

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STRATEGIES OF EUROPEAN COLONIALISM AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT: *The China-Africa Cooperation Forum has led to a steady expansion in bilateral trade. Criticism has been directed at China's expansion into Africa for its promotion of unstable governments and its exploitation of the continent's resources. However, the effects of European colonialism continue to be felt in the form of economic dominance, political interference, and military occupation, despite the fact that the majority of African states achieved independence between 1945 and 1960. China's global strategy to exert influence is significantly influenced by its involvement in Africa, which is characterized by economic investments, political influence, and social dominance. European colonialism and Chinese involvement in Africa share similarities; however, they employ distinct methodologies. While operating within the confines of international conventions and its historical status as a developing nation, China implements indirect strategies, including bilateral trade agreements and investments. The historical European colonialism and Chinese involvement in Africa are compared in this study. China's involvement is devoid of direct political and economic authority over African nations and geographical dominance. Using a comparative approach, the study explores the involvement of European colonialism and China in Africa, with a focus on the similarities, differences, observations, and conclusions. The soft power strategy of China, which encompasses trade, investment, financial aid, and cultural influence, is in stark contrast to the methods of assimilation and direct governance employed by European colonizers in Africa. In order to prevent being depicted in a negative light by the West, China's foreign policy toward Africa prioritizes history and peaceful ascension, which are rooted in historical ties that date back to the Han dynasty. The study concludes that, despite the fact that European colonialism and Chinese engagement in Africa share some similarities, they employ distinct strategies.*

Keywords: *European Colonialism; Chinese engagement; Politics; Economics; Strategy;*

1. Introduction

For decades, Sub-Saharan Africa has been neglected due to limited economic growth, political instability, and inadequate inclusive development [Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021]. Historically, Europe has assisted marginalized African nations, but corporate sector engagement remains minimal. Notwithstanding economic expansion in the 2000s, poverty, inadequate governance, and income inequality endure [Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021]. China identified a gap in the colonial relation with African countries, and Sino-African ties strengthened in the 2000s as China made substantial investments in infrastructure and established new markets for low-value manufactured goods in African countries, notwithstanding their perceived infrastructural inadequacies and political instability [Zhao, 2017]. Most recently, China's

2021-25 plan seeks to diminish reliance on export markets for economic growth via a dual circulation approach; yet, future dependency on global markets is probable [Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021]. China's foreign policy is guided by its *guanxi* approach, which emphasizes South-South cooperation for reciprocal advantages. This idea is seen in China's 2021 White Paper on International Development Cooperation, which prioritizes human resources over physical infrastructure, focusing on capacity building, livelihood programs, volunteerism, and interpersonal connectivity [Mulakala & Hongbo, 2021].

China entered African nations quickly thanks to its quick thinking and pragmatism in areas including infrastructure, trade, finance, business formation, and military assistance [Jing, 2017], even though European colonialism in Africa has ancient landmarks. Colonialism is the direct

subjugation of one nation by another, predicated on the authority of a foreign power [Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012]. Its aims encompass political supremacy and exploitation. Colonialism in Africa transpired from 1800 to the 1960s, coinciding with transformations in European production [Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012]. Conventional European development policies concerning Africa emphasized assistance transfers; nevertheless, insufficient coordination between European entities and African governments obstructs the execution and enforcement of European development cooperation; the absence of good communication and the failure to inquire about the needs and priorities of African governments impeded successful collaboration [Tadesse & Maalim, 2020]. However, the European Union continues to be the foremost provider of official development assistance to Africa, notwithstanding the increasing trade and development collaboration between China and Africa [Moyo, 2009]. Historically, European nations have served as benefactors to African countries; nevertheless, contemporary challenges such as political turmoil, climate change, and ecological destruction have necessitated a reevaluation of African-European relations. The EU seeks partners committed to a green transition and mitigating climate change [Moyo, 2009]. Recently, the EU is formulating an extensive strategy for a long-term strategic engagement with the African Union, emphasizing poverty alleviation, political discourse, private sector advancement, trade, inclusive growth, and sustainable development objectives. This strategy enhances other international and bilateral methods [Boidin, 2020]. The collaboration between European and African partners encountered obstacles stemming from bureaucratic structures and conflicting goals [Boidin, 2020]. Concerns about financial resources are also raised by new European strategies that ignore failed states in favor of reform partnerships. Different political objectives further exacerbate Europe's absence of an authoritatively coordinated development cooperation policy [Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021]. Using comparative analysis, this study compares European colonialism to contemporary Chinese involvement in Africa. Comparative research in political science analyzes systems, organizations, and processes at various scales, facilitating the description of systems, presentation of theoretical concepts, and anticipation of future outcomes [Stafford, 2013].

