

SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: This review was prepared by United States International University – Africa (USIU-A) students: Abubakar Mohamed Ahmed, Madey Eliyas Issack, Waigumo Shiela Kariuki, Asha Idris Mohamed, Shisanya Sophie Amutavy and USIU-A lecturer Weldon Ng'eno KWA. We review about 100 papers on Sino-African relations published during the past 12 years for the most part, in order to put some structure on the existing strands. The literature is classified into dominant schools of thought, namely the: neocolonial or pessimistic; balance development or optimistic and accommodation schools. After the classification, we reconcile the schools of thought in light of dominant themes and debates on development models, inter alia: (1) pessimists versus (vs) optimists; (2) preferences of rights in development models (economic vs political, national vs human & sovereign vs idiosyncratic); (3) the Washington Consensus vs the Beijing Model and; (4) an African Consensus in both the Washington Consensus and Beijing Model.

Keywords: AFRICA REALTIONS, USIU-A lecturer Weldon, accommodation schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lost decades of the Washington Consensus as a development theory have pushed African policy makers to start seeking non-Western allies (Fofack, 2014, p. 6). Moreover, a plethora of factors are constraining African nations towards alternative development models, inter alia: manipulation during the Cold War; Structural Adjustment International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies; corruption of governments by Western companies; Slavery and; Colonialism. In this light, the growing political and economic influence of China has become an interesting option for African nations (Robinson, 2009; Asongu & Aminkeng, 2014). Accordingly, the burgeoning Sino-African South-South relationship is essentially motivated by the need for more equity (at least in policy) which the West has not delivered to African nations for centuries.

China's burgeoning footsteps on the African continent has led to a series of debates in academic and policy making circles because "China returns to Africa in the 21st century with not only a need for economic resources but with the cash to play the game dramatically and competitively" (Lyman, 2005). The debates have been substantially based on China's economic diplomatic strategies (Taylor, 2006; Besada *et al.*, 2008; Asche *et al.*, 2008; Biggeri *et al.*, 2009; Ortmann, 2012). The numerous studies have discussed the need for multi-polar development strategies (Tull, 2006); analyzed limited short-term benefits of the relationship (Duclos, 2011); put forward the resource-seeking and bad-governance oriented Chinese motivations (Renard, 2011; Kolstad & Wiig, 2011; De Grauwe *et al.*, 2012); push and pull factors governing the nexus (Biggeri & Sanfilippo, 2009) and; the politics in the nexus (Taylor, 2007); inter alia, Alden *et al.* (2008), Alves (2006), Gaye (2006), Guerrero & Manji (2008), Klaplinsky & Messner (2008), Kitissou (2007), Lall *et al.* (2005), Mawdsley (2008), Moreira (2007), Muneko & Koyi (2008), Wang & Zheng (2012) and, Wei (2007).

As far as we have reviewed, the evolving literature on Sino-Africa relations has left a substantial gap to be filled: classification of narratives into dominant schools of thought and reconciliation of the schools of thoughts.

In light of the above, to the best our knowledge, Babatunde (2013), Asongu and Aminkeng (2013) are studies in the literature closest to the current exposition. While the former is essentially based on stylized facts with a limited perusal of

the literature, the latter have presented the debate in terms of schools of thought but failed to critically engage existing narratives supporting the schools. First, Babatunde whose paper reference's only 17 articles has used stylized 'facts and figures' to present the good, bad and ugly faces of China in Africa and secondly, Asongu and Aminkeng (2013) have also used stylized facts to classify Sino-African relations into three dominant schools of thought: the optimistic, pessimistic and accommodation schools. It is interesting to note that, 'the bad, the good and the ugly' sides of China documented by Babatunde (2013) do not independently correspond to the three schools of thought suggested by Asongu and Aminkeng (2013). In essence, all three Chinese faces could in some cases only be consistent with the narrative of a single school of thought. For example, authors after presenting all the faces of China may either take a pessimistic, an optimistic or an accommodation view.

