

## China and African ‘Development’ in the Twenty-First Century Global World

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### Abstract

*One of the major emerging powers or developing nations in the world that is strengthening its economic ties with Africa is China. However, China is by far the most important and powerful party in this alliance. China has established the most significant connections with Africa, which is home to the greatest number of developing countries globally, in addition to fortifying ties with other continents and areas that are home to developing countries, such as Latin America and Central Asia. This article analyses the interplay between China's foreign policy, political economy, and developmental initiatives in Africa, while assessing the adequacy of modern theories in political geography, international relations (IR), and development studies in explaining these evolving dynamics. In fact, it looks into how Beijing views changes in the world political scene and the historical transformation of Africa in relation to its foreign policy strategy. It also examines China's state-centered, bilateral approach to relations with African allies. This paper highlights that, in contrast to the strategies adopted by Western countries since the 1950s, China is experiencing something new and a little disturbing with the idea of "development" as a separate policy domain. In order to fully comprehend how China is, for the first time since the 1980s, offering new "choices" and changing the face of African development, it promotes*

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Received 17 Oct. 2024; Accepted 24 Oct. 2024. Available online: 30 Nov. 2024.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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*a thorough analysis of the larger geopolitics surrounding China-Africa relations, both past and present, as opposed to focusing only on particular aspects like aid or governance.*

**Keywords:** China, Africa, Development, Partnership, Geo-Politics, Foreign Policy.

## Introduction

Africa has long been seen by China as a border between the West and the rest of the world. The ideological stance towards the continent was shaped by the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Following the liberation of African nations from colonial powers in the 1950s, China began to engage in African affairs. China's support for liberation movements was initially driven by ideology, but over the years, this viewpoint changed. The start of China's "Opening up and Reform Policy" in the 1980s marked a significant shift in the dynamics of the connection between China and Africa. The result of this massive undertaking is modern China. The connection between China and Africa now is based less on a desire to advance a certain political ideology and more on geopolitical manoeuvres and economic interests. As China's increasing power and resource demands led to closer connections with Africa, the nature of engagement changed.

China returned to Africa as the continent's economic situation deteriorated as a result of structural adjustment programmes, violence, and poor management. China became a serious contender to replace the unipolar world order in the 1990s, offering prospects for social, political, and economic development. African countries were drawn to China's offers because they were fed up with the multipolar donors and the exorbitant expenses of international development initiatives.

While the industrialised world saw tremendous affluence, China suffered from severe poverty. China's younger and older generations both recall those difficult times and their effects. Due in great part to changes made during the previous forty years, China has now established itself as a major worldwide force, even though it only makes up 5% of the world's population. This

extraordinary ascent is frequently referred to as "miraculous" and was made possible by the Reform and Opening Up Policy, which created the "Chinese Model," a successful wealth-creation blueprint. China is prepared to share its growth and development techniques with developing countries, despite the fact that its advancement is particularly successful. As a result, China is becoming more and more influential in African politics, governance, and development. The collaboration between China and Africa is becoming robust, shown by the formation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in the early twenty-first century, which has garnered the attention of an expanding cohort of African leaders. The 5th FOCAC meeting in Beijing attracted considerable interest, with a record attendance of 42 African leaders of state and government.

This evolving relationship between North America, Europe, and Africa has sparked considerable scrutiny and led to extensive debates. Within this broader discourse, a diverse array of viewpoints has emerged from politicians, economists, historians, businesses, journalists, and others. Let's explore some of the key points that characterize this dialogue.

There are others who contend that China's policies in Africa are inferior to those of the West. A closer look, though, indicates that these claims might not be true. Critics point out that consumer items make up the majority of Chinese exports to Africa. This business strategy seems to help African consumers by providing reasonably priced, reasonably high-quality goods, but it may also increase unemployment by reducing the competitiveness of local companies. Although this criticism is legitimate, it also holds true for economic relations between the US, the EU, and Africa, as these trade blocs openly levy tariffs and give farmers subsidies, further weakening the competitiveness of African exporters and producers.

Chinese opportunistic investments in Africa have come under fire because some contend that these companies target particular countries regardless of the political climate and frequently

take advantage of possibilities that others have passed up or abandoned. Furthermore, compared to their Western counterparts, Chinese businesses are thought to be more risk-taking. Beijing uses export credits and soft loans to encourage the growth of state-owned and private businesses in Africa, but other countries have adopted comparable policies. It is also important to emphasize that governments and corporations in North America and Europe are frequently willing to ignore problems of bad governance and violations of human rights, even in the face of stringent legal frameworks. This is especially apparent in regions where rights to use oil and other valuable resources are undermined, like Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, Nigeria, and more lately, Eritrea. Expecting China and other nations to adhere to higher ethical standards than their competitors would be disingenuous.

Furthermore, China has been accused of arming "rogue states" in Africa, but a thorough examination of the material at hand shows that these allegations are unfounded. The Middle East and Asia receive the majority of China's arms exports, with only 7% going to Africa. The United States, Russia, and Germany were the main exporters of weaponry to Africa between 2007 and 2018, with China ranking as the eighth-largest provider. Significantly, China's share of all arms sales in Sudan, a nation Beijing views as strategically significant, was only 8% between 2013 and 2018, while Russia accounted for 87% of all purchases (Guijin, 2022).

As a result, one may say that Beijing's involvement in Africa is mainly consistent with the customs and guidelines set by more powerful countries like the US, UK, and France. The history of Western governments supporting dictatorships, secretly transferring military forces, and using financial aid to advance their own agendas is more worrisome than Beijing's present contentious tactics. Outside of Africa, this truth is frequently disregarded.

The incapacity of African economies to create value is their main problem. Products from other countries are more affordable, more efficient, and of greater quality than what our workers and

manufacturers can produce. Creating financial value in these circumstances is more challenging than merely renting. To maintain a sustained competitive advantage in the global economy, African governments must direct the private sector toward value creation. Africa can also concentrate on improving its environment by forming partnerships. Accordingly, an Africa that only concentrates on "rent collecting" will not be able to maintain its relationship with China in the long run. Only a partnership centered on supporting Africa's value creation efforts can genuinely be considered a form of South-South assistance that will endure and be mutually valuable.

The inquiry into whether the China-Africa relationship is driven by a genuine dedication to enduring South-South cooperation is essential for the conversation to possess any substantive practical relevance. It is essential to understand that Chinese foreign policy, founded on the principle of "non-interference," must not be misconstrued as "indifference" to the challenges and circumstances of Africa. As has been noted, China has raised its profile and level of participation by increasing its humanitarian aid and contributions to UN-led peacekeeping missions in Africa. As a result, its strategy aligns with adjusting its relationships to African realities and improving the frameworks that regulate its interactions with both specific African countries and the continent at large.

The FOCAC provides both partners a unique chance to shape their relationship based on equality, mutual benefit, and reciprocal benefits, aligning with their long-term objectives. Furthermore, the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum (CATTF) offers a forum for academics and thinkers from China and Africa to discuss issues pertaining to Sino-African ties and offer ideas for improving cooperation. In order to create enduring and productive relationships, this allows African scholars and researchers to grow from past mistakes and help their governments create new policies or enhance current ones.

China's innovations are positioned to promote world peace, stability, and prosperity rather than endanger or injure other people. China's economic internationalization and its foreign policy discourse have changed in tandem with its progress. Traditional ideas of "solidarity" and "partnership" with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have been used by China. China's perspective on "development" is changing both domestically and internationally. The adoption of a "new" and "pragmatic" approach to development that prioritizes economic growth and liberalization while staying rooted in historically substantial concepts of "peaceful" and "win-win" collaboration is part of China's recent push toward internationalization. This has led some analysts to critique it as market extremism (Wang, 2018) or even a variant of neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2022).

China's pursuit of this growth-focused approach has made several African nations key focuses in its foreign policy, either as rising customers for Chinese exports or as possible sources of raw materials to support China's expansion. Accordingly, some see China's foreign policy as moving away from an ideological orientation and toward a business-oriented one, employing "soft power," as Joseph Nye (2014) defines it, to influence client states to enter into agreements with China. According to analysts such as Alden (2017) and Taylor (2017), soft power is a component of China's "oil diplomacy," whereby bilateral agreements pertaining to trade, engineering contracts, and oil supply are accompanied by promises of low-interest loans, seemingly unconditional aid, and technical cooperation agreements.

