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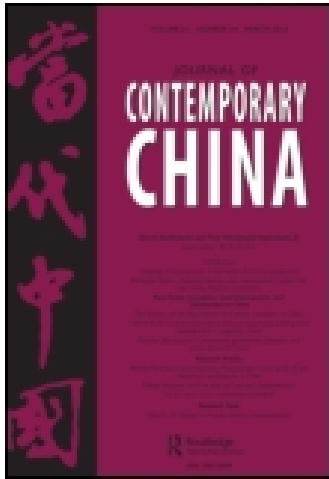
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# China in Africa: presence, perceptions and prospects

FEI-LING WANG\* and ESI A. ELLIOT

*This article reports and analyzes China's presence in Africa with an emphasis on how that has been perceived by the Africans. Based on the findings from surveys and field research conducted in eight sub-Saharan African countries and interviews with scholars and practitioners from other African countries as well as Chinese and Americans in Africa, we outline the diverse, complicated and evolving African perceptions about China's explosive presence in general and the booming Chinese business activities in particular that now range from love to suspicion. Our findings about how China is perceived in Africa suggest that Beijing has acquired substantial goodwill in Africa yet is developing deep issues and facing uncertain challenges and growing obstacles.*

## Introduction: China in Africa

China's explosive presence in Africa, especially its phenomenal expansion of business activities since the 1990s, has begged for answers to profound questions. How is China perceived and received by the local hosts? Is Beijing acquiring sustained power and influence in Africa as a result? Is China's presence in Africa a grand and comprehensive competition with the West? And, if so, what are the prospects for that competition?

This article seeks to address those questions through examining how China is now perceived in Africa. Based on the findings from surveys and field research conducted in eight African countries (Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe) and interviews with African scholars and practitioners from other African countries as well as Chinese and Americans in Africa, we outline the diverse, complicated and evolving African perceptions about China's presence that now range from love to suspicion and worse. The general patterns and key features of how China is perceived in Africa seem to suggest that China is poised to further extend its presence in Africa and Beijing has acquired substantial goodwill among Africans

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yet is developing deep issues and facing uncertain challenges and growing obstacles. China has encountered uphill battles that are often quite cost-ineffective in its much-speculated competition with the West in Africa, if Beijing indeed had a coherent grand strategy for such a rivalry. The opportunistic and extractive nature of Chinese business activities and Beijing's inability to offer a distinctively different yet attractive value-norm system appear to be some of the key hurdles limiting China's winning of hearts and minds in Africa.

### *An explosive presence*

The People's Republic of China (PRC since 1949) is not a newcomer in Africa. Because of its ambitious agenda of promoting world revolution, and its pragmatic and often desperate need for international recognition deemed crucial to regime survival, Beijing went to Africa during the Mao Era (1949–1976) with massive financial and military aid.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese efforts yielded considerable political payoff as the PRC made advances culminating in its membership of the United Nations in 1972 with significant support from African countries.<sup>2</sup> China's ventures in Africa were also a major component of Beijing's effort of isolating Taiwan, its political opponent. After decades of a diplomatic bidding war, Beijing succeeded in persuading most African countries to switch their diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, although today Taiwan still maintains an unofficial but strong presence throughout Africa.<sup>3</sup>

However, China's going to Africa in the 1950s–1970s was almost entirely favor procuring and thus was financially costly, expedient and unsustainable. When Beijing started to trade-away its world-revolution goals for economic ties with the West, Chinese activities in Africa were scaled back and even gutted. The Maoist presence in Africa, politically motivated and narrowly focused, nonetheless left behind a tangible legacy like Tazara (Tanzania–Zambia Railroad) and the lauded service of Chinese medical teams, generating credit and good feelings.<sup>4</sup>

By 1980, Sino–African trade was only about US\$1 billion.<sup>5</sup> Only in the 1990s did China's own capitalistic economic reform lead to the rising need for new markets for its exports, especially when the trade relationship with its main market, the United States, remained constrained and unstable due to the then annual US Congressional review of the Sino–US trade status after 1989. Furthermore, China's booming manufacturing sector has developed insatiable demands for raw materials and energy that Africa could provide in abundance. Therefore, chiefly for profit and resources, China went back to Africa with massive orders, investment and exports.<sup>6</sup>

1. Philip Snow, *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988).

2. Chang Ailing, 'From "brothers" to "partners": China, Africa build strategic ties', *China Daily*, (9 September 2007).

3. Peter Brookes and Ji Hye Shin, 'China's influence in Africa: implications for the United States', *Heritage Foundation Report*, Washington, DC, (22 February 2006).

4. Since the early 1960s, China has sent medical teams to 46 African countries with over 18,000 medical workers, and treated 200 million patients. PRC State Council, *China–Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation* (Beijing, 2010).

5. Peter Wonacott, 'In Africa, US watches China's rise', *The Wall Street Journal*, (2 September 2011).

6. Chris Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares De Oliveira, *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

Bilateral trade has grown rapidly ever since, by double digits annually, reaching US\$55 billion in 2006, to make China Africa's second largest trade partner (surpassing France).<sup>7</sup> With a trade explosion of 160 times over 30 years and surpassing the US in 2011, China became Africa's largest trading partner with a total volume of US\$199 billion and a trade deficit of US\$28 billion in 2013.<sup>8</sup>

Chinese investment in Africa has boomed too. Growing at an annual rate of 114%, foreign direct investment (FDI) from China has covered most of Africa, active in just about every industry, especially mining, energy exploration and construction.<sup>9</sup> Chinese IT companies have been pursuing 'near monopoly' positions in half a dozen African nations.<sup>10</sup> Huawei, for example, has scored a 20–25% annual growth in West Africa and over 10% in the whole of Africa, beating Erickson for the top position.<sup>11</sup> By 2013, China had a total of US\$193.8 billion contracted FDI and over 2,000 state-owned and private companies operating in Africa, with US\$40 billion new FDIs in 2011 alone, including some mega projects.<sup>12</sup>

China has also become a major provider of aid in education, medical services and civic projects in 50 African nations, funding 31 Confucius institutes in 23 African countries.<sup>13</sup> China also plans to build 1,000 'Hope Schools' in Africa as a gift, with nearly 100 already funded by 2012. A large Chinese media center based in Nairobi produces news and entertainment programming for African markets. Tens of thousands of African students are now studying in China, many funded by the Chinese government.<sup>14</sup> Through a Beijing-funded 'Ten with Ten' program, ten Chinese think tanks are pairing up with ten African think tanks to enable structured exchanges of ideas.

Beyond economic and sociocultural arenas, China has sent thousands of soldiers to participate in peacekeeping missions in Liberia and DR Congo and sustained naval assets to patrol off the Horn of Africa against maritime pirates.<sup>15</sup> Making major policy shifts away from 'non-interference', Beijing has acted to protect its interests and image in Africa with direct moves such as the massive evacuation of Chinese in Libya in 2011,<sup>16</sup> the 'quiet' demands made on behalf of Chinese state enterprises in

7. Wonacott, 'In Africa, US watches China's rise'.

8. Mike King, 'China–Africa trade booms', *Journal of Commerce*, (18 July 2012); US Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c0013.html>; 'China and Africa: a maturing relationship', *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, (9 April 2013).

9. Xiaoyang Tang, 'Bulldozer or locomotive? The impact of Chinese enterprises on the local employment in Angola and the DRC', *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45(3), (2010), pp. 350–368; Sigfrido Burgos and Sophal Ear, 'China's oil hunger in Angola: history and perspective', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(74), (2012), pp. 351–367.

10. Email interviews with Cisco employees in Africa, November 2012.

11. Huawei's employment in Ghana jumped from 60 in 2008 to 1,000 in 2013 (half are Chinese). Interview with Huawei regional managers, Accra, Ghana, February 2013.

