Friends and Interests:  
China’s Distinctive Links with Africa

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Abstract

China’s presence in and other links to Africa have expanded greatly during the current decade. An international discourse that has emerged with this expansion focuses on how to characterize China-Africa relations and ranges from presenting China as the new colonialist to depicting her as Africa’s benefactor. Not unexpectedly, Western (especially US and UK) political forces and media are China’s chief accusers, while the PRC, with substantial support from Africans, has mounted a spirited, if not always unfeigning, defense. The presentation will use a comparative perspective to examine two sets of factors that make China’s links with Africa distinctive: the China Model & Beijing Consensus and Aid & Migration. It will argue that the differing ways in which China’s links have developed with Africa make the PRC appear as the distinctly lesser evil in comparison with the West, particularly with regard to questions vital to Africa’s development and African dignity.
“Between countries, there are no friends, only interests.”
Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, paraphrasing Lord Palmerston, in a 2005 letter to Pres. Chen Shui-bian, announcing Senegal’s de-recognition of Taiwan and establishment of diplomatic relations with China.¹

“... China has no friends, only interests.”
African diplomat, commenting on Pres. Hu Jintao’s 2004 visit to oil-rich Gabon.²

In early 2006, an unacknowledged exchange occurred between the US Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and PRC government on how to characterize China’s policies in Africa. A CFR report, aimed at determining how US influence in Africa can be enhanced, devoted a chapter to China, charging that it protects “rogue states” like Zimbabwe and Sudan, deploys its influence to counter Western pressures on African states to improve human rights and governance, and unfairly competes with US firms in bids for contracts in Africa, the same points already made by veteran critics of China in the US Congress.³

China’s elites have long regarded the CFR as a “superpower brain-trust” and “invisible government” shaping the US global role⁴ and responded quickly in a paper that argued China has forged “a new type of strategic partnership with Africa that features political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange.”⁵ China was said to support Africa’s desire for a more democratic international order. The paper alluded to the African Human Resources Development Fund, jointly run by six PRC

¹ Chang Yun-ping and Ko Shu-ling, “Taiwan Foreign Minister Offers to Quit Over Senegal’s Severance of Ties,” Taipei Times, 27 Oct. 2005. Queen Victoria criticized her Foreign Minister Lord Palmerston for expressing sympathy for Poles seeking independence from Britain’s ally Russia. He replied, “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates, 3d ser., vol. 97, col. 122 (1 Mar. 1848). Ironically, Palmerston is best known in China for prosecuting the Opium War of 1839-1842.
² Allen Cheng, “Thirst for Oil Knows No Bounds,” South China Morning Post (SCMP), 26 June 2004:5.
ministries, training 16,000 Africans in 2001-2006,\(^6\) the China-Africa Cooperation Forum (CACF), which brought African and PRC ministers to Beijing in 2000 and Addis Ababa in 2003 and will convene heads of state in Beijing in November, 2006,\(^7\) and its subsidiary Program for China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development and Addis Ababa Action Plan of 2004-2006, involving a wide range of development projects\(^8\)

The CFR report and PRC paper present single-minded visions. One Western stock idea about China is that “In some African countries, it is possible to talk of China’s behavior as a new form of colonialism.”\(^9\) The CFR panel fosters this notion by presenting PRC actions as deleterious to African interests in ways that it does not acknowledge with regard to the West: it singles out China’s activities as uniquely supportive of illiberal regimes and harmful to the environment through purchases of illegal African timber. Elsewhere, China is accused of especially promoting corruption in Africa and trading in ways that damage African anti-poverty efforts.\(^10\) Several Western powers, however, have long supported authoritarian regimes in Africa, as Taiwan does with states that recognize


it, rather than the PRC. The most-praised US ally in Africa, Yoweri Museveni, for example, incarnates “competitive authoritarianism,” having tried his main opponent for rape and treason and changed the constitution to continue in office after 20 years as Uganda’s President. While PRC support for Sudan and Zimbabwe is much discussed in the West, less is said about US support for authoritarian African states, especially oil producers such as Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, Chad and Equatorial Guinea, support that extends even to Sudan through US-Sudan intelligence cooperation.

There is no indication African regimes have become more corrupt since China’s presence began to rise around 2000. Both China and the EU are large purchasers of illegal African timber and it is Western pharmaceutical companies that engage in biopiracy in Africa. PRC exports compete with African exports almost solely in the textile/clothing sector and 60% of China’s exports are in fact produced by foreign-owned companies. Cheap PRC-made household goods, brought into Africa by both Chinese and Africans, may inhibit African light industry formation and thus harm a section of the poor.

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as potential producers. Yet machinery, electronic equipment and “high- and new-tech products” made up nearly half of China’s 2005 exports to Africa\textsuperscript{18} and because PRC goods are much cheaper than Western imports and many local products, they do benefit wider sections of the poor as consumers.\textsuperscript{19} In any case, African industrialization was already severely damaged by Western imports following 1980s and 1990s International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank structural adjustment programs (SAP’s).\textsuperscript{20}

In its paper, the PRC presented its policies as benign opposites of the West ignoring African aspirations for a more equitable international distribution of wealth and power. It eschewed, however, the obligation of states to vindicate the rights of especially oppressed people\textsuperscript{21} and indicated China will forge bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) in Africa, following the West’s path of going beyond WTO requirements to open developing states to even higher levels of penetration by overwhelming external economic forces.\textsuperscript{22}

Given the asymmetries of US-China relations, the CFR report is predictably accusatory and the PRC paper defensive. The report in fact represents a common discursive binarism


\textsuperscript{20} Claire Melamed, \textit{The Economics of Failure: the Real Cost of ‘Free’ Trade for Poor Countries} (London: Christian Aid: 2005); \url{www.christian-aid.org.uk/indepth/506liberalisation/Economics%20of%20failure.pdf}.


about China’s Africa policies, exemplified by a German foundation’s ad for its panel on “China in Africa” at the NGO forum of WTO’s 2005 ministerial meeting, which queried

Are China-Africa trade & investment relations following a pattern of South-South cooperation, guided by development needs of both sides? Or are [they] just replications of the classical North-South model, where Africa’s hope of building a manufacturing sector gets another beating? Will the Chinese ‘no political strings attached’ approach help the African development state regain posture or is it a recipe for closed-door business with autocrats to get a competitive edge over Western economic interests .

