversity, development, diaspora, and dialogue: managing the diversity of its actors; maximising the promises of mutual development; minimising the maltreatment of each other's diasporas; and maintaining a productive balance in their respective dealings with the other major powers and economies.

A remarkable feature of this relationship is its multidimensionality and the multiplicity of players involved. This paper has largely focused on the economic aspects, but it is a relationship that also encompasses political affairs, military and security ties, and cultural, educational and media interactions. Africa-China relations operate at four levels: bilateral contacts between Chinese and individual African governments; multilateral exchanges between China and groups of African countries through the FOCAC mechanism or regional agencies such as the AU and the African Development Bank; trilateral dealings between China and Africa mediated through international organisations from the UN to the World Bank; and multiple transactions between Chinese and African non-state actors including business enterprises, civil society organisations, and individuals. Besides their own internal logics and dynamics, there are complex intersections among the actors and activities at each and across levels.

Much of the Western media with its almost reflexive demonisation of China trumpeted China's relations with what they regarded as pariah regimes, principally President Omar al-Bashir's Sudan and President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe. But in 2014 China enjoyed diplomatic relations with all but 4 of Africa's 54 countries. African regimes ranged from robust democracies with strong and diversified economies such as South Africa to poor but resource-rich weak democracies such as the DRC, to fast growing illiberal regimes both large and small, such as Ethiopia and Rwanda, and motley regimes in transition from dictatorship to democracy. In fact, in 2009 the stock of Chinese investment in Zimbabwe, as a part of China's total investment in Africa, was a minuscule 1.1%, while in Sudan it was 6.0%, compared to 24.7% in South Africa, 11.0% in Nigeria, 9.0% in Zambia, and 8.1% in Algeria (Bokilo 2013, 26).

The Western media gives the misleading impression that the views of Africans towards China are largely negative, except for the political elites who are dismissed for their
China are largely negative, except for the political elites who are dismissed for their alleged venality. Studies by African scholars on Africa-China relations tend to present more varied and complex portraits of African attitudes towards China (Prah 2007; Ampiah and Naidu 2008; Morrisey and Zgovu 2011; Manji and Marks 2007; George 2014). Even more revealing are opinion surveys conducted in several African countries by Gallup poll and Pew Global Attitudes Survey, which show that respondents were generally more favourable than unfavourable towards China, and that China was perceived more positively than the US. In 2013, for example, among the highest favourability ratings for China in the world were in Kenya (78%), Senegal (77%), Nigeria (76%), and Ghana (67%). The highest were recorded in Pakistan and Malaysia (81% each). 4

Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong concluded:

aspects as beneficial. Next, the findings of the random sample surveys are at variance with the dominant Western media representations that only African ruling elites are positive about these links. Finally, based on our own survey, we find that among the university-connected respondents in Africa, the key variation is by country. All other variations, except gender, fade from significance when country is taken into account. (Sautman and Hairong 2009, 179–180)

In comparison to Western policies, Sautman and Hairong’s survey of African students and faculty in nine countries found China’s policies were seen to be much or somewhat more beneficial by 48.9% of the respondents, both beneficial and harmful by 32.5%, generally harmful by 5.3% and 13.3% did not know. As for the adaptation of Chinese to local society compared to Westerners, 50.3% of the respondents found the former much or somewhat more adapted, 18.1% said the two groups were the same, 22.2% thought the Chinese were somewhat or much less adapted, and 9.4% did not
22.2% thought the Chinese were somewhat or much less adapted, and 9.4% did not know. As to what effect they thought China as a rising power would have on Africa, 61.1% stated it was potentially somewhat or very beneficial to Africa, for 13.9% it had no relevance, 10.5% believed it was potentially or very harmful, and 14.5% did not know. On whether China practises neocolonialism, 37.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 27.8% were neutral, 21.4% agreed or strongly agreed, and 13.8% did not know (Sautman and Hairong 2009).