12. 'Mozambique–China trade continues to grow', available at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201212090143.html> (accessed 12 December 2013); Samuel Mungadze, 'PetroSA, Sinopec sign deal for \$10bn refinery at Coega', *Business Day*, Johannesburg, (26 March 2013), p. 18.

13. PRC State Hanban figures, available at: [www.hanban.edu.cn](http://www.hanban.edu.cn). Beijing (accessed 15 April 2013).

14. During 2013–2015, Beijing was set to provide 1,800 full scholarships to African students and bring over 30,000 Africans for short-training programs. Kenneth King, *China's Aid and Soft Power in Africa: The Case of Education and Training* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2013).

15. 'Seychelles invites China to set up anti-piracy base', *Agence France-Presse*, Victoria, (2 December 2011).

16. Shaio H. Zerba, 'China's Libya evacuation operation: a new diplomatic imperative—overseas citizen protection', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), doi: 10.1080/10670564.2014.898900.

Tanzania and Zambia, and the pressure backed by official aid to hush criticisms against illegal activities by a princeling-run Chinese company in Namibia.<sup>17</sup> Clearly disapproving of two of its neighbors' (India and Japan) aspirations for permanent seats at the UN Security Council, China has publicly supported similar bids by all three of the possible African candidates: South Africa, Egypt or Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> Beijing has largely funded the China–Africa Forum of Cooperation since 2000.

In short, China's presence is expanding rapidly in Africa as an active donor, financier, contractor and builder, marketer, buyer, and investor.<sup>19</sup> At least a million merchants, investors, farmers and workers from the PRC now live in Africa, up from negligible numbers 30 years ago (this number increased ten times in 2002–2011).<sup>20</sup> Over 40,000 Chinese state-employees now work in Luanda, Angola alone.<sup>21</sup> At least 10,000 Chinese now live in Tanzania, up from barely 1,000 a decade ago.<sup>22</sup> Chinese in Zambia are estimated in late 2013 to number from 11,000 to the hard-to-believe 100,000.<sup>23</sup>

### *Features and patterns*

At a very rapid rate of growth, China is now Africa's largest trade partner, exporting to basically all 54 African countries with no clear reliance on any single market, yet four countries (Angola, Libya, South Africa and Sudan) provide over 71% of China's imports from Africa. Taken together with the market of four other exporters (Congo, DR Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Zambia), 84% of China's imports from Africa is oil (one-third of China's total oil import), mineral ores and timber.<sup>24</sup> This is a rather typical Africa–outside country trade pattern with manufactured goods flowing in and raw materials and energy going out—a *bona fide* colonial style economic relationship as termed by the Governor of the Nigerian Central Bank.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the rapid growth and the rather typical and traditional trade patterns, the third characteristic of China's booming economic relationship with Africa is that much of China's business activities are state actions even though most of the

17. Beijing offered huge loans to quietly make the Namibian government drop its anti-bribery case against the Chinese company run by then PRC President Hu Jintao's son. Author's interviews in Windhoek, Namibia, March 2013.

18. Jean-Christophe Servant, 'China's trade safari in Africa', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Paris, (11 May 2005).

19. Jenifer L. Parenti, *China–Africa Relations in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2009). For more analysis of China's presence in Africa, see Suisheng Zhao, 'A neo-colonialist predator or development partner? China's engagement and rebalance in Africa', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), doi: [10.1080/10670564.2014.898893](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898893); and Sven Grimm, 'China–Africa cooperation: promises, practice and prospects', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), doi: [10.1080/10670564.2014.898886](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898886).

20. 'Zhongguo maibu feizhou' ['China strides in Africa'], *Guoji caijing shibao* [*International Financial Times*], Beijing, (22 August 2011).

21. BBC, *The Chinese are Coming*, documentary (London: BBC, 2012).

22. Wu Ming, 'Feizhou guniang yanzhong de zhongguo nanren' ['Chinese men in the eyes of African girls'], *Renmin wang* [*People's net*], Beijing, (5 October 2012); Marc Francis and Nick Francis, *When China Met Africa*, documentary (Speakit Films: 2010).

23. Author's correspondence with field-study scholars, November 2013.

24. 'Zhongguo maibu feizhou', *Guoji caijing shibao*; *The Economist*, (20 April 2011); 'China and Africa', *The Economist Intelligence Unit*.

25. Lamido Sanusi, 'African must get real about Chinese ties', *Financial Times*, (11 March 2013). For more in-depth analysis about this issue, see Joshua Eisenman, 'China–Africa trade patterns: causes and consequences', *Journal of Contemporary China* 21(77), (2012), pp. 793–810.

2,000 plus Chinese firms and business entities in operation in Africa are not exactly state-owned.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Western states, the Chinese government actively finances, encourages and organizes Chinese business ventures into Africa. Interest-free or low interest government loans are common such as the US\$2 billion credit line at 1.5% for 17 years to Angola in 2005 for oil exploration and the US\$2 billion subsidized loans to Ghana for oil and gas projects in 2010. Also, Beijing has shown significant generosity in dealing with African states with, for example, the cancelation of over US\$10 billion in government debt in 2000–2005.<sup>27</sup> In 2012, PRC President Hu Jintao pledged US\$20 billion new credit to Africa. In 2013, the new PRC President Xi Jinping pledged billions more.

The active and aggressive Chinese government-backed business dealings, financial aid and charitable activities in Africa are often free of political and ideological strings. In fact, China has made lucrative deals with African states such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and Angola that are chastised by Western sanctions on the grounds of human rights violations. Beijing has used its veto power in the UN Security Council to provide defense and protection to the leaders of some of its African partners who are challenged by the West. This type of seeing-no-evil and hearing-no-evil business attitude has clearly contributed to China's explosive growth in Africa and earned significant goodwill from many of the African leaders and political elites who have grown tired of the political 'nanny' from the West.<sup>28</sup>

Not only ignoring local human rights and other political issues in Africa, Chinese officials and businessmen practice personal connections (*guanxi*) that often involve bribery. This Chinese way of business effectively matches with some traditional social norms in many African countries and greatly oils the wheels of bureaucracies in host countries to facilitate deals. The Chinese way of business also helps to finance local government officials' affluent life style and contributes to the coffers of the rulers to sustain their current, democratic or not and popular or not, regimes. Well known examples include the relationship between Beijing and Harare and the controversial case of China's secretive, eye-popping 2007 investment contract for minerals with DR Congo, reportedly worth US\$40–120 billion.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, due to China's own peculiar position in the global chain of production, the expansion of its business activities in Africa is not necessarily a displacement of the West, as Chinese goods and technology have yet to compete directly with, let alone begin replacing, goods and technology from the West. Although US officials are concerned that Chinese government loans and counterfeits may disadvantage US firms, direct competition between Chinese and US firms has been limited as they 'general[ly] operate in different sectors'.<sup>30</sup> As some Africa-based business leaders have asserted, the infrastructure and mining projects that the Chinese are building in

26. We learned in the field that there is a complicated and opaque ownership and cooperative relationship between Chinese government and many non-state business ventures in Africa.

27. Servant, 'China's trade safari in Africa'.

28. Suisheng Zhao, 'A neo-colonialist predator or development partner?'

29. 'China's oil trade in Africa', *The Economist*, (13 August 2011); 'China international fund: the Queensway Syndicate and the Africa trade', *The Economist*, (13 August 2011); Global Witness on DR Congo, *China and Congo: Friends in Need* (London: 2011).

30. US GAO, *Sub-Saharan Africa: Trends in US and Chinese Economic Engagement* (Washington, DC: USGAO, February 2013), pp. 49, 54–55.

Africa, competing against some Western firms for sure, also create new opportunities for more Western exports to Africa such as automobiles and heavy machinery.<sup>31</sup> We noticed in the field that many Chinese construction sites were using non-Chinese equipment and the booming traffic on Chinese-built roads was mostly vehicles made in Germany, Japan, Korea and the United States.