PRC Africa policies should not however be reduced to either “China is the best” or “China is just like the rest.” The PRC is a trade-driven industrial power integrated into the world system and practices a realpolitik of aggrandizing national wealth and power.

It thus necessarily presents to Africa a “neo-liberalism with Chinese characteristics” that replicates in key ways developed state policies of disadvantageous terms of trade, exploitation of natural resources, oppressive labor regimes and support for authoritarian rulers. The commonalities of the PRC and Western approaches are therefore fundamental.

There are however distinctive features of China-Africa linkages that stem from the country’s semi-colonial and socialist legacies and its status as a developing country. They derive as well from China’s late entry into Africa as a resource-seeking state, in the midst of a decades-long decline in African fortunes associated with the privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and austerity policies that comprise the Washington Consensus (WC).

This paper concentrates on two distinctive sets of China-Africa links that contrast with what the West has had on offer through the WC and Post-Washington

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Consensus (PWC), and make China’s soft power effort a lodestone for attracting the continent’s political and intellectual elite. One set is described in terms of the “Beijing Consensus” (BC), an “ideology” within neo-liberal parameters that nevertheless takes seriously some aspirations of developing states often ignored or opposed by the West. The other set involves China-Africa aid and migration links which, unlike those of the West, are often seen by Africans as not exclusively serving foreign and elite interests.

PRC leaders are usually depicted as having an instrumental approach to dealings with foreigners and are said to have interests, but no friends abroad. The distinctive features of its links with Africa, however, often position China as a perceived lesser evil among great powers interacting with the continent. That perception may allow Chinese leaders to make good on their claim to have Africans among their “all-weather friends.”

China in Africa: the “Model” in Context

Post-colonial Africa is often understood as burdened by civil wars, epidemics, and venal regimes that aggravate endemic poverty, a perception that led to a post-Cold War Afro-pessimism or even Afrophobia and to Africa’s downgrading as a concern for

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In part because of China’s increased presence, which began in the 1990s when China-Africa trade grew by 700%, Western leaders are again giving some attention to the continent. Yet, even as China’s activities increasingly displace traditional British, French and US interests, many Africans still find Africa “remains all but invisible,” particularly to the US. That is so even though it is the second largest continent, with the fastest-growing population: it had 900 million (m) people in 2005 and may reach 1.3 billion (b) by 2020, when China and Africa will each have 20% of the world’s people. Africa’s economy is growing slowly in per capita terms, but population growth may double its size in a generation.

Africa is also the most resource-laden continent, with every primary product required for industrial production. It accounted for more than 10m of a global 84m barrels per day (bpd) oil production in 2005. Most is light, sweet, highly profitable crude, mainly offshore, away from politics. Some 85% of the world’s new oil reserves found in 2001-2004 were on west/central African coasts. There is strong competition to secure African oil. The US imported 60% of its 20m bpd of oil used in 2005, 16% from Africa, a figure expected to rise to 25% by 2015 and its government works closely with US companies to boost access to the continent’s oil.

China imported 40% of the 7.2m bpd of oil it used in

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2005, 30% from Africa. More than 60% of the oil production of Sudan, Africa’s third largest producer, goes to China and supplies 5% of PRC oil needs. Angola, the second largest producer, sends a quarter of its production to China, as does Nigeria, the largest producer. In 2005, a PRC oil firm announced it would invest US$2.3b in an oil and gas field off Nigeria. China too carries out vigorous “oil diplomacy” in Africa.35

Before the 1990s, PRC Africa policy was purely political: China fostered anti-colonial and post-colonial solidarity,36 efforts repaid through most African states’ recognition of the PRC.37 The symbol of China-Africa links from the 1960s to 1980s was Tazara, the Tanzania-Zambia railway built by 50,000 Chinese.38 China’s practice then of supporting developing state initiatives and providing aid that did not enrich elites still resonates with Africans today. Since the 1990s, PRC activism on behalf of developing states has waned however and much of China’s activity in Africa is now profit-centered.39

There were 750 Chinese enterprises in Africa in 2005.40 While a growing presence, they account for a tiny part of foreign direct investment (FDI). In 2004, PRC entities

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invested $135m in Africa and in the first ten months of 2005, $175m (of China’s $3.6b and $6.9b in outward investment). Africa’s average annual FDI intake in 2001-2004 was $15-18b, despite Africa providing the world’s highest returns on FDI, averaging 29% in the 1990s and 40% in 2005. FDI in Africa jumped in 2005 to $29b (of $897b in global FDI), but China’s realized FDI in Africa stood at only $1b of Africa’s $96b, two-thirds of which is European (half British or French) and one-fifth North American. PRC Africa investment is also concentrated; in 2005, $316m was in Zambia and $230m in S. Africa. Based on planned investments, however, China may become one of Africa’s top three FDI providers in five years. PRC trade with Africa was also a tiny part of her 2005 $1.4 trillion world trade, but it is fast growing. Only $10b in 2000, it was $39b in 2005 (with an overall balance slightly in Africa’s favor), a total not far short of the US’s $44b 2004 trade with Africa and almost a tenth of Africa’s $435b world trade (70% of it with the EU). China is now the third largest trader with Africa, after the US and France.41

In the 1970s, Africa’s share of world trade was 5%; in 2005 it was only 1.5%. In the 1980s, Africa received 30% of world FDI; in 2003 it was 7%. China-Africa investment and trade links however have increased dramatically and PRC and African analysts contend that eases Africa’s dependence on the West. The UN Development Program agrees and underwrites a China-Africa Business Council in Beijing that plans to set up offices in six African states. Many Africans also understand China’s political economy to have attributes that differ from those of the West in ways that matter to Africa. Talk of a “Chinese model” is common in such African states Nigeria, Ethiopia, and S. Africa.

While some analysts argue most facets of the erstwhile “Chinese model” do not apply to Africa, African elites often find aspects appealing. The African Development Bank’s president has said of the Chinese that “we can learn from them how to organize our trade policy, to move from low to middle income status, to educate our children in skills and areas that pay off in just a couple years.”

