

China's New World Order Model of Engagement: A Critical Comparison with the Old European Colonial Powers' involvement in Africa

Makhura B. Rapanyane

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0530-1083>

North-West University

South Africa

makhurabenjamin2@gmail.com

Abstract

China's engagement model with Africa has received little scholarly attention from international relations scholars and practitioners in the past. Scholars who have written more about China's engagement with Africa have far more focused on other significant aspects emanating from alternative sister disciplines of econometrics, economics, political science, and so forth. While this is the case, this paper sought to extensively delve into the subject of China's Africa engagement model and compare and contrast China's Africa engagement model with that of the British and French colonial models of the earlier imperial period. This paper argues fundamentally that China's Africa engagement model—although not far different from that of the European colonial powers—advances pillars that champion a soft foreign policy stance while it hides its extensive disregard for African countries and their economies. Methodologically, this paper relied on complete interdisciplinary discourse analysis and prevailing continental relevant literature on the subject of China-Africa relations, British-Africa relations, and French-Africa relations.

Keywords: China; Africa; Britain; France; non-interference principle; direct political control; administrative control

Introduction

Building on the studies conducted by prominent and authoritative voices regarding China's international relations with Africa, this paper explores China's new world order model of engagement through a broader comparison of contemporary China and European colonialism in Africa. The most relevant consulted scholarly studies that directed the current paper include those conducted by Brautigam (2015) titled *Will Africa Feed China?*; Taylor (2007) titled *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise*; Brautigam (2009) titled *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*; Rapanyane and Sethole titled *An Afrocentric Critique of China's Security Concerns in Africa: The Cases of Mali and South Sudan* (2020); and Rapanyane (2020b) titled *An Afrocentric Critique of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of China towards Africa: Case Study of Zambia, 2010–2018*. There is no gainsaying that the above-mentioned studies have contributed immensely to the understanding of China's international relations with Africa, particularly as framed within an unequal power relation existing between the two. The studies mentioned are categorically inter-linked argumentatively with the current study, although thematically de-linked. One central feature of the mentioned studies remains that China engages with African countries primarily for extracting Africa's mineral resources, and to some extent, in exchange for infrastructural loans. Even if so, the current study seeks to interrogate China's real intentions in Africa. This is done through a broader comparison of European colonialism as a special test case of Britain and France's involvement in Africa, with that of China's contemporary relations with Africa. The study specifically focuses on the narration of what European colonialism in Africa has been like; exploration of the drivers of Chinese and European countries' engagement with Africa; and an examination of China's soft policy engagement with Africa as a way of hiding its real agenda, which is a replica of former colonial powers (Britain and to a lesser extent France) in Africa.

Methodological Interpretation

This study has adopted a qualitative research approach in the form of desktop research and the utilisation of semi-structured interviews in analysing China's engagement model with Africa as a replica of European, British, and French neocolonial models in Africa. Academics and emerging scholars who were interviewed work within the discipline of international politics, particularly foreign policy and international organisation and strategic studies. A total of 50 combined documents, including policies, journal articles, website reports, books and official documents, were collected and analysed. The information collected by the author was analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA), as explained by Anderson (2017). The author also made a concerted effort to ensure that the data collected are dependable, credible, and confirmable by adopting the tool of data triangulation at all stages of the analysis.

