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THE ROLE OF CHINA IN AFRICA:
AN AGENT FOR DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSFORMATION OR JUST NEO-COLONIAL
EXPLOITATION?

By Surgeon Captain (D) G Sidoli, Royal Navy

“The beautiful flower of Sino-African friendship is blooming ... together we will greet a flourishing tomorrow. China, the fastest developing country in the world, is ready to join hands with Africa so that together we can march into the 21st century full of confidence and expectation.”

President Hu Jintao
(13 May 2006)

INTRODUCTION

1. China is fast becoming a developmental ‘champion’ and a beacon of hope for the world’s poorest countries, many of which are to be found on the African continent. In the process it is fundamentally challenging the way in which the development of poor countries is considered; to the point where it is no longer axiomatic that the creation of a political democracy is an absolute requirement for economic and social progress.

2. At the end of the Cold War it seemed that Western ideologies had won the day1 and it was generally accepted that there was a causal and symbiotic relationship between the establishment of a democratic political system and sustained developmental progress. China has now challenged that construct by promoting its own unique model of authoritarian centralized rule and the gradual adoption of market principles, but with the preservation of many large State-controlled enterprises.

3. For a number of differing reasons of self interest the leaders of many developing African countries find this model attractive. They now seem to argue that their countries should reject the failed Western system with all of its demanding conditions and follow the freer Chinese developmental model, pursuing economic growth first and deferring the political reforms until later2.

4. This change of approach is beginning to undermine the West’s developmental efforts in Africa. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) spent years negotiating a transparency agreement with the Angolan government only to be told in 2007 that Luanda was no longer interested in IMF money. Instead they had secured a $2 billion ‘no conditions’ loan from China3. This scenario has been repeated across Africa in countries such as Chad, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe4.

5. In its Foreign Policy pronouncements China has repeatedly reaffirmed its strong advocacy for the ‘sovereignty’ concept and the right of all states to be free of interference in their internal affairs5. This is a position in direct contrast to the West’s growing consensus for the justification of humanitarian intervention6.

6. In the six weeks following the violence associated with the disputed election in Kenya, a procession of high profile diplomats, including the UN Secretary General and the Chair of the African Union visited Nairobi in an attempt to get the parties to negotiate7. Given that China has such a large economic stake in Kenya, and that China’s


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President had visited just before the elections, the absence of an envoy from China was most noteworthy. This was probably not due to China’s indifference to the situation but rather explained by their ideology, a manifestation of the so-called ‘Sovereignty Fetish’ effect.

7. China’s trade with Kenya was around $706 million in 2007 and with China to fall back on President Kibaki could maintain his position even in the face of impending economic sanctions from the West. This delayed, and ultimately undermined, subsequent UN-led negotiations for a compromise agreement.

8. The Chinese establishment has actively defended their ideological stance on the Kenyan election issue. An editorial in a state-controlled Beijing newspaper defended the Kenyan government by stating that;

‘Western style democratic theory simply is not suited to the African situation, but it rather carries the root of disaster. The elections crisis is a prime example of this and there are many more across Africa. Western countries need to leave African states alone’.

9. Beijing is prepared to offer aid and developmental funding to African states with ‘no strings attached’. By contrast Western donors continue to tie their aid to demands for political reform and the protection of Human Rights. The Chinese are avowedly non-judgmental about the political and humanitarian behaviour of the countries with which they choose to deal.

10. However, there appears to be limits to these ‘no interference’ and ‘no strings attached’ policy and Beijing is now seemingly prepared to apply some subtle pressure to its African ‘partner’ states to avoid criticism from the international community. At the centre of international pressure concerning the Darfur situation in the Sudan, Beijing was encouraged to use its political leverage on the Sudanese leadership to better manage a conflict that has reportedly seen the death of 400,000 people and the displacement of two millions.

11. There is little doubt that China could exert considerable influence in this instance as it sells Sudan weapons, buys two third of its oil and has invested $6 billion in its industries. Yet China initially resisted UN Security Council plans for sanctions and the imposition of UN Peacekeepers. As a consequence it was subsequently accused by the Western press of ‘bank rolling genocide’. At first China continued to frustrate UN plans for Darfur by insisting that Peacekeeping forces should only be deployed with the Government of Sudan’s full consent. However, as international pressure grew, and the Beijing Olympics were being branded as the ‘Genocide Games’ by the world’s media, it finally sent an envoy to Sudan to help persuade the government to admit UN Peacekeepers (including Chinese forces) and to initiate negotiations with the rebel forces. This event may mark a small but perhaps significant shift in Chinese ‘no interference’ policy in Africa.

12. Much of the previous strategic analysis of the Chinese presence in Africa has focused China’s ever-deepening economic engagement and the implications for the West in terms of the obvious competition for Africa’s rich energy and mineral resources. This may be a too simplistic parameter for investigating the phenomenon of the Chinese presence in Africa. As the world’s biggest consumers of many commodities, China’s leaders need a steady supply of these resources to continue with its economic ‘miracle’ and it will undoubtedly compete with Western companies to access these commodities in the future. However, the consensus of opinion amongst economists is that since commodity markets are global, the risk of any one consumer cornering exclusive supplies or indeed securing them at a lower price is negligible, even one that is heavily state subsidized such the majority of Chinese enterprises.

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10 China Foreign Policy White Paper 2005
13. An alternative, and perhaps more sophisticated, analysis would be to undertake an examination of China’s ideological challenge in Africa. It is an ideological position that contrasts with and directly undermines the Western approach at a number of differing levels. It is an approach that is finding considerable popularity amongst African leaders and their elites. History may well show that China’s developmental rhetoric in Africa was nothing more than a cynical political manoeuvre to seek competitor advantage in the exploitation of African resources. Alternatively, it might just be that the model for the Chinese economic ‘miracle’ is exportable beyond Asia and it might prove to be the much-needed catalyst required to transform the development of impoverished countries across the African continent.

14. The aim of the paper is to analyze the impact of the deepening ideological influence of China on the African continent, to discuss whether the Chinese political and economic development model could be made to work for African states and to examine what the possible implications are for the West and how these could best be mitigated.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINA IN AFRICA

15. In 2007 China’s President Hu Jintao announced the creation of a new ‘Special Economic Zone’ not on mainland China, but in the copper mining region of Zambia. A combination of export subsidies, tax breaks and investment in roads, railways and shipping would be extended across this zone. The Zambian leader, President Mwanawasa, was obviously delighted with the injection of an estimated $800 million into his economy, announcing this would prove to be a transformational event in the development of his country.