A Nigerian journalist argues

[The Chinese government knows what is good for its people and therefore shapes its economic strategy accordingly. Its strategy is not informed by the Washington Consensus. China has not allowed any IMF or World Bank to impose on it some neo-liberal package of reforms. . . . Their strategy has not been a neo-liberal overdose of deregulation, cutting social expenditure, privatizing everything under the sun and jettisoning the public good. They have not branded subsidy a dirty word.]

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African analysts distinguish massive PRC state infrastructure investment and support services from their states’ failure to provide these requisites of development and contend the difference results from “strictures imposed by multilateral and bilateral financiers.”

Many Africans also distinguish between Chinese and Western investment and trade. When a blogger criticized PRC support for Sudan’s regime, other Nigerians responded by contrasting Chinese and Western economic practices in Africa. They and other Africans decry developed states’ locking in underdevelopment through detrimental terms of trade and accuse Western firms of destructive ties with Africa -- “buying natural resources and then selling weapons, alcohol and cigarettes” or what is termed “unequal and disparate exchange.” Analysts argue China wants Africa’s oil, but “the way in which China’s demand for oil is framed in the Western media -- in breathy, suspense-filled undertones . . . smacks of racist double standards.” Indeed, while three-fourths of US FDI in Africa is in oil, 64% of PRC FDI in Africa from 1979-2000 was in manufacturing and 28% in resources. Lack of infrastructure inhibits FDI and African exports but, with

50 “China’s Growth Debunks Capitalist Myth,” The Nation (Kenya), in AN 3 Jan. 2006
$6.3b in construction contracts in 2005, PRC firms are Africa’s preeminent infrastructure builders and now often do employ many African workers. A Nigerian official has also noted that “the Western world is never prepared to transfer technology -- but the Chinese do [and] while China’s technology may not be as sophisticated as some Western governments’, it is better to have Chinese technology than to have none at all.”

Even US allies such as Museveni see Africa’s “donating” of unprocessed raw materials to the West as allowing a small part of humanity to live well at Africans’ expense and contend Africans need investment that will permit them to sell coffee and not just beans, steel and not just iron ore. They regard China’s surging demand for African exports -- the PRC share as a destination of such exports rose from 1.3% in 1995 to 9.3% in 2004 -- as aiding that effort. Africans also find PRC goods are cheaper than Western imports and less expensive than even local goods used in construction: an Angolan official has noted that a 50 kilo bag of local cement costs $10, while China’s imported cement costs $4.

Talk of Chinese colonialism in Africa is thus inapt, but China’s practices can be seen as proto-imperialist, at least in the simplistic sense of creating requisites of hegemony in some states. “Imperialism” is often “indiscriminately applied to any foreign policy . . .

to which the user happens to be opposed,” but is commonly equated with “informal empire,” where a central authority determines a periphery’s external policies and influences its domestic matters. China has begun to do so in a few states; indeed, it does not wholly reject claims that it dominates Zimbabwe, but chalks them up to jealousy. Yet PRC practices do differ in scale from the activities of longstanding practitioners of imperialism. Examples of US and European direct exercises of hegemony in Africa are legion and found as well in efforts organized under through international organizations: it is said the UN Secretary General’s envoy holds the “true power” in Sudan today and that a parallel UN military/civilian establishment issues orders to Sudanese authorities. In contrast, China “allows African countries to vote as they please at the United Nations [and] does not propose to deploy any troops on their territory.”

Other characteristics that Africans attribute to China concern her position in the international system. A South African scholar has noted that China is the first country from the so-called marginalized developing fold to occupy centre stage in the global political economy. In terms of political ideology and approaches to socio-economic development, China is closely aligned to countries of the south. This has, for many years, shaped China’s relations with countries in Africa and elsewhere

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and created a somewhat idealistic impression of the distant partner or big brother in the East that is still evident on the continent today.\(^{67}\)

For many Africans then, there is a “Chinese model,” not just of FDI/export-led rapid industrial expansion,\(^{68}\) but of a developing state that does not fully implement WC policies. China is seen as more willing than the West to help develop the predicates of industrialism in the global South and to do so at a lower cost to the continent, without imposing what many find to be onerous requirements for African states’ policies. Whether this positive view of a “Chinese model” is warranted is less important than the fact it exists and plays a role in how Africans appraise the policies of developed states. This perception is now part of an image recently labeled the Beijing Consensus.

**The Beijing Consensus and Africa**

China’s self-representation as Africa’s helpmate is often dismissed as propaganda designed to curry favor with African elites. Because however the WC/PWC has a more than two-decade history in Africa,\(^{69}\) many Africans are disenchanted with Western neo-liberalism and plausibly regard the PRC as an alternative, based on the experiences and needs it shares with Africa. China’s creation of this attractive (although not necessarily accurate) image, now termed the BC, in itself distinguishes China’s links with Africa.

The BC notion was elaborated by Joshua Cooper Ramo, former *Time* magazine foreign affairs editor, Goldman Sachs China advisor, and Qinghua University professor, who is

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now Managing Director of Kissinger Associates. It is often discussed as PRC investments, aid, and trade not being conditioned by the demands made by Western states and international institutions. US neo-conservatives, who are particularly exercised by the BC, have reduced the notion to one of “economic growth without the constraints of democratic institutions” or “economic development without political change.”\textsuperscript{70} Others describe it as liberalized trade and finance with strong state leadership\textsuperscript{71} or a strong state role in industrial development, but caution toward liberalization and deregulation.\textsuperscript{72}

WC/PWC market fundamentalism is about Western prescriptions for the world’s economies and politics and the ordering of global power relations. The BC is about lessons of the articulation of state and economy in China and the PRC approach to international relations. Ramo presents it as a multi-faceted policy set that forefronts constant innovation as a development strategy (instead of a one-size-fits-all neo-liberal orthodoxy) and uses quality-of-life measures, such as equality and environmental (not just GDP) in formulating the strategy. He asserts that it opposes the hierarchy of nations embodied in WC-related institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO.\textsuperscript{73} PRC leaders are said to reject “a US-style power, bristling with arms and intolerant of others’


world views," in favor of “power based on the example of their own model, the strength of their economic system, and their rigid defense of ... national sovereignty.”