Concerns about how China's foreign investment and aid packages may affect governance have been raised by a number of Western commentators. Some policy circles have expressed skepticism and anxiety over China's recent increase in aid activities, especially among those Nye (2016) calls "China hawks." The notion that China acts as a "rogue creditor," participating

in exploitative loan practices (Phillips, 2016) and encouraging problematic forms of "rogue aid" (Naim, 2017) embodies this mistrust. Some contend that the absence of political requirements associated with Chinese aid could exacerbate Africa's debt and governance issues (Chidaushe, 2017; Schoeman, 2017, p. 95). For example, Naim (2017) characterises China as a "threat to healthy, sustainable development," contending that the Chinese "are effectively pricing responsible and well-meaning organisations out of the market in the very places they are most needed" by "underwriting a world that is more corrupt, chaotic, and authoritarian." Many observers have suggested that China may act as a neo-colonial entity due to its emphasis on aid and lack of conditionality. They contend that Beijing may "plundered" African resources and return them in the form of Chinese goods, thus maintaining the long-standing unequal labour distribution between Africa and the rest of the world (Manji & Marks, 2017; The Economist, 2018; Trofimov, 2020).

The relationship between China's political economy, foreign policy, and African development is examined in this article, along with the effectiveness of current political geography, international relations, and development studies theories in elucidating these dynamic relationships. The global political economy perspective it takes views China's interests in Africa as being on par with those of other industrialized nations vying for the continent's resources, both historically and now, even if it is not a "defense" of China. The propensity of Western enemies to amplify and vilify China's engagement stems more from their concerns over Chinese competitiveness than from the actual circumstances. The primary inquiry of this study is: What theoretical frameworks exist within political geography, development studies, and international relations for analysing modern China-African interactions? This supports the idea that the rise of "neo-liberalism with Chinese characteristics" is a political process and calls for a thorough, non-deterministic approach to political economics. This involves analysing many discourses, particularly Chinese geopolitical discourses, and analysing how these

discourses impact practice and policy, according to IR theory. It also requires an understanding of the processes that link real-world events with foreign policy discussions. In light of this, this paper proposes a state-centered political economy that draws inspiration from post-colonial theory, which examines how "markets" are established and granted legitimacy through processes that seem to be external to the market. This paper's second focus is primarily empirical, using these theoretical concepts to analyse actual China-African ties. It raises concerns about how "new" China's aid drive in Africa is and how much it borrows from earlier development and geopolitical narratives to bolster its current ties with the continent. Furthermore, it seeks to assess how China's development model "travels" and how contacts with African institutions influence its local manifestation. This method recognizes the perceived rigidity of the "Beijing Consensus," the fractures and tensions within the ostensibly unified "China Inc.," the heterogeneity of African political systems, the agency of African political actors, and the degree to which China's emphasis on "non-interference" genuinely allows for development policies that are "nationally owned" and contextually pertinent.

### **Historical Perspectives on China and Africa**

#### **China**

China is a big country with different landscapes and weather. Over 1.3 billion people live there, dispersed erratically among various territories. The nation has the longest uninterrupted historical record globally. The oldest known writing systems, found on oracle bones going back 4,000 years, are the precursors of Chinese characters. The Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE), the most enduring dynasty in Chinese history, is the period from which the earliest surviving literary works originate. Many of China's most important intellectuals were born during this dynasty, especially during the Eastern Zhou era (770–256 BCE). Concepts from Laozi,



Confucius, Mencius, and Mozi have a major influence on the basis of modern Chinese civilization.

China is governed by the CPC, a single political party with significant political clout. The party places a strong focus on the ideas of Xi Jinping, Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, Mao Zedong's Thought, Deng Xiaoping's Theory, and Marxism-Leninism. During a week-long assembly in October 2017, these ideals were codified in the party's constitution. Reestablishing China to its previous prominence is a primary priority. The National People's Congress (NPC), the Communist Party of China (CPC), and the Central People's Government (sometimes called the State Council) make up the government system. They support an authoritarian regime that allows for a variety of economic liberties. The CPC oversees all opposition organizations.

Within the CPC, there are both central and local organizations. The Central Committee has the highest position. In its absence, the Central Committee's authority is exercised by the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee. The Central Committee plenary session is where the members of the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee are chosen. Party members occupy the most significant roles nationwide in university, social organizations, finance and industry, internal security, and the military. Independent political organizations and organized opposition are not recognized by the CPC. Even in private conversations, when there is a little more freedom, the Chinese government still has complete control over the media. The political party messaging is extended through Chinese media, such as print, radio, and television. Equal rights for all members of society are claimed to be provided by official regulations in China, however this is not always the case in reality. Freedom House (2021) claims that laws pertaining to foreign NGOs and cybersecurity, heightened internet surveillance, harsh

punishments for human rights attorneys, micro bloggers, grassroots activists, and religious practitioners, and other problems that stifle private and public discourse, particularly online, have resulted in a significant erosion of freedoms.

The paramount state authority of the People's Republic of China is the National People's Congress (NPC). The NPC, with 3,000 members, and its standing committee convene annually and are elected for five-year periods. The NPC functions primarily as a symbolic assembly under the direction of the CPC. Village committees and urban residency councils, which report to the local CPC committees and have limited authority, are the only bodies that can organize competitive elections. Corruption, wrongdoing, and attacks on independent candidates plague many of these elections. However, the nomination process for candidates is still strictly regulated.

The main administrative body is the Central People's Government, sometimes known as the State Council. There are four levels at which local government organization's function: provinces (which include municipalities and autonomous territories under direct central government control), cities and prefectures, counties, and townships. The government and military answer to the CPC, which sets the national policy agenda.

Although the president of the People's Republic of China is the head of state, he or she functions independently and uses power in accordance with the rulings of the National People's Congress (NPC) and its standing committee rather than independently. In November 2012, the 18th Party Congress established the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee. Xi Jinping is the president of China, the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), and the chairman of the Central Military Commission. In March 2013, he was formally elected state president. At the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi was re-elected

as the CPC Central Committee's Secretary General. He was also appointed to lead the Military Council.

Economic Reforms: Mao Zedong left Deng Xiaoping with a struggling nation and a stagnant economy. China was still regarded as a developing country. Similar to Zambia, its GDP per capita was less than half of the norm for Asia and roughly two-thirds of the average for Africa. Centrally managed production targets governed the nation's commercial activity and industrial output. The standard of agriculture was community farming. After the 1978 reforms, China's economy under Deng's leadership transitioned from being centrally managed to being market oriented. The reform placed a lot of emphasis on agriculture, giving farmers more control over their property and financial incentives. The economic shift brought about by the open-door policy was mostly attributed to trade and foreign direct investment (FDI). This strategy opened China to imports and encouraged exports. In order to process domestic or imported resources for export, international investors were urged to establish manufacturing facilities in Shenzhen and Shanghai's special economic zones throughout the 1980s, either alone or in collaboration with local businesses. Import taxes did not apply to goods that were prepared for export. Leveraging international investment and technical expertise while employing Chinese labour was one of the main goals. Deng emphasized the idea that "some areas must get rich before others" and held the view that the money created along the coast would eventually aid in promoting economic growth inland. His well-known 1992 southern tour featured the catchphrase "To get rich is glorious," which sought to encourage entrepreneurship as a key economic driver in China. China introduced the "Go Out" or "Going Global Strategy" in 1999 to entice Chinese businesses to make outside investments. China thus became completely integrated into the world economy in 2001 when it joined the World Trade Organization. China needed African resources and energy to support its industrial and construction sectors while

looking for new markets for its goods, which resulted in exceptional growth because of this integration. China became the world's manufacturing centre as a result.

For China, the advantages of these market reforms have been significant. With a focus on export-driven, labour-intensive industry, it has become the world's second-largest economy in only a few decades. The impressive double-digit GDP growth that has been taking place every year has helped to lift almost 800 million people out of poverty (World Bank, 2021). China's life expectancy, primary school attendance, and literacy rates are comparable to those of other middle-income countries, and its Human Development Index has been steadily increasing. The great majority of Chinese people now live in better circumstances. For many people, earning money has become a reality.