This paper steers clear of these viewpoints but instead classify the stock of recent Sino-African literature into the dominant schools of thought and; reconciling the schools in light of dominant views and models of development. First, the literature is classified into dominant schools of thought, the: neocolonial or pessimistic, balance-development or optimistic and, accommodation schools. After the classification, we reconcile the schools of thought in light of dominant themes and debates on development models, inter alia: (1) pessimists versus (vs) optimists; (2) preferences of rights in development models (economic vs political, national vs human & sovereign vs idiosyncratic); (3) the Washington Consensus vs the Beijing Model and; (4) an African Consensus in both the Washington Consensus and the Beijing Model.

Schools of thought and arguments:

2. THE PESSIMISTIC OR NEOCOLONIAL SCHOOL

Consistent with Asongu and Aminkeng (2013), this first school is led by critics or skeptics of the Beijing model. According to Nijs (2008), the Beijing model of development is in favor of State regulation and prudence in the openness of markets. More emphasis is placed on prudential market reforms and national sovereignty. While Moyo (2013) defines the Washington Consensus (WC) as 'liberal democracy, private capitalism and priority in political rights', the Beijing Model (BM) is defined as 'deemphasized democracy, state capitalism and priority in economic rights'. In spite of some criticisms (Huang, 2010), there is growing consensus that the BM is more adapted to 21st century development, in comparison to the WC that focuses on government failures by preaching, 'liberalization, marketization and privatization' (Fofack, 2014, p. 6).

The narrative of this school of thought sustains that, Chinese external flows to Africa are not consistent with conditions that promote good governance. According to Clinton (2011), it is simply neocolonialism and profit-making without morales². In line with the school, Western development approaches like the USA oriented African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) go beyond profit-motives by offering an economic ladder of opportunity and sustainable investment that should benefit Africa in the long-run. This school has motivated myths in the Sino-Africa relationship:

"China targets aid to African states with abundant natural resources and bad governments, Chinese do not hire Africans to work on their projects, Chinese workers and managers live in extremely simple conditions as compared to Western advisors, China outbids other companies by flouting social and environmental standards and, low linkage levels between Chinese and local businesses" (Asongu & Aminkeng, 2013, p. 263).

The literature supporting this first school's narratives include, inter alia: Chinese trade crowding-out and rendering African domestic industries vulnerable (Giovannetti & Sanfilippo, 2009, p. 506); the agricultural exports of Southern Africa not being positively impacted by China's growth (Villoria, 2009, p. 531); prostitutes from China perceived as junk and cheap as Chinese trade commodities (Ndjio, 2009, p. 606); the USA and Europe growingly suspicious of the burgeoning Sino-African nexus and searching for strategies to improve their footprints (Huliaras & Magliveras, 2008, p. 399); Sino-African relations remain asymmetric from the Western perspective (Alden, 2006, p. 147); and substantial discontent in working relationships in the textile industry of Zambia (Brooks, 2010, p. 113).

Accordingly, the investment of China in Sudan is destroying local communities (Askouri, 2007, p. 71); resource-driven Chinese investments (Kiggundu, 2008, p. 130); the burgeoning trade relations not a source of higher standards of living in the long-term for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Elu & Price, 2010, p. 587); Africa will not benefit from the relations because it is characterized by low levels of diversification and small productive capacities (Chemingui & Bchir, 2010, p. 562); the nexus is harmful to the industrial prosperity of SSA because it is contrary to mainstream wisdom of industrialization as a crucial development strategy component (Power, 2008, 7); Sino-African relations may also export human rights violations

(Breslin & Taylor, 2008; Zhou, 2005) and; there are myths surrounding Sino-African relations presented by Asongu & Aminkeng (2013, p. 263) from a plethora of literature (Freschi, 2010; De Grauwe et al., 2012).