European Colonialism: British and French Models of Engagement in Africa

The French and British were the dominant empires in the 19th and 20th centuries and the principal actors in African colonisation that dominated most of the 20th century. The main goal behind Africa's colonisation, by both the British and the French, was to engineer the exploitation of African natural resources to benefit their own countries' economic feed (Antwi-Boateng 2017). The imperialist agenda in Africa was depicted by the "scramble for Africa" that showed the real intention of Europeans in Africa. The combination of economic, political and social factors was the driving force behind the European imperialist agenda, although the principal goal of colonisation of the continent was driven by economic factors. The latter might have been because of the fact that industrialisation in Europe had arrived a century before; therefore, both France and Britain were initially looking for various global markets and new sources of raw materials. That is why Ekeh (1975, 95) argues that "The British bourgeoisie fundamentally supported colonialism." As such, colonialism required effective colonial management strategies on expansive African territories. Britain employed a policy of indirect rule that was applied in various colonised countries—including South Africa and Kenya—and was practical. This strategy of governance initially relied on African traditional leaders and other relevant stakeholders to govern their people. Unlike France, Britain was not keen on transforming the local people's cultures and traditions. The markedly different integration style into French life was not deployed by Britain (Kervinen 2007, 14–18). The assimilation of colonised African people into French culture and tradition management strategies were employed by the French colonial policy in Africa. Far different to that of Britain, France had the approach that their culture and traditions were superior and that Africans in the Francophone countries who embraced and learnt their language and adopted their cultures and traditions, were to become French citizens (Fenwick 2010). The French principle of assimilation was premised upon a policy of the expansion of the French culture to the Francophone colonies. Therefore, the Francophone countries were promised duties and rights as French citizens. Equally, France sought to prove to the whole world that their assimilation principle was effective in Africa and could be deployed elsewhere in the world. This very same principle—deployed as a policy—created loyalty for British colonisers, who in the same way favoured African traditional leaders and elite to earn loyalty for management purposes. Alternatively, one might argue that these strategies had served their purpose of governing both the French and British colonies (Fenwick 2010).

Stimulation and Alignment: Chinese and European Engagements in Africa

This section of the study argues fundamentally that both China and the European colonial powers (Britain and France) share the same neocolonial interests in the African continent, which include, amongst others: the pursuit of global markets; competition for

access to raw materials; a desire for international influence; and the use of similar altruistic rhetoric to justify their policies and actions in Africa. Within the context of the pursuit of global markets, this paper argues that China's international engagement with Africa focuses on trade as a tool to look for more markets to feed its booming manufacturing sector. Likewise, European colonial powers were motivated to trade with African colonies in order to access Africa's local markets for their manufactured products at the height of the first industrial revolution (Antwi-Boateng 2017). Within the context of accessing local markets, European countries promoted a developmental agenda in Africa during the first part of the 20th century, embarking on numerous construction and infrastructural projects such as railways, roads and communication channels. Moreover, African people were educated and used as colonial administration resources so that they would allow them (colonialists) to bring their products into Africa. Similarly, Chinese multinational corporations (MNCs) backed by State financing had secured billions of loans for allocation to African governments in order to fund the same infrastructural projects which are continuously used in exchange for access to the local markets. The utilisation of Chinese labour and technology in Africa has the principal aim of boosting Chinese exports into Africa. Conclusively, one can observe that both China and former European colonialists engage(d) in Africa to expand their markets for their products, which in turn expand(ed) their economies (Antwi-Boateng 2017).

Secondly, both former European colonialists and China have sought to compete for access to Africa's raw materials. Arguably, they needed Africa's abundance of minerals and/or raw materials for the sustenance of their transformational economic growth. European colonial powers (who are resource-poor) sought to access Africa's raw materials to sustain their industrialisation. Similarly, China now imports most of the African nickel, copper and timber from African countries, just like European colonial powers mostly imported ivory, timber, agricultural produce, copper, and horticultural produce to feed their economic growth. This implies that both China and former European colonialists are/were initially driven by the global competition for access to raw materials in their international engagement with Africa (Kurlantzick 2007). Thus, China's (also referred to as the Asian giant) unbridled exploitation of African raw materials is similar to all the tactics of neocolonialism in Africa (Rapanyane 2020b). It is Nkrumah (1965) who reminds us that neocolonialism can be a form of foreign capital that is issued for the exploitation of other less-developed countries, instead of promoting these countries' development. Furthermore, Nkrumah (1965) highlights that under neocolonialism, investment seeks to increase the gap between the poor and the rich instead of decreasing it.