The survey investigated other issues that have been widely reported in the popular media and discussed in the academic literature. On China's path of development, 74.2% of the respondents said it represented a very positive or somewhat positive model of development, as opposed to 7% who thought it was irrelevant, 5.6% who were negative, and 13.2% who did not know. On how much China and Africa share common interests, 31.5% said they share some, 29.3% thought most or many, 22.3% said a few, 8.3% none, and 8.6% did not know. As to whether China was in Africa just for natural resources, 37.3% agreed or strongly agreed, 25.2% were neutral, 30.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 6.8% did not know.

Concerning China's policy of non-interference, 34.2% stated it was basically good but with some problems, 25.7% said it was good, 16.0% found it more harmful than good, 10.9% quite harmful, and 13.1% did not know. Views of Chinese small businesses varied, as 37.7% thought they helped but were also a source of problems for local people, 34.0% said they helped with local economic development, 12.2% thought they were not helpful, 10.2% found them harmful, and 6.4% did not know (Sautman and Hairong 2009).

As noted earlier, the relationship is complicated by the fact it involves one country, China, dealing with a continent of 54 separate countries of divergent sizes, economies, political systems, and geopolitical significance. This renders the relationship inherently unequal as it is infinitely harder for the African countries to coordinate their China policies than it is for China to deal with Africa. The asymmetrical development of technocratic, institutional, industrial, infrastructural, human capital, and sustainable development capacities among African states, and between them and China, also make Africa-China relations exceedingly challenging and unpredictable. This reality makes it imperative for African countries to develop a coherent strategic approach to
But there are multiple actors in China as well. They range from the Communist Party that sets national policy to sub-state actors at the provincial and municipal levels that are increasingly active in China's foreign affairs. To quote Chris Alden:

The link between “provincial” diplomatic initiatives and their business interests are apparent in Angola, where two of the largest construction firms are actually state-owned enterprises from Anhui and Sichuan provinces, both of which have formal links with Angolan provinces. In the aftermath of the Africa China Summit of November 2006, Lagos state in Nigeria and Jiangsu have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the newly created Lekki Free Trade Zone drawing upon the

around 60 percent of China's exports and 40 percent of total investment in the country can be attributed to FIE activities. Thus, much of China's burgeoning demand for energy and other natural resources is being driven by the now very large numbers of American, European, and Japanese and other foreign multinational enterprises operating within the country. In this sense, China's demand for Africa's resources are part of the latest phase in global capitalist development. (Dent 2011b, 9)

The diversity of actors and objectives places considerable limits on the ability of the government to exercise full strategic and regulatory control and ensure consistency. It is particularly difficult for the Chinese government to manage the activities of SMEs sponsored by provincial and municipal governments, let alone monitor the behaviour
sponsored by provincial and municipal governments, let alone monitor the behaviour of the swelling armies of petty traders and settlers. A series of oversight agencies have been created, including the State Council, Chinese embassies, the Forum on Africa-China Corporation, the Ministries of Finance, Commerce, Foreign Affairs, and Chambers of Commerce, state-owned companies, and a variety of commercial and development banks, to accomplish its Africa policy, but this is ever harder to manage. (Power and Mohan 2012, 58)

The Africa-China imbalances can only be diminished through concerted efforts on both sides. Most crucially, there is a need for African regional institutions including the AU to play a greater role as interlocutors of African policies towards China. In order to deepen the Africa-China development relationship, an African Development Bank. Named the Africa Growing Together Fund, it is intended, according to the governor of China's central bank, to rectify “some past deals by Chinese companies and agencies in African countries [that] hadn't been made in acceptable ways …. Mr. Zhou said the $2 billion investment fund was a way for China to do business differently in Africa” (Stevis 2014).