16. The Zambian ‘Special Economic Zone’ was the first of five that the Chinese are intending to establish on the African continent. The second Zone will be in Mauritius and will look to provide Chinese businesses with preferential access to the twenty African states that make up the Common Market of East and South Africa (CMESA). The third Zone will be a transportation hub, probably to be located in the port of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

17. Over the years the China’s engagement with the African continent has gone through a number of distinct phases, ranging from periods of intense activity to periods of relative neglect. Almost immediately after the inauguration of the People’s Republic of China in October 1949 the Communist regime sought to restore China’s historical international position through an increasing involvement with various African states but this aspiration was tempered by the backdrop of China’s own internal political and economic developmental challenges. These early, and limited, African excursions were very much undertaken under the guidance of Stalin’s Soviet Union but as Mao Tse-Tung’s relationship with the Soviet Union deteriorated, China developed its own ‘Three Worlds’ policy, ostensibly acting as the non-aligned ‘champion’ of the developing world. This was the first example of China using Africa as a terrain for ideological competition.

18. At the Bandung Conference in 1955, Mao’s charismatic envoy, Chou En-Lai, wooed the African countries present promising China’s ‘solidarity’ in their struggle for independence from their colonial masters. The level of concrete support to African nations that actually materialized was relatively limited but the low key contribution of the ‘barefoot doctors’ and a variety of Chinese agricultural specialists left a positive impression on the future leaders of a number of nascent African countries. Yet very much as today, there had to be some tangible benefit from this relationship for the Chinese. In this instance Mao used the goodwill of African nations (with their numerical presence and block-vote tendencies) to further his main foreign policy objective of removing the Republic of China from the coveted position as a member of the UN Security Council.

16 Leonard, M., op.cit. p 119.
21 Chang and Halliday, op.cit. p 603
22 Ibid. p 439
19. The onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1968 saw the emergence of a more introspective China and as part of its self-imposed isolation, many Chinese projects with African ‘comrades’ were curtailed. A notable exception was the construction of the TanZam railway in 1975, linking Zambia with the port of Dar es Salaam (thereby freeing President Kaunda’s Zambia from dependence on Rhodesia).

20. It is interesting to note that many of the characteristics of that impressive project still resonate in China’s relationship with Africa today, namely, the use of high profile ‘signature’ projects to cement relationships, a responsiveness to the personal requests of the African elites, the use of state sponsorship in large ‘loss leader’ infrastructure construction projects and a near total reliance on imported Chinese labour23.

21. In the 1980’s Mao’s ‘internationalist’ strategies began to lose ground to the more immediate quest for China’s internal modernization as advocated by the new and more pragmatic leader, Deng Xiaoping. Deng set China off on an internally focused path of gradual capitalist-orientated development, the so-called ‘Yellow River Capitalism’,24 that was largely responsible for producing the phenomenal levels of economic growth witnessed in China over recent years.

22. During this same period Africa was experiencing ever greater social and economic challenges (which may well have been another exacerbating factor in the China’s temporary withdrawal from the African scene 25). The ending of the Cold War left many African leaders looking for alternatives sources of political, diplomatic and military support other than the Soviet Union. The loss of the one of their primary sponsors had created a void that African leaders desperately need to fill.

23. In 1989, the Chinese leadership was taken aback by the action of its own people in the events around Tiananmen Square and also greatly angered by the Western world’s reaction. It prompted an intense debate within the Communist Party hierarchy as to which direction the country should take. Deng Xiaoping’s faction eventually prevailed26, resulting in a recommitment to the existing quasi-capitalist model for the transformation of China’s economy.

24. As part of this period of post- Tiananmen reflection there was also reaffirmation of a foreign policy which was well encapsulated in Deng’s subsequent statement:

‘China needs to observe calmly, secure our position. Hide our capabilities and bide our time. Be good at maintaining a low profile, do not interfere, and never claim leadership’27.

25. Nevertheless, the events of Tiananmen Square left China looking for new allies in the world. In a climate of near-universal condemnation at China’s actions following Tiananmen Square, a number of African leaders grasped the opportunity to rekindle their relationship with China. Leaders from both Angola and Namibia (themselves with less than perfect credentials in terms of democratisation and Human Rights) used this occasion to show their solidarity with China, publically congratulating the Chinese Army on their actions in quelling the ‘rebellion’28.

26. At the same time China’s ruling Communist elite had realised that their very survival depended in ensuring continued high levels of economic growth of their nation. Just as Deng exalted ‘to get rich is glorious’ 29, the Chinese leadership began to appreciate that China’s self-sufficiency in a host of vital areas such as energy, strategic minerals and forestry resources could no longer be maintained. Even its Diaqing oilfields, which Mao had made a byword for China’s industrial zeal30 were now running dry.

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23 Alden, op.cit. p 17.
24 Leonard, op. cit. p 22.
27 Ibid. p 243
28 Taylor, op cit p 457.
29 Leonard, op. cit. p 47.
27. These series of interlinked events resulted in a renewed interest in the African continent, building on the firm foundations China had established in earlier years. The African elites in turn, remembering a China that had been a staunch supporter in the struggle for independence from the colonial influence and against the domination of the Cold War superpowers, welcomed them back with open arms and set the conditions for the relationship that exists today.

28. At this early stage of renewal it would seem that China’s interests in Africa were purely driven by economic considerations, it being such a rich source of all the commodities that they desperately desired. This cynical, commercially-driven approach perpetuated one of the consistent features of Chinese engagement in Africa in that it has shown little discrimination in its choice of friends. As a direct consequence some of China’s more long term partners in Africa are leaders of so-called ‘pariah’ regimes, as labeled by the international community. One prominent, and topical, example is in Zimbabwe, where the Chinese government supported the ZANU-PF movement in its struggle against white rule in Rhodesia. It then provided President Mugabe with decades of political, military and technical support in a relationship that continues to the present day, irrespective of a huge weight of condemnation from the international community.

DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF MODERN-DAY CHINA

29. It would be impossible to achieve a true appreciation of the complexities of China’s multilayered involvement in the African continent without attempting to gain an understanding of modern day Chinese political thinking, especially concerning their engagement with foreign powers and their cultures.

30. However, it is firstly worth conducting a brief examination of the Chinese economic ‘miracle’. Deng Xiaoping used the term ‘Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ to describe China’s political and economic strategy post-Tiananmen Square. As already stated Deng and the other Communist leaders appreciated that their very survival depended on maintaining high levels of economic growth and they were content to compromise some, but not all, of their ideological principles to achieve this aim:

'It does not matter if the cat is black or white. All that matters is that it catches mice.'

31. As a consequence China's economic base transformed itself from a centrally-planned system that was largely closed to international trade to a more market-oriented economy that has a growing private sector and is a major player in the global economy. Reforms started with the phasing out of collectivised agriculture, and expanded to include the gradual liberalisation of prices, fiscal decentralisation, increased autonomy for State enterprises, the foundation of a diversified banking system, the development of stock markets, the growth of the non-State sector, and the opening to foreign trade and investment.

32. The restructuring of the economy and resulting efficiency gains have contributed to a more than tenfold increase in GDP since the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Measured on purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, China in 2007 stood as the second-largest economy in the world after the US (however it must be recognised that in per capita terms the country is still lower middle-income.)

33. An authoritative assessment of the Chinese economy in 2007 suggested that the Chinese government faced several challenges:

- To sustain adequate job growth for tens of millions of workers laid off from state-owned enterprises, migrants, and new entrants to the work force.
- To reduce corruption and other economic crimes.

33 Chang and Halliday, op. cit, p 581.
34 Leonard, op. cit.
36 idem.
• To contain environmental damage and social strife related to the economy’s rapid transformation.

• To add energy production capacity from sources other than coal and oil as its double-digit economic growth increases demand.

• To secure the access to mineral and other commodities to sustain its continued industrial growth.

34. Chinese energy officials in 2006 agreed to purchase five third generation nuclear reactors from Western companies. However these will not be completed until 2018 at the earliest; in the interim it needs to secure reliable external sources of energy to feed its voracious industrial complex. Recent practice would suggest that it seems to have a distinct strategic preference for obtaining from alternative sources other than Middle East.

35. As already stated there can be little doubt that economic necessity was the initial driver for China’s renewal of its relations with African states and China’s future energy requirements suggest that its engagement in Africa will need to continue, or even deepen, in the near to medium term.

36. Nevertheless, within the context of the overall success of ‘Yellow River capitalism’, China regards western policy-makers’ clumsy attempts to manage, or manipulate, its inexorable rise as largely irrelevant. What seems to be of more interest to Chinese strategists is how to manage the inevitable decline of the Western powers so as to best advance Chinese interests. China believes that it is already the major global economic power and awaits the inevitable time when this economic power can be translated into global political power. It would appear that China’s aspiration for a global political ‘reach’ is being realized through its considerable influence across many sub-Saharan African states.

37. China is beginning to appreciate that their model, promising the delivery of rapid economic growth whilst maintaining state control, is rapidly turning into a beacon of hope for developing countries in Africa and around the world. It also appreciates that, almost by default, this is becoming a real challenge to long-established Anglo-Saxon fundamentals in developmental macro-economics.

38. China fully accepts that the sheer pace of its economic progress has brought about some unintended consequences but it now considers that it has provided an alternative route for development that no longer requires the choice between assimilation of the ‘Washington Consensus’ or international isolation. Instead, they are promoting a new model, the so-called ‘Beijing Consensus’ where they believe that national governments can be masters of their own destinies rather than be subjected to the manipulations of international capital and to the values of the Western world.

39. It understands that the Beijing Consensus is an increasingly attractive proposition a period of disillusionment with its Washington counterpart. China will be well aware of the reasons for the backlash against the Washington Consensus: the legacy of the financial turbulence in the 1990s in for example Latin America and Russia and the US’s confrontationist foreign policy.

40. The two ‘Consensus’ positions have obvious structure differences. Whereas the ‘Washington Consensus’ is against economic state intervention, favouring privatisation and economic prudence, the Beijing version promotes the use of public money to drive innovation. It also seeks both to protect public property and promote state-sponsored economic grand projects such as the ‘Special Economic Zones’. However, the most important, and most contentious, difference is Beijing’s lack of an insistence for a liberal-style democratic system of government as a precursor to achieving economic prosperity and social progress.

37 ‘China will buy 4 reactors from US’, New York Times, 18 December 2006
39 Leonard, op. cit, p 56
41 Alden, op cit, p 75.
44 Stiglitz, op cit, p 15.
41. China’s leaders, and the intellectuals who advise them, encourage China to engage with the world but on its own terms, and not to be overwhelmed by the effects of globalisation. They see a globalised world that still maintains the role of national governments in setting their foreign policy agenda, controlling their economy and managing their politics. It is somewhat ironic that globalisation was supposed to bring about the universal victory for the West’s liberal democratic model but instead China’s model of state capitalism may ultimately prove to be the biggest beneficiary45.

42. Chinese preoccupation with sovereignty seems to be sincere and may be explained by review of its political history. For centuries Chinese Emperors were obsessed with keeping China shielded from the barbarian hoards on the other side of the Great Wall, thus preserving national sovereignty and the power of their state. Today’s mentality is not one protecting the country from incursions but one maintaining the internal stability of the Chinese state in the face of secessionist movements in Tibet46 and the rise of a sizable Islamist faction in the Western provinces or Xinjiang and Gansu47. Promoting the Chinese view of sovereignty to the countries of Africa and elsewhere is a natural projection of this policy.

43. China looked on in horror at the series of popular uprisings calling for democracy in a number of states in the former Soviet Union. The Chinese leadership’s reaction was typically straightforward; it decided that it did not want foreign funded NGOs promoting democracy and Human Rights within its territory and severely curtailed their activities within China48. This approach has been largely carried over into their increasingly strained interrelations with African-based NGOs49.