2. European colonialism in Africa

The African continent has been pivotal in human evolution, with colonialism commencing in the 14th century and concluding in the 19th century, resulting in 90% of the continent being colonized by European nations [Munyai, 2020, p. 4]. Colonialism was propelled by cultural hegemony and resource exploitation, motivated by the demand for raw materials and natural resources [Ocheni & Nwankwo 2012, p.46]. The motivations were economic, political, and psychological, as colonists aimed to stimulate the industrial revolution, dominate the African economy and trade governance, supplant the barter system with a monetary system, and promote the slave trade [Bulhan 2015, p.239-256; Ocheni & Nwankwo 2012, p.48]. The impediment of African development is blamed on colonialism. Despite its conclusion, inequitable trade agreements and unstable governmental institutions have been defining features of African history [Munyai, 2020]. However, Agenda 2063, which is an extensive framework, explores key domains for Africa's global impact, tackling the repercussions of colonial policies and the obstacles in utilizing natural resources for advancement and guaranteeing control over natural resources [Addaney 2017, p.181-199].

The European practices of colonization resulted in the marginalization of Africans and the erosion of their cultural identity and legacy [Nkrumah 1965, p.1]. In order to define development and political governance, the colonists imposed their own currencies on the occupied territories, therefore monetizing the African economy. For example, taxation was levied with colonial currency, which African populations were compelled to acquire through labor in plantations, mines, or industries [Ocheni & Nwankwo 2012, p.50]. The colonization process encompassed two dimensions of conquest: the physical acquisition of territory and the psychological domination of knowledge systems, intellects, and historical narratives [Lephakga 2015, p.145-163]. In the action of annexing, Lephakga finds an inconsistency: powerful beings were protecting the nations that were selected, while inferior beings were protecting the losers [Lephakga, 2015].

Meta colonialism, an adaptation of colonialism, profoundly affects Africa by honoring Western education and expertise while

undermining local knowledge [Bulhan 2015, p.239-256]. This system relentlessly denies and deprives African peoples of their uniqueness by undermining the African concept of "being oneself" [Lulat 2005, p.535-539]. Africa's liberation from colonialism and recovery from European dominance are contingent upon the right to self-governance, which encompasses social, cultural, and commercial freedoms. It encourages and facilitates sustainable development [Sunday et al. 2015, p.127-158].

For instance, Great Britain previously possessed Nigeria's petroleum sector, which contributes to 70% of its GDP [Obaje 2009, p.1]. In order to overcome the underdevelopment that has resulted from colonialism, Africa must maximize its political potential and economic capabilities and assert control over natural resources. This requires an awakening that surpasses the confines of European colonialism. The 1963 Yaoundé Convention emphasized economic and trade links, whereas the EU's development program was deficient in human rights considerations. African nations declined to implement conditionality in development assistance, referencing apprehensions of colonial disparities [Mangala, 2013]. This rejection of binding conditionality can be perceived as an anti-colonial stance in their ties with the EU.

3. Chinese engagement in Africa

During the Cold War, Africa saw incomplete decolonization due to economic dependency, which cultivated antidemocratic conditions and authoritarian regimes [Vicini et al., 2022.]. In the late 1950s, China established diplomatic ties with Africa through bilateral business ties with Egypt, Algeria, Guinea, Somalia, Morocco, and Sudan [Antwi-Boateng, 2017]. The 1955 Bandung Conference was a significant event for Afro-Asian nations, with China playing an essential role in the Non-Aligned Movement [Vicini et al., 2022.]. China has expanded its trade and investment initiatives in Africa, establishing firms in infrastructure development, the retail sector, manufacturing, and natural resource extraction [Xi, 2014]. These interactions correspond with China's foreign policy tenets of equality, mutual advantage, and non-interference [Wen, 2004].

In the 1970s, China's strategy for exerting influence in Africa involved secretive funding for rebel groups against the USSR; in the 1980s,

China discontinued its involvement with Africa and focused on enhancing relationships with technologically advanced states; and during the 1990s, China's international relations expanded, culminating in the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] in 2000, which sought to promote genuine friendships, mutual respect, and peace and progress [Vicini et al., 2022.]. Western governments have expressed suspicion regarding China's expansion in Africa, seeing it as a neo-colonialist scrambling for strategic resources [Alden, 2007].

The consistent policy-making framework of China has become more complex as a result of economic advancement and global engagement. The Communist Party is the most influential of the three primary entities in China's international decision-making process, which are the Chinese state, the Communist Party, and the People's Liberation Army [Stahl, 2018, p. 128]. The political influence of China in Africa is in the form of soft power.