### Reflections in the literature

Not surprisingly, China's presence in Africa has drawn great attention.<sup>32</sup> Scholars ponder the strategic and global implications of China's going to Africa.<sup>33</sup> Some explore the Chinese incentives and motives behind its active ventures in Africa as part of China's new global strategy for power and influence that may actually provide an opportunity for Africans to develop their economy.<sup>34</sup> Others view China's ventures in Africa as potentially new challenges to China itself as well as to the West.<sup>35</sup> Dispelling some 'fuzzy facts' about China's oil ventures in Africa, one study argues that the Chinese presence in Africa is quite similar to that by other multinational corporations,<sup>36</sup> the colonial or neo-colonial predators acting aggressively for influence and wealth. Some wonder if the Sino-Western (specially European) competition in Africa may already be in China's favor.<sup>37</sup>

An international team of experts has offered a comprehensive report on the state and prospects of China's relationship with Africa.<sup>38</sup> Another edited volume presents the Chinese, Western and African perspectives on China's presence in Africa in the light of the post-Cold War economic globalization.<sup>39</sup> A European study investigates the 'three most important instruments China has at its disposal in Africa'.<sup>40</sup> 'Returning' or not, argued another work, China has probably entered a new 'scramble for Africa' and begun a 'new Chinese imperialism', with profound implications for the continent and beyond.<sup>41</sup> Concerning China's rapidly expanding ties with Africa, especially its mining and timber interests, there are several scholarly works that offer rich statistical and anecdotal evidence and analyses.<sup>42</sup> Noted experts have tried

31. Jaco Maritz, 'Six thoughts on China's involvement in Africa's infrastructure sector', *Foreign Investment*, (7 March 2013).

32. 'The Chinese in Africa: trying to pull together', *The Economist*, (20 April 2011).

33. 'Contrasting rhetoric and converging security interests of the European Union and China in Africa', a special issue of *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 40(4), (2011).

34. Marcel Kitissou, ed., *Africa in China's Global Strategy* (London: Adonis & Abbey, 2007).

35. Sarah Raine, *China's African Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2009).

36. Erica Down, 'The fact and fiction of Sino-African energy relations', *China Security* 3(3), (Summer 2007).

37. Thierry Bangui, *China: A New Partner for Africa's Development—Are We Heading for the End of European Privileges on the Black Continent?* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publication, 2011).

38. Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2008).

39. Julia C. Strauss and Martha Saavedra, eds, *China and Africa: Volume 9: Emerging Patterns in Globalization and Development* (The China Quarterly Special Issues) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

40. Meine Pieter van Dijk, *The New Presence of China in Africa* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

41. Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, Christopher Alden and Daniel Large, *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

42. Serge Michel and Michel Beuret, *China Safari: On the Trail of Beijing's Expansion in Africa* (New York: Nation Books, 2009); Ian Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publication, 2010).



to answer the question of whether Beijing is helping or hurting Africa through its peculiar, extensive, often apolitical aid.<sup>43</sup>

The now politically contentious issue of Chinese migrating to work and live in Africa has been studied, albeit still mostly on national or sub-regional levels. There has been a history of racist discrimination against Chinese in Africa especially under the apartheid regimes since the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Studies have found that contemporary Chinese migrants in South Africa, the largest host of Chinese in Africa, appear to be a 'differentiated grouping of migrants' and have a highly interesting 'transitional, unstable, and fluid nature'.<sup>45</sup>

Many African scholars and journalists have reflected on China's booming presence in Africa. We see here the general pattern of positively assessing and appreciating China as rewarding economic opportunities for Africa and as a non-confrontational political and ideological partner, in sharp contrast to the old Western relations with the continent. Growing doubts, criticism and resentment among Africans against the Chinese presence are also reported.<sup>46</sup> Some Africans have pondered if China has become a development partner, an economic competitor or simply a new hegemony to Africa.<sup>47</sup> Another group of African scholars and practitioners analyze specifically China's role in Southern Africa's extractive industries with thoughtful policy suggestions calling for innovative actions aiming at a win-win-win partnership for the Chinese, local rulers and elites, and local populace.<sup>48</sup> African researchers have also published impressive works to examine China in Africa with a highly commendable goal of understanding China more.<sup>49</sup>

### Gauging the African perception: our field research

Armed with the lessons from the existing literature, in 2012 and 2013 we conducted field research in sub-Saharan Africa to gauge and examine how China's explosive presence has been perceived by the African hosts. We commissioned an opinion survey in Ghana and utilized another opinion survey done in Madagascar. One of us visited seven countries (Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe) from February to April 2013, met many dozens of African, Chinese and American politicians, officials, businesspersons, workers, scholars, students and

43. Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

44. Karen L. Harris, 'Not a Chinaman's chance: Chinese labour in South Africa and the United States of America', *Historia* 52(2), (2006), pp. 177–197.

45. Philip Harrison, Khangelani Moyo and Yan Yang, 'Strategy and tactics: Chinese immigrants and diasporic spaces in Johannesburg', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38(4), (December 2012), pp. 899–925; Yoon Jung Park, 'Boundaries, borders and borderland constructions: Chinese in contemporary South Africa and the region', *African Studies* 69(3), (2010), pp. 457–479.

46. Ali Askouri et al., *African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2007); Axel Harneit-Sievers, Stephen Marks and Sanusha Naidu, eds, *Chinese and African Perspectives on China in Africa* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2010).

47. Chris Alden, *China in Africa: Partner, Competitor or Hegemon?* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

48. Garth Shelton and Claude Kabemba, eds, *China, Southern Africa and Extractive Industries* (Johannesburg: SARW, 2012), pp. 228–237.

49. A good outlet of such works has been the South African Journal *African East-Asian Affairs—The China Monitor*.

journalists there, and visited many sites and institutions related to Chinese activities in Africa. We also carried out interviews or discussions with scholars from several other African nations (Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Togo and Zambia).

The findings of our field research tend to support much of the existing literature and, we believe, have also generated new understandings about African perception of China's presence in Africa. Our research has offered clues to help answer questions about the implications and long-term sustainability of China's presence in Africa, and about the prospects for the much speculated China–West competition for power and influence in Africa.

### *Major findings from the field*

There is clear evidence that Beijing is making extensive efforts to influence African views and improve its position, to win favors, in Africa. In 2013, PRC President Xi Jinping outlined in Africa his new initiatives for exchanging ideas of governance with Africans, enhancing personnel exchanges and movements, and educating young Africans and cultivating future African leaders to protect Sino–African friendship.<sup>50</sup> The Chinese media network, including Sida International TV (based in Nairobi and headquartered in Beijing), is covering many African communities. Beijing has funded numerous educational and cultural institutions in Africa. Chinese diplomats have actively forged largely cooperative partnerships with the Chinese diaspora throughout Africa. The real size of China's aid to Africa during 2000–2011 was revealed in 2013 to be US\$75 billion, 'significantly larger than previously estimated'.<sup>51</sup>

Yet, our research suggests that either China does not really have a coherent grand strategy (beyond basically opportunistic and economy-driven efforts of 'going global') to compete with and replace the West in Africa, or that strategy has been poorly designed and even more poorly implemented. Beijing's massive and expensive efforts to influence Africans are often self-defeating and largely cost-ineffective so far. The Ghanaian and Zimbabwean elites and their offspring educated in China (for graduate degrees for free) we met were eager to get 'useful' further training in the United States, for instance. Few university students we met in Africa made China their top choice for further schooling (many wished that the US could offer the same kind of scholarships as the PRC). A senior African politician dryly commented about his colleague (a Chinese-trained Ph.D. who now assists the country's vice president) 'people educated in China tend to run away from China fast when they return home'.