3. THE OPTIMISTIC OR BALANCE-DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL

According to the second school, Sino – African relations should be seen from an optimistic angle. Moreover, if the relationship is asymmetric, African governments have the leverage to take action for a balance-development approach (Duclos, 2011; Menell, 2010). This school is also an anti-thesis to the first school because it argues that the approach of patronizing African countries by Western nations is much severe compared to the Chinese foreign policy that is based on unconditionality and non-interference. Moreover, the use of ‘colonialism’ by the first school to qualify the relationship is too strong a term and/or even hypocritical because the use of foreign aid by the West to influence domestic policies in African countries is more friendly to ‘neocolonialism’ (Tull, 2006; Asongu & Aminkeng, 2013).

Asche and Schüller (2008) have provided an interesting literature about concerns of the first school and concluded that empirical evidence to substantiate the positions of this school is not yet very apparent. A finding confirmed by Asongu and Aminkeng (2013) and supported by Menell (2010) who concludes that Sino-African relations offer possibilities for mutual development. Some analysts have even postulated that policy makers in Africa should stop listening to the West (Akomolafe, 2008) because China and Africa were both in the same economic stalemate in the 1970s. Nijs (2008), a former junior Dutch minister supports this school in her position that China’s foreign policy is consistent with the New Partnership of Africa’s Development (NEPAD) because it is in line with the African Union’s conception of African ownership.

The conclusions of the literature supporting this second school’s narratives include, inter alia: the dependence theory as postulated by the first school should be abandoned in order to better understand the Sino-African nexus (Ajakaiye & Kaplinsky, 2009, p. 479); the Beijing model should be engaged instead of being criticized (Kuo, 2012, p. 24), essentially because Sino African relations offer the possibility of a development regime that mitigates poverty in Africa (Carmody, 2009, p. 1197); dependence on capital goods from China is good for economic prosperity in SSA (Munemo, 2013, p. 106) and; there are both positive and negative effects of the nexus and African policy makers should work towards mitigating the negative effects which outweigh the positive (Ademola et al., 2009, p. 485). For example, SSA should device sustainable policies in order to benefit from the exploitation of its natural resources (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2009, p. 551), essentially because the rise in the prices of natural resources is benefiting Africa, though there are also dramatic and unexpected consequences (Goldstein et al., 2006).

The literature on the second school also concludes that: China-Africa relations are mutually beneficial even in non-resource rich countries like Mauritius (Ancharaz, 2009, p. 622); China is bringing transformation to Africa through economic dynamism and export of entrepreneurial talent (Friedman, 2009, p. 1); the relationship has been historically mutually beneficial and is sustainable in the future (Power & Mohan, 2010, p. 462); African agencies are also playing a substantial role in shaping Sino-African relations (Mohan & Lampert, 2010, p. 92); from a Senegalese experience, Chinese land grabbing could be more beneficial to local actors if more of their views are considered in the negotiation of contracts (Buckley, 2013, p. 429) and; more studies are needed to prove the criticisms by the first school of SinoAfrican relations, especially the importing of Chinese labour (Mohan, 2013, p. 1255).

The growing specialized economic zones that have been initiated by China are improving value chains in Africa (Edinger, 2008); the effect of the relationship may be positive or negative depending on countries (Jenkins & Edwards, 2006, p. 207); trade with China is diversifying African economies and mitigating the negative impact of natural resource specialization on economic prosperity (Diaw & Lassoua, 2013, p. 189); China’s substantial rate of poverty mitigation holds special lessons for Africa that can be drawn from Sino-African relations (Wu & Cheng, 2010, p. 629) and; China’s aid to Africa significantly affects development, but the impact varies depending on structural and institutional characteristics of recipients (McCormick, 2008).

4. THE ACCOMMODATION SCHOOL

The third stream of the literature which is the Accommodation school argues that the Sino-African relationship is neither an issue of pessimism (or neocolonialism) as advocated by the first school nor one of optimism (or balance-development) as in the narrative of the second school. According to this third school, the nexus is simply a chain of ineluctable evolving

globalization and economic relational processes to which African nations must accommodate. According to this school, African nations have no other major alternatives beside the West and China, hence must succumb (De Grauwe *et al.*, 2012; Asongu & Aminkeng, 2013, 2014).