Ramo himself cannot be written off as reflexively “pro-China.” He is a CFR member and has been declared a “Global Leader of Tomorrow” by the neo-liberal World Economic Forum (WEF), famed for its Davos, Switzerland conclaves of the rich and powerful. Ramo is affiliated with the Tony Blair-founded Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) in London and his book on the BC that it published has been praised by the World Bank. He nonetheless thinks highly enough of the BC to approvingly quote an Indian sociologist who stated that “China’s experiment should be the most admired in human history. China has its own path.” It is not surprising then that the BC, as Ramo conceives it, is a “model” within the neo-liberal paradigm, but with distinctive features.

China’s government denies it touts a model. Asked about Rwanda’s development, the PRC Ambassador limited himself to saying that Chinese experience shows Rwanda should encourage local and foreign investment. Yet soon after Ramo coined the BC concept and WEF chair Klaus Schwab contrasted it with the WC at a Beijing conference, a leading PRC economic journal published an article by Ramo. A TV program on his book was telecast in China and his work was circulated to the top 5,000

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74 Ramo, 2004:37.
76 Joshua C. Ramo, “China has discovered its own Economic Consensus,” FT, 7 May 2004:19.
PRC leaders. The PRC newswire Xinhua reprinted a business journal article that argued the BC will replace the WC.\(^\text{82}\) The leading newspaper carried an article in which economists Wu Shuqing (former head of Beijing University and now a Ministry of Education advisor) and Cheng Enfu (Academy of Marxism head and a proponent of the “socialist market economy” as a world model) endorsed the “theoretical scientificty and practical superiority “of the BC. Opposing it to the WC, they spoke of its “growing influence in the world, particularly among developing countries.”\(^\text{83}\) Along with translations of Western books critical of the WC,\(^\text{84}\) other Chinese works counter-pose the BC and WC,\(^\text{85}\) a contrast now also taken up by some US scholars and commentators.\(^\text{86}\)

In China, enthusiasm for the BC is found among those who seek to make their country the world’s leading state, while in some circles in the West it may stem from the view that the BC is a more saleable variant of the neo-liberal PWC or that any “consensus” is better than one enforced by the US.\(^\text{87}\) In the Global South, however, there is a

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\(^\text{84}\) David Held, Quanqiu Menyue: Huashengdun gongshi yu shehui minzhu (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenjian chubanshe 2005) (Global Covenant: the Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus).


widespread sense of grievance with neo-liberalism, as an aggravated form of worldwide unequal exchange. At the CACF opening ceremony, Zambia’s president stated

[Developed countries] are not prepared to discuss the issues of justice and fair play concerning the international trade and commercial sector, which imposes considerable suffering and privation on developing countries . . . [T]he developing world continues to subsidize consumption of the developed world, through an iniquitous trade system. The existing structure is designed to consign us to perpetual poverty and underdevelopment . . . It is unrealistic to expect support, relief or respite from those who benefit from the status quo.\textsuperscript{88}

The Beijing Consensus as a Competing Framework

Arif Dirlik has argued that the BC’s key aspect may be its acknowledgement of the desirability of a global order “founded, not upon homogenizing universalisms that inevitably lead to hegemonism, but on a simultaneous recognition of commonality and difference.”\textsuperscript{89} That recognition magnifies China’s soft power in Africa. With 53 countries, Africa has the largest concentration of developing states and is the BC’s main testing ground. It stands in direct competition with several WC/PWC instruments initiated by the EU, US and S. Africa at the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, although PRC institutions of cooperation mirror the form and much of the content of those of developed states.\textsuperscript{90}

The Cotonou Agreement of 2000, the EU framework for dealing with 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, is based on principles of free trade, including WTO compliance and a sub-continental regionalism; privileged private enterprise, export production and FDI; austerity measures; conditionality for receipt of aid, with a leading


role provided to the EU’s European Commission; and a precedence of individual political rights over group and socio-economic rights. Poverty reduction is seen as a concomitant of trade, capital liberalization, and FDI secured by the provision skilled and compliant labor. Quintennial conferences serve to renegotiate the EU-ACP relationship, which also includes bilateral and regional free trade Economic Partnership Agreements. These pacts, like those the US negotiates, weaken solidarity among developing states in the WTO.  

The US African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) of 2000 provides that states that marketize, liberalize, privatize, de-subsidize, deregulate and do not undermine US foreign policy interests may receive trade preferences. Some 37 African countries, many of them authoritarian, have been declared eligible. Once every two years, US and eligible states’ ministers participate in an AGOA Forum. AGOA trade concessions only go slightly beyond the pre-existing US General System of Preferences, in part because oil accounts for four-fifths the value of African exports to the US. Only a few countries have gained under AGOA, mainly through exports of agricultural products not plentiful in the US, such as cut flowers. Most African products remain barred by competition from subsidized US agriculture and non-tariff health and safety barriers, while many products entering the US from Africa are produced by Asian-owned firms. Meanwhile, AGOA serves as a platform for FTAs between the US and African regional entities. 

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for African rulers lies not mainly in direct benefits, but in closer political attachment to the US, resulting in aid, including military training useful in acting against oppositions.\(^{93}\)

Since 2001, neo-liberal principles also have been embodied in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). Based on the idea that there is no alternative to neo-liberalism and that only integration into the world market resolves poverty, this development-through-good-governance-and-poverty-reduction initiative is fostered by global and S. African firms and endorsed by the African Union. Critics compare NEPAD as implemented to IMF/World Bank SAP’s,\(^{94}\) but its representation as “by Africans for Africans” provides another mechanism for implementing developed countries’ WC/PWC frameworks. US corporations in Africa thus link AGOA and NEPAD\(^{95}\) and US leaders praise NEPAD as “extend[ing] democracy and free markets and transparency across the continent.”\(^{96}\) EU endorsements of NEPAD link it to the Cotonou Agreement.\(^{97}\) China too voices support for NEPAD and holds it is helping to implement it through the CACF.\(^{98}\)

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The BC appears as an alternative to obviously neo-liberal “consensuses” because PRC aid comes without the strings attached by AGOA and other programs and because China approves African states concentrating investment in infrastructure and human capital, rather than primary products, and addressing development problems not being solved through market fundamentalism’s favored corporate initiatives. Jim McDermott, the US Congressman known as the “Father of AGOA,” has implicitly drawn this contrast:

[T]he US cannot rely solely on the private sector to help support Africa’s endeavor to develop. Private companies may invest in new manufacturing plans or mineral extracting facilities, but they usually do not drill water in remote villages, or build schools to educate young Africans. Do you know of many venture capitalists who buy malaria or TB drugs for the world’s poor to enhance their trade opportunities?