Third and last, we also consider colonialists' desire for international influence and/or prestige. Just as the Chinese have done by turning their attention to Africa at the beginning of the 21st century, the European colonialists also turned their attention to Africa at the beginning of the 20th century (Large 2008). With China, its "peaceful rise policy" is more important than anything, including the pursuit of the multi-polar world for the total disintegration of the unipolar world driven by the United States of America

(USA) (Rapanyane 2020a). Thus, the presence of China is driven by its goal of amassing international influence. A great power's status hallmark is its capacity to showcase power even beyond its regional sphere of influence to pursue its national interests, not prevented by any other great power(s) (Antwi-Boateng 2017). During the 19th and 20th centuries, both Britain and France (as European colonial powers supported by their naval superiority) were able to showcase influence and power beyond their regions and shores, to ultimately amass numerous African colonies supporting their influential international positions. While European colonial businesses were driven into Africa by economic factors, it has become clear that even the associated prestige was a principal attraction, as showcased by other less economically advanced European colonisers like Belgium and Portugal, who also engaged in the "scramble for Africa" (Huang and Chan 2015). As such, the African continent, more like the former European colonies, has given China a soft foreign policy spot to test its great power credentials by supporting it on an international platform. Due to the Asian giant's international charm offensive that aims to bolster its global prestige, Xi Jinping (Chinese President) offered 8 000 Chinese soldiers at the UN General Assembly as part of its initiatives of the peacekeeping force, \$1.1 billion for the Chinese UN peacekeeping fund, and military assistance for the African continent's peace-preservation missions (Huang and Chan 2015). Through the combination of peaceful development and/or peaceful-rise, China aims to further its international ambitions of being an influential great power in global affairs. The Chinese call for the challenge of a unilateral international system is informed by the desire to unseat the Western countries led by the USA's global domination and prestige over world affairs (Rapanyane 2020a). Antwi-Boateng (2017) highlights that, just as European colonial powers had operated under the ambit of colonialism to push for their influence in Africa, China is doing the same for its rise as a global power in world affairs.

China's Africa Engagement: Pillars of Soft Foreign Policy and Neo-colonial Agenda

No Civilising Mandate

China, unlike European colonial powers, has no civilising mission in Africa for the African people. This implies that, while European colonial powers viewed the civilisation of the dark continent as culturally imperative and moral, evidenced by the catch-phrase "white man's burden," China does not have such a policy or intention. Instead, China aims to promote its culture as a nuanced part of the broader cultural, diplomatic strategy that seeks to enhance its image amongst African people, which may, in turn, be attractive to their economic benefit. To some extent, one might argue that China showcases relative respect for the culture and traditions of the African people and does not seem to want to assimilate African people, unlike its European counterparts, e.g., France. For China, culture is being used as a bridge for the enhancement of China-Africa relations, and the combination of political and cultural hegemony is not important; thus, its peaceful rise strategy does not conform to the cultural assimilation of the people of Africa. The cultural diplomacy adopted by China has enabled the Asian

giant to communicate with African countries on a friendly and fair basis, including the projection of itself as an extreme pro-African greater power (Antwi-Boateng 2017). China has done the latter by promoting the Confucian cultural institutions in African countries for the expansion of its only cultural ties and not cultural enforcement. Equally, some African universities are now willingly offering the Chinese language, intended to boost cultural ties between China and Africa. China's strategy of soft cultural interaction with Africa has seen it formulate an image of humbleness. This kind of Chinese soft power applied in Africa is most likely difficult to overcome due to the aggressiveness of former Western colonial powers' inflexibility and the colonial maintenance of their traditional approach (Kurlantzick 2007). Both the Chinese News agency Xinhua, which covers 47 African countries, and the China Central Television (CCTV) that is now located in Africa, enhance Sino-Africa relations. China now uses its media content to convey its productive relations with Africa, much of which covers trade as the most powerful soft power tool deployed by China to expand its influence in Africa. China uses the media as a tool for formulating the image of a good international partner. The Asian giant's increased media investment came at a time when Western states had been cutting back on media-related costs (Brookes 2007). China also demonstrates its power in Africa through economic opportunities.