Chinese investment is generally welcomed in African countries. But serious concerns have been raised about some of its patterns and implications. Most vociferous have been African labour and civil society organisations, journalists and academics, as well as African and Western businesses and traders unable to compete. They have attacked Chinese enterprises for their allegedly unfair competitive and investment practices, poor worker safety standards and low wages, failure to comply with domestic labour and environmental laws, excessive use of Chinese labour and failure to train African workers, authoritarian managerial practices, and even racist attitudes. Labour relations are particularly fraught in Chinese SMEs, which have provoked widespread
relations are particularly fraught in Chinese SMEs, which have provoked widespread strikes in some countries, such as among Zambian mining workers and Tanzanian textile workers (Lee 2009). Chinese workers, managers, and traders have also been subject to expulsions, abductions, violence and even killings in some countries, from Ghana to the Sudan.

The collapse of the textile industry in several African countries due to a flood of cheap Chinese imports became, for China's critics, emblematic of the country's neocolonial exploitation of Africa and contribution to Africa's de-industrialisation. Stung by such attacks, in 2006 China introduced a two-year self-imposed quota of textile exports to South Africa and the Minister of Commerce “announced that Chinese government would be setting up clothing and textile factories across the region, as well as committing itself to purchasing more cotton from West African producers” (Alden 2009).

While the growth in Africa-China trade has been hailed for some of its positive impacts, critics have complained bitterly that it replicates, indeed reinforces, the colonial patterns of trade. The benefits have included increased demand for Africa's exports, rising commodity prices, and reduced prices on consumer and investment goods. But depending on their commodity specialisation some countries have witnessed reduced production, employment and demand in both domestic and third markets for their products because of Chinese competition (Penard 2011, 38). Particularly worrying has been the fact that African exports to China comprise largely of primary commodities while imports consist mainly of manufactured goods.

The imbalances in the composition of Africa-China trade have increasingly become a bone of contention and risen to the top of the policy agenda for African regional organisations, such as the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as think tanks such as the New Economic Partnership for Africa (NEPAD) and the Economic Commission for Africa, and financial institutions, including the African Development Bank. They have all called for the expansion of higher value added African exports to China.
China has sought to respond through various policy interventions and initiatives, including several outlined earlier. Among them are tariff policies, industrial investment strategies such as the establishment of joint enterprises and free overseas zones, and capacity-building activities especially in terms of infrastructure and human capital development. The FOCAC conferences and visits by Chinese leaders have been used as platforms for showcasing Chinese concerns and commitments to addressing the imbalances. These conferences and other forums have focused on ways to increase Chinese investment in manufacturing for export diversification, to improve coordination between China and Africa's traditional development partners on debt relief and aid effectiveness, to strengthen climate change mitigation and adaptation technology, and to promote regional infrastructure projects.

In this article and Hughes (2009, 26). In 2009, Premier Wen Jiabao proposed a China-Africa partnership to address climate change, enhance cooperation in satellite weather monitoring, and in the development and use of new energy sources. In fact, according to Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2012, 265), “China's investment in renewable energy and cleaner energy systems in Africa (which are becoming an important feature of China-Africa development cooperation) suggests that China is becoming increasingly conscious of its environmental responsibilities in its engagements with Africa”.

Given the diversity of Chinese interests and actors in Africa, it stands to reason that their adaptive capacities and ability to make improvements depend on several factors. First, there are different logics and impacts among Chinese extractive, industrial, and merchant capitals and their various fractions. Second, the levels of state embeddedness for the Chinese actors in China and African countries vary. Third, African countries display divergent levels of development, democratisation and state
African countries display divergent levels of development, democratisation and state capacity, as well as diverse forms of economic and resource nationalism, and histories of labour and civil society organisation and activism, all of which affect the modalities of engagement for Chinese businesses and entrepreneurs.