To some analysts, the differences between the WC/PWC and BC now amount to a US-China “ideological” struggle between a “neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon credo” and an Asian-derived “socially oriented” approach. A prominent British journalist has even put it that the BC/WC confrontation around the world represents “the biggest ideological threat the west has felt since the end of the cold war.” Expressing no doubt about which “model” will prevail, he opines that two decades from now “the press will be full of articles about ‘Asian values’ and the ‘Beijing Consensus.’”

Distinctive Aid and Migration

PRC aid to Africa and the patterns of migration of Chinese to Africa and Africans to China differ from Western practices, but relate to each other. Infrastructure development as the centerpiece of PRC aid facilitates China-Africa migration. Over several decades, China has sent 15,000-20,000 medical personnel to Africa to develop hospitals and

clinics and treat 180 million patients. Chinese have long aided African agricultural development. More than 10,000 PRC agro-technicians have been sent to Africa since the 1960s and worked on some 200 projects, including setting up farms and agricultural stations and personnel training. In Tanzania, the PRC-built Ubungo Farm Implements Factory (UFI) turned out 85% of hand tools in a country that relies on hoes, plows and machetes for farming, while the Mbarali Farm produced a fourth of the rice eaten by Tanzanians. Some 530 PRC teachers have worked in African secondary and tertiary education and Chinese have also gone to Africa to train government staff. Many more go for contract labor service, building railways, roads, telecommunications systems, hospitals, schools and dams or to do business that uses much of that infrastructure.

Africans go to China to learn how to build the infrastructure themselves or how to work in it as doctors, teachers, officials, etc. From 1956-1999, 5,582 Africans studied at Chinese universities. In 2002, there were 1,646 African students (of 85,000 foreign students) in China; 525 undergraduates, 539 masters and 223 doctoral students, plus 278 in non-degree courses, while new students in 2004 numbered 332. China provides 1,500 scholarships annually to Africans and by late 2004, 17,860 Africans had received one, with about 15,000 having graduated. Graduates include a number of political leaders.

102 “Expert: China-Africa Cooperation with Bright Future,” China Radio International, 16 December 2003, http://en.chinabroadcast.cn/144/2003-12-16/88@70013.htm; Thompson, 2005. While some countries pay the medical teams’ expenses, it is often done with grants or loans from China or other states.
104 “Focus is on Aid and Support for Africa,” BD, in AN, 1 Oct. 2004:23.
A few Africans remain in the PRC after graduation, some engaging in China-Africa business links, despite the many difficulties presented by a commonplace racism.  

China’s aid to Africa, while not disinterested, is not used as a political tool in the same way as aid from Western political actors in Africa. This approach is a longstanding policy. Julius Nyere, Tanzania’s first leader, commenting on the loan for building Tazara stated: “The Chinese people have not asked us to become communists in order to qualify for this loan . . . they have never at any point suggested that we should change any of our policies – internal or external.” During the Cold War, the US and other Western states pressured Tanzania to take the West’s side and later to accept IMF/World Bank SPA’s. The US is now heavily involved in influencing African politics, for example through multi-million dollar programs to support or undermine the governments of Angola, Burundi, Sudan and Zimbabwe, carried out by the self-described “overtly political” Office of Transition Initiatives of the US Agency for International Development.

Chinese aid has also differed from US aid in terms of whether it was to be the recipient or donor who decides the projects on which aid monies were to be spent. Although China’s approach is more commercial than in the past and favors joint ventures between private firms, it contrasts with US and UK insistence on aiding only private enterprise.


development. It continues to support some state-run projects, both in industry and agriculture. There is no evidence China conditions its aid on adoption of a particular political stance or alignment, except that recipients must maintain full diplomatic relations with the PRC, rather than Taiwan, as all but six African countries do.

PRC migrants are more numerous and likely to become long-term residents than Westerners in Africa. Many fewer are managers and professionals. Migration of Africans to China is also of a different order: the numbers are much smaller than those of African migrants to Europe and North America, the migrants are still overwhelmingly temporary, and there is little of the “brain drain” that marks Africans’ flow to developed states.

**Tied and Untied Aid**

A PRC official has said “There are no political conditions attached with China’s economic assistance,” but much developed state aid is subject to conditions benefiting the donor economically and politically (including its security interests). A study notes that Tied aid is a particularly inefficient form of development assistance because it does not help poor countries develop their economies. Instead of creating new businesses and jobs in recipient countries, most of the benefits remain in the donor nations. Tied aid is also inefficient because often goods and services would be available at a lower price from local producers or world markets.

About 80% of US grants and contracts to developing countries must be used to buy goods and services from US firms and NGOs. About 90% of Italy’s aid benefits Italian companies and experts; 60-65% of Canada’s aid and much of that of Germany, Japan and

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111 For example, the UK’s Commission on Africa 2005 report states that Africa should adopt the Private Finance Initiative: all major projects should be ‘built and delivered in conjunction with the private sector.” Quoted in Fraser Nelson, “How African Aid Can Be the New Imperialism,” Scotsman, 8 June 2005:26.


113 Lu 2006.

France is tied to purchases from those states. A UN study found such ties cut by 25-40% the value of aid to Africans, who are required to buy non-competitively priced imports. An OECD study found that the actual costs of tied direct food aid transfers are 50% higher than local food purchases and a third higher than buying third country food.

The popular view in the West is nevertheless that developed countries are generous with Africa, in response to NGOs seeking to help Africa through debt relief and increased aid. Yet, from 1970 to 2002, Africa received $530b in aid and loans and repaid $540b. G8 and international institutions subsequently cancelled the debt of only 14 African states and the continent’s debt still stands at about US$300b. An additional $50b in aid was promised in 2005, but more than half of that is either double-counted or involves money already pledged. Debt relief for Africa and refugee-related expenditures in developed countries are also counted by them as part of increased development assistance.