**Economic Expansion:** China has ascended to a prominent global economic power, now ranking as the second-largest economy worldwide. The Congressional Research Service indicates that from 1960 to 1978, China had an average annual real GDP growth rate of 5.3% prior to the economic changes implemented in 1979. By 1990, the growth rate had decreased to 3.9% annually. As reported by the World Bank, the peak annual growth rate was recorded in 2007 at 14.2%, with an increase of 8.5% occurring in 2000. Following that period, China's GDP growth has shown considerable fluctuations largely due to the repercussions of the global financial crisis. Efforts to tackle air pollution began in August 2008; however, debates about political reforms persist. The nation's economy was advancing rapidly. The fourth-biggest investment bank in the US, Lehman Brothers, filed for bankruptcy in September 2008. The global financial turmoil and the ensuing worldwide recession adversely affected China's economy. Reports highlighted those millions of Chinese workers faced job losses, GDP growth decelerated, and there was a decline in both imports and exports, as well as in foreign direct investment. In response, the Chinese government loosened its monetary policies and launched a \$586 billion economic stimulus package to promote bank lending. The annual GDP growth rate in 2008

dropped by 4.6% to 9.6% compared to the prior year. China successfully attained its long-desired growth target of 8% during the years 2009, 2010, and 2011. However, after a GDP growth of 7.9% in 2012, the government established a "new normal" growth target of 7.5%. With an increase of only 6.9% in 2015, China marked its lowest growth rate in 25 years, catching global markets off guard. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016a, 2016b) projected a continued slowing of growth to 6.3% in 2016 and further down to 6.0% in 2017. Nonetheless, official data indicates that, despite significant government intervention, China's GDP rose by 6.7% in 2016. Although this was lower than expected, it represented a more substantial decline than the 6.9% recorded in 2015. Economists propose that such patterns of growth may be temporary and anticipate a further reduction to 6.5% by 2025.

Overcapacity in manufacturing and excessive lending to local governments are the main causes of China's problems in the real estate and industrial sectors. As a result, there is an excess of housing available, which drives down prices, especially outside of large cities. Although China's debt load is similar to that of a number of other nations, the rate at which it is accruing debt is concerning. According to a 2022 McKinsey analysis, debt has risen since 2007 and about half of all loans are associated with real estate acquisitions. The potential for a collapse in China's economy has caused concern among international markets. There has been persistent doubt about the reliability of economic data. The governor of Liaoning, a significant industrial region in northeastern China, revealed that from 2011 to 2014, the province's economic data was exaggerated by falsified figures, which fuelled ongoing skepticism about the accuracy of China's economic statistics. China's official state news agency, Xinhua, reported this information. The province has admitted to manipulating economic data for a long time (CNN, 2017).

China's economic expansion has encountered various challenges. These challenges raise questions about the government's legitimacy, which largely depends on maintaining economic

growth and tackling emerging social issues. Protests among citizens have become prevalent across the country. In fact, environmental damage has been a byproduct of economic progress. The condition of the environment is deteriorating significantly. One of the most pressing issues facing China is the escalating ecological crisis. Being the largest carbon emitter globally, the air quality in many cities falls short of international health standards. The resulting health hazards are understandably alarming the populace. The advantages of development have not been distributed equally. As disparities between regions and cities widen, income inequality within the population is also on the rise. China is confronting demographic challenges linked to gender imbalances, an ageing population, and internal labour migration. With the workforce proportion decreasing and the number of dependents rising due to the ageing demographic, the country faces significant pressures. In response, China has eased its previous one-child policy, permitting couples to have two children. However, many couples argue they cannot afford to have another child, which may not alleviate the economic and demographic challenges. Moreover, China is rapidly evolving from a rural society to an urban one. World Bank predictions from 2021 indicate that around one billion people, or about 70% of the population, are anticipated to reside in urban areas by 2035. This fast urbanization intensifies the need for social services, urban infrastructure, and employment prospects. The government has liberalized the Urban Registration System (hukou) to facilitate the move from rural to urban regions. Peasant migrants may relocate to metropolitan areas and get low-paying employment, although they are deprived of fundamental urban social amenities. As a result, their children are often left in rural areas to be looked after by grandparents, other relatives, or themselves. China is currently shifting its economic focus from manufacturing to a model centered on services and high technology, a transition that also influences African economies.

### **Africa**

With 54 distinct countries and a population of almost one billion, Africa is the second-largest continent in the world. North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa are the continent's five regions. Rich natural resource diversity, unique fauna, breathtaking scenery, intriguing cultures, and intricate ethnic divisions are some of its defining features. In terms of geographic, historical, and cultural viewpoints, as well as sociopolitical and economic circumstances, Africa offers a striking contrast. Reminiscent of Janus and like an African mask with two faces that gaze both to the past and the future, it is a place of geographical and cultural change.

Numerous discoveries in the Great Rift Valley region support the idea that Africa is the birthplace of humanity. Its cultural traditions reach back to ancient eras. The historical story of Africa is influenced by two significant invasions and customs. The continent has absorbed various ideas through the blending of Arab Islamic and European Christian traditions. The impacts of Christianity and Islam changed African societal practices, resulting in the creation of new institutions that either replaced or contended with indigenous ways of living. Africa's historical narrative, characterized by colonial oppression and the slave trade, is closely linked to the continent's difficulties in attaining internal unity and development. Beginning in the late 15th century, Europeans and Arabs forcefully abducted enslaved individuals from West, Central, and Southeast Africa. The Dutch began exploration and settlement during the 17th century. As the leading maritime power, Britain emerged as the primary nation involved in the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1492 and 1885, Europe maintained the role of the dominant continental authority. Wealth and power were accrued by Europeans who owned plantations and enterprises in the Americas and the Caribbean, largely due to the millions of Africans transported there (Asante, 2017, p. 216).

The era of direct colonization and conquest commenced in 1870. The partitioning of Africa took place during the Congress of Berlin in 1878, orchestrated by Otto von Bismarck, the first

chancellor of Germany. It was divided into straight geographic lines of latitude and longitude following the principle of "effective occupation," resulting in a division comparable to slicing a cake (Carmody, 2021, p. 2). Five competing nations—Germany, Italy, Portugal, France, and Britain—consumed Africa, referred to as "un Magnifique gâteau African," while Spain claimed some of the remaining territories (Pakenham, 2021, p. xxi). The continent endured exploitation and oppression under the guise of conquest, trade, Christianity, and "civilization." The most severe exploitation occurred in the Belgian Congo under King Leopold II of Belgium. The Scramble for Africa, which involved the colonisation and annexation of African lands between 1881 and 1914, arose from the presence of European nations on the continent. Each of these events has significantly shaped Africa's development. A brutal struggle persisted between Africa and Europe for 150 years, beginning in 1807 when Britain prohibited the slave trade and concluding in 1957 with the independence of the Gold Coast, later known as Ghana. Even after gaining political independence from colonial powers, Africa continued to grapple with the psychological and physical control of its former colonisers (Asante, 2017, p. 216).

Modern Africa has undergone significant changes over the years. After gaining independence, the continent experienced decolonization and numerous conflicts in various regions over the subsequent fifty years. Except for Ethiopia and Liberia, which were never colonized, all nations formerly governed by Germany, England, Italy, and France achieved freedom from colonial domination. From 1945 until 1980, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in the Cold War. During this period, Western countries abstained from exerting pressure on African governments receiving assistance to adopt free market or democratic changes. In Zaire, they endorsed "friendly" anti-communist autocrats such as Mobutu Sese Seko, who seized power in a coup aided by Belgium and the US Central Intelligence Agency. Following the Cold War, the prerequisites for economic and political transformation established by donor states and Western-affiliated financial institutions became normative starting in the 1980s. The World



Bank and the IMF initiated structural adjustment programs that required developing nations to liberalize their markets in exchange for financial assistance. To access this funding, countries needed to fulfil several requirements. As a result, nations were encouraged to establish multiparty democratic systems during the 1990s. The continent saw movements toward multiparty democracy following the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, which ended the internationally criticized apartheid regime. By 2015, elections were successfully conducted in politically difficult nations like Nigeria, Tanzania, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast. Simultaneously, hostilities erupted in regions such as Mauritius, Cape Verde, Botswana, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Somalia.

Africa, the most exploited continent in history, has long been isolated and marginalized economically. China started to expand its economy and make inroads into Africa more recently. China bought hydrocarbons and raw resources, made infrastructural investments, and supplied the continent with reasonably priced goods. China became sub-Saharan Africa's most important trading partner in 2012. Nonetheless, during the 2008 global market crisis, which adversely impacted many African nations, China's economic expansion ceased. Economic growth is crucial for Africa to tackle poverty, climate change, human development, and social inclusion issues, while also facilitating improvements in health and education. While the pathways for development and growth across Africa's economies differ, the World Bank (2024a, 2024b) forecasts a recovery for Sub-Saharan Africa by 2025–2026, along with a gradual advancement in the region's leading economies.