The explosive growth of Chinese business activities and personnel inflow easily cause people to suspect that China is aiming towards some kind of neo-colonialism scheme in Africa. But, beyond significant yet largely still opportunistic gains like profits, markets and raw materials, China's effort at winning hearts and minds in Africa seems to be a tough uphill battle with an uncertain prospect. Chinese citizens

50. Xi Jinping, 'Remaining reliable friends and faithful partners forever', speech at the Nyerere Center, Da es Salaam, Tanzania, 24 March 2013.

51. The US aid to Africa during the same period was larger (US\$90 billion). Claire Provost and Rich Harris, 'Soft power, hard cash, how China has spent billions on aid and development in Africa', *The Guardian*, (29 April 2013).

in Africa, now estimated to be between 1 and 2 million,<sup>52</sup> mostly segregated from the local populace,<sup>53</sup> are often treated as second-class foreigners by the local hosts, hardly colonial masters.<sup>54</sup> Sometimes, like in Ghana, local police used lethal force to control the activities of Chinese migrant workers.<sup>55</sup> Beijing's political influence in Africa is at best limited and obscure as leaders and officials happily take Chinese money but do little special for the Chinese beyond window-dressing and lip-services, such as the eye-pleasing Chinese signs at the Harare Airport.

It may be just an issue of time—the clumsiness of Beijing as a newcomer. But the low-yield of China's great efforts and massive transfer of funds in Africa seems to be more a structural problem: some key structural and ideational features of China's own internal sociopolitical economy have seemingly contributed to the great expansion of the Chinese presence in Africa but appear to be fundamentally hindering the growth of Chinese power and influence on the African peoples. Almost everywhere in Africa we found eager appreciation of the inflow of China's 'easy' money and praise for the infrastructure projects the Chinese have built, often as gifts, and Beijing's official policy of non-intervention in local sociopolitical affairs,<sup>56</sup> but much less so about the coming of the Chinese people who indeed in many ways seem to be effectively neutralizing Beijing's massive and expensive charm diplomacy.<sup>57</sup>

52. Due to the many illegal immigrants from China, the size of the Chinese diaspora living and working in Africa is a guesstimate at best and even unknowable. In South Africa, for example, depending on which government agency or research institution you ask, there were 150,000 or 350,000 Chinese in the country in early 2013.

53. We observed in the field that Chinese predominantly lived by themselves, often in heavily guarded compounds, with limited sociocultural contacts with the local community. In Windhoek, the compound named China Town was like a fortress or jail. We heard very few cases of Chinese–African dating or marriage, and virtually none of the Chinese we interviewed in Africa planned to make Africa their permanent home. We heard of only a handful cases of Chinese being naturalized and most of them were from Taiwan or Southeast Asia. Many Chinese we met in Africa basically spoke no English, let alone the local native languages, even after many years.

54. PRC citizens often could not get the convenient landing visa, let alone visa-waiver. In Zimbabwe and Tanzania (dubbed by one West African scholar as mini-China), both heavily financed by Beijing, we saw that Chinese pay more in advance for the same visa granted to Americans on landing and they were routinely harassed at the customs for petty bribes.

55. Ghanaian police killed one and arrested over 100 PRC citizens in 2010, for unlawfully working in small gold mines. Chu Xinyan, 'Jiana junjing qiansha zhongguo gongmin' ['Ghanaian military and police shot and killed Chinese citizens'], *Xin Jingbao* [*New Capital News*], Beijing, (15 October 2010). The Ghanaians we met in Ghana in 2013 unanimously blamed the Chinese workers, as did the Chinese officials there. Another major crackdown happened in June 2013 with 169 Chinese arrested [Adam Nossitter, 'Ghana arrests Chinese in gold mines', *The New York Times*, (6 June 2013)], their properties looted and burned, and 'several killed' according to Chinese media that were reporting based on the desperate call for help via social media. Peng Yinru *et al.*, 'Zhongguo taojinzhe de jiana weiji' ['Crisis for Chinese gold diggers in Ghana'], *Diyi caijing shibao* [*First Financial Times*], Shanghai, (6 June 2013).

56. Unconditional aid and trade/investment packages have been a key for Beijing to open doors and gain access in Africa. The political elites in African nations we met seemed to unanimously appreciate and praise this as a welcoming contrast to the West's annoying 'nanny' attitude. However, some African politicians and more intellectuals mentioned the negative impact of Beijing's nice-guy policies, suspecting that 'Beijing actually has other selfish plans' such as to displace the West, retard the much needed sociopolitical reforms in Africa, and extract resources through opaque deals with corrupted local officials.

57. The bulk of negative opinions about China we heard in Africa involves complaints against the activities, business or otherwise, of the many Chinese merchants, workers and opportunists: from counterfeiting, smuggling, tax-evasion, corruption, harsh labor practices, predatory extraction of minerals, to driving local merchants and traders out of business and poaching wild life. See Erin Conway-Smith, 'Chinese eat up Zimbabwe's endangered wildlife', *globalpost.com*, (12 April 2012); Aisia Rweyemamu, 'Kagasheki unveils Chinese ivory haul in Dar es Salaam', *IPP Media*, (5 November 2013); David Brown, *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Lion: How China's Advance in Africa is Underestimated and Africa's Potential Under Underappreciated* (SSI, US Army War College, 2012), pp. 64–71.

While Beijing has worked hard to create and maintain its image of being an ‘all-weather’ genuine friend and faithful partner to Africans forever,<sup>58</sup> more than a few Chinese shop owners we met simply refused to hire locals for clearly racist reasons. One Chinese grocer in Nairobi told the author that he never even allowed any black customers in his shop because ‘they always shoplift’. The lack of good coordination between the cautious and friendly Beijing and the increasingly numerous cowboy-like Chinese fortune seekers in the wild west of Africa is so obvious that Chinese officials in charge of the China–Africa Development Fund were calling it ‘a major problem for us’. This reality contrasts interestingly with a rather popular African view that ‘the Chinese are so well-disciplined and organized by Beijing to come here to do XYZ at our expenses’.<sup>59</sup> The many Chinese businessmen and workers we met in Africa not only ignored and disobeyed Beijing’s official policies, they openly thought that the Chinese officials were in corrupt collusion with African officials and ‘never care about us’ or ‘cannot do anything to protect us’.<sup>60</sup> Other research has also confirmed that the massive number of Chinese with very diverse backgrounds coming to Africa are mostly ‘independently motivated by their desires to improve their lives’ rather than organized agents of the PRC state.<sup>61</sup> It makes us wonder about the nature and future of China’s presence in Africa and what that may mean for China’s own domestic politics.

Somewhat as expected, we found very little genuine enthusiasm in Africa for Chinese culture and values or the Chinese way of governance and politics, although there were quite a few Africans we met who thought that an emulation of Chinese style state-capitalism and mercantilism would be good for economic growth in Africa. Several African intellectuals we met believed that the so-called China Model could be a good alternative to the Western style governance to enable real economic growth in Africa, yet they also subsequently doubted the sustainability of that model in China itself.<sup>62</sup> There are now Beijing-facilitated experiments of special economic zones (SEZs) in Egypt, Ethiopia, Mauritius, Nigeria and Zambia to hopefully replicate the success story of the Chinese SEZs in the 1980s–1990s.<sup>63</sup> China has also offered to train civil servants for African countries. Beyond that, Beijing’s political and policy influence in Africa is largely reduced to gestures of goodwill and *ad hoc* deals, even though there seems to be a widespread speculation in many African countries that Beijing has already unduly bought many officials and officers of the local governments and militaries.

58. Xi Jinping, ‘Remaining reliable friends and faithful partners forever’, speech. He reiterated the same ideas six days later in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo.

59. Interviews with bankers and academicians in Accra, February 2013.

60. When asked ‘why come here’, Chinese non-state businesspeople and workers in Africa usually list the following: it’s freer here, officials are easier to deal with here, easy to make money here, air is cleaner here, or just want to get out of China citing corruption, pollution, over-crowded space, declining returns of investment and the low job-prospects at home.