China’s aid to Africa provides it with political benefits, such as support from aided countries for China on sovereignty issues and for China gaining “market economy status” that will enable it to better resist anti-dumping actions brought before the WTO. If China were to confront Western states in international forums -- it does so now only to overcome US attempts to have its human rights record condemned -- support could be expected from the few African states where it is beginning to exercise hegemony and

119 Ching 2005.
several others it aids. China, unlike the US and UK, does not however need to demand support from other states for war-making and the control of international institutions.

PRC firms do secure contracts on projects in Africa financed by Chinese government soft loans; an analyst speaks of “indirect conditionalities,” an understanding Chinese firms will secure a portion of work financed by PRC loans.\(^{120}\) The $2b credit line China extended to Angola in 2004, used for railroad repair, road building, office construction, a fiber-optic network and oil exploration, was guaranteed by a contract for the sale of oil from a field that generates 10,000 bpd. The loan, at 1.5% interest, will be recouped over 17 years, including a 5-year interest free period. Its terms reserve for Angolans 30% of the value of contracts paid for with its funds, but Angolans fear PRC firms will win the remaining 70%, engendering resentment among them.\(^{121}\) Chinese firms, however, can in any case be expected to secure many construction contracts: in Botswana, they now win 80%.\(^{122}\) Their winning bids are based on low labor costs and profit margins and a quick project turn-around. In Ethiopia, some PRC firms have been instructed by their government to make unprofitable bids to get a foot in the door for future undertakings. Lower salaries and profits margins also arise from state-owned PRC firms competing with each other to secure contracts.\(^{123}\) In any case, efficient, low-cost Chinese practices in construction soften the image of PRC participation in the overall unequal relationship in trade and investment between Africa and the more developed states, including China.

\(^{123}\) Shinn 2005; Lyman 2005; interview with PRC engineer working on Ethiopia’s Tekedze dam, July 2004.
While China’s aid to Africa is thus not entirely untied, it is distinct from Western aid in a key way that stands at the intersection of aid and migration. As one analyst explains:

Chinese aid is often dispensed in such a way that corrupt rulers cannot somehow use it to buy Mercedes Benzes . . . [It] is often in the form of infrastructure, such as a railroad network in Nigeria or roads in Kenya and Rwanda. Or in the form of doctors and nurses to provide health care to people who otherwise would not have access . . . . In addition, China provides scholarships for African students to study in its universities and, increasingly, funds to encourage its businessmen to invest in Africa.124

Speaking of China’s activities in Africa, including aid, Sierra Leone’s Ambassador to the PRC has said “The Chinese are investing in Africa and are seeing results, while the G-8 countries are putting in huge sums of money and they don’t see very much.”125 This difference advantages China in African eyes even when altruistic motives are discounted.

Draining and Gaining Migrations

Differing migration patterns are another key distinction between China-Africa links and Western connections with the continent. Africans generally perceive Chinese who work in Africa as less privileged and exploitative than Western expatriates.126 Chinese construction personnel and agricultural advisors live more like their African counterparts than do expats, in keeping with the Eighth Principle on External Economic and Technical Assistance set out by Premier Zhou Enlai during a 1964 trip to Africa: “The experts dispatched by the Chinese government to help construction in the recipient country should enjoy the same living conditions as the experts of the recipient country. The Chinese experts are not allowed to make any special demands and ask for any special

124 Ching 2005.
125 “Africa Big Oil Supplier to China,” UPI, 18 July 2005.
126 Western analysts, in contrast, often subtly shift the focus away from the West’s business and political practices in Africa by focusing on the Chinese presence. See Binyavanga Wainaina’s bitterly satirical “advise” to Western writers in “How to Write About Africa,” Granta no. 92 (2006) (“When talking about exploitation by foreigners, mention the Chinese and Indian traders”), www.granta.com/excerpts/2615.
Similarly, the small, usually short-term African migrations to China are seen as benefiting Africa, while many Africans view the large, permanent migration of African professionals to the West as more harmful than helpful to Africa’s development.

A surge in Chinese migration to Africa began in the mid-1990s and accelerated in the present decade, quickly rendering population estimates obsolete. An Ohio University (OU) database, last updated in 2002, shows 137,000 Chinese in Africa, the same figure provided for 2000-2001 by Taiwan’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission (OCAC). Its estimates for 34 African states are now very out-of-date, due to the migration surge. While some discrepancies may reflect differing conceptions of residence, the magnitude of the differences indicates the rapid growth Africa’s Chinese communities.

Table 1: Number of Chinese in Select African Countries, ca. 2001 and Later Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ohio U. Database 2001</th>
<th>Estimate for 200X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1000-3000 (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5000-10,000 (2004-2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>5000 (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>6000 (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>600* (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>50,000 (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>1500 (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>8000 (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1000 (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>10,000 (2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


127 Donnelly, 2005. The Eight Principles were followed in 1983 by four principles announced by Premier Zhao Ziyang, including that “The experts and technical personnel sent by the Chinese side do not ask for any special treatment.” Ai Ping 1999:169.
The largest discrepancy concerns S. Africa. The OU database shows 30,000 Chinese in 2002, but there were already 36,000 in 1993, on the eve of the transition from apartheid. The 10,000 “indigenous” or “South African Born Chinese” (SABCs) were almost the whole Chinese population until 1980. Between then and 1993, an immigrant community, 90% from Taiwan, began to form. A decade later, the PRC Embassy in S. Africa stated there were 50,000-100,000 or perhaps 80,000 Chinese residents, while the S. African Ambassador to China has said there are many more than 100,000. Almost all the increase of the last dozen years has come from Chinese mainland migrants, as the Taiwan-origin community shrank by half to 10,000 and the SABC population also declined. Estimates in 2004-2006 ranged from 100,000-300,000 (legal and illegal) Chinese residents.

