

CONTEMPORARY SINO-AFRICAN RELATIONS: MUTUALISM OR PARASITISM?

Oreva Olakpe

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies

Introduction

In biology, the interaction between two organisms is defined as being mutualistic, commensalistic or parasitic. The mutualistic relationship is one in which both parties benefit equally from their association. In commensalism, one party benefits from the relationship while the other neither gains nor loses from it. Parasitism, on the other hand, is marked by the gain of one party to the detriment of the other party.¹ While these are biological definitions of specie interactions, they may define the relationships between states as well. Political, social or economic exchanges between individuals and groups can also be characterized by mutualism, commensalism or parasitism. Therefore, it is safe to say that whenever there is an interaction of any kind, there will be costs and benefits to the parties involved.

Globalization has created new and complex relationships between states, individuals and international organizations, which have been both beneficial and detrimental in character. Recently, one of the most scrutinized interactions has been between China and Africa. In the 1950s, China's foreign policy towards Africa was based on the "five principles of peaceful coexistence."² These principles that had regulated Sino-Indian relations in the past served as the foundation for Sino-African relations in the fight against colonialism and in the development of economic and cultural relations. The five principles underline China's claims of the desire for a relationship with Africa based on "mutual

1 Alvin Silverstein et al., *Symbiosis* (Minneapolis: Twenty First Century Books, 2008), 8-9.

2 The five principles of peaceful coexistence are: mutual respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence. These principles were first developed in the negotiations between India and China on the issue of Tibet. The five principles later emphasized the cooperation between Asian and African states against the former colonial powers at the Bandung Conference in 1955. Emmanuel John Hevi, *The Dragon's Embrace: The Chinese Communists and Africa* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 6-9.

benefit, equality and peaceful coexistence,” recognizing Africa as a continent of independent states. However, times have changed since then, and so have the political, social and economic atmospheres in both China and Africa.

Today, critics of China’s globalization policies claim that China is now involved in some sort of neocolonialism or ‘scramble’ in Africa and that there is nothing mutual about Sino-African interactions. In other words, her increased dialogue with the continent is of a parasitic kind that is detrimental to Africa’s development. This essay intends to characterize the relationship in terms of the costs and benefits to the parties concerned in specific economic sectors. The following question will attempt to be answered: What have been the economic costs and benefits of close ties between China and Africa? This essay will focus specifically on the textile, timber and technology industries to ascertain who is truly benefitting from Sino-African relations and how this may influence Africa’s development. This essay argues that in labor-intensive sectors like textiles, China is more parasitic, and in skilled sectors like technology, the relationship is closer to mutualism.

The Costs and Benefits of Sino-African Relations

“Business is business. We try to separate politics from business.”

*Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong on Sino-Sudanese cooperation in 2004.*³

This statement may be taken at face value as a motive for contemporary relations between China and Africa. It is reflective of the shift from China’s ideology-centered support of Africa in the 1950s to a relationship that is based primarily on business and trade.⁴ Guided by the “business is business” perspective, one can assume that China’s dealings with African countries must incur the least costs and the greatest benefits both financially and politically. However, is this the reality of the situation? This essay will now look at three industries in Africa (timber, textiles and clothing, and technology) to weigh the ‘true’ costs and benefits of the interaction between China and Africa.

3 Cheng Li (ed.), *China’s Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 2008), 132.

4 Chris Alden and Ana C. Alves, “History & Identity in the Construction of China’s Africa Policy,” *Review of African Political Economy* 36, no. 115 (2008): 48.

Timber

China has enforced strict laws since 1998 to protect its forests from domestic logging in order to prevent erosion and flooding.⁵ Wood imports have risen by 400 percent over the past decade, and China is now the largest importer of timber in the world due its domestic urbanization policy.⁶ It is able to satisfy its high demand for timber through its rapport with some of the largest timber producers in Africa: Gabon, Liberia, the Republic of Congo, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.⁷ China also has exclusive access to import timber from Mozambique.⁸ China is benefitting in the timber trade largely because in these countries (specifically Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Congo and Cameroon), over 80 percent of the timber exports to China are illegal. As a result, Chinese logging companies do not face tariff or tax barriers.⁹

This illegal logging,¹⁰ while immensely beneficial to China because of the absence of tariffs, is detrimental to African economies and to the environment, especially because illegal logging far surpasses legal logging in these countries.¹¹ The revenue that would have come from legal logging may have had a positive contribution to the development of African timber producing countries. President of the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) Allan Thornton described China’s position in the African timber industry as being of a “predatory” nature because of the level of corruption and environmental degradation it brings.¹² In other words, the interaction between China and Africa in the timber industry creates more benefits for China while destroying or weakening the African timber industry. Because of the high level of domestic demand as well as benefits to be gained, China may have indirectly aggravated conflicts in Congo, Sierra Leone and Liberia.¹³ In the case of Liberia, China (and France)

5 Margot Schuller and Helmut Ascher, “China’s Engagement in Africa: Opportunities and Risks for Development,” German Institute of Global and Area Studies Publication (September 2008): 60-61.

6 Karen Foerstel, “China in Africa: Is China Gaining Control over Africa’s Resources?,” *CQ Global Researcher* 2, no. 1 (January 2008): 8.

7 Alden and Alves, “China’s Africa Policy,” 63.

8 “Mozambique,” <http://www.globaltimber.org.uk/mozambique.htm> (accessed December 5, 2010).

9 Exact percentages are as follows: Cameroon 80, Equatorial Guinea 90, Gabon 80, DRC 90 and Liberia 90. Foerstel, 8, 62-63.