## **International Relations, Political Geography and Development: Moving Beyond**

### **Reductionism**

We will begin by examining our central inquiry on the theoretical frameworks applicable to the analysis of contemporary relations between China and Africa. It is essential to consider

different academic viewpoints on China's involvement with the continent to assess how its growth impacts its relations with African governments. This section argues for the significance of a structural approach by analyzing how development studies and international relations (IR) have understood African politics and development (Ó' Tuathail, 2019; Brown, 2023). We have also challenged the conventional perspective that claims knowledge about regions and IR is so limited by geography and culture that it fails to shed light on situations elsewhere. There is a necessity for a more hybrid and progressive understanding of how theories of international relations are formed instead of merely promoting or exoticizing concepts characterised by "Chinese traits" or "Western logic." This creates an opportunity for an initial exploration of Chinese IR theories. Following this, we examine how these normative policy issues originating from China are implemented in Africa and investigate the reasons for the variability among African governments. This evaluation relies on a more conventional political economy perspective, yet it is moderated by the recognition that neo liberalisation is a political process that draws from a variety of discourses and practices found in both market and non-market contexts.

### **International Relations, Africa, and the Advantages of Hybrid Theories**

Implicit rather than explicit linkages may exist between IR theories and development narratives. Therefore, both exhibit a certain amount of Eurocentrism and reductionism, depicting Africa as nothing more than a historical and modern artifact (Brown, 2023). Even though many critics contend that "Western" IR has consistently ignored or misrepresented Africa in particular, a number of initiatives have surfaced in recent years to rethink development and push ideas beyond what is typically considered to be "ethnocentric, masculinized, northern, and top-down" (Booth, 2019, p. 125; Chowdhry & Nair, 2023). Hart's (2011, p. 650) distinction between "big D" and "little d" development serves as the foundation for the framework for talking about development. Hart posits that "big D" development

represents an interventionist project in the "Third World" that surfaced during decolonization and the Cold War, whereas "little d" development signifies the evolution of capitalism as a series of historical processes that are deeply contradictory and geographically inconsistent.

Hart acknowledges the similarities to Cowen and Shenton's (2022) framework, but he takes a Polanyian stance, arguing that market liberalization leads to a "counter-movement." Therefore, "these opposing tendencies are encapsulated within capitalism, rather than implying the counter-movement is an external intrusion into a smoothly developing teleology." This leads us to consider how global capitalism might be "formed and continually reshaped" (Cowen & Shenton, 2022) and what it might mean to reject or change it from a Gramscian perspective. In this counter-movement, the relationship between power and knowledge is referred to as "governmentality" or "the emergence of specific regimes of truth regarding the management of conduct" (Rose, 2009, p. 21). We need to look into "the rationalities of rules, the forms of knowledge and expertise they create, and the particular and contingent assemblages of practices, materials, agents, and techniques through which these rationalities function to generate governable subjects" in order to put this into practice (Hart, 2011, p. 92). By examining international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral organizations, and the points where different governmental domains converge, other academics build on the concept of governmentality (Ferguson & Gupta, 2022; Watts, 2023). As a result, understanding development and its implementation requires a great deal of control and discipline, which influences the conversation about the ensuing neo-liberalization process.

International relations (IR) is still largely viewed as a discipline predominantly influenced by American perspectives, a point noted by Hoffmann over four decades ago (Hoffmann, 1977; Tickner, 2023). Discussions about "critical geopolitics" often highlight its tendency to neglect

global peripheries, especially Africa, as it emphasizes geopolitical narratives from North America and Europe (Berg, 2014; Dalby, 2017; Grundy-Warr & Sidaway, 2023; Kelly, 2023; Kofman, 2004; Perry, 2007; Sidaway, 2017). Perry (2007, p. 6) pointed out that "Anglo-American political geography offers a limited and impoverished view of the discipline, largely sidelining the political issues facing four-fifths of the global population," a remark made shortly after the launch of the journal *Political Geography*. Kofman (2004, p. 437) reiterated this critique in the mid-1990s, highlighting the "heavily Anglocentric, if not Eurocentric, bias present in political geography literature." These critiques directed at "Anglo-American" human geography have also been applied to political geography. Therefore, understanding international relations helps to identify and clarify the tangible practices of global diplomacy that marginalise and control Africa, which can be analysed through the lens of Orientalist theory.

Dunn (2021) suggests that the emphasis on the state as the primary unit of analysis in Western neorealism overlooks Africa. He argues that the state's presence is largely absent in the African context, making it difficult for IR to engage with the continent's "real" political situations. He contrasts this with the distinct and cohesive states found in Europe, asserting that this makes IR applicable there. Brown (2023) critiques Dunn and others for blending international relations (IR) with neo-realism, though he supports the broader objective of achieving a deeper understanding of Africa. According to Brown, neorealism is inherently flawed, which is evident even before its application to the African context. He specifically mentions that employing the European state as a benchmark for analysis normalises certain teleological arguments that mainly focus on Africa and other regions. This notion that Africa highlights these limitations and is so unique that it necessitates a "new" theory yet to be developed results in its omission from major conversations regarding international relations.

Hence, criticisms of specific IR theories reflect those directed at contemporary issues, acknowledging inherent statism and producing hegemonic knowledge. Nonetheless, we argue that alternative viewpoints exist concerning the connection between development and IR, and that the relationship between China and Africa provides an opportunity to shift away from Western interpretations of global politics and examine the "intertwining" of knowledge. Bilgin (2024) builds on the critiques from scholars such as Dunn by pointing out that these admirable efforts to integrate the periphery into IR depend on reversing "Western" theorization. Bilgin posits that we should also pose challenging inquiries about the "non-Westernness" of certain perspectives and the "Westernness" of what are considered "Western" approaches to international relations. To put it differently, our understanding of "non-Western" insights on global politics or "development" could be heavily influenced by "Western" ideas and theories (e.g., the relevance of modernization discourse to China's technocratic or scientific interpretation of "development"). Bilgin argues that this calls for a critical approach to comprehend how the historical relations between the "West" and "non-West" have shaped the evolution of "almost the same but not quite" ways of thinking and acting (Bhabha, 2023, p. 86). In other words, a process of "mimicry" may occur as a way of "doing" international politics or development that appears "similar" yet unexpectedly "different," rather than focusing on the uniqueness of China.

As a result, we have been striving to understand modern Chinese viewpoints on international relations. We acknowledge that the theories of international relations and foreign policy are closely linked, although they are not precisely the same (Shambaugh, 2022; Wang, 2018). In his analysis of Chinese international relations, Zhang (2022, p. 102) identified three distinct schools of thought. One perspective suggests that Chinese scholars "needed to catch up by importing Western IR theories." On the other hand, another group, referred to as the "neo-comms" by Leonard (2022), aims to reinterpret Marxism-Leninism to create an IR framework

"with Chinese characteristics." While this theoretical endeavour is thought-provoking, Zhang (2022) contends it is limited by what he views as an "increasingly anachronistic" Maoist ideology, mixed with world-systems theory and Lenin's critique of imperialism; he argues that this approach does not offer any novel insights. The third theoretical viewpoint posits that a significant portion of existing IR theory has emerged from specific geopolitical contexts that reinforce the dominance of major powers, and it aims to represent the unique trajectory of China's development. According to Zhang (2022, p. 104), this third framework should "engage in theoretical discourse within the global IR community while addressing theoretical concerns based on China's national experience" in order to effectively highlight China's distinctiveness (see, for example, Callahan's (2023) exploration of tianxia). This mutual engagement, though arguably implicit and at what Zhang describes as a "primary stage," could result in a more "international" IR theory.

The varied outcomes of China's involvement in the liberal international order necessitate a thoughtful examination of both the similarities and differences among "non-Western" societies. However, by amplifying "non-Western" perspectives, we do not support a mindless relativism that equates, for instance, the statements of the Chinese government with those of competing nations vying for resources in Africa. We assert that grasping the historical context is critical for analysing continuities and uncovering historical influences that shape (or are shaped by) contemporary actors. We intend to avoid the belief that China's current actions are entirely new in its foreign policy history or that they represent a significant departure from the past behaviours of other external stakeholders on the continent.