In essence, the underpinnings of the school are based on two foundations. First, while China and Western nations may have the same neocolonial ambitions, there is not much African nations can do about it. Second, China is using the same norms of free market competition advocated by the WC to win more projects in Africa. Moreover, given that the failed prescriptions of the WC administered to African countries over the past decades have failed to deliver for the most part (Bartels *et al.*, 2009; Tuomi, 2011; Asongu, 2012; Darley, 2012; Fofack, 2014), it is politically correct for China to use it as an instrument in its foreign policy.

The conclusions of the literature supporting this third school's narratives include, among others: corporations from China have the same motivations as Western companies (Drogendijk & Blomkvist, 2013, p. 75); Sino-African relations are ineluctable processes that merit the cooperation of the European Union (EU) for greater synergy in African development (Wissenbach, 2009, p. 662); China's engagement with Africa represents both a new-imperialism and a new model of development (Ovadia, 2013, p. 233) and; Chinese versus American goeconomic strategies in Africa are reworking patterns of colonial trade, fueling conflicts and consolidating autocratic regimes (Carmody & Owusu, 2007, p. 504).

Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) is similar to conventional FDI (Lin & Farrell, 2013, p. 85); the primary factors motivating Chinese private investment in Africa are market opportunities, strong spirit of entrepreneurship and, competition within China (Gu, 2009, p. 570) or risk-taking and market-seeking features (Zhang *et al.*, 2013, p. 96); migration of Chinese workers into Africa is part of the competitive game, though it has raised concerns (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2009, p. 588); Chinese investments in two Zambian sectors are not different from mainstream foreign investment (Kragelund, 2009, p. 644) and; Chinese investments in Zambia are also broadly consistent with the rule of free market competition (Kamwanga & Koyi, 2009, p. 6). While Chinese investments in Africa are resource and 'weak institutions' driven, this is not different from the motivations of Western FDI (Kolstad & Wiig, 2011, p. 31) or China's move into Africa is not different from that of the West centuries ago which was motivated primarily by the need for raw material for its industries and markets for its finished products (Osei & Mubiru, 2010, p. 1).

Sino-African relations is a historical evolution (Alden & Alves, 2008, p. 43) and hence, studies should go beyond mainstream determinants of market potential & natural endowments and critically engage how FDI is linked to economic cooperation (Sanfilippo, 2010, p. 599). This confirms the need to construct complementarities among Africa, traditional development partners and China (Schiere, 2010, p. 615). This would ultimately dissipate the ambivalent Sino-African relations, though it offers new options for the development of Africa (Mohan & Power, 2008, p. 23).

Reconciling the schools of thought:

This section reconciles the schools of thought into four main strands: pessimists versus (vs) optimists; preferences in rights (national vs human, sovereign vs idiosyncratic &, economic vs political); the Washington Consensus vs the Beijing model and; an African consensus both in the Beijing Model and Washington Consensus.

First, based on the available literature, the Accommodation school is the most supported because there are genuine reasons to be both pessimistic and optimistic about Sino-African relations. On a first note, as postulated by Tull (2006) and recently supported by Asongu and Aminkeng (2014), the West has been hypocritical in its criticism of China's foreign policy in Sino-African relations. This is essentially because; the USA's foreign policy in Saudi Arabia is selective and not constrained by human rights concerns: it is motivated by the same 'oil or resource'-diplomacy employed by China. Moreover, the French policy in Africa has historically not been motivated by her cherished values of 'liberty, fraternity and equality'. On a second note, Sino-African relations are historical processes that are bound to continue in a distant future. Hence, advocates of the Optimistic or Balance-development school can rely on the criticisms of the Pessimistic or Neocolonial school to improve the Sino-African nexus. This is mainly because China is simply playing by the very standards of globalization cherished by the latter school.