61. Tu T. Huynh, Yoon Jung Park and Anna Ying Chen, ‘Faces of China: new Chinese migrants in South Africa, 1980s to present’, *African and Asian Studies* 9, (2010), pp. 286–306.

62. Some interviewees asserted that the Chinese model was ‘unsuitable in Africa as Africa has a very different state–society relationship’. Interviews with African economists in Accra, Ghana, Nairobi, Kenya, and Cape Town, South Africa, February–March 2013. We heard similar views from politicians in Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

63. ‘China and Africa’, *The Economist Intelligence Unit*.

We have seen few Africans could go beyond saying *nihao* (hello) in Chinese or show any possession of Chinese artifacts. The audience for Chinese TV programming was basically only the Chinese diaspora. Perhaps due to the relatively high price, Chinese restaurants in Africa, unlike in most other places of the world, tend to serve very few locals. Contrary to the fairly common use of the Star-Spangled Banner as decoration by many Africans, we saw no instance of the public displaying the PRC flag in Africa outside of official functions and Chinese-owned buildings. Compared to the ubiquitous presence of Western cultural or merchandise icons such as Coca Cola, KFC or Apple, even the infamously massive flood of Chinese goods seems to be rather stealthy in Africa: in the University of Nairobi, when asked about the maker of their cellphones, all six students initially insisted that their Chinese-made devices were from Korea.

### *A great dichotomy*

There appears to be a great dichotomy in African perceptions about China's presence: China is widely viewed in Africa as a beneficial business partner, investor and donor, contributing significantly to the economic development in many host nations. The so-called Chinese model of authoritarian state-capitalism has been gaining an audience and followings in Africa, as has Chinese culture. Many, including some white Africans, hope that China is representing a new outside influence in Africa that will be decisively different from the role of 'resource-extraction plus political-nanny' of the West in the past.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, there are growing African complaints against the opportunistic even predatory behaviors by the Chinese in Africa—acts that resemble very much the old Western resource extractions that damage the local business environment, ruin social fabric, and undermine labor rights and employment opportunities. Certain peculiar business practices by the Chinese have created resentments over the depletion of non-renewable resources and bio-diversity.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, there are creeping suspicions about China's geopolitical objectives and the rapidly growing influx of Chinese migrants, colored with nationalistic and populist reasons, racial and ethno-culturally xenophobic or Sino-phobic feelings.<sup>66</sup> An African leader from Kenya commented in private that Beijing acted nicely and generously to really promote its 'long-term strategic and political objectives in Africa' and the Chinese people who came to Africa as a result of that were only there for quick-profits and resource-extraction, not treating Africans as their equal business partners, so there is now a 'fundamental mismatch between Chinese approaches and African perspectives'.

64. Interviews with scholars in South Africa and Botswana, March 2013. An economist from Kenya in Accra in February 2013 strongly echoed this view; three other economists (from Burkina Faso, DR Congo and Togo) present, however, disagreed.

65. Many Africans frequently commented to the author about how 'China is doing just the same as the old Western colonialists'. Also see Sanusi, 'African must get real about Chinese ties'.

66. In Zimbabwe, where a visiting South African NGO activist labeled it 'a part of the new Chinese empire in Africa', a senior leader bluntly told the author that China is treating Africans as peoples lesser than Europeans or Americans and 'we know that and we have lot to be suspicious about China's motives and objectives in Africa'. One DR Congo scholar asserted that many of his countrymen now simply 'hate' the Chinese, especially Chinese retailers. In early 2013, a South African journal *Noseweek* published repeatedly racist essays against Chinese immigrants.

**Table 1.** Visa fees in Zimbabwe (2013)

<b>Landing visa</b>	
US citizen	US\$30
Russian citizen	US\$30
Japanese citizen	US\$30
UK citizen	US\$55*
Other EU citizen	US\$30
Canadian citizen	US\$75*
<b>Advance visa (14 days before arrival)</b>	
PRC citizen	US\$65–161 (400–1,000 RMB)

*Note:* \* The reason why the British are treated less favorably is obvious. Harare dislikes Canadians because Ottawa, since 2008, has frozen the assets of President Robert Mugabe and banned arms transfer to Zimbabwe. (Author's field notes, Harare, Zimbabwe, March 2013.)

As a result, Chinese people are often treated less favorably than Europeans and Americans in Africa even in some of China's long-time friends like Zimbabwe where PRC citizens are treated lesser than the openly hostile British and Canadians concerning visa privileges. Zimbabwean politicians and officials agreed that China had quiet but considerable political clout in Harare, even in the military, procured through opaque and massive financial aid. Yet, both Zimbabwean officials and Chinese miners have confirmed that Harare has now quietly adopted policies to restrict Chinese immigration and presence through raising annual license fees and rents to squeeze the Chinese out of the lucrative gold and diamond mines (see [Table 1](#)).<sup>67</sup>

China's peculiar sociopolitical values and norms have visibly led to cultural and value frictions and conflicts with local populations, suggesting an outside influence that is somewhat challenging the existing Western-influenced institutions and values regarding governance and social rights. But the Chinese challenge has yet to be meaningfully strong, much less attractive. As evidenced throughout Africa, China seems to offer little lasting alternatives superior or even distinctive to colonialism or neo-colonialism from the West. The Chinese way of real estate development in Angola, for example, has proven that Beijing wastes African money in Africa just like it does with its own at home.<sup>68</sup> Being increasingly Westernized itself and changing constantly at home, China seems to have a hard time developing its own brand of soft power in Africa, despite its explosive presence throughout the continent.

In short, China is well liked and welcomed by African host states as a new source of economic opportunities and an alternative political support. Yet Beijing also faces

67. Anecdotally, such fees and rents have been raised '10–25 times' in the past ten years so some Chinese simply abandoned their 99-year land leases and mining licenses. Harare declared that it would start to arrest Chinese business owners in 2014 for working in 'sectors reserved for local people', mostly services including wholesale and retail activities. 'Zimbabwe: Nigerians, Chinese business owners face arrest in January', available at: [www.zimeye.org/?p=95055](http://www.zimeye.org/?p=95055) (accessed 8 January 2014).

68. China built Nova Cidade de Kilamba in Luanda, for half a million residents, in three years. But it is now an empty ghost town, priced way above the local income level and has cost US\$3.39 billion (to be paid with Angolan oil). 'Why has China built a ghost town in Africa?', *Daily Mirror*, London, (9 July 2012).

rising suspicion, grievances and even resentments that have led to quiet resistance and policy changes at many levels and sometimes outbursts of open demonstrations and protests labeling China as an economic and cultural imperialist power. While not many in Africa believe the assertion that Beijing is pursuing a neo-colonialist conspiracy to take over and colonize the continent, China is rapidly being viewed and treated by ever more Africans as just another outside power coming to Africa pursuing self-interests, remarkably similar to the West (or to the ‘disliked’ Indians in East Africa). Some Africans hope for a ‘positive competition’ between China and the West in Africa so ‘we Africans may have more bargaining power in negotiations with the West’ but they also wonder if that is possible at all.<sup>69</sup> Beijing’s signature, often refreshingly different, approaches, such as building infrastructure for resources, refraining from criticizing or commenting on hosts’ internal affairs, and sprinkling generous and unconditional official aid, have earned nearly unanimous warm receptions from the rulers and leaders in Africa. The picture becomes more complicated, however, if the general public and the actual government policies of the local hosts are examined. The activities of the million-strong Chinese who now live and work in Africa have worked to significantly neutralize Beijing’s charm diplomacy and cause growing backlashes, stirring up local concerns about Chinese colonialism. Many governments openly (such as Zambia and Algeria) or quietly (such as Zimbabwe and Tanzania) have adopted measures to ‘slow down and restrict Chinese immigration’ and reduce and even confiscate Chinese properties such as land and mining leasing rights.<sup>70</sup> One African think tank published tellingly on ‘how to fight Chinese imports’ to save African jobs.<sup>71</sup> Chinese influence in Africa is likely to grow further but this is unlikely to be at the same pace as the growth in trade and investment. In the long run, Beijing faces a steep uphill battle to win hearts and minds, or to replace the reputation and influence of the West in Africa.