The changing dynamics of economic relations between the two regions have spawned a new and demanding challenge, the growth of diasporas. The proliferation of Chinese petty traders in African cities and even villages has provoked growing hostility from African traders in many countries, even if consumers might welcome the benefits of access to cheap commodities. This underscores the changing demographic, social and cultural dimensions of the Africa-China relationship as the number of migrants increase in both directions. The first wave of Chinese immigrants came during the construction of European colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, diverse. The migrants have come from the traditional migrant-producing coastal provinces and other parts of China, and smaller numbers from the Chinese diaspora in Europe. They comprise temporary skilled and semi-skilled labour migrants working on large infrastructure development projects who stay at the end of their contracts, small-time traders and investors, farmers, and transit migrants including diplomats, journalists and students who leave for China at the end of their tours or education.

Available data for 41 African countries shows that the numbers of Chinese immigrants grew from 129,605 in 2001 to 583,050–820,050 between 2003 and 2008. The largest number was in South Africa, which hosted 200,000–400,000 Chinese in 2007 up from 30,000 in 2001. Next came Nigeria, where the numbers rose from 2000 to 100,000, Sudan from 45 to 20,000–74,000, and Madagascar from 30,000 to 60,000. In 2001, only 4 of the 41 countries had more than 10,000 Chinese immigrants, by 2007 more than 20 did. Some of the spectacular growth was registered in countries such as Angola (500 to 20,000–40,000), Algeria (2000 to 20,000), Cote d'Ivoire (200 to 10,000), Egypt
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and Macau. West Africans predominated in Guangzhou, North Africans in Yiwu, Southern Africans in Hong Kong, and migrants from Lusophone countries in Macau, while Beijing and Shanghai had more mixed distributions. The conditions for Africans in these cities varied. There were also pockets of Africans in other provincial towns and major cities, such as Chongqing and Tianjin.

The future of Africa-China relations will increasingly depend on how the African diaspora in China and the Chinese diaspora in Africa are treated. As China and Chinese immigrants become more embedded in African economies and societies, they will become more embroiled in African politics as targets and actors, thereby straining China's long-cherished policy of non-intervention. The growth of the Chinese diaspora also presents opportunities for China, with new intermediaries able to bridge cooperation and communication between the two regions. Similarly, the growth of the African diaspora in China poses similar opportunities and challenges for African countries. African countries need to become more strategic in the deployment of their diasporas in China, as their economic, political and cultural brokers.
Two recent books on Chinese migrants in Africa (French 2014) and African migrants in China (Bodomo 2012) underscore the challenges involved in navigating the messy, fluid, and complex landscape of people-to-people relations. The contrasts between the Chinese migrants that French meets in his sojourns across Africa and the African migrants that Bodomo engages in his research in China are striking. The Chinese entrepreneurs, petty traders, farmers, and officials which French encounters in Mozambique, Zambia, Senegal, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Mali, and Ghana seem exceedingly ignorant about Africa, exhibiting superiority complexes and racism. The African traders, investors, professionals and students which Bodomo interviews in Guangzhou, Yiwu, Beijing, Shanghai, Macau, and Hong Kong are notable for their knowledge of and forgiving attitudes towards China, even when they encounter identities out of the continuous intersections of the imaginaries, demands, and promises of the homeland, the host country, and the migrant condition. The two books offer poignant tales of success as we are introduced to ambitious Chinese and African traders in Africa and China, respectively, becoming investors and factory owners, contributing to economic development and employment in their new locations, as well facilitating and fuelling trade between their respective countries. The migrants serve as cultural ambassadors whose interactions with local populations help to break down barriers. But there are also tragic accounts of failure and disappointment as some trek back home with their dreams shattered. Reports abound of the misunderstandings, xenophobia and racism that the Chinese and Africans face in each other's countries, which engenders conflicts and even violence and leaves behind a trail of mutual distrust and dislike.