Chinese “Non-interference” International Policy Principle

One of China's longest-standing attraction tools employed within African states and governments is the Asian giant's international principle of “non-interference” in the internal affairs of other nation-states. Aidoo and Hess (2015, 110) remind us that the Asian giant's principle of non-interference has existed for more than 60 years and has always been the foreign policy cornerstone of China, particularly regarding the South-South cooperation developed under the aegis of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The same principle is part of the “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” advanced by China internationally and based on what Hess and Aidoo (2010) state as: “mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence.” This Chinese principle is in sharp contrast with Western colonial policies, which decimated and destabilised pre-existing African political systems, with unbearable consequences for the African continent. After colonialism and with the dawn of independence in Africa, there were numerous African countries that had to deal with Western colonial powers' conditionality as a major source of huge irritation to post-colonial African leaders. This manifested in periodic protests that condemned Western interference and violations of a long-standing Westphalian principle of sovereignty. In contrast to Western-African relations, China's international relations with Africa have signified economic aid and investment that all come with no strings attached (Hess and Aidoo 2010).

However, various signals are showing that the non-interference principle advocated by China in Africa is facing challenges. Verhoeven (2014, 66) contends that “China's deepening material interests are forcing it to abandon the principle of non-interference.” Various test cases of this include, amongst others, China's unconditional military supply

of weapons to Sudan and South Sudan, its military involvement in Djibouti, and its attempt to capture Zambia's national strategic assets for loan reimbursement (Rapanyane 2020b). In Sudan, China had supplied the Sudanese government with military supplies during the Darfur crisis crackdown. Chinese citizens have also been reported to be guarding the oil installations in Sudan, which raises serious concerns about the Asian giant's involvement and real intentions in Africa. China has departed from this non-interference principle by supplying UN peacekeeping missions in Africa with hundreds of troops in countries like South Sudan to boost the UN peace mission in the African country—"the first-ever Chinese infantry battalion to be sent on external peacekeeping operations" (Allen 2015; Rapanyane and Sethole 2020). Evidence of the challenge facing the Chinese non-interference principle is the acquisition of a military base in Djibouti to safeguard its interests in the African country. Even if so, this was realised through a mutually agreed bilateral deal with an independent country instead of forceful means, as was the case under European colonialism (Allen 2015).

No Direct Political and Administrative Control

Unlike European colonial powers, China is not interested in the administrative and political control of African countries. China recognises that it deals with independent African states that are recognised by the UN, where it is celebrated as a permanent member state of the Security Council with veto powers. Administrative and political control goes against the Asian giant's policy of peaceful rise as an international economic powerhouse. The recognition of African countries as co-equals is significant, as China insists that it is a developing state. Both Hrituleac and Jorgen (2011) understand that China deploys soft power and diplomacy to gain influence instead of political control. Unlike China, European colonial powers, such as France and England, had developed violent and aggressive administrative and political controls in their various African colonies. For China, trade and increased bilateral relations are more important than hegemonic motives since occupation, aggression and political control are more likely to dent China's international image as a peaceful rising power. One might argue that China's soft power foreign policy strategy has indeed earned it more influence than any other emerging power in the international system. This is unlike the European colonial counterparts, who viewed Africa as an extension of their mainland (Antwi-Boateng 2017). The one-China policy does not include independent African countries, as it is advanced through the non-interference policy principle, which categorically states that it does not meddle in the internal affairs of other independent countries. This implies that China has rejected any imperialist agenda as a peaceful riser and does not strive for territorial occupation or aggression toward Africa. However, a different situation can be observed from its direct neighbours, where it is forever in a territorial dispute, particularly in the South China Sea (Rapanyane and Shai 2021).

China's hidden Disregard for Africa, Africans, and African Economies: A Miscalculation of Mutual Respect

The self-casting of China as a non-interfering economic part of Africa was partly accepted by 40% of the research respondents, who cited many examples, including its off-hand indirect involvement in Zanzibar (Rapanyane 2020b). Unlike China, Western countries had deplored the Zanzibar government for cancelling (“unfairly”) the 2015 general elections, which brought about a huge debate (BBC 2015). Whether this is a good thing or not, one thing is observably clearer: China does not interfere in the internal affairs of the African countries that it cooperates with, as long as business interests are not compromised; implying that China's zero-interference policy is not practically applied and 100% true. It does interfere in some cases, maybe much more than traditional development partners (DPs). The notable disparity can be distinguished by it not working with civil society organisations (CSOs), activists, media, opposition figures, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). China interferes by working with the initial governments of the ruling parties directly (Kinyondo 2019).