### Tales from two nations

To further illustrate African perceptions of China’s presence, we report below on opinion surveys and field investigations conducted in two African countries that are literally a continent apart: Ghana in West Africa and Madagascar off the coast of East Africa, representing the English-speaking and French-speaking African countries, respectively.

#### *China perceived in Ghana*

Ghana was the first British colony in Africa to achieve independence in 1957 and is now one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The China–Ghana relationship dates back to the 1950s and China has been a significant economic partner

69. Interviews with African economists in Accra and Nairobi, February–March 2013.

70. Zambia re-nationalized a Chinese coalmine after high-profile labor disputes in February 2013. See Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, ‘Bashing “the Chinese”’: contextualizing Zambia’s Collum Coal Mine shooting’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), doi: [10.1080/10670564.2014.898897](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898897).

71. Zwelinzima Vavi, ‘How to fight Chinese imports’, available at: [www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/vavi-how-fight-chinese-imports](http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/vavi-how-fight-chinese-imports) (accessed 7 January 2014).

**Table 2.** Perceptions about China in Ghana

	Std error	P value	Significance
General attitudes towards Chinese	0.5574	0.1194544	Not significant
Views about Chinese employment	0.5217	0.3354689	Not significant
Views about Chinese social behavior	0.5138	0.3723661	Not significant
Views about Chinese infrastructure	0.6813	2.539596e-06	Significant
Views about Chinese contribution to development	0.7609	5.273849e-12	Significant
Views about Chinese business in Ghana	0.5611	0.1009874	Not significant
		Test value = 3	Significance
	<i>t</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)	
<b>General differences</b>			
High confidence—Chinese business opportunities	0.4279	0.3346	Not significant
High confidence—Chinese new products	2.55	0.005808	Significant
Confidence—Chinese contributing to economic growth	0.4211	0.3371	Not significant
Low confidence—Chinese businesses contributing to social development	-4.427	8.315e-06	Significant
Low confidence—Chinese businesses contributing to good governance	-6.2652	1.347e-09	Significant
Higher expectation—Chinese investment in Ghana	2.1922	0.01483	Significant
Higher expectation—Chinese development projects	2.8817	0.002223	Significant
Lower expectations—Chinese people in Ghana	-0.1287	0.4489	Not significant
Study preference in China to Japan, EU, US, etc.	-1.5065	0.06687	Not significant
Perceptions of China as very different business partner compared to EU and US	3.4868	0.0003083	Significant
<b>Differences in views by profession</b>			
<i>Positive vs. negative views about Chinese employment</i>	12.1079	0.007022	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus businessmen	3.1849	0.07432	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus students	8.5972	0.003367	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus traders	5.363	0.02057	Significant
<i>Positive versus negative views about Chinese social behavior</i>	13.6998	0.003344	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus businessmen	3.8991	0.04831	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus students	11.6596	0.0006387	Significant
Negative views—bankers versus traders	11.6596	0.0006387	Significant
<i>Positive versus negative views about Chinese infrastructure</i>	0.7604	0.3832	Not significant
<i>Positive versus negative views about Chinese contribution to development</i>	0.1471	0.7013	Not significant
<i>Positive versus negative views about Chinese business in Ghana</i>	4.6984	0.1953	Not significant

to Ghana.<sup>72</sup> Beijing set up its West African office of the China–Africa Development Fund in Accra and provided massive credit for Chinese companies in Ghana.

In the fall of 2012, we commissioned a survey study in Ghana about the Ghanaian perception of the Chinese presence, in comparison to the Ghanaian perception of the Western presence there. This study involved 184 Ghanaian stakeholders of Chinese business in Ghana, all based in Accra. The statistical results of the survey are summarized in [Table 2](#).

72. Samuel Kwadwo Frimpong, 'Research on relationship between China and Ghana: trade and foreign direct investment (FDI)', *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development* 3(7), (2012), pp. 51–61.



Nicely supporting the general findings of our field research, the survey indicates that there is not a direct translation of trade and investment/aid into goodwill. Ghanaian views of China vary widely, from an enthusiastic welcoming to apprehension. Many Ghanaians think that the Chinese are more committed to developments in Africa than the Europeans or Americans. However, there are nuanced reservations in Ghana about Chinese practices there. The bankers (the most savvy group of businessmen) tend to be especially skeptical. During our field interviews, Ghanaian bankers showed concerns about China's 'dumping' style of exports, 'rule-violations' and 'taking over' Ghanaian real estate and land, and harsh labor practices—in 2013, a major Chinese construction company paid its local employees only US\$70 per month while the legal minimum wage, albeit poorly enforced usually, was US\$300.

As we discovered elsewhere in Africa, the interests of Chinese corporations and that of the Chinese government are interestingly often in conflict. It is the Chinese state that pushed and lured Chinese businesses to Africa in the first place, backing Chinese firms in local biddings and providing cheap credit and skilled low-cost labor from China.<sup>73</sup> However, the multiple oversight bureaucracies and competing companies often undermine the objectives of the Chinese government. Chinese companies were often viewed as acting in a fiscally irresponsible manner because they could rely on China's state-controlled banks for financial support regardless of performance. Some Chinese firms in Ghana have been instructed by their provincial governments to make unprofitable bids just to get a foot in the door. Such practices have led to negative perceptions and even resentment among Ghanaians. Chinese construction firms tended to prioritize completing projects quickly and cheaply, resulting in lax safety, poor quality and bad labor practices.

A major concern has been that Chinese firms are not building much local capacity.<sup>74</sup> The Chinese government does encourage Chinese firms to hire local people to create a good social image and some state-owned firms are working on it,<sup>75</sup> yet many Chinese companies behave differently. Unlike other outside investors, Chinese companies were uninterested in spending time and money training local workers for those usually one-time and short-term (less than three years) projects. The public projects sponsored by government agreements make the Chinese firms mostly concerned with keeping to schedules in order to please the politicians who award the contracts. There has been a displacement of African workers by the tightly managed workers brought from China.<sup>76</sup> A self-claimed 'pro-China' senior politician we interviewed in Accra in 2013 voiced strong complaints that the Chinese investors often insist on a majority (60%) control of joint-ventures. He asserted that Ghanaian

73. Gill Bates and James Reilly, 'The tenuous hold of China Inc. in Africa', *Washington Quarterly* 30(3), (2007), pp. 37–52; Hannah Edinger and Christopher Burke, *AERC Scoping Studies on China–Africa Relations: A Research Report on Zimbabwe* (Centre for Chinese Studies, University of Stellenbosch, 2008).

74. Margaret Pearson, 'The business of governing business in China', *World Politics* 57(2), (2005), pp. 296–322.

75. Zhiren Zhou, 'Study of government performance management in China: a historical review and critical assessment', *Journal of Public Administration* 1, (2009), p. 4; Antoine Kernén and Katy Nganting Lam, 'Workforce localization among Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in Ghana', *Journal of Contemporary China* 23(90), (2014), doi: [10.1080/10670564.2014.898894](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2014.898894).

76. Chris Alden and Martyn Davies, 'A profile of the operations of Chinese multinationals in Africa', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 13(1), (2006), pp. 83–96.

workers and rural people simply ‘dislike even hate’ Chinese for the jobs lost to the ‘rule-violating’ retailers, miners and construction workers from China.