Second, there are issues in preferences of rights motivating the first and second schools that merit reconciliation. These include, national vs human rights (Taylor, 2006); sovereign vs idiosyncratic rights (Asongu & Aminkeng, 2014) and; economic vs political rights (Moyo, 2013; Asongu, 2014cd; Lalountas *et al.*, 2011). While the second-sets of rights are substantially advocated by the first school, the first-sets are prioritized by the Chinese model and hence, represent the

foundations of the second school. On a first note, the non-interference foreign policy of China is partially founded on the preference of national rights over human rights. Africa's historic suspicion of Western bias in the conception and definition of human rights has been recently consolidated with gay rights considered as fundamental human rights in the face of national rights (executive, judiciary and legislative). Accordingly, the ability of African countries to pass and enforce anti-gays laws is being seriously constrained. A case in point is the recent anti-gay legislation bill in Uganda that has been greeted with the suspension of foreign aid and loans by some Western donors and the World Bank respectively (Asongu, 2014d).

On a second note, specific individual rights which could be classified as 'idiosyncratic rights' should not take precedence over sovereignty rights, according to Chinese foreign policy (Taylor, 2006). Therefore, since African nations are more in tune with principles that are friendly to the absence of hegemony, international law should not enable sovereign nations to criticize other sovereign nations on matters that are backed by domestic law and principles of democracy. If this is the case, most radical criticisms leveled on Sino-African relations by the first school would be relaxed in favor of more constructive criticisms.

The third note on preferences between 'the right to vote' and 'the right to food' has been the object of intense debate in recent development literature (Asongu, 2014d; Moyo, 2013). There is a growing believe that political rights are more endogenous to economic prosperity, productive structures or economic rights (Anyanwu & Erhijakpor, 2014). Hence, if the first school of thought were to acknowledge that developing countries need economic rights more than they need political rights, criticisms leveled on Sino-African relations would substantially reduce.

Fourthly, the debate over whether political rights or economic rights should come first in a development model could be reconciled with the Moyo (2013) conjecture. It should be noted that, whereas the Beijing model is defined by Moyo as 'state capitalism, deemphasized democracy and priority in economic rights', she also defines the WC as 'private capitalism, liberal democracy and priority in political rights'. While the prioritization of political rights is strongly advocated by the first school, the second school puts more emphasis on the need for economic rights. The conjecture advocates for a short-run model that is based on priority in economic rights or the Beijing Model and the long-term development model based on priority in political rights or the Washington Consensus.

In essence, a sustainable middle class is required for political rights to be genuinely demanded and the Beijing model has proven historically to be the better model at providing this middle-class within a relatively short time horizon (Asongu & Aminkeng, 2014). Therefore, in the presence of a middle class, political rights would automatically be demanded by the population. Moreover, the demand for political rights would not be tainted by crony democracy because; economic rights (of food and shelter) that are concerns of the low-income class would have been fulfilled. The Moyo conjecture has been broadly validated in developing nations and African countries respectively by Lalountas *et al.* (2011) and Asongu (2014a).

Fourth, an African consensus has also been derived from a reconciliation of the first (Washington consensus or priority in political rights) and second (Beijing model or priority in economic rights) schools. The current African consensus or New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is promoted by both the WC and BM. Accordingly, while the WC promotes democracy and human rights advocated by the NEPAD, the BM through its noninterference policy is consistent with the NEPAD's value of African ownership. It should be noted that the NEPAD is a consensus for African development that underscores: the 'promotion of rights (human & democratic), good governance and strong institutions' and 'African sovereignty'. Whereas the BM favors the latter, the former is supported by the WC.

In light of the above, both the first and second schools advocating the WC and BM respectively are reconcilable in the NEPAD. This African consensus has been adopted by serious African nations for the advancement of the continent. Democratic, economic development, good governance and human rights are values that are articulated in its charter.

5. CONCLUSION

We have reviewed about 100 papers on Sino-African relations published during the past 10 years for the most part, in order to put some structure on the existing strands. The literature is classified into dominant schools of thought, namely the: neocolonial or pessimistic; balance development or optimistic and accommodation schools. After the classification, we reconcile the schools of thought in light of dominant themes and debates on development models, inter alia: (1)

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