In Tanzania, Dr Lu Youqing (former Chinese ambassador) once adorned the ruling Tanzanian party publicly, causing an uproar in the African country as this was contrary to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that barred diplomats from interfering in the internal partisan politics of their host countries (Mahira and Nyanje 2013). Scholars have also observed that China's economic partnership with African countries comes with strict diplomatic conditions, which are in contravention of the principle of national sovereignty, e.g., Chinese economic assistance needs the receiving countries to denounce Taiwan as a sovereign country (Haroz 2011). Various African countries rejected this condition, including Sao Tome, Swaziland, Principe, Burkina Faso and Gambia, which till today do not receive any Chinese development assistance in any manner. Kenya, in the year 2016, had to deport 50 Taiwanese nationals back to Taiwan to stay in the good books of China (Manero 2017). One might argue that China's Africa partners are a “pushover” due to their smaller financial muscles. However, this argument may be under scrutiny when we look at the South African government's denial of Dalai Lama's entry into the country in the year 2014, following huge diplomatic pressure from China, speaking volumes of the extent of Chinese hegemonic power relations and/or pressure over its African developing and under-developed partners, especially where its national interests are affected directly or indirectly (Kinyondo 2019).

Equally, for a country that often emphatically states its non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, China has successfully managed to establish a military base in Djibouti, which is close to the USA military base of Camp Lemonnier (Koran 2018). This military base could be utilised for the restriction on other non-Chinese friendly countries' access into the Djibouti strategic port, with huge global negative implications. This first step in military encroachment is a signal of the Chinese deviation from their non-interference principle for the sake of the African markets, natural resources and

global influence. Ofodile (2009) understands that in the year 2008, South Africa turned away a Chinese ship that carried 77 tons of ammunition being transported to Zimbabwe. Kinyondo (2019) reminds us that this had raised international criticism, as the ship had carried an estimated “three million rounds of ammunition, 2 500 mortar rounds, and 1 500 rocket grenades.” This is further supported by Ofodile (2009), who says that this was the first signal of the pre-empted bloodshed towards the 2008 general elections in then-beleaguered Zimbabwe.

There is a clear misunderstanding that China’s international relations with Africa are premised upon mutual respect and, to some extent, non-interventionism. This may be untrue to some extent, as it is promoted by both post-colonial African leaders and Chinese scholars who emerged extensively prepared to praise China as the Messiah of Africa. Both Rapanyane (2020a/b) and Songtian (2018) disagree that China is an innocent partner. They both argue that even though China-Africa relations are based on the principles of “equality, mutual trust, and mutually beneficial cooperation,” be that as it may, Chinese stories vindicating the Asian giant as mutually respectful towards African countries are mostly exaggerated. This implies that China upholds some neocolonial and imperial practices in Africa. The most relevant case in point would include Zambia, where Chinese nationals had lost their coal mine by their failure to conform to the health, environmental and safety governmental concerns. This is supplemented by the 2011 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on mass human rights violations and disregard for Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) by Chinese MNCs in various African countries (Rapanyane 2020b). The incident preceding the 2011 HRW report had to do with Chinese mine managers who were taken into custody for killing two Zambian local workers over a labour dispute (Al Jazeera 2014). On the issue of not conforming to the conditions of CSR in local host countries, Espotio and Tse (2015) raise an important point by highlighting that over the last two decades in Zambia, local people had worked in various Chinese mines without safety helmets, amid poor ventilation in the ground and had succumbed to deadly accidents that occurred daily. Chinese nationals are also favoured with local jobs in Chinese mines, and this has created a combination of xenophobia and resentment towards Chinese nationals. However, this scholarly deserving topic may be a matter for further research, including for South Africans who lost 75 000 jobs to Chinese nationals between 2000 and 2011 (Espotio and Tse 2015).