### **Political Economy and the Emergence of Chinese Neo-Liberalism in Africa**

Our second theoretical contribution is to outline a framework for examining the dynamics of connections between China and Africa, which is crucial because many traditional

interpretations of this relationship adopt a binary perspective, implying that China's actions across Africa are uniformly detrimental, affecting economies, political systems, and environmental conditions similarly. The dynamics between state and capital, especially how Chinese investments and state entities interact with various sectors of African capital and political forces, will significantly influence the political repercussions of China's appointment on the continent. The internationalization of capital challenges a rigid territorial view of political and economic domains, which presumes that capital maintains a national identity and complicates the relationship between capital and the state (Glassman, 2019). Given the significance of transnational actors, interconnections, and processes, along with China's growing role in global production networks, it is vital to acknowledge the limitations of a state-centric viewpoint when analysing China (Cheung, 2019; Pan, 2022). We affirm that exploring the varied forms and combinations of capital, as well as the role governments play in facilitating their success or how capital takes advantage of (intentional) gaps in state policies, is vital. This is fundamentally a political procedure where different classes obtain to transmute governmental structures to fulfil their interests. This viewpoint is significant because, unlike the Chinese concept of respecting sovereignty and non-interference—based on the premise of a functional state—Chinese policies are attuned to local political conditions. Consequently, grasping the political frameworks that Chinese entities engage with in their business operations is essential. Furthermore, governance might be affected if China aims for "stability" in the economic environment, regardless of the methods used to obtain it. In such cases, alternatives to the state might produce more favourable outcomes.

We aim to avoid determinism that views Chinese attachment in Africa as a form of *deus ex machina*, inadvertently robbing African actors of their agency by concentrating only on the state and its connections with capital. In this regard, the core aspects of neo-liberalism and its various expressions have been comprehensively analysed within economic geography

literature. Peck and Tickell (2022, 2023) argue that the transformative and adaptive capabilities of this broad political-economic undertaking have been consistently undervalued, calling for a process-oriented understanding of "neo-liberalization." This necessitates, among other factors, a careful exploration of the geographical and historical (re)construction of the neo-liberalization process and the complex ways in which different local neo-liberalisms are woven into broader neo-liberal frameworks and structures (Peck & Tickell, 2022). Neo-liberalism functions across multiple levels, demanding greater attention to the various expressions of neo-liberalism, the hybrid nature of contemporary policies and initiatives, in addition to the diverse and conflicting elements within neo-liberal spaces, strategies, and themes (Larner, 2023). Our goal is to analyse China as a context-specific variation that is neither distinctive nor universally applicable.

### **Present-Day Histories: China's Geo-Politics and the Creation of History**

To assess how foreign policy narratives "move," "spread," and materialize in actual circumstances, this section looks at the contemporary interaction between China and African governments. Two fundamental questions must be investigated: does China's developmental model call for a new international strategy that builds upon rather than rejects earlier development trajectories? To determine the novelty of this development strategy and the frameworks that influence modern interactions, the first inquiry is historical. Additionally, we want to understand how this past operates as a discursive framework for legitimizing contemporary foreign policy.

The connection between China and Africa still substantially draws upon historical geopolitical ethnicities and a history of collaboration with the continent, even though it has grown and changed over the past ten years—more specifics will be provided later. Even while China's historical ties to Africa have influenced modern development, China has recently utilized these



historical ties to justify its commercially oriented activities. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said during a 2006 trip to Africa that China has been suffering from the effects of colonial domination for more than a century. The Chinese people are well aware of the pain inflicted by colonial powers and the necessity of opposing them. China may refute accusations of imperialism over its recent actions in Africa by presenting itself as a player in both developing and developed regions thanks to their shared colonial past. Beijing asserts that China and Africa are the origins of civilization, that they possess a mutual adversary, and hence, their strategic objectives and perspectives on significant world issues are analogous. Chinese and Africans share the belief that African experiences cannot be compared to Western ideas of "development" and that there are not many lessons that apply to the continent.

The links established during China's revolutionary foreign policy era in the 1950s and the anti-colonial campaigns for independence are the origin of the unique form of the current relationship between China and Africa. China's foreign policy is marked by both collaboration and confrontation, with aspects of both overlapping, claims Harding (2015). Among the more cooperative accounts of China's interactions with Africa, Harding names benefactors, clients, and collaborators. Cold War superpowers have been among the advantages at different points in time. China has benefited from its approach in Africa by supporting a variety of liberation movements in order to build relationships and advance nationalism as a fundamental value (Snow, 2019). Many of China's foreign policy partners received less concessional aid compared to client states and experienced a tense relationship with China during the Maoist era.

China was trying to assert itself as the leader of non-aligned nations while strongly opposing the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War at that time (Wang, 2020; Jung & Halliday, 2022; Snow, 2019). The foundations of China's interactions with Africa are rooted in the tenets of Third Worldism and the Non-Aligned Movement. Liu Guijin (2022) points out that China's early

diplomatic efforts in the post-Cold War era primarily aimed at undermining Taiwan's international status and countering Russian and Western influence in Africa. Important milestones in this regard included the Asian-African Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955, and the inaugural conference of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) in 1957, alongside China's confrontations with the United States during the 1950s and 1960s and with the Soviet Union in the 1960s and 1970s (Lyman, 2015). The notion of Afro-Asian unity that emerged during independence movements eventually became a crucial political foundation for the developing China-Africa relationship. Drawing from its legacy as a former colonial power and its ongoing battle against poverty, China argued that the solidarity between Sino-African nations stems from a shared understanding of Africa's economic struggles, which could create a strong basis for amicable relations (Tjønneland et al., 2018). Consequently, Larkin (2001, p. 28) observed that Bandung represented "Afro-Asia as a viable political concept," and China utilized the Bandung spirit to gain support for its preferred policies.

Following visits to ten African nations, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai declared Beijing's commitment to standing with Africans resisting imperialism, describing it as "the poor helping the poor." This statement confirmed Beijing's support for the continent as it served as a battleground for the competing ideologies of Washington and Moscow (Adie, 2004; Ismael, 2019). The principles steering cooperation and assistance were influenced by China's own experiences of receiving aid before this era, motivated by a desire to "show up the North," while the Chinese had yet to recognize their position as "clients" (Snow, 2019). During this time, Chinese aid to Africa was viewed as a "heroic endeavour," aiming to fulfill its "missionary duty of freeing Africa," thus framing the continent as the "focus of a philanthropic crusade" (Snow, 2019, p. 153).

Nonetheless, in their attempts to impose a universal revolutionary model on all African "liberation movements," Chinese leaders failed to acknowledge the significance of regional rivalries and the cultural and historical distinctions among the various countries, which may have led to Peking's shortcomings in Africa during the late 1960s (Snow, 2023). During this period, China sought to support liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa but ultimately "backed the wrong horse in all three cases" (Cheng & Shi, 2022, p. 89). Similarly, Snow (2023) asserts that China's engagement with the internal affairs of African nations was minimal, let alone a true commitment to promoting Communism in those states. For most of the Maoist era, China's connections with its so-called "poor friends" and "Third World partners" were described as "either thin or troubled" (Harding, 2015, p. 394) because it did not participate in significant organizations like the Non-Aligned Movement and the G77.

China has consistently underscored the significance of South-South cooperation in its objective to counter independent universal authority and to forge alliances that would bolster Beijing's diplomatic initiatives against "hegemonism." All of China's foreign policy over the past fifty years has been unified by its goal of finding a suitable place for itself in international affairs and reducing the influence of hegemonic powers, which stems from the belief that China has been "muscle out" of global relations (Taylor, 2020).

Some authors (Alden, 2015; Marks, 2016, 2017; Neuhauser, 2019; Melville & Owen, 2023) question China's interest in Africa as a vehicle for "South-South cooperation," considering China's current state of uneven development and the instability of its home economy (Chan, 2021). Therefore, does China represent a new form of "partnership" for expansion that extends throughout the South? We argue below that China is different from earlier superpowers. It has continuously engaged in strategic interactions with Africa and taken advantage of the continent to achieve its national and geopolitical goals (Harding, 2019; Taylor, 2020). Thus, similar to

what other countries have done and are doing for Africa, this is another instance of South-South development cooperation.