The soft power of China in Africa is characterized by its investments, commerce, assistance, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. Despite its presence, it has not yet secured the affection and support of the African population [Lahtinen, 2018, p. 65]. The significance of soft power in achieving political and economic objectives was emphasized by the ancient Chinese philosophy, which characterized it as "drops of water" that could infiltrate inflexible and powerful entities [Lahtinen, 2018, p. 35]. China offers a variety of humanitarian aid instruments to African countries, such as food aid and medical personnel, while endorsing anti-colonization and liberation movements in African nations, advocating for anti colonialism under the banner of South-South Solidarity, as African history has been significantly influenced by colonial periods [Brautigam, 2009, p. 122].

China's non-interference policy in Africa is demonstrated through its participation in international peacekeeping efforts, which prioritize political equality and regard African leaders with respect [Thorborg, 2017, p. 70].

China's political influence is enhanced by its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and African nations provide their backing in international organizations. China is currently a significant peacekeeping actor in Africa, adhering to the policies of the African Union Ozden & Arabaci,

2019].

Economic relations between the two partners have been bolstered by the increasing energy demand of China and the high hydrocarbon production share of Africa. According to Jianhong [2017, p. 132–133 cited in Ozden & Arabaci, 2019], China's oil exports from Africa have experienced substantial growth, comprising 24.1% of its total imports in 2009. African nations have benefited from economic agreements that have arisen as a consequence of the demand for oil in China.

Since 2007, China has constructed infrastructure in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Nigeria, including the Tanzania Railway, the longest railway in Africa. This railway connects Tanzania and Zambia [Lahtinen, 2018]. China is a significant supplier of consumer products to Africa, which is a critical continent for economic cooperation.

However, China faces challenges in terms of accessibility and quality. Despite this, China maintains its commitment to promoting collaborative development and mutual benefits in economic and political relationships with African nations [Ozden & Arabaci, 2019].

4. Comparing strategies of european colonialism and contemporary chinese engagement in Africa

4.1. Power Strategy

In an effort to expand its influence in Africa, China has implemented a soft power foreign policy that emphasizes financial aid, culture, and trade [Zhou, & Sabrina, 2016; Lahtinen, 2018], while the European Community employs asymmetrical power dynamics and mechanisms in Africa, prioritizing binding conditionality and penalties while underscoring the significance of an effective government for peace and tranquility [Stahl, 2011, p. 152]. The objective of China's soft power foreign strategies is to increase relevance by influencing the behavior of others [Paradise 2009]. China is strengthening its claim to great power and enhancing its international standing by utilizing its monetary assets to promote soft power endeavors [Shambaugh, 2015]. Together with other Chinese leaders, Xi and Premier Li Keqiang travel to many African countries, where they sign agreements on bilateral relations and investment, offer aid, and give loans

[Provost & Harris, 2013]. African countries are drawn to China's rapid economic transformation, which provides a distinctive development paradigm known as the "Beijing Consensus" in contrast to the "Washington Consensus" [Ramo, 2004]. The Beijing Consensus emphasizes the significance of the state's involvement in strategic market interventions and macroeconomic planning, emphasizing the need for flexibility and pragmatism in addressing a variety of issues that emphasize innovation, equal opportunity, and freedom of choice [Serra & Stiglitz, 2008] while the Washington Consensus and its subsequent strategies promote universality, advocating for rigorous reform packages for developing nations. These Washington Consensus methodologies are based on European encounters, standards, and beliefs. The neoliberal paradigm, which is rooted in European tradition, combines the principles of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation with market growth, democratic leadership, social integration, and ecological considerations [Turin, 2010.]. In contrast, China acknowledges the importance of distinctive methodologies and allows for independent, nation-specific development [Ramo, 2004].

4.2. Involvement Strategy

China's growing interdependence and global economic influence are driving its involvement in Africa, driven by internal dynamics, energy diplomacy, and the lucrative African market [Alden et al 2008]. China-Africa relations began with trade in Egypt, honoring Han emperors and direct communication began under Ming dynasty Zheng He, promoting friendliness and peace [Shinn & Eisenman, 2012, p. 21]. African governments and leaders continue to be attracted to China's non interference policy, which is a key aspect of South-South cooperation [Aidoo et al., 2015]. Chinese authorities maintain the principles of non-interference and self-determination, which permit African leaders to participate in their businesses as long as it does not disrupt the Chinese business model. European colonialism impacted Africa's political, social, and economic progress. It facilitated capitalism, expanded exports, and introduced technology, but also led to destitution and dictatorship [Heldring & Robinson, 2012; Leander & James, 2012]. However, the German Marshall Plan has been designed to enhance donor-recipient development