The survey confirms our field observation that different socioeconomic segments of the hosting societies tend to perceive China differently, in clear correlation to the benefits they receive (or lose) from China’s presence. Much like elsewhere, government and political elites appreciate the resources and opportunities China has brought to Ghana and thus view the Chinese presence more positively than the lower social classes who have been negatively affected by the increasingly numerous Chinese migrants. Chinese building of infrastructural projects was widely acknowledged and appreciated as such projects create new business opportunities for the locals.<sup>77</sup> Yet Chinese in Ghana were similarly segregated from local communities and fueled suspicions and resentment, justified or unfounded, among locals especially the less informed working class people. The common practice of violating intellectual property rights has created resentment among Ghanaian manufacturers inundated by counterfeit ‘African handcraft’ goods from China.

#### *China perceived in Madagascar*

On the east side of sub-Saharan Africa, Madagascar has had a long and stable relationship with China. Madagascar established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1972, relatively late in Africa. Representing the French-speaking Africa, Madagascar showcases diverse and increasingly complicated opinions about China and the Chinese presence.<sup>78</sup>

The Chinese came to Madagascar early, at the latest in the mid-nineteenth century, as construction and plantation workers under French rule. The Chinese population grew steadily to reach 60,000 in the 1990s and jumped to over 150,000 by 2010. The Chinese presence has a visible impact even on the Madagascar diet—‘ubiquitous shops dedicated to varieties of noodle soup and stir-fried noodles are a “fast food” standard in every city in the country’.<sup>79</sup> China became the biggest trade partner of the country in 2003, surpassing the old colonial master of France, and is now twice as big a trade partner as the United States.

Among Malagasy people, including the old (came before 1990s) Chinese-Malagasy citizens, there is now a complicated feeling that the newly arriving Chinese from the PRC are both a blessing and a curse to the local society: they have brought with them business opportunities but also created rising tensions. As in other African nations, the ‘new’ Chinese are generally isolated from the local community (hiring workers from China and living by themselves), speaking limited local languages (French and Malagasy) and behaving like typical outsiders making money in competition with the locals. There have been ‘occasional anti-Chinese public

77. Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins, ‘Chinese migrants in Africa as new agents of development: an analytical framework’, *European Journal of Development Research* 21(4), (2009), pp. 588–605.

78. Our report on Malagasy perception of China relies primarily on the work by Gregory Veeck and Sokhna H. A. Diop, ‘Chinese engagement with Africa: the case of Madagascar’, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 53(3), (2012), pp. 400–418.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 407–408.

**Table 3.** Grievances against the Chinese in Madagascar (2011–2012)

Issues and/or themes	Number of articles	Number of related blog comments
1 Undue political influence by Chinese government and Chinese companies	7	137
2 Mineral resource ‘grabs’ and excessive access to Madagascar natural resources by China and Chinese	5	42
3 Illegal logging and traffic in hardwoods and endangered species	3	54
4 Social conflicts and cultural insensitivity by Chinese towards Malagasy citizens	6	31
5 Monopolization of trade and investments in various sectors by Chinese firms	8	10
6 Counterfeit and substandard Chinese goods sold in Madagascar	2	14
7 Real estate/agricultural ‘land grabs’ by Chinese firms	1	1
8 Cultural imperialism by China	2	2

Source: Adopted from Veeck and Diop, ‘Chinese engagement with Africa’, pp. 414–415.

protests that have sometimes led to looting and threats of physical violence’ against both the new Chinese and the old Chinese-Malagasy.<sup>80</sup>

In Antananarivo (the capital), the Chinese businesspeople all live together in a compound of Chinatown, and all plan to return to China after three–five years or after making the fortune they planned to make there, reflecting a rather typical outsiders’ attitude, even though they all reported to have enjoyed living in Madagascar, citing clean air, good food and the ‘friendliness’ of local people,<sup>81</sup> similar to what we saw in English-speaking Africa. In Accra, Ghana and Brazzaville, Congo, one report shows the Chinese businessmen all plan to leave for ‘richer’ places like Canada after making their fortunes in Africa.<sup>82</sup>

Similar to places like South Africa, Chinese in Madagascar have developed worries about anti-Chinese violence and riots. They tend to hire very few locals (in a Chinese-run shopping mall, all of the 60 plus stores hired only Chinese workers). Local, non-Chinese Malagasy and French online media reflect ‘clear and growing frictions’ between Chinese and their local hosts. The vast majority of the blogs seemed to show anger and frustration directed either toward the Chinese government and or the ‘new’ Chinese from the PRC, with harsh words and sharp criticisms lamenting ‘Chinese economic imperialism’. Those grievances, seen in eight categories in Table 3, are still mostly words only but have led to a couple of college-student-led open protests in 2011.

Conflicts between the locals and the Chinese are hardly that momentous but some have become ‘very inflammatory’, showing poorly functioning intercultural relations ‘on the ground’. Even the life of the old Chinese-Malagasy citizens has now been affected by the anti-Chinese sentiment that has boiled over into street demonstrations and violence. As expected, the local government consistently views China as a source

80. Catherine Fournet-Guérin, ‘New Chinese immigration in Antananarivo’, *China Perspectives* 67, (September–October 2006), pp. 45–57.

81. Veeck and Diop, ‘Chinese engagement with Africa’, pp. 410–413.

82. ‘The Chinese in Africa’, *The Economist*.

of economic and political benefits. Consequently, there is now a growing local suspicion that the Madagascar government has given too much to China and lost control of the influx of Chinese migrants and investment.<sup>83</sup> This kind of mismatch and cost-ineffectiveness in China's cultivation of local goodwill is very much the same as what we have found elsewhere in Africa.

## Conclusion

China has had an explosive success in expanding its presence, primarily business activities, in Africa over the past two decades. It is now Africa's top trade partner, major investor and big donor, well perceived by the rulers, leaders and elites throughout the continent. Chinese cultural, even political, influence is also clearly rising. This is driven by the creative efforts of the Chinese state and the hard work of millions of industrious Chinese. Two key ingredients of China's success are seen from the field research: there has been a great push by the Chinese state with its diplomatic power, condition-free trade and investment packages, generous (and secretive) financial aid, and non-interference in local politics. There is also the peculiar Chinese ways of conducting business, such as cultivating personal connections and freely using financial means to get around local bureaucracies, that fit well many traditional social and cultural norms and practices in Africa. There appears to be room for a greater Chinese presence in Africa, given the development stage that China and Africa are at and the rise of China's global power position and ambition.

So far, the impact of and the reaction to China's presence and activities in Africa vary significantly across the different sectors of African society. There is clearly a co-relationship between Chinese orders, investment and aid and the level of positive feelings about the Chinese presence. There is also a co-relationship between the sociopolitical status of the Africans and their attitude towards the Chinese presence—the political and business elites seem to be more welcoming and appreciative whereas the nationalistic and liberal-leaning elites and displaced local traders and business owners tend to be much less positive. An appreciation for the Chinese style of authoritarian state capitalism is now detectable in Africa. Nationalistic African criticisms of China are growing on the grounds of environmental protection, labor and other human rights, anti-resource extraction, and anti-corruption.<sup>84</sup> As our report from the field shows, there is also a growing concern, even suspicion, among local elites about Chinese infringement of African intellectual property rights, extracting local resources, colonizing land, retarding local sociopolitical reforms, displacing the West's development of good governance in Africa,<sup>85</sup> and using Africa in Beijing's global competition with the West, particularly the United States. Some even started to have suspicions about the military ties Beijing is funding and cultivating there.

83. Veeck and Diop, 'Chinese engagement with Africa', p. 416.

84. 'Illicit activities and high level of corruption' were deemed common among Chinese businessmen in Mozambique. Mafalda Picarra, 'Revisiting Sino-Mozambican cooperation', *African-East Asian Affairs—China Monitor*, South Africa, 72, (June 2012). Algeria banned both Huawei and ZTE 'due to corruption cases'. See *CCS Weekly China Briefing*, South Africa, (15 June 2012).