44. A barometer of the importance with which Africa is held in China is that senior Chinese officials have established the diplomatic precedent of beginning each year with a major official visit to Africa. In 2007 the Foreign Minster, Li Zhaoxing, undertook a seven nation tour of Africa. The year before President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao undertook an extended visit to more than a dozen African nations. This last round of visits was preceded by the issue of the first ever Chinese white paper on Sino-African relations, timed for the 50th anniversary of the start of China’s diplomatic relationship with Africa50.

45. At these meetings the Chinese leaders have routinely emphasised their commonality with Africa and their desire to support economic transformation whilst not interfering with the internal affairs of the African states51. In a rather formulaic manner, they seem to reiterate a desire for closer dialogue and cooperation in areas such as peacekeeping missions, medicine and health, and business partnerships.

46. Beyond the rhetoric of these numerous bilateral meetings it is the three Forums on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) summits that have actually provided the framework for Chinese expansion in Africa. The most recent summit (Beijing 2006)52 was by far the most impressive both in terms its ambition. It is apparent that the Chinese leadership expended considerable effort in ensuring a successful outcome and, by all accounts, the African leaders enthusiastically embraced the vision set out in the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan53. The Action Plan set out a target based plan for greater cooperation in several major policy areas, namely, political and economic cooperation, cooperation in international affairs, and cooperation in social development. More specifically, the Action Plan committed China to a development fund of $5billion to be made available to support reputable Chinese companies investing in Africa. As an integral part of this plan China up-rated its direct aid to Africa by agreeing

45 Leonard, op.cit.

to cancel all existing loans due by end of 2005, both to heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs) and to those least developed countries (LDCs) that had strong diplomatic ties with China. This was the only condition that China applied to their loan cancellation initiative.

47. The FOCAC Action Plan should be put into the backdrop of the considerable investment to African states that China has already provided. According to the World Bank, Beijing’s Export-Import Bank has provided a total of $800 million in concessional loans for 55 projects in two dozen African countries. The World Bank study further estimates that as of the end of 2006 the total amount of Export-Import Bank (ExIm) loans is valued at $12.5 billion, mainly concentrated in Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

48. Of course there are many hard commercial interests at play amidst all this largesse. China’s energy needs continue to rise and oil imports from Africa account for 30% of China’s total external oil dependence. China’s stated intent of ‘developing and rationally exploiting Africa’s natural resources’ is based on the knowledge that Africa has about 8% of the world’s proven oil reserves. Since 2003 Angola has been the leading African supplier to China. Indeed in 2006 it accounted for over 50% of China’s oil imports becoming China’s biggest external supplier. New off-shore discoveries in the Gulf of Guinea are expected to provide one in four of every new barrels that enter the marketplace over the next few years. Chinese oil companies are competing successfully with their Western counterparts to secure extraction rights, and to construct pipelines and refineries in this region.

49. Indeed, a reoccurring pattern emerges once these impressive ‘partnership’ arrangements have been agreed in concept at the multilateral level (FOCAC) and in detail at the bilateral level. China’s state-controlled commodities companies move in and secure access to valuable resources that before had been in under the influence of Western conglomerates. Riding on the wave of diplomatic goodwill their speed of penetration of the resource market is nothing short of remarkable. On the back of this resource exploitation are a number of Chinese construction companies who, through their initial objective of facilitating the access for resource extraction, have then broadened their exposure in the African construction market by successfully competing for a range of the civil projects, such as hospitals, schools and sporting stadia.

50. Beijing’s activist industrial strategy uses public money with some foreign private investment to build large capital intensive industries across Africa. This would appear to have impressed their African partners to the point where they are reversing some of their economic policies, especially the privatisation programmes demanded by the World Bank in 1990s. Like China they are beginning to believe that the large State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) can produce transformational public profits which can be used in national interest. Rather more cynically the ruling elites in Africa also probably appreciate that by retaining control of these enterprises they can prevent politically motivated entrepreneurs from challenging their position.

51. The remarkable rise in commodity prices in recent years has further empowering the leaders of resource rich African nations, and the election of independent-minded populist leaders has probably hardened their anti-Western ‘conditions’ stance. Ultimately however it is the example of stunning success of China’s economy that has been the major attraction for African leaders.

52. It is important to acknowledge that the Chinese penetration of African states is not all conducted in economic and commercial areas, but has additional educational aspects. China announced a commitment to make available 100 agricultural experts to set up demonstration sites and send 300 volunteers under the Chinese Young

56. Broadman, op cit. p34.
60. Alden, op cit.
62. CHEM meeting, Paris, 28 May 2008
Volunteers Serving Africa\textsuperscript{63} programme to support education and sports related subjects. On the broader educational front China has undertaken to train 15,000 African professional in the next three years, build 100 rural schools and double the number of scholarship available for African students in Chinese universities. Beijing has also sought to expand educational partnerships with Africa universities by creating three Confucius Institutes in Kenya, Rwanda and South Africa\textsuperscript{64}.

53. Another almost unnoticed aspect amidst all this high-level penetration is that many African nations are experiencing a wave of unprecedented immigration from individual Chinese citizens. Their reputation as hard-working, small scale entrepreneurs is manifest across the African continent as settlers are set up corner stores, restaurants and laundry businesses\textsuperscript{65}. Exporting Chinese workers to Africa to work in both large and small scale enterprises may be a solution to one of China’s key economic challenges, that of rising unemployment at home\textsuperscript{66}.

54. Finally, it is worth commenting that with its increasing personal wealth China is set to become one of the world’s largest outbound tourist markets with a projection of 100 million Chinese travelers by 2020\textsuperscript{67}. In 2005 only 110,000 Chinese tourists visited Africa\textsuperscript{68} but China has now actively promoted Africa as a tourist destination, with two dozen Africa states designated as official tourist destinations for their citizens.

THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

55. African nations have found the way that Beijing has maintained control of its own destiny as impressive as its economic growth. China is perceived to have freed itself from the influence of Western financial institutions and is confident enough to deal with, for example, US pressure to devalue its currency on its own terms and in its own time. In African countries that increasingly believe that they have merely exchanged their past colonial masters for the overbearing diktats of the IMF\textsuperscript{69} this is a most attractive and enviable position which they would aspire to duplicate in their own countries. African nations may wish to welcome the world’s investment and trade but not necessarily welcome Western values or be overwhelmed by the forces of globalization.