Most challenging for African migrants in China, unlike those in Western countries, is the lack of a clear path to citizenship due to China's rather archaic immigration laws
the lack of a clear path to citizenship due to China’s rather archaic immigration laws and nationalist attitudes. As I argued in a previous paper, the nature of Africa's history with China serves, as a double edged sword. It saves China from the pernicious legacy of slavery and colonialism that afflicts relations between Africa and Euroamerica, but it also deprives the Africa-China relationship of the intimacies of familiarity and the mediations of the enduring African diasporic presence at the very heart of Euroamerica. (Zeleza 2008, 184)

This is why Chinese dealings with Africans on the continent and the treatment of the Africans in China are so crucial: Africans have sharp memories and sensitivities to the denigrations of racism and long histories of struggles against it.

across the continent. China’s soft power in Africa remains relatively weaker than that of the US, which benefits from the presence and projection of the cultural and political influence of African-Americans. China and African countries need to take more seriously the imperatives of learning each other's histories, cultures, and languages beyond the stereotypes of superficial encounters and instrumental economic transactions. The expansion of more informed media coverage, African studies in Chinese universities and Chinese studies in African universities, student and faculty exchanges, as well as tourism, is encouraging and deserves greater support on both sides (King 2013; see also Shinn and Eisenman 2012, Chapters 3 and 7).

Finally, it is clear that Africa's relations with China are situated in the exceedingly complex contexts of a rapidly changing global political economy. This makes it both imperative and difficult for each party to manage effectively their relations with each other and with other major powers and economies. Particularly critical to both are their dealings with the West in their engagements with each other. China-West-Africa relations are simultaneously characterised by competition, confrontation, and
cooperation. For Africa, the challenge and opportunity is how best to triangulate China and the West and others scrambling to get into the continent for its own sustainable development.

To many policymakers and commentators in both the West and China, the latter's ascendancy in Africa, for centuries regarded as Europe's backyard, seems to fit into the narrative of the West's apparent historic decline and China's rise. The virulent Western attacks on China's Africa policy, in which its relations with the so-called “rogue” regimes of Sudan and Zimbabwe are overstressed, can be read in this light. The humanitarian complex of NGOs and Western-dominated intergovernmental organisations reinforce official Western disquiet over the growth of Africa-China relations. The currency and leverage of the humanitarian lobby and powerful aid relative weaknesses of civil society in China only serve to fuel their critiques of China. They cynically brandished complaints by African civil society activists, which China seemed to pay more attention to. But the competition and even occasional confrontations between China and the West over Africa were nowhere near the deadly rivalries of the Cold War. In fact, it could be argued that China is constrained by the fact that it largely operates by the rules of the world capitalist system overseen by the WTO and other international financial institutions and multilateral organisations, including the UN.

It is in this context that expectations of the so-called Beijing Consensus supplanting the Washington Consensus as a global ideology of economic management and development appear exaggerated. It is instructive that the concept of the Beijing Consensus was coined by a Western, not Chinese, scholar, although some Chinese scholars have embraced it (Ramo 2004). The notion of a Beijing Consensus attracts both those who are fearful and gleeful about China's extraordinary global ascendancv.
It also appeals to Western and Chinese hawks yearning for a bipolar world of a Cold War and radicals from the South hankering for the dreams of a New International Economic Order of the 1970s buried by the rise of the Washington Consensus.

China's rise pluralises the centres of economic power, but does not yet offer “an alternative to the neo-liberal Washington Consensus, but more as a method of moderating its spatial, social, and political consequences within the parameters set by that consensus” (Dirlik 2011). In fact, argues Dirlik (2011), neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics offers at this historical juncture a way to salvage “a capitalist world economy that is unprecedented in its destructiveness, by suggesting the sustainability of such an economy rather than its final demise”. In this context, it is certainly questionable, to quote Dent (2011a, 3), “whether the Africa-China

Thus, China does not so much offer a new model of development outside the framework of the international economic system; rather it presents a new face of capitalist globalisation, the amazing story of a once-poor developing country rising to become the world's second largest economy, which is soon slated to overtake the US for the top spot. China has achieved an unprecedented feat in world history: lifting more than 600 million people out of poverty in a generation. It is an astonishing example, forged out of China's own history as a successful East Asian developmental state, not a turnkey model that can be imported and automatically switched on for Africa's development. The discourse of the Chinese model for Africa reprises the pernicious tendency of reducing Africa into a hapless tabula rasa always waiting for the inscription of development models from elsewhere. African countries will have to forge their own trajectories based on their experiences and the historic project of constructing democratic developmental states.
V. Conclusion