### **The Geo-Politics of China's Africa Policy**

Even though China and Africa have a long-standing "solidarity," this is only one way that China communicates and instils its "vision" of growth. As has been shown, there are many ways to regulate the approach to development, and the key element affecting the results of this interaction is the way China's vision is filtered via a few African nations. As a result, we want to turn our focus to China's post-Cold War engagement in Africa and specifically look at Chinese narratives about aid and governance. The "delivery" of development and how political narratives based on respect for sovereignty justify these interventions will then be examined. Lastly, we will briefly mention that Chinese policies are evolving, partly due to their experiences in Sudan. It appears that China is increasingly engaging in multilateralism and that its principle of non-interference may be beginning to weaken.

### **Chinese Neo-Liberalism?**

The designation of China as "neo-liberal" is frequently contested due to the conventional interpretation of "neo-liberalism" as involving close market dynamics unconstrained by state planning, which appears to be at odds with China's real situation. The identification of China's economic outlook as "neo-liberal" is essentially speculative and preliminary, and our study aims to explore the suitability and significance of this label. We examine the familiarities of other "post-socialist" governments going through transitions, especially the Soviet Union, and try to draw lessons from them.

China's progress during the past half century has depended on international markets for primitive commodities or technological transfer. However, the 1960s saw a change in emphasis toward domestic development, defined by a great deal of militarization and a delegation of

expansion to guarantee that territories could become independent in the face of alleged external threats. Although the economy has opened up significantly since the late 1980s, regional governments have remained strong and unassailable (Leonard, 2022), which has led to a major increase in investments in engineering and infrastructure projects throughout Africa. However, how best to describe this growth trajectory and the mechanisms and processes that propel it? China may appear "neo-liberal" because of its participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO), efforts to draw in foreign direct investment (FDI), claims of trust in market economies, reliance on cheap labor, and seeming disregard for the effects of expansion on the environment. The Chinese government still formally opposes neo-liberalism, but it still supports its ideals and uses nationalism as a check on it. The form of primitive capitalism that has emerged in China (Huang, 2020), as some have tried to explain, does not reflect the most recent iteration of Deng's "socialism with Chinese characteristics"; rather, it reflects a system in which state actors—typically at the local level—remain essential to the economy's operation. According to Breslin (2023, p. 2), "the plans and strategies of national level decision-making elites are not as critical as the aggregation of numerous initiatives to interpret and implement economic change to serve specific interests."

The years following 1989 marked the start of what the Chinese government referred to as a "transitional" historical phase. Because the Chinese were keenly aware of these occurrences and wanted to compete with these economies, Harvey (2022) contends that Deng Xiaoping's initial attempt to liberalize China's economy was intended to increase China's influence on developments in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Harvey claims that although the Chinese did not initially intend to create an economy centered on exports, their reforms did open up industrial capacities in different parts of the nation, allowing China to compete on the global market with sophisticated technology, a reasonably educated workforce, and—most importantly—a very inexpensive labour force, which is frequently found in the recently

established special economic zones (SEZs). China rapidly integrated into the global economy, resulting in a significant influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) that fueled their enthusiasm for the neo-liberalization process. It remains unclear if this was a deliberate strategy, but its effects on the global economic landscape are undeniable.

According to Wang (2018), the term "transitional" refers to both a historical process and a historical "myth" that has been influenced by the government. A seamless shift from economic to political improvement is improbable, as this procedure is influenced by distinct power undercurrents and social pressures that herald a new epoch of state capitalism and neo-liberal economics, characterized by the supremacy of a privileged minority over political authority and production resources. Wang asserts that China's shift from socialism was driven by coercive state intervention rather than an organic evolution instigated by market dynamics. According to him, phrases like "free trade" and "unregulated" are ideological fronts used to hide the repressive laws passed by the government to favour socioeconomic classes and organizations. The analysis of China's strategy in Africa, often portrayed as commercial, pragmatic, and rational, underscores this ideological neutrality (Zhao, 2023).

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize Harvey's (2021) claim that neo-liberalism creates wealth by transferring capital (accumulation by dispossession) rather than creating it initially (accumulation by wage labour). The capture of natural resources, raw materials, and slave labour as a way of transferring value marks the beginning of the long-standing process of accumulation through dispossession in Africa. These procedures frequently reflect "primitive accumulation," in which Northern countries used their exploitation of Africa to increase their capital (Bond, 2020). It is possible that some of the old "looting" techniques are being resurrected, and the extraction of riches through imperialist ties has increased in recent decades. Concerns persist that the newly established neo-liberal trade and investment relationships between China and Africa may evolve into regimes of expropriation. The debate surrounding

whether China's recent activities in Africa can be categorized as imperialism has sparked considerable discussion; however, these actions may not constitute imperialism since China's primary objective appears to be acquiring the continent's natural resources rather than taking control of its societies.

### **The Foreign Policy of China and Liberal Internationalism**

In the last ten years, China's foreign policy strategy has changed dramatically. Two major historical periods can be used to frame the noticeable shift in national priorities since the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949: the "revolution" phase under Mao Zedong (1949–1976) and the "modernization" phase under Deng Xiaoping (since 1978). These periods mark the transition of China from a revolutionary force to a post-revolutionary nation (Zhao, 2023). Beijing's support for multipolarity, which entails the creation of adaptable coalitions intended to challenge hegemony and create a more equitable international order, is frequently the driving force behind its growing engagement in Africa (Cheng & Shi, 2022; Tull, 2023). According to Leonard (2022), the PRC is currently going through a major ideological split as old guard communists emphasize the need to strengthen military might and take a more combative approach toward other countries. On the other hand, although its influence has waned since the mid-1990s, a smaller but significant "new right" faction supports total liberalization, and a foreign policy focused on the market. The desire to lessen inequality tempers the current leadership's view of markets, giving rise to conflicting interpretations that categorize them as "populist" (Wang & Lim, 2021) or "new left" (Leonard, 2022). There is a liberal internationalist faction within this paradigm that seeks to peacefully move up the international norm's hierarchy.

Chinese leaders have referred to their strategy for economic, political, and military expansion since late 2013 as "peaceful ascendance." However, this term's actual applications are still

unclear. The populist notion of scientific progress, the latest manifestation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," is grounded in the doctrines of Mao and Deng and underpins the socio-economic ideology of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This notion was approved into the Party's constitution during the 17th Party Congress in October 2007. It is characterized by egalitarian ideals including social welfare, improved democracy, sustainable development, and the establishment of a "harmonious" and "people-centered" society. Hu Jintao is intimately linked to it, and it aims to change the official government agenda's emphasis from "economic growth" to "social harmony." What is meant by "scientifically pursuing development"? Is it just modernization rhetoric masquerading as something distinctively Chinese, with an emphasis on efficiency, science, industrialization, education, and technological advancement?

### **China's Africa Policy**

These important ideas are further supported by the policies that are becoming more and more focused on Africa, which are primarily motivated by the need for energy and natural resources. This became a cornerstone of Chinese foreign strategy by the mid-1990s. China started importing oil in 1993, and because of its growing reliance on imported oil and natural gas, there is an urgent need for safe transportation routes and a variety of supply sources. China's increasing interest in Africa for essential minerals like copper, cobalt, and oil makes it evident that it has to diversify and expand its oil source (Klare & Volman, 2022).

China's engagement with Africa is highlighted in its policy document. This policy, which was released in 2006, emphasizes cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and the idea of "non-interference" in internal political matters to set itself apart from Western approaches, which frequently have conditions attached. Since their articulation by Zhou Enlai in the 1960s, the cooperative principles have solidified non-interference as a fundamental element of China's involvement in Africa. However, one can wonder if this principle is only a front for hidden



agendas. Today, development partnerships with Western donors are sometimes seen as "inherently one-sided," implying that conditionality and cooperation may be inherently incompatible (Slater & Bell, 2023, p. 346).

It is unclear whether China's discussions about South-South cooperation and partnership are truly unique, despite the country having a much longer record of considering cooperation among Southern states. Furthermore, it is critical to acknowledge that socialism included a variety of trusteeship structures. It is unlikely that China and its new African friends will form an equal alliance given China's increasing economic might. But more research is needed to fully comprehend China's perspective on collaboration and the often-cited win-win situations. Large (2020) noted that China's engagement in Africa aids in the resurgence of triangulation, enabling African nations to leverage competition among donors and investors and to interact with multiple foreign powers (as demonstrated by Angola's shift to China following its 2003 collapse in negotiations with the IMF). China also discusses threats to hegemonic power, its position in international institutions, and its goal of becoming a major player in a multipolar world when talking about partnerships (Cowen & Shenton, 2022). In keeping with its liberal foreign policy and its recent WTO membership, China recognizes the value of winning votes to defend and advance its interests.