56. It would be fair to state that the predominant African view on China’s considerable and deepening evolvement in their continent remains very positive. However, on a deeper analysis of the African perspective it would appear that a number of tensions have surfaced in China-Africa relationship. These will need to be addressed if a mutually empowering and developmental relationship is going to prove sustainable in the longer term.

57. It has become apparent that specialist African knowledge and expertise in China’s policy advisory community is lacking. As its relationship with Africa becomes more complex China will need a far more comprehensive understanding of their African partner states. To date, few Chinese scholars or policy ‘think tank’ specialists have the opportunity for extended travel or research in Africa. This has resulted in a situation where the Chinese seem to be ‘blind’ (or perhaps intentionally ignores) African public opinion on a range of important issues directly related to their presence. This lack of a deep understanding has resulted in some relatively ‘ad hoc’, and ultimately unsatisfactory, Chinese solutions to local African challenges\textsuperscript{70}.

58. There are other, more practical, obstacles to further Chinese influence and integration. Unlike English and French, Chinese is not widely spoken in Africa. Chinese diplomats and entrepreneurs will need to master these languages in order to properly progress their ambitions with their African partners. The 2006 FOCAC Beijing Action Plan called for increased exchanges between African and Chinese media in order to help address this cultural and linguistic divide\textsuperscript{71}.

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Chinese Young Volunteers Serving Africa’, People’s Daily Beijing, 5 August 2005.
\textsuperscript{66} CIA Year Book, op cit
\textsuperscript{67} www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/ece
\textsuperscript{68} http://english.sina.com/life/1/2006/.html
\textsuperscript{69} Stiglitz, op cit
\textsuperscript{71} FOCAC Action Plan 2005.
59. Furthermore, it would seem the Chinese have a policy of avoiding any engagement with the many emergent Non-Governmental Groups (NGOs) in Africa. African NGOs are now less constrained by restrictions on freedom of speech and have demonstrated their influence across a number of important policy areas such as the independence in the media, labour relations and Trades Unions, anti-corruption initiatives, championing Human Rights and supporting the empowerment of women. There is an awareness that China has failed to recognize, or at least respect, the considerable role of these organizations play in policy making deliberations across a number of African states.

60. Probably the most serious manifestation of these cultural and linguistic misunderstandings occurred in the Zambian mining belt in 2005. Local Zambian employees complained about low wages and the lack of any safety protocols in the mine. There was obviously a communication problem with the Chinese managers, probably exacerbated by the fact that the local Trade Unions and NGOs had been banned from operating at the mine. Unofficial strikes and civil unrest resulted in the Chinese management shooting indiscriminately into a crowd of workers, killing five of them. The event sparked a national debate in Zambia on the conduct of the Chinese and the opposition candidate in the national election built his campaign around the anti-Chinese sentiment. He was relatively successful, winning 28% of the vote.

61. It is noteworthy that the Chinese engagement in Africa has not taken into account the influence of religion in African society or made any effort to adopt an approach for developing relationships with religious leaders. The African Catholic and Protestant communities are amongst the fastest growing Christian groups in the world and Africa’s 300 million Muslims are organized into many complex and dynamic communities. Both the Muslims and the Christians have a strong voice on matters of African public debate. They provide an important range of social services, especially in matters of education and healthcare. Furthermore, these faith communities maintain extensive linkages with powerful counterpart organizations outside of Africa. To date, China has largely chosen to ignore Africa’s religiosity but it can not afford to do so for much longer without aliening this powerful force in African society.

62. The massive deterioration of the China’s own environment in terms of air pollution, soil erosion, and the steady fall of the water table has been a well publicised ‘side effect’ of its remarkable economic progress. Resource rich African nations are becoming increasingly sensitive to the environmentalist agenda and are beginning to place demands on Chinese conduct vis à vis the environment. In 2006, for example, the Government of Gabon discovered that Sinopec, a Chinese state-owned oil firm did not have the required environmental permits and ordered it to halt a big drilling project within a National Park.

63. From the African perspective one of the most contentious, and most consistent, features of Chinese investment in Africa is the preferred use of Chinese labourers rather than local workers. Thousands of Chinese labourers and engineers were brought in to build Ethiopia’s $300 million Takazee Dam, for example. In Sudan, Chinese workers constructed an extensive oil pipeline and it is estimated that 74,000 Chinese remain in the country even after its completion. Chinese workers are also being used in Namibia, Zimbabwe and a host of other African states. This has produced a ground-swell of resentment based on an appreciation that recruiting workers from China provides little long-term benefit to local people;

You end up with a stadium, but there’s no knock-on effect, no financial benefit. It all goes back to China. One of the biggest demands in Africa is for jobs because much of the continent is

72 Leonard, op cit
73 Trofimov, Y., ‘New Management in Africa: China’s expansion begins to stir resentment’, Wall Street Journal, 2 February 2007
78 Alden, op cit
inhabited by young people. The Chinese are bringing in their own people, and they are paying lip-service to employing Africans.\(^79\)

64. It is paradoxical that just as the interests of China and their state sponsored businesses deepen in Africa, it is evitable that Beijing’s ‘no political strings attached’ and their policy of absolute respect for sovereignty will be subjected to mounting pressure, not least from fellow Africans. A recent illustration of these tensions was when the African Union joined the international outcry about the humanitarian abuses in Sudan’s Darfur region.\(^80\)

65. Sooner or later China will also need to confront issues of endemic corruption, absence of law and order, and targeted attacks on private energy and other business sector interests. The ‘no interference’ maxim will come under further pressure in these scenarios and yet just one ill-advised Chinese incursion into the internal affairs of an African country may lose for ever the Chinese the moral high-ground amongst its African partners.

66. There is a growing and seemly genuine consensus in African states around a number of anti-corruption initiatives. The Chinese business community diaspora in Africa are considered to be high risk in respect to bribery and counterfeiting amongst other controversial practices.\(^81\) The Chinese Ministry of Commerce has exerted some degree of influence with regards to this reputational risk for the state-controlled enterprises\(^82\) at home but their influence is minimal over the large numbers of entrepreneur independents active in Africa. At this present time China makes no attempt to subject its mining industries to the inspection of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.\(^83\) This is contrary to the policies of the African Union and other African regional economic groups.