A Belgian diplomat in Tanzania once told a Japanese diplomat in the early 1970s that one of his African employees had queried, “Why are there two kinds of Chinese in Tanzania? One kind wears dirty clothes, looks poor, but works very hard; another kind wears a good suit, rides in a modern car with a camera on his shoulder, and looks like an American.” The African worker was conflating as “Chinese” those who had come from

the PRC to build Tazara and Japanese visiting Tanzania for very different purposes.\textsuperscript{130} While only a small part of Chinese in Africa today perform service of the kind rendered then by their compatriots, substantial differences remain between the positions of Chinese and citizens of developed countries in Africa. A South African university official has advanced a common, implicitly comparative viewpoint in noting that China provides low-cost technology and its people are willing to work in inhospitable places.\textsuperscript{131}

Most developed country citizens in Africa are managers or professionals. Some work for large corporations, others are among the 40,000 NGO-employed expats.\textsuperscript{132} They generally command salaries that allow a lifestyle very different from most Africans and usually better than local occupational peers. Larger Chinese communities in Africa also have well-off members, usually business people. Most long-term Chinese residents in Africa, however, are small merchants who sell what one Kenyan has called “down-street merchandise.” Many have very little capital.\textsuperscript{133} In Zimbabwe, Zambia and S. Africa, there are also Chinese farmers.\textsuperscript{134} An unknown number of Chinese study in Africa. Most are in S. Africa where, by 2004, 3,300 Chinese had attended tertiary institutions.\textsuperscript{135}

Many temporary Chinese migrants work in Africa under labor service contracts. They are paid much less and live more frugally than Western expats doing comparable work. In 1992, Africa employed 100,000 developed country expats at a cost of $4b per year, i.e. $40,000 per expat or nearly $800 per week. These generally work, directly or indirectly, for African governments or NGOs; Westerners employed by multi-national corporations have even higher salaries. Chinese salaries are even now not nearly so high. Chinese “workers” (i.e. managers, engineers and skilled craftsmen) for one construction firm in Angola receive some $500 a month, live two to three to a room, and cook for themselves, while Europeans each rent a house and eat out.

China’s largest contract in Africa, worth $650m, is to construct Sudan’s Merowe Dam, where in 2003-2005, 1,800 Chinese and 1,600 Sudanese have worked. A Chinese firm won the bid because it kept expected profit margins and PRC staff costs low. All project managers, 90% of engineers and 75% of technicians are to be Chinese; locals are to be 20% of skilled workers and all general labor. Expatriates are to earn $220-$600 per week, Sudanese $22-$350.

While many Chinese now live in Africa, few Africans live in China. Beijing in 2005 had about 600 Africans, Shanghai 500, and Shenzhen 100. The vast majority were students expected to return to Africa within 4-5 years. Most study medicine, engineering

139 Peter Reina, “Chinese Contractors Flex Lean Muscles in Sudan,” Engineering News-Record, 12 Apr. 2004:18; “Dam up the Nile to Benefit Poverty-Stricken Sudanese,” Xinhua, 29 Jan. 2006; PRC contractors building Ethiopia’s roads seek a 3% profit; Western businesses typically seek 15% or more. Leggett 2005.
or natural science, a small brain gain that contrasts with Africa’s brain drain to the West that originated with the SAPs. These have required sharp reductions in state involvement in economies. Up to 1980, Africa had a dozen high growth countries, averaging 6%. A third of African states had savings rates higher than 25%, which sustained human resource development. SAPs curtailed social expenditures, including at universities, and costly expats had to be imported to take the place of local intellectuals. Savings rates plummeted to 10% today, too low for industrialization or adequate education.141 Thus, Africa produces only 83 engineers per one million people annually, while China graduates 750 and developed countries 1,000.142 Many African engineers emigrate moreover; there are more African engineers working in the US than in all of Africa.143

The effect of SAPs on education created a “push” factor that contributed to an exodus of Africa’s intelligentsia. From 1985-1990, 60,000 professionals emigrated. By 2005, 300,000-500,000, including 30,000 doctoral degree holders, had left and 20,000 more emigrate each year to the US or Europe. The half million figure would mean a third of African professionals had left; on average each represents a loss of $184,000 to Africa.144

Of 400,000 African immigrants age 16 and over in the US in 2000, 36% were managers or professionals. Many were brought in through the Diversity Visa Program (“Green Card Lottery”), most of whose winners are Africans. By 2005, 50,000 Africans a year were migrating to the US, with perhaps four times that number entering illegally.

While such migrants usually find work and send remittances home, a leading African scientist in the US estimates that Africans there contribute 40 times more to America than to Africa’s economy. Others stay on after graduation from US universities, which had 34,000 African students in 2000-2001, 6.25% of their international students. Most were graduate students and a survey of Africans who received US PhDs from 1986-1996 showed that 37% remained there after graduation. The percentages of those staying were higher in fields important to development: engineering (54%), physical sciences (44%) health sciences (44%) and business management (67%). The percentages were higher too for two of the three top PhD-producing countries, Nigeria (62%) and Ghana (61%).

The poaching of Africa’s human resources is most apparent among medical workers, of which Africa has 1.4 per 1,000 people, while North America has 9.9. Of Africa’s estimated 800,000 “trained medical staff,” 23,000 per year leave for developed countries. The doctors among them cost on average $100,000 to train. Their immigration saves a receiving country like Britain $340,000-430,000 in the costs of training a doctor. Ghana, with six doctors for each 100,000 people, has lost 30% of the MDs it educated to the US, UK, Canada and Australia, all of which have more than 220 doctors per 100,000, while S. Africa, Ethiopia and Uganda have lost 14-19% of their doctors. In 2001, Zimbabwe

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147 Mark Pires, etc., Investing in Return: Rates of Return of African PhDs Trained in North America (New York: Social Science Research Council 1999). The other country was the continent’s richest, South Africa.
graduated 737 nurses, 437 of whom left for Britain.\textsuperscript{150} There are more Ethiopian-trained doctors in Chicago than in Ethiopia; more Beninese doctors in France than in Benin.\textsuperscript{151}

**Conclusion**

In 2005, a PRC official working on WTO affairs, Wu Jiahuang, made a presentation to a UN agency on industrialization, trade and poverty alleviation through South-South cooperation.\textsuperscript{152} Wu noted industry’s increasing importance to China’s GDP and argued its high growth rate was fueled by Chinese saving 44% of their income and by China’s encouragement of FDI (half from Hong Kong and Taiwan), which contributed 28% of value added to industry in 2004. He said PRC industrial development and trade expansion are related, with over half of industrial exports produced by foreign investors.