In the southern tip of China, there is a well-known African trader city known as Kwangchow or Canton, and this city has been historically accused of having a lot of fake, cheap goods that are made for resale on the African continent only (Hong 2018). In the year 2018, during China’s New Year Break, there was an uproar on Chinese State television during a gala show that showcased an Asian woman who wore a sizeable butt pad and a blackface accompanied by an African actor who wore a monkey suit. Despite this huge uproar and disrespect for African countries, the incident and the clip’s critics were censored, but this never stopped scholars from raising conversations around the racist video that was broadcast live on Chinese national television (Kinyondo 2019).

There is another incident that took place in the year 2016, which was composed of a Black man who was manhandled into a washing machine, to come out as an Asian-looking boyish man that had light skin (Hong 2018). Despite all of this, China continues the provision of various conditionally diplomatic galvanised loans and the practice of dumping in most of its African partners' markets. Chinese MNCs indeed do dump their low and cheap manufacturing goods and products with fake quality in African markets (Brautigam 2011; Rapanyane 2020b). Observably, the Chinese presence in Africa is also not effective and impactful when it comes to skills development, adequate technological transfer and measurable upgrades. Within the context of Nigeria, the practice of dumping low-priced textile goods has consequentially resulted in the closure of 80% of Nigerian local indigenous manufacturing companies (Espotio and Tse 2015).

The same approach, adopted untruly in the name of non-interventionism, is being practised in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), whereby in the year 2008, the Sicomines deal that initially advanced access to mineral rights in exchange for infrastructural development was signed (Rapanyane and Shai 2019). China had identified a gap left by the DRC's traditional DPs of improving the African country's infrastructure and had taken on this opportunity and volunteered for the construction of various water and electrical infrastructural projects in exchange for access to natural resources (Kinyondo 2019).

Despite its military projects in Djibouti, China has a stronghold on Djibouti as the African country owed China 82% of its external debt at the end of the year 2016, and there had been various threats of China negotiating for taking over Djibouti's port in exchange for loan repayment (Heanue 2018). Similar concerns were raised in Tanzania, where China is currently planning to build a US\$10 billion investment, Bagamoyo, which is also poised to become the biggest African port, should the Tanzanian government of the day agree to proceed with the deal (Ali and Stewart 2018; Chellaney 2017). The anxiety and distress with respect to the construction of this anticipated port are motivated by the fact that Tanzania already owes billions to China for the construction of the Mtwara Dar es Salaam gas pipeline, potentially adding more billions of debts on top of billions (Financial Times Reporter 2018).

Conclusion and Counter Policy Recommendations

Drawing heavily from the above analysis, I argue that China's engagement with Africa is more alike or similar to the former colonial powers' (France and Britain) engagement in Africa. Even though China is not completely and directly involved in the internal affairs of Africa, there are several new emerging signs of Chinese encroachment into Africa's internal affairs to safeguard its various interest in Africa. One more apparent thing is that European colonial powers have used indirect means of political and administrative control mechanisms throughout Africa as part of their colonial strategies of management. Far different from former colonial powers, China champions the principle of "non-interference" in the internal affairs of any country globally. This notion is debatable, looking at various African countries such as Zambia, Djibouti,

Angola, and the DRC, where China has either established a military base or is negotiating what we call “infrastructural loans in exchange for mineral and/or natural resources.” Conclusively, one might argue that China (second-biggest global power) is not that far different from former colonial powers who engaged in Africa for the sole purpose of extracting Africa’s raw materials for their economic feed. Although the latter countries have deployed a direct, offensive political control, China has distanced itself from such a type of neo-colonial practice in Africa. However, both have the same interests in Africa, which must be recognised as the “Scramble for Africa’s raw materials.”

Recommendations

This paper highly recommends that China revises its international strategy of engagement with weak but developing African states, particularly when it comes to loan negotiations. Equally, China is advised to disband its military base in Djibouti and renounce all its military involvement, particularly without any UN approval in Djibouti, as this often creates an impression that China is imperialising the African country. All African countries should always be strategic and deploy a win-win approach in their trade and loan negotiation with any other international big economic power in the international system. More like the former colonial powers, China should desist from any form of supplying African countries with military weapons to promote any civil unrest for the protection of their national interests. Counter neo-colonial and new imperialism policies and principles should be adopted by African developing and underdeveloped countries in their engagement with China and former colonial powers.

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