67. It is axiomatic that many impoverished African nations would accept developmental aid from whatever source it came. To date, Chinese Government departments have resisted sharing any detail on its donor activity in Africa with other international and bilateral donors who are involved in African aid. China’s approach makes little attempt to avoid duplication and integrating its assistance with key organizations such as the IMF and World Bank.\(^84\) However, there seems to be a growing appreciation in Africa, certainly from the African Union, that uncoordinated aid donations can be counterproductive in the longer term. This has led to a mounting concern that this may be undermining the overall debt relief strategies and there as been some, limited, African support for the US Treasury Department belief that ‘China is a rogue creditor practicing opportunistic lending’.\(^85\) Whilst not averse to bypassing the World Bank and IMF most African nations would still have reservations about alienating the US administration.

68. Finally, there is a sense that African nations are increasingly confused, and to a degree frustrated, by the very nature of China’s broad multilayered approach. At present it is far from clear which body in the Chinese system has overall coordination of its Africa ‘enterprise’. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce, the energy and extractive conglomerates, the large-scale construction companies or the other important business actors are all involved. As Chinese enterprises invariably become more market-orientated and independently minded they will become primarily concerned with the profit-making aspects of their international operations. It would not be unreasonable for African leaders to postulate that this could well contradict China’s broader transformational agenda in Africa and thereby revert to a more traditional exploitative neo-colonial model.

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79 http://www.ethicalcorp.com/content, accessed 08 April 08.
WHERE IT COULD ALL GO WRONG FOR CHINA

69. History would suggest that there are a number of constraints which affected external bodies wishing to engage with Africa and that these constraints have proved remarkably resistant to change. There are some authorities who contending that, in spite of its dramatic appearance on the African scene, China will ultimately conform to this pattern of constraints rather than providing a new model for transformation and development. If China remains permanently engaged as a major player in Africa, (which is looking increasingly likely), it will need to go through the same difficult learning processes that other outside powers have experienced in the past and are likely to resort to similar solutions; ultimately making and repeating the same mistakes.

70. Africa has proved to be a difficult space to both organize and to govern and the difficulties which have affected both the colonial powers and modern African states will undoubtedly remain as an enduring back-drop to the Chinese presence. African states and societies have historically proved extremely intractable to grand projects of social and economic reform, far more so than China itself and other Asian states.

71. It has been suggested that Africa’s innate intractability originates from the enduring features of the continent’s demography. With populations unevenly spread over extremely large land areas established territorial states have been difficult to maintain and models of social organization and governance appropriate to the management of densely populated countries, such as China, have given away to an environment where personal pre-eminence, genealogical relationships and religious authority have instead played a major role.

72. Africa’s past exposure to global economics and international systems of government have often resulted in some form of exploitation of local populations normally under the premise of a racial superiority over the indigenous peoples. Despite the public rhetoric claiming that China and Africa are equal partners of the ‘developing world’ this is not at all substantiated by the economic data. There is no member state of the African economy that can even begin to engage with China on equal financial terms, so in this respect China is no different to Africa’s past colonial masters. African attempts to break out of primary production have been undermined by the low-cost, efficient Chinese industrial machine. An objective analysis beyond the transformational ‘solidarity’ rhetoric would suggest there is no plausible way in which African can duplicate the astonishing pace of economic development experienced by China. Any good will that Africa feels for their Chinese partners is likely to be undermined in the face of their continued economic structural divergences.

73. As a consequence of the enduring inequalities across a succession of colonial and post-colonial presences African leaders have pragmatically developed coping mechanisms of accommodation. These mechanisms have been well documented by Bayart, who uses the term ‘extraversion’ to describe African elites using the resources provided by external actors to consolidate their own authority. Bayart suggests that the reason the Chinese have been so welcomed by African states is not that they are a beacon of developmental hope but rather because of the fact that they have followed this well-established pattern and filled the vacuum created by the end of the Cold War. Bayart believes that, rather than providing a developmental alternative to the governance doctrine of the ‘Washington Agenda’, China’s role has been to merely reinforce the old system.

74. One area of China’s Africa strategy which will invariably come under further challenge is its position on the sacrosanct nature of ‘sovereignty’ and the rejection of western-style ‘conditionalities’. It may well be that China’s position on this issue is genuine, given its own
internal past experience but it is, nonetheless, a paradoxical doctrine for such a powerful state to adopt with its ever more complex relationships with a number of weak and failing states. In the Cold War era the ‘sovereignty’ argument was in practice a pretext for the powerful ‘sponsor’ maintaining control over its investment by unconditionally supporting the existing elite. It became apparent to the key actors in the Cold War, and it is likely to become evident to the latest arrivals in the African scene, that this is a high risk strategy in a number of respects. One obvious problem is that might lock China into a relationship with an unpopular leader, for example President Mugabe, whose eventual demise or removal results in a policy of the new regime automatically reversing its external partnerships. In failing African states weapons can be easily lost from the control of the state to become a strong destabilizing influence to the very regimes they were meant to sustain. It cannot be long before China realises that the short-term gain from its arms trade with African states could compromise the more important priority of maintaining secure lines of supply from the sources mineral and energy extraction to their port of dispatch to China.

75. Another lesson is to be learnt from the potentially counterproductive impact of China’s developing arms trade with Africa. In failing African states weapons can be easily lost from the control of the state to become a strong destabilizing influence to the very regimes they were meant to sustain. It cannot be long before China realises that the short-term gain from its arms trade with African states could compromise the more important priority of maintaining secure lines of supply from the sources mineral and energy extraction to their port of dispatch to China.

76. This is then the very scenario where the ‘Beijing Consensus’ becomes seriously challenged; a partner state that fails to ensure internal control in certain areas of their territory and China’s vested interests, for example mining concerns, then being reduced to making deals with local actors, which may well be criminal groups or separatist groups looking to further undermine the state. The unenviable position of many Western oil companies in the Niger delta provides a good illustration of this difficult scenario.