China has frequently emphasized ideas like "respect for sovereignty" and "non-interference" in its discussions of aid to Africa. This story contributes to the perception that China is not forcing its political beliefs, morals, or ideals on recipient countries (Davies et al., 2022). The Chinese government's special envoy to Africa, Liu Guijin (2022, p. 3), said in Pretoria in 2016: [t] To begin with, China does not intend to undermine Africa's democracy. China is working hard to build a socialist democracy and promote human rights and good governance at home. And China is a responsible major country in the world. I doubt there is any tiny political gain

China can get by doing such things against the historical trend and the common wish of the people of all countries.

Guijin said, "We [China] have never, and will never in the future, impose any political conditions on our aid and development initiatives because we believe that providing assistance is solely for the benefit of the people; it is not for political gain or for displaying our generosity to the outside world." In 2018, while serving as the Chinese government's special representative for Darfur in Sudan, Guijin said this. This concept highlights China's non-interference policy and the idea that the country has taken a practical and "non-ideological" stance, putting resource security ahead of attempts to sway public opinion. In addition, there is a discourse of mutual reliance that supports China's foreign policy philosophy of peaceful growth. "China definitely needs Africa more for her development process, even though Africa might need China" is the key takeaway (Anshan, 2023, p. 10). This highlights how China's interactions with Africa are mostly commercial in nature. It is important to recognize that Africa's resources are vital to China's growth and that there is a win-win situation rather than a well-planned "catching up" strategy with more developed countries. It is unclear if the benefits of this expansion would reach the most marginalized groups in African cultures, although several policies show this commercialism-focused strategy over aid (Kaplinsky, 2023).

Since the application of non-interference has always been adaptable and situation-specific, it is difficult for such a principle to stay constant. Even though a new administration may subsequently decide to change these accords, China may have to back unpopular authoritarian regimes once deals are made with them. Karumbidza (2022) asserts that the Chinese are probably well aware of how unrealistic their non-interference stance in Africa is. Given the significance of its economic relations, the Chinese government is interested in promoting long-term stability. According to their story, the government thinks that harmony and careful interest balance are the best ways to accomplish this, not force. China's recent involvement in Sudan

and the increasingly assertive non-interference technique used in discussions about Zimbabwe's post-Mugabe state demonstrate that non-interference is clearly losing credibility. China is increasingly addressing internal governance issues with greater responsibility, which runs counter to some arguments about "rogue aid." Sudan serves as an illustration of the evolution of China's position. One part of China's dual anti-imperialist rhetoric, which frames its human rights programs, is historical, contending that Western nations are dishonest because of their colonial past. As stated on page 10 of Anshan (2023):

This is indeed ironic, coming from Western countries talking about abuse of human rights when they have committed relentless human rights abuses during their colonial periods. ... It is almost shameful for these countries to accuse China of human rights abuses when they have committed much more atrocious acts in the past.

The second response is connected to the fact that the Chinese view any human rights conditionality as inherently violating such rights. China's participation in Sudan has been characterized by this defence of sovereignty. Significant political sway has resulted from China's "blind-eye" support for numerous Khartoum regimes during the previous 10 years in return for the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) continuing to manage the oil industry. Although Sudan's oil-rich regions generate a significant amount of revenue, the affected civilian population's access to services has not yet improved. China has also supplied weapons to Sudan and aided in the expansion of the armaments manufacturing industry in Northern Sudan. China's diplomacy in Darfur gained so much attention after 2006 that it was hard to argue that it wasn't meddling. Beijing has miscalculated the political peril that Darfur poses to its interests in Sudan and its reputation in Africa and beyond. To enhance its visibility and provide solutions, China appointed a new special ambassador in May 2017. For instance, more assistance is now being sent to Darfur. China was also able to enhance its interests through initiatives in Darfur, participation in international forums, and more vocal diplomacy. China's

persistent support of Sudan's sovereignty, resistance to additional sanctions, and bolstering of economic links, however, complemented its more robust diplomatic style. Even if diplomacy may help this pariah state lose some of its reputation, oil has instead further concentrated its wealth rather than bringing about wider prosperity for this state (Alden, 2017; Kaplinsky, 2023). The example of Sudan is essential for demonstrating China's transition and the ways in which Western donors are trying to collaborate with China to find solutions for Africa's development.

The allocation of Chinese aid and the possibility of donor cooperation on development are therefore a source of worry. The idea that Beijing is not forcing its political views, objectives, or ideals on recipient countries is further supported by the difficulties in differentiating between Chinese investment and aid as well as the necessity for greater transparency about China's allocation and disbursement of foreign aid. Since there is no official definition of aid in China and there is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding its meaning, the Ministry of Commerce is actively striving to define it (Davies et al., 2022). The need for greater transparency regarding the distribution, amount, and effectiveness of Chinese aid is one of the facts selected for criticism. Data and information in this sector are unclear, which adds to the perception of China as a "rogue creditor," as is the lack of openness over the scope and terms of China's assistance to other countries (Jacoby, 2021). Statistics on the amount of Chinese aid are collected differently than those on aid from Western donors, and the amount of aid is occasionally regarded as a state secret (Lancaster, 2023). Lancaster says the Chinese justify this secrecy to avoid local criticism that they are helping other countries instead of alleviating poverty in their own country, as well as to avoid competition and criticism from major donor nations. The Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, which disseminates data on foreign aid, does not include China (Jacoby, 2021). The upcoming wave of major infrastructure projects in Sudan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Angola,

Tanzania, Zambia, and Gabon, for example, are mostly unknown (King, 2022). Although it might seem logical for Westerners to focus on the health and education sectors as the most visible ones that require assistance, China has likely always favoured a far more holistic view of its interactions with other countries (Mojian & Nath, 2023). The idea of development policy as a separate field that first appeared among Western countries in the 1950s is alien (or at the very least unsettling) to Chinese practice.

Although it does not offer aid on its own, a single government ministry is typically linked to different types of aid and business alliances. Most of China's bilateral aid activities are overseen by the Department of Foreign Aid, which is part of the Ministry of Commerce. The Ministry of Finance is in charge of multilateral assistance, while the Ministries of Health and Education are also involved in bilateral help. Apart from the federal government, relief and development projects are also supported by local and metropolitan authorities, for example, through sister city relationships. In practice, it is frequently difficult to distinguish between development, investment, and help when using project finance channels. Chinese funding is usually allocated for specific projects, mostly infrastructure-related, according to Sautman and Hairong (2020). Western aid is more difficult to embezzle, as it increasingly enters country budgets as "sectoral support." Such sectoral and budgetary support may provide recipient governments a greater sense of "ownership," but it may also indicate a deeper incorporation of Western donors into the very fabric of government (Batley, 2021). By emphasizing bilateral ties and encouraging non-interference, China has taken a radically different tack from Western donors, who often try to combine internal and external initiatives. Moreover, there is little proof that the Western strategy of sector-wide plans and direct financial support is better than China's preferred bilateral, project-focused approach.

Furthermore, the Chinese typically pay for a portion of the costs associated with major infrastructure projects, including oil, which may indicate a decreased danger of money being

stolen. One argument in favor of project-oriented development techniques is that they have clear boundaries and make it easier to spot if they are not being carried out, in contrast to alternative systems that would allocate cash into an opaque pool that could be abused during implementation. The US\$2 billion credit line that China's Exim Bank gave the Angolan government in 2014 serves as an illustration of this. In response to Chinese intelligence regarding the embezzlement of Exim loans by officials in the Angolan Ministry of Finance, the Angolan government created the Gabinete de Reconstrução Nacional (GRN; Office for National Reconstruction) to supervise the loan initiative and enhance transparency.