85. Brown, *Hidden Dragon, Crouching Lion*, p. 4.

The general public in Africa also seems to have complicated feelings about the Chinese presence. There is a clear appreciation for the orders, goods, investments, tourists and humanitarian assistance from China. There is approval and admiration for Chinese culture and Chinese entrepreneurship and business success. However, due to the significant competition for jobs created by the massive influx of Chinese workers and the human-rights-deprived Chinese labor management on the factory floors, in the mines and in the farming fields, there is a rise of resentment among the masses about Chinese people in Africa.<sup>86</sup> Complaints about the sub-standard quality of Chinese goods and construction works as well as other 'grey' even unlawful practices, just like elsewhere in the world, are very common in Africa.

Furthermore, fueled by the sensational cases of land-grabbing, the environmentally unfriendly resources extraction projects, the typical colonial-style ways of living and working in Africa, and the noticeable collusion between Chinese businessmen and local officials (sometimes at the expense of the national interests of the host countries), suspicion and grievances against the Chinese presence in Africa are growing.<sup>87</sup> These negative attitudes are increasingly mingled with nationalistic, xenophobic and even racist feelings on both sides to create a seemingly new wave of opposition, sometimes in the radical name of anti-Chinese cultural and economic imperialism.<sup>88</sup> Although some Africans with Chinese blood have assumed government positions in Africa, such as Manuel Chang who was appointed Finance Minister of Mozambique in 2009,<sup>89</sup> it was only in the fall of 2013 that the first PRC-born Chinese migrant, Yu Hong Wei (Astan Coulibaly) who was naturalized through marriage 30 years ago, ran for public office (member of parliament in Mali) but lost with just 6.5% of the votes in her home district of Segou.<sup>90</sup>

On balance, as long as the rulers and leaders in Africa are sufficiently happy with the Chinese infusion of funds and goods, and as long as the Chinese government continues to be careful, considerate and generous in its conduct in Africa, African perception of China is likely to remain generally positive and friendly. However, the positive perceptions are often literally purchased with huge sums of Chinese money and hence are increasingly costly to Beijing. They have also to race against the growth of societally negative feelings and the exponential growth of various frictions and conflicts between local hosts and the Chinese traders, investors and workers.

It is noteworthy that the negative attitudes towards the Chinese presence in Africa are now increasingly entangled with the local hosts' domestic politics and tribe rivalries. In more democratic African nations, we now see political leaders and

86. In Zambia, local farmers accused the Chinese chicken farmers of taking away '90 percent of business' by flooding the market with sub-standard but cheaper poultry products. BBC, *The Chinese are Coming*, documentary.

87. Such suspicion, as a Cape Town-based African scholar put it, is often aggravated by Beijing's politics such as its stance against the Dala Lama.

88. Chinese media reported tense resentments in Malawi where the huge influx of Chinese merchants 'are not welcome at all'. A local merchant was quoted saying that 'a violent battle will happen sooner or later'. Lu Zhengqing, 'Feizhou minzhong ruhe kandai zhongguo shangren?' ['How African people view Chinese merchants?'], *Ershiyi shiji wang* [21st Century Network], Beijing, (8 October 2012).

89. 'Manuel Chang, Finance Minister, Mozambique', available at: [www.changes-challenges.org/MChang](http://www.changes-challenges.org/MChang) (accessed 4 December 2013).

90. See [www.abamako.com/elections/legislatives/2013/election/cercle.asp?R=4&C=22#gsc.tab=0](http://www.abamako.com/elections/legislatives/2013/election/cercle.asp?R=4&C=22#gsc.tab=0) (accessed 4 December 2013); 'Chinese candidate a Shanghai surprise in Mali polls', *New Vision*, AFP, Uganda, (17 November 2013).

factions seizing the grievances against China and running with them for political gains, as the recent developments in Tanzania and Zambia have demonstrated. In that way, China in Africa may turn out to be eventually not that special or unique after all. Beijing is to be deemed and treated in predictably the same way as others before: outsiders who come for their own self-interests. Furthermore, when well-oiled and well-connected friends in power are somehow toppled or replaced, China stands to lose its investments spectacularly, as has happened in Libya recently.

Interestingly, the most vocally anti-China political leaders, such as the President of Zambia, Michael Sata, who famously stated that ‘we want the Chinese to leave and the old colonial rulers to return ... at least Western capitalism has a human face’ before winning his presidency, seem savvy enough to continue welcoming Chinese investment and workers despite their politically incinerating but scoring rhetoric.<sup>91</sup> It is telling that most of the African intellectuals we interviewed tend to suggest that African states ought to ‘bargain harder and better’ with Beijing. Equally interesting is the finding that the professed friends, like Zimbabwe and Ghana, have actually already started to curtail and restrict the Chinese presence.

The Chinese presence in Africa, complicatedly perceived by the locals, also develops interesting and profound demands and pressures for Beijing. Many Chinese we interviewed in Africa think Beijing is ‘soft’ and ‘neglecting us’ with ‘no real help’ when they were in dire need. Some Chinese in Beijing have already openly called for more concrete government and even military actions to ensure the security of Chinese people and Chinese interests in Africa, especially those ‘struggling’ non-state enterprises and millions of workers there: ‘when (our citizens) are kidnapped, there is no option other than (military) rescuing’ like those done by the American SEAL teams in places like Somalia—as the officially bragged ‘traditional friendship’ (procured with aid) between China and Africa is ‘far from enough’.<sup>92</sup> If Beijing reacts or is forced to react, a more assertive Chinese political even military presence may greatly alter the overall situation.

Finally, China’s soft power is growing perceptibly in Africa. But the complicated local reception struggling between wanting financial gain and resenting Chinese conduct, seems to suggest that there are clear limits to how much power and influence China can actually acquire in Africa in the long run. In all the African countries we observed, the locals seem to have shown no significant deference and little difference in their general attitude towards China’s explosive presence when compared to the relatively stable and even declining presence of the West, indicating an interesting absence of alternative ideas, norm, institutions, values or even distinctive characteristics from the PRC.<sup>93</sup> This may be an issue of time lag but may also be

91. ‘Chinese–African attitudes: not as bad as they say’, *The Economist*, (1 October 2011). Sata later also visited Beijing in April 2013.

92. Nuan He, Gao Hongyan and Jin Xiaonan, ‘Zhongguo touzi feizhou daijia yuelai yuegao’ [‘The cost of Chinese investment in Africa is getting ever higher’], *Zhongguo maoyi xinwen* [China Trade News], Beijing, (15 February 2012). Hong Kong media reported that hundreds in Guangxi demonstrated to protest against the PRC embassy’s ‘inaction’ and lack of sympathy when hundreds of Guangxi miners were arrested (some killed) by Ghanaian police; see *Apple Daily*, (7 June 2013).

93. Despite the fact of Beijing’s self-assumed ‘exceptionalism’. Chris Alden and Daniel Large, ‘China’s exceptionalism and the challenges of delivering difference in Africa’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 20(68), (2011), pp. 26–38.

more telling about the nature and future of China's presence in Africa. One African leader has already warned that, bringing in only financial benefits but little good governance, human rights and political democracy, China could soon be 'rejected' by Africans.<sup>94</sup> Just like the overall endeavor of the rise of China,<sup>95</sup> the prospects for the much-speculated competition with the West for African hearts and minds, if it were to be the case, appears to be still greatly uncertain, increasingly expensive and seriously challenging to Beijing.

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94. Rene N'Guettia Koussi (director of economic affairs of the African Union Commission), 'Long-term ways China should underpin its aid to Africa', *Europe's World* no. 19, Brussels, (Autumn 2011), pp. 92–96.

95. David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).