77. At a certain point in time the Chinese African footprint is likely to come under moral pressure due to the narrow nature of its engagement. In China’s denial of the social justice agenda it runs the risk of presenting itself to an increasingly aware African population as a short-term interloper fixated only on economic profiteering. In its rush to expand it commercial footprint, China has re-established an era of ‘prestige projects’ which have little benefit to local people. The Chinese state-owned Jiangxi International, built $4 million worth of new housing in Ethiopia, after a flood left hundreds destitute but instead of accommodating the homeless, the blocks were used by military officials. This amoral approach was commented on by a Jiangxi manager in an interview with the Wall Street Journal;

"It was an internal political decision and so long as the Ethiopian officials are happy, our goal is fulfilled."

78. There are also international constraints associated with China’s incursion into the African economic landscape. China has firmly placed itself in between Africa’s existing relationship with the West, in effect converting it into a triangular relationship. It has not empowered new diversification in the African exports market but rather diverted these goods away from the Western economies.

79. The ideological challenge to the West is closely linked to China’s economic positioning. Logic would suggest that this positioning will, ultimately, be counter-productive for all parties concerned and that a more collaborative, multilateral approach would be to everybody’s interest.

A MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH?

80. Like China, the West has started a new expansive phase of engagement with Africa. A number of Signature White House initiatives have focused on Africa: the President’s five year $15 billion AIDS Relief Plan, the Malaria Initiative looking at trans-continent Health gains and the Millennium Challenge Corporation which looks to

96 ‘West’s oil giants meet Local Militants,’ Daily Telegraph, 30 April 2008.
98 idem
100 ‘Bush’s Aids Plan is undermined by morality clauses,’ The Guardian, 16 April 2008.
provide financial rewards for states that are well governed and performing well economically. The EU is also attempting to increase its ideological influence in Africa with the eight interlinked objectives of the EU-Africa Partnership strategy.\textsuperscript{101}

81. It would be reasonable to anticipate that developments in Africa, especially in the context of weak state institutions, their high levels of conflict and their economic fragility, will repeatedly test the West’s and China’s ideological positions. It will be important to take into account such differences of ideology, past mutual suspicions and misunderstandings and competitive tensions when looking to negate the risk of a West-China clash in Africa.\textsuperscript{102}

82. However, there appears to be a movement both within the US and the EU for the adoption of a more collaborative ‘China in Africa’ agenda which seeks to manage potential ‘hot spots’ and mitigate them preemptively. For the West, such an anticipatory approach to issues regarding the Chinese in Africa will demand a greater openness to engage and involve China in multilateral forums, such as the UN, the EU-Africa Partnership and the Bretton Woods financial institutions. The diplomatic process of consensus building may well prove to be frustrating and lengthy but could prove to provide long term benefits for all parties concerned.

83. This consensus could be formed by focusing on exiting shared interests such as the control of infectious diseases and Public Health initiatives. There could also be a convergence of interests in the military sphere, in matters of conflict prevention, peacekeeping efforts and counterterrorism. Differences persist in respect to Darfur but in respect to Al Qaeda’s presence in Africa there are no significant differences of opinion. A global counterterrorism strategy that involves the Horn of Africa programme\textsuperscript{103} and the Trans-Sahara counterterrorism initiative would be welcomed by China. The Chinese are also likely to welcome the US’s plans for improved maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea as there are obvious benefits for Chinese energy companies. In return there are some signs from Beijing that China may be prepared to further increase its Peacekeeping commitments in Africa.

84. An excellent catalyst to promote this new collaborative environment would be to offer formal membership, or a standing invitation, for Chinese officials to attend the G8 summits, where they would be able to contribution to concerted planning on both debt relief and aid. In the past the Chinese leadership has been lukewarm about the prospect of joining the G8, believing that joining it would not serve their national interests.\textsuperscript{104} It viewed the United Nations as the only international organisation with legitimacy. However, under the presidency of Hu Jintao there has been a perceptible change and China has been responding positively to invitations to G8 meetings.\textsuperscript{105}

85. It is accepted that closer collaboration over debt sustainability is a key area in developing a meaningful tripartite relationship. China’s debt relief has been challenged by a past President of the World Bank,\textsuperscript{106} who expressed apprehension that many of Africa’s poorest countries may be incurring excessive new debt as the result of unconditional loans made by Chinese banks and that they may effect the long-term impact of the HIPC debt relief initiative concluded at the time of the G8 summit in Gleneagles.\textsuperscript{107} However, Beijing seems to be awakening to the long term negative implications of its lending strategy. African debt sustainability was high on the agenda at the inaugural session of the Strategic Economic Forum 2006\textsuperscript{108} bilateral between US and Chinese policy makers. Washington’s attempt to engage the Chinese, bilaterally and later multilaterally through the World Bank, should be the first steps to ensure that the African states reap the benefit of a properly coordinated debt relief programme, whilst avoiding a new build up of unsustainable debt.

86. One of the features of the China-Africa relationship which greatly frustrates the West is the perceived lack of transparency associated with

\textsuperscript{101} EU-Africa Partnership Strategy, 2005.
\textsuperscript{102} Meeting with S Donnan, 26 March 2008
\textsuperscript{103} US Combined Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOR)
\textsuperscript{104} Leonard op cit
\textsuperscript{105} http://www.opendemocracy.net/ globalization-G8/china_2689.jsp, accessed 8 April 2008
\textsuperscript{106} P Wolfowitz statement, 13 April 2006.
\textsuperscript{107} G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, 2005.
China’s business dealings. A degree of greater transparency would be of undoubted long-term benefit to China and the objective could be achieved through China’s enrollment into the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). A Non Governmental Organization which aspires to a greater transparency in the affairs of the extractive industries, China’s participation in EITI would assist a number of African countries in fighting corruption in their energy sectors. Furthermore, logic would suggest that if China’s wish to develop more technological efficiency in their extractive industries they may be advised to join forces in business partnerships with established Western companies working in Africa. There are those who argue that Chinese companies may also need to explore the establishment of public-private partnerships as a means of building more acceptance amongst the African communities in which they are operating and to help defuse any cultural tensions.

87. As part of its emerging peace and security challenges China will need to consult more on joint solutions, involving other key players such the African Union, The European Union and the US. The formation of the EU–Africa strategic partnership for Peace and Security and the US’s new Africa Command will make this integration easier. Immediate attention needs to be focused on the worsening situation spreading inland from the Horn of Africa, from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan to Chad. It would be in China’s interests to have a collaborative approach to address security challenges emerging in the Niger delta, Angola, Zimbabwe and the maritime security of energy and raw materials shipments off the east coast of Africa. It is reassuring to note that the role of Chinese military in African peacekeeping operations has increased to the point where it now one of the largest contributors to the UN with over 1,600 troops or policemen working in 11 missions across Africa.