Wu stated that China’s trade with the South was growing rapidly and is not marginalized; for example, a zero tariff is in place for 25 of Africa’s Least Developed Countries (LDCs). PRC trade policy, he said, rejects over-protecting domestic industry. Average PRC tariffs dropped from 43% in 1992 to 10% in 2005, lower than those of its trading partners.\textsuperscript{153} China’s tariffs for primary agricultural products and textiles averaged 15.5% and 12.9%, while those of its trading partners averaged 24.5% and 17.7%. China provides world-class resources and “the cheapest domestic labor,” so foreign and domestic businessmen can market the world’s most competitive products. One result is

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{152} Wu Jia Huang (Vice-Chair, China WTO Research Center), General Conference of UNIDO, Industrial Development Forum, 28 Nov. 2005, Vienna, www.unido.org/file_storgae/download?file_id=46437.
increasing incomes for Chinese, even if rural people’s incomes still average only $1 per
day. Another result is more state revenue, including more customs revenue, even though
tariffs had been lowered. Increased revenue had allowed for greater social welfare.

Wu called on WTO to remove trade-distorting subsidies to farmers in the North so that
farmers in the South can sell their products at a better price. He explained that Chinese
farms are very small, having on average .7 hectares of land, compared to US farmers’ 200
ha. and Europeans’ 20 ha. He also noted that PRC agricultural tariffs averaged 15.8%,
compared to 23% in the US and 73% in Europe. Meanwhile, state support for China’s
farmers was only 1.5% of their income, while in the US it was 18% and in the EU, 33%.
The G20 (a group of developing states active in WTO) and China were thus in the same
boat in needing cuts in developed world agricultural subsidies.

The PRC official’s presentation summed up, for an audience of mainly developing
country representatives, several commonly-held conceptions about Chinese economic
practices that relate to the perceived distinctiveness of China-Africa links: China provides
a model for developing states based on rapid industrialization fueled by a high-level of
investment and concentration on exports. Moreover, unlike the West, its low-tariff, low-
subsidy regime allows other developing countries to export freely to China and compete
with her in world markets. The official thus essentially argued that PRC policymakers
are more consistent economic liberals than those of the West and that this greater
liberality fulfills the common needs of Chinese and citizens of other developing countries.

Wu did not explain how China’s experience of the world’s highest rates of savings and
its attraction of FDI mainly from co-ethnics on its periphery can be duplicated by most
developing states. Nor did he recognize that these states are scarcely positioned to take
advantage of China’s economic liberality by competing with PRC producers, either in their domestic market or the world. Still, one point was doubtless attractive and likely convincing: that China, unlike Western states, in not obstructing development in the world’s poorer countries. That one point, whether it relates to the BC or to aid and migration, epitomizes the distinctiveness of China-Africa link for many Africans.

It is the practices of Western states associated with past colonialism or present imperialism that make PRC practices appear distinctive to Africans. Most prominent among these are impositions of neo-liberal SAPs that have resulted in diminished growth, huge debt, declining incomes, and curtailed social welfare for most Africans; the use of aid to compel compliance with SAPs and the foreign policies of Western powers; protectionism (despite free trade rhetoric) in developed states that inhibits African exports; and continued support for authoritarian leaders (despite talk of democracy and human rights) in order to secure natural resources and combat everything “radical.”

To these points must be added Western disparagement of Africa through an unremitting negative discourse, overlaid with strong implications of African incompetence. The ideas that colonialism, on balance, benefited “the natives” and that Africa’s troubles have all been post-colonial are popular among elites of the main Western states. Pundits (more often British or Canadian imports than Americans) often recommend the imperial experience to US power elites. The historian Niall Ferguson, brought from Britain to Harvard, argues “empire is more necessary in the 21st century than ever before” because, while British colonialism brought the colonized a beneficent modernity and liberal capitalism, post-colonial states have often been more exploitative, worse for economic growth, and more violent than colonialism. With independence a
disaster for most poor countries, imperial governance in which national sovereignty is suspended for decades should be imposed.\textsuperscript{154} That stance is also prominent in British political circles. Then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said that “the story of how Europeans explored and colonized – and yes, without apology – civilized much of the world is an extraordinary tale of talent, skill and courage.” Chancellor of the Exchequer (and likely future Prime Minister) Gordon Brown, visiting Africa in 2005, stated “[T]he days of Britain having to apologize for its colonial history are over. We should move forward. We should celebrate much of our past rather than apologize for it.”\textsuperscript{155}

The experience of Africans in China has been less than positive due to popular racism, which Chinese in Africa also often display. The PRC government bears some responsibility for it, due to its propagation of Social Darwinism (the more rich the more fit) and representation of Africa as uniformly poor. It is nevertheless careful to recognize the main cause of Africa’s problems as the legacy of colonial depredation.\textsuperscript{156} PRC leaders would never term Africa a “hopeless continent.”\textsuperscript{157} They (officially at least) celebrate

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{157} The cover story, “Africa: the Hopeless Continent,” \textit{Economist}, 14 Apr. 2000, caused much offense in Africa, where it was regarded as reflecting widespread Western elite views.
\end{flushleft}
Africa’s culture and achievements, while these are implicitly denigrated in the West, where all that is celebrated about Africa are leaders who hearken to Western advice.

Unlike during the Mao era, China today provides no radical solutions to Africa’s predicament and its “neo-liberalism with Chinese characteristics” likely provides no solutions at all. The PRC instead avails itself of the historically-determined disadvantages of Africa in trade, although some of what it sells to Africa is useful in developing aspects of industry or affordable consumer goods. While China is different from the West in that a greater proportion of its investment seemingly goes to non-oil sectors, part of the still small PRC investment is imbricated with the continent’s harsh labor regimens, in places like the Copperbelt of Zambia. China nevertheless is widely perceived as acting differently from the West in providing some investments of direct benefit beyond elite circles, in not insisting Africa’s political economy steer a particular course, and in not draining, but instead contributing to Africa’s talent pool. For that reason, neo-conservatives in the US have increasingly expressed alarm about PRC gains in Africa.

It is not clear whether the differences outlined will persist over the long-term. Among major powers at any given time, there are always differences in approach to subordinate states. The very process of differentiating super-ordinate and subordinate states and dominant and subaltern peoples tends over time however to make the conduct of great powers and their elites more similar than different. In a very few years we should be able to determine whether that will be the case as well with China in Africa.

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