The main sources of funding and assistance are the recommended Chinese businesses chosen under the Chinese government's "Go Out" program from 2002 (Reilly & Na, 2017). These national champions bear a substantial portion of the focus of China's internationalization policy. Nevertheless, the Chinese government finds it increasingly difficult to keep a steady regulatory and strategic watch on businesses as more expand into foreign markets. China's corporate involvement in Africa has been overstated, according to Gill and Reilly (2020), and the China Inc. model calls for more efficiency and consistency. Additionally, smaller, locally focused companies are now engaging in international operations (Reilly & Na, 2017). According to Schuller and Turner (2022), the government views Chinese companies as an essential component of its geopolitical posture in Africa since state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are essential to an all-encompassing foreign economic policy goal. Individual SOE operations, however, frequently deviate from this more comprehensive foreign policy; many of these businesses do not see their position in Africa as a component of a larger geopolitical strategy. As China's policy in Africa becomes more reliant on corporate agents and bureaucratic procedures, contradictions are likely to surface. The State Council, Chinese embassies, the Forum on China–Africa Co-operation (FOCAC), various Ministries such as Finance, Commerce, and Foreign Affairs, Chambers of Commerce, State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs),

and numerous commercial and development banks constitute a complex array of governmental oversight entities executing Beijing's Africa strategy. For instance, McGregor (2019) notes that several Beijing-based diplomatic experts have recently observed that SOEs have frequently appropriated China's diplomatic efforts in Africa, particularly in Sudan, putting financial gain ahead of more important national goals. These oversight bodies do not have direct control over Chinese companies doing business outside.

The current aid structure has been upset by China, but other donors are careful not to offend China too much, so they support and encourage communication and cooperation in its place. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) actively emphasizes achieving Millennium Development Goal 8—establishing a global partnership for development—rather than extensively funding Chinese development projects. The underlying presumption here is that China can follow international assistance sector standards. According to some detractors, China's interactions with Africa ought to be based on Western ideas and methods (Wilson, 2021). However, they support a "dialogic" approach instead of a straight reprimand (Tjønneland et al., 2018). To improve harmony and alignment between donors and beneficiaries from the standpoint of the receivers, China, for instance, signed the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005. China's approach to Africa still mostly focuses on bilateral aid despite this commitment. China's relationship with the African Union and the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which actively promotes and acts as a testing ground for its changing perspectives on world politics, is another matter pertaining to the politics of aid. Despite its proven efficacy, NEPAD promotes a multilateral strategy to address Africa's developmental issues. Although Chinese state-backed investors often shown leniency about accountability, transparency, and investment sustainability, NEPAD has been striving to encourage African states to establish norms and protocols for assessing and monitoring investments. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is being developed for

this reason. Conflicts could arise once more, and it is possible that African countries could be pressured to compete on labour and environmental norms to draw in and keep Chinese investment.

### Concluding Remarks

China's position in international relations underwent a dramatic change during the 1989 Tian'anmen Square events and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis. As a result of its isolation, China started to be seen as a new global force that threatened its Asian neighbours and didn't fit in with the established international system. China's efforts to modernize and improve its military capabilities served to support this view. After successfully gaining membership in organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China has improved its ties to the global system, which has benefited its economy and reputation. This has come about as a result of China's increased participation in multilateral forums. China was considered a "responsible stakeholder" in the pre-existing (Western-style) international order during the first ten years of the twenty-first century.

The China-Africa relationship has garnered scholarly interest, focusing on China's expanding global influence, its approaches to global challenges like poverty alleviation and energy security, and the efforts of African nations to forge novel partnerships with non-traditional donors. Moreover, many see this partnership as a sign of China's preparedness to assume greater diplomatic responsibilities within the framework of the shifting multipolar global order. A primary emphasis of academic inquiry and discourse about the China-Africa connection is China's economic interests in Africa, mostly driven by its heightened desire for natural resources to facilitate rapid industrialization.

China-Africa relations have garnered extensive scholarly attention due to several factors: (i) the swift expansion and present magnitude of the relationship concerning economic assistance



and exchanges; (ii) China's classification as a "developing country," setting it apart from the historically established developed country "partners" with whom African nations have typically engaged; (iii) China's distinctive strategies in navigating relationships with Western powers while establishing development partnerships in Africa; and (iv) the broader geopolitical ramifications of China's economic engagement with developing regions such as Africa, including the challenge posed to Western hegemony.

Along with Brazil, South Africa, Russia, and India, China is one of several significant emerging countries that are strengthening their economic ties with Africa and gaining more clout in the global economy (Zhao, 2023). China, however, is by far the most important and potent participant in this group. It has sometimes assumed the role of a mediator between rich and developing nations or acted as an advocate for the interests of developing countries in international matters, including World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and G20 discussions related to the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. China has enhanced economic connections with other continents and areas inhabited by developing nations, particularly in Latin America and Central Asia, but it has established the most significant partnerships with Africa, home to the highest number of developing countries globally.

China's engagement in Africa serves as an example of the need for greater communication between critical development theory and critical geopolitics/international relations. IR and development theories have traditionally been kept apart by a long-standing division of labour in the social sciences, which holds that the geopolitical sphere is separate and distinct from the supposedly economic and technological dimensions of development (ÓTuathail, 2021; Zhao, 2023). Building on our previous examination of IR and development, an understanding of geopolitics and non-Western cultures' geopolitical viewpoints is crucial to comprehending the formation of modern development theories and practices. According to Slater (2023, p. 224), "we cannot fully comprehend power and knowledge if we remove it from the context of

imperial encounters and the geopolitical history of West/non-West interactions." However, we must not write off aid as a mere "outdated sideline in the geopolitics lexicon," as it is more than a means of achieving historical political goals (Sogge, 2022, p. 10). But since 1945, every major conceptualization of development has been shaped by a geopolitical imagination that shapes and governs its relationships and meanings (Slater, 2019). China actively employs historical geopolitical narratives (such as respect for sovereignty, non-interference in political affairs, and anti-hegemonism) in conjunction with themes of mutuality and commonality (friendship, solidarity, and anti-imperialism) to support its current policies in Africa. China's current growth strategy is inextricably linked to foreign policy issues.

Instead of just talking about aid or development assistance separately, we have conducted a more thorough and complete analysis of the geopolitics of China's involvement in African development. This method is preferable to disentangling the economic and technical aspects of development ideas and practices from their geopolitical dimensions. To do this, it was necessary to sort out the intricacies of China's aid distribution system as well as the connections between aid, trade, and foreign investment—all of which have complicated routes that lead to Africa. Although Davies et al. (2022) distinguish between development assistance and aid, it is not always possible to do so (Brautigam, 2023). In the past, China's rivalry with Taiwan, which also gave aid to the Soviet Union, has made aid a key geopolitical tactic. By increasing their economic and humanitarian assistance and decreasing their arms exports, they hoped to humiliate the Kremlin. As a result, aid became increasingly important in highlighting the weaknesses of China's adversaries, both Western and Soviet. As a result, critical geopolitics of China-Africa interaction has to look at how China's historical readings of international relations and foreign policy narratives have shaped the meanings associated with development and the alliances established with African countries. Because it establishes a discursive space that

validates the current foreign policy, this historical understanding of geopolitics is still essential. Increased interaction with Chinese (and African) ideas on IR is a crucial first step in this regard. Chinese "aid" differs from Western methods even if it is used to forward geopolitical objectives. It is distinguished by its emphasis on bilateral funding allocation and South-South cooperation. "Humanitarian and development aid with influence but without interference" is how China describes its policy, in contrast to the West's coercive approach of enforcing sanctions in addition to military action (Qian & Wu, 2022). The Orientalism in Western narratives that portray China as an exception and the possibility that some aspects of China's development strategy may resemble, if not coincide with, those of Western donors must be recognized in any critical analysis of the geopolitics of China-Africa ties. One possible explanation for the "neo-liberalized" depiction of China's explosive economic growth is that imitation produces slightly similar but strikingly different results.

Furthermore, as China is not the only show in town, Chinese engagement with Africa must be seen from the standpoint of the larger modern race for Africa, which is a part of it. This includes the efforts of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), the European Union (EU), the Turkey-Africa Summit, the India-Africa Forum, and the Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD). Accordingly, "China" and "Africa" must be kept apart because neither group provides a coherent and consistent set of opportunities or motivations (Mojian & Nath, 2023). We also need to learn more about how China interacts with local, national, and international organizations, how it influences African governance models, and how it resolves conflicts. Critical geopolitics must also confront the media discourses on China's involvement in Africa, which are founded on several Orientalist assumptions that essentialize China and oversimplify its aims while remaining completely uncritical of Western relations with the region. The geopolitical images and representations of Chinese and African ideologies, foreign policies, cultures, and the produced imaginaries of China and Africa must be examined post

colonially to do this. This has to do with worries about the dynamics of race and class, especially in African countries.

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