88. African health issues are a common concern between the international community and China. These issues would include combating HIV/AIDS, steeping up the fight against malaria and TB. A truly international approach is required to establish pan-African prevention and management regime for outbreaks of avian influenza and other such deadly infectious illnesses. It is not unreasonable to foresee a number of mutually beneficial ‘quick wins’ to a more collaborative healthcare approach; Western and medical NGOs could provide valuable experiential in advice to the Chinese building of medical centres and the Chinese could promote a greater uptake of their traditional medicines and anti-malaria drug, Artemisin.

89. Addressing the perceived inequalities on trade between China and African nations requires a greater dialogue between China and the African regional economic blocks; these include the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

90. To date Africa’s growing civil society movements and organizations have been largely neglected by China. Working with civil society organizations, both locally and internationally, will engender a greater understanding of domestic issues and serve as a sensitive barometer of the reactions to China’s growing presence. Such interactions should include supporting environmental groups, constructive engagement with Trades Unions and employment safety organizations, religious groups, Healthcare groups, Human Rights associations including women rights groups. One positive first step that China could take over the issue of societal governance is the unequivocal endorsement of the African Union’s Charter on Human and People’s Rights.

115 Alden, ‘China on Africa’, op.cit, pp., 84-86.
91. Finally, the FOCAC summits are internationally recognized as powerful forums for driving the Chinese agenda with its African partners but what may be lacking a permanent secretariat to drive and coordinate its deepening partnership. This would provide an opportunity for African leaders to have more input into shaping the nature of Chinese assistance so to best meet African needs. China’s interests would also be served by such a body that it would help prioritise its ambitious assistance goals and helps legitimize Chinese policies by more regular consultations with its African counterparts. Furthermore, a permanent secretariat provides third parties, such as donor NGOs or the World Bank an appropriate route by which to coordinate their efforts.117

CONCLUSIONS

92. The developmental needs of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa remain as acute as ever and are likely to remain a major challenge for the foreseeable future.118 It is increasingly acknowledged that Western attempts at transformation have largely failed African nations and as a consequence Western influence in Africa is on the wane.119

93. Gone are the days when IMF officials compromised national sovereignty by telling African leaders how to run their countries by controlling lifelines to capital investment and access to foreign aid. With the advent of the Chinese, IMF officials struggle to attract the attention of even the poorest countries in Africa.120 For the time being at least, the Beijing Consensus is proving far more palatable to African leaders than its Washington counterpart.

94. Freedom House has used the term ‘freedom stagnation’ to explain the fact that the number of free countries in the world has not increased in the last few years (the report particularly highlights the disappointing performance of African nations).121 This cannot all be due to China’s influence, but China has certainly helped prove the ‘sequencing myth’ i.e. that political reform must come before economic progress.

95. If the ‘universalisation of Western liberal democracy’ in Africa has indeed stalled due to China’s influence it is probably only as a side effect of their hard-nosed commercial approach. There can be little doubt that the original raison d’être for their re-engagement with African was to exploit their resource wealth. However, the story of the next twenty years may be of a self-confident China reaching out and more obviously trying to shape African nations in its own image. China already aims to plant its own growth model into the African continent by building a series of industrial hubs, the “Special Economic Zones’.

96. China’s linear ascent to superpower status may not be assured, and indeed, it is possible that its model of State capitalism, open markets and a closed political system may not survive the challenges ahead. However, whilst the Western world is preoccupied with attempting to mould China’s ever deepening relationship with Africa, it is probable that in Beijing, a discussion is taking place about how China can best capitalise upon the declining influence of the West across Africa and use it to advance Chinese interests and values.

97. The success of the Beijing model of government intervention has raised the morale of authoritarian regimes across Africa. Logic dictates that Beijing would have little interest in actively promoting authoritarian regimes but, by adopting a neutral approach that puts its national interest first, it would appear that almost by default China is emerging as the champion of autocracy in Africa, creating new options for dictators who previously were dependant upon those who insisted on Human Rights progress.122

98. China’s so-called ‘Sovereign Fetish’ approach has been directly challenged by events the Sudan, Kenya and Zimbabwe and the evidence would suggest that China will not risk the full

force of international criticism to support the regimes of its less than savory African partners. The fact that it has shifted its tactics slightly does not mean that China will ever be a champion of free multi-party democracy and Human Rights. After all why would it wish to promote rights for Africans that its own citizens do not enjoy?

99. In spite of China’s mantra of ‘non-interference’ in the affairs of sovereign states, pragmatism would suggest that China will, in the future, chose to act within the mandate of an international or regional consensus to deal with political or security crises within its partner African states, especially when its own interests are being compromised. The special relationship between China and Africa will probably continue and deepen, but logic would suggest that China will have to adapt to circumstances and modify its policies on Africa, in similar ways to previous external actors in Africa.

100. As a result if an international consensus emerges which is properly legitimised through, for example, the UN Security Council, one of the UN Operating Agencies, or the African Union, Beijing may well be less obstructive to interventions, but still keep a relatively low profile in the coercive process.

In this new competitive environment Western policy makers will need to adapt their own ideologies to introduce more flexibility if they want to protect and promote their liberal democratic ideals. There is a strong perception amongst African leaders that the western model of developmental transformation, with all the associated conditions, has largely failed them.123

101. It is suggested that a more multilateral collaborative approach is urgently required by all parties, with initial cooperation potentially focused on areas of mutual interest such as counterterrorism, healthcare and partnerships in the extractive industries. The danger is that with humanitarian crises, developmental tensions and security concerns, the West (the US in particular) will not allow China the time for its African policy to mature and move into this more collaborative phase. That would be an error which could result in potentially serious consequences for all the major actors.

102. None of this is intended to down play the changes that China has brought about for some aspects of live of the African scene, especially in terms of the enormous advances in African infrastructure that China has instigated.124 However, China is unlikely to fundamentally change or transform the quality of life of the vast majority of Africans without coordinating its developmental agenda with the broader international community.


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