The Africa-China relationship has become a major feature of contemporary international relations for both parties, as well as for the rapidly changing global political economy. The breadth and depth of the relationship can be seen in the phenomenal growth of economic cooperation from aid to trade to investment and in other spheres. It is worth noting the high level of official contacts that is unmatched for Africa in its relations with any of the major powers. As Shinn and Eisenman inform us:

Between 1956 and 2006, there were more than 800 high level visits between African countries and China. Chinese leaders and foreign ministers made more than 160 visits to Africa while 524 Africans of ministerial rank or above made 676 visits to China. (Shinn and Eisenman, 52)

Since 2006 the visits have increased. Two months following the FOCAC and Beijing Summit of 2006, President Hu Jintao went on a tour of eight African countries from 30 January through 10 February 2007. The first foreign trip of President Xi Jinping was to Tanzania, South Africa and the DRC from 24–30 March 2013, only ten days after he assumed the presidency.

Pivoting towards China and Asia more generally, as well as the major emerging economies of South America and Europe, has become popular among many African governments, business leaders, traders, journalists, and scholars. They welcome not only the vast new economic opportunities China has opened up but also the diplomatic breathing room it has afforded them, especially for regimes proscribed by the Western powers. China's rise as an economic counterweight to the West, even if not an ideological opponent in the manner of the former Soviet Union, has been deeply gratifying to many Africans intensely distrustful and resentful of Western imperialist reflexes, superiority complexes, staggering duplicities, and endless prescriptions.
Despite the phenomenal growth of Africa-China economic relations, and the lavish attention paid to Africa by Chinese leaders and even the Western critics of China in Africa, it is important to note that in terms of investment and trade Africa remains less important to China than its Asian neighbours, Europe, and the US. In 2010, Asia accounted for more than 50% of China's trade. The onus for strengthening these relations falls on both China and Africa. But for it to become a true partnership that benefits all parties, China must practise what it preaches about mutual benefits and become more attentive to addressing African concerns.

Specifically, African countries need to develop robust laws and strengthen their monitoring and enforcement mechanisms and institutional capabilities for labour, safety and environmental protection applicable to all investors, domestic and foreign.

Most critically, African countries must articulate more clearly, coherently, and collectively what their fundamental interests are in this crucial relationship. These interests must be rooted in the historic and humanistic agendas of African nationalism for self-determination, sustainable development, democratisation, and regional integration. The West has never committed to these goals, hence its fraught relationship with the continent since decolonisation. There is a lesson in this for China, a country that knows all too well the struggles against external aggression, occupation, and exploitation, as well as the sweet revenge of turning the historical tables on the erstwhile imperialist interlopers and hegemons.

African history teaches us to beware of strangers bearing gifts. China is no different. In the words of a Ghanaian economist:

Countries are not philanthropists.... They are in business for themselves, and like many business people, they will cheat you if you don't enforce your
and like many business people, they will cheat you if you don't enforce your own rules and regulations. For African counties, the only safeguard is to try to negotiate advantageous conditions for oneself. That's the game we're in. (French 2014, 189)

In short, the challenge is for Africa to be clear and strategic in pursuing its own long-term interests in its relationship with China, as with any major power. The countries that will benefit most from the relationship with China are those which have coherent policies and democratic accountability – in short, the continent's democratic developmental states. But even they cannot do it alone: it is imperative for them to increase their leverage by dealing with China as collectively as possible.

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Notes
1. Shinn and Eisenman (2012, 136) question these estimates given “China’s large investment in petroleum in Sudan and copper in Zambia”.


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