cooperation by emphasizing African development objectives even though there are not many shared European colonial development strategies with African nations due to their involvement strategies of assimilation and direct governance [Antwi-Boateng, 2017]. Smart power is employed by China to foster cooperation, which benefits Africa [Lahtinen, 2018]; in 1954, China established the “Five Principles of Peaceful Living” in order to entice new nations and thwart foreign intervention by neo-colonial powers [Alden & Alves, 2008, p. 47]. Unlike European-colonial African engagement of expropriation [John, 2014], Chinese involvement in Africa through financial support and investment is unconditional, even though African countries face Western conditions and objections [Hess et al., 2010]. Growing material interests are posing challenges to China’s non-interference approach in Africa [Allen 2015]. Scholars contend that China’s military assistance to Sudan, which includes the deployment of Chinese citizens to protect energy installations, raises concerns regarding its intentions in Africa. Despite the fact that this was a bilateral agreement, China shifted its focus to peacekeeping in 2015, deploying personnel to South Sudan and acquiring a military base in Djibouti [Allen 2015]. China has no intention of civilizing Africans, in contrast to European colonial powers, it improves its reputation among Africans and facilitate their economic development by promoting its culture as a component of a cultural diplomacy strategy [Kurlantzick, 2007]. Even though aid transfers were among the goals in traditional European development strategies for Africa, the lack of coordination between European entities and African governments hindered the successful implementation and enforcement of collaboration [Tadesse et al., 2020].

4.3. Administrative Strategy

China, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, does not pursue administrative control over African countries, as it regards them as sovereign nations and concentrates on diplomacy and soft power to exert influence [Hrituleac, 2011]. China’s administrative strategy for Africa differs from that of European colonial powers like France and Britain, which place more emphasis on governmental and administrative authority

[Hrituleac, 2011]. China strives for a benign ascent by pursuing trade and enhanced bilateral relations. European colonial strategy prioritized the interests of donors over the needs and priorities of African nations, which resulted in disagreements with African elites [Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2011]. The European bureaucratic framework impeded the effective development cooperation between European and African colonies, resulting in a multitude of conflicting priorities [Boidin, 2020]. China’s non-interference administrative policy, which does not involve territorial occupation or aggression, has granted it greater influence than an emerging power. The leaders of China and Africa share a mutual interest and respect, with the objective of increasing living standards; this is contrasted with the authoritarianism of European colonialism in African elites [Zhou, & Sabrina, 2016].

Diplomacy and trade are the driving forces behind Sino-African relations, while European colonizers employed African elites as control mechanisms. However, China’s respect for African leaders has not consistently translated into equal consideration of African citizens. This has led to protests due to violations of rights, depletion of biodiversity, and land seizures [Zhou, & Sabrina, 2016].

5. Conclusion

The strategies of China and European colonialism toward Africa are similar, as they both pursue Africa’s valuable resources and crude oil at minimal expense and implement free tariff policies and both have unique financial institutions and initiatives for Africa.

Chinese enterprises transport Chinese nationals to Africa, leading to diminished local employment prospects and substandard working conditions. China’s funding and credit policies are unconditional, and its historical relationship with Africa is more favorable than that of Western nations [Gresh, 2008; Aidoo et al., 2015].

China’s involvement in Africa is influenced by insights gained from European colonialism as well as internal and foreign limitations. China has interacted with African nations within a certain international political, economic, and legal framework, thereby preventing breaches of international norms. The foreign policy of China is shaped by its historical context and national character. Notwithstanding significant economic

advancement, China's relationship with Africa has evolved from economic collaboration to power dynamics. China has assimilated ideas from European colonialism and forged bilateral relationships with African nations to accomplish its economic goals efficiently and economically. China indirectly influences sovereign African nations to serve the interests of a prevailing power. This economic collaboration and multilateralism strengthen China's export-driven economy, which underpins its rise in the global political and economic hierarchy.

China's expanding influence in Africa presents benefits for African nations, including enhanced connectivity, industrial growth, and market access, while also requiring a reevaluation of development cooperation strategies.

Nonetheless, China's development may also include hazards, including human rights abuses, labor rights infringements, natural resource exploitation, and debt crises.

In the colonial era, European authorities, in their development cooperation initiatives, failed to engage African stakeholders in the process. They did not acknowledge that African stakeholders should assume leadership roles, and Europeans failed to act cohesively in establishing authentic partnerships with African nations. Colonialism influenced Africa's culture, society, politics, and economy.

African state governments must prioritize self-determination, autonomy over natural resources, and collective dependence to address inadequate growth sustainably.

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