10 Illegal logging is defined as the bypassing of export bans in unprocessed timber, operating without the required licenses, surpassing quotas, etc. It may also include legal logging activities that are done in an ecologically damaging manner. Schuller and Ascher, “China’s Engagement in Africa,” 64.

11 The loss of forest cover due to massive amounts of logging was 55 percent from 2000-2005. *Ibid.*, 61.

12 “Chinese Involvement in African Illegal Logging and Timber Trade,” Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations 2005: 2.

13 *Ibid.*, 6.

blocked United Nations sanctions placed on Charles Taylor's government in the 1990s from including timber because they were the two largest importers of Liberian timber.¹⁴ In exchange, France and China had access to Liberia's timber during the conflict.¹⁵ Consequently, the revenue from the continued timber trade helped to finance the Liberian conflict because timber was the primary source of funding for Taylor's paramilitary groups. This ended up contributing to the increase in human rights abuses and violence during the conflict.¹⁶ While France was involved in cooperating with Taylor for timber, China's role was equally important because China was the largest buyer of timber from Liberia until the UN sanction on timber exports in 2003.¹⁷ This case shows the business imperative of China as well as the negative impact it brings.

China, in its pursuit of minimizing costs and maximizing benefits, collects only unprocessed wood in Gabon, which has laws dictating that timber must be processed before being exported.¹⁸ Chinese middlemen also bypass laws protecting local logging businesses in Mozambique, creating loss of jobs and revenue for the local population.¹⁹ China's preference of unprocessed logs is driven by the fact that import tariffs in China favor unprocessed logs.²⁰ This also helps create jobs in the wood-processing sector and the production of important byproducts of log conversion (e.g. wood chips, sawdust and shaving) in China.²¹ All of these benefits would be lost if China allowed the timber to be processed in Africa.

Perhaps the losses incurred from the situation in Gabon and illegal logging in African countries are paralleled by the amount of investment that the Chinese government is pumping into these countries. One could even argue that it is profitable for local producers to sell unprocessed wood to China because a lack of infrastructure and technological know-how leads to inefficiencies in

production, labor and transport costs in African countries.²² Nevertheless, trade relations based on such detrimental activities may backfire on China and African countries in the future. It may also weaken China's policy of mutual benefit and equality on the continent.

Textiles and Clothing

The effect of Sino-African trade interactions is also largely felt in the textile and clothing industry.²³ The influx of cheap Chinese textiles between 2000 and 2008 led to the loss of 250,000 jobs and the shutdown of 80 percent of textile factories in Nigeria.²⁴ The impact is similar in South Africa, where 90 percent of textiles are imported from China, to the detriment of South Africa's textile industry.²⁵ While Africans with low incomes are benefitting from the cheaper prices of clothing, this benefit is comparable to the losses of African textile producers. Lower prices may be good in the short run, but in the long run will result in excessive dependence on China and deindustrialization.

The World Trade Organization's Multi-Fiber Agreement, in order to protect developed countries from competition from cheap and large-scale producers like China (currently the largest in the world), allowed countries to place quotas on textile imports.²⁶ When this agreement came to an end, barriers to Chinese exports were removed in all markets. Consequently, other textile exporters like Lesotho became disadvantaged because they were not able to compete with China's extremely low prices and massive scale of production. Between 2004 and 2005, Lesotho, Swaziland, South Africa and Kenya's textile industries declined considerably as a result.²⁷ According to a former worker in a Zambian textile factory, the cost of producing a Zambian tee shirt is four or five times what it costs China to produce the same shirt.²⁸ Chinese firms are now even producing African traditional-style textiles and clothing, a business

14 Filip Verbelen, "The Role of the African Timber Trade in the Creation of Conflict and Poverty," *Green Peace* 17 (November 2002): 2.

15 Ibid., 6.

16 "Issue 5: Helping Liberia Escape Conflict Timber," *Forest Trends Information Bulletin* (June 2006), http://www.forest-trends.org/documents/files/doc_2325.pdf (accessed May 1, 2011).

17 "Liberia," <http://www.globaltimber.org.uk/liberia.htm> (accessed December 5, 2010); "Helping Liberia."

18 Foerstel, "China in Africa," 9; Verbelen, "African Timber Trade," 5.

19 Verbelen, "African Timber Trade," 6. In Cameroon, the World Bank discovered that Chinese companies were manipulating the records that showed the source of its logs in order to bypass export controls. "China's Rise: Hope or Doom for Africa?," *Sunday Vision*, <http://www.sundayvision.co.ug/detail.php?mainNewsCategoryId=7&newsCategoryId=132&newsId=570825> (accessed December 5, 2010).

20 Robert Kozak and Kerstin Canby, "Why China Prefers Logs: Explaining the Prevalence of Unprocessed Wood in China's Timber Export," *Forest Trends Information Bulletin* 9 (October 2007): 2.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 5.

23 As of 2006, textile and clothing accounted for approximately 25 percent of African imports from China. Ascher and Schuller, "China's Engagement in Africa," 27.

24 Chris Alden, "China in Africa," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 47, no. 3 (2005): 147-64.

25 Foerstel, "China in Africa," 14; Kweku Ampiah and Sanusha Naidu (eds), *Crouching tiger, hidden dragon?: Africa and China* (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 182.

26 Frank Phiri and Moyiga Nduru, "Asia Strips Africa's Textile Industry," *Asia Times*, April 26, 2005, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global_Economy/GD26Dj01.html (accessed May 3, 2010).

27 Schuller and Ascher, "China's Engagement in Africa," 14; Ampiah and Naidu (eds), *Crouching Tiger*, 231.

28 Marek Hanusch and Aleksandra Gadzala, "African Perspectives of China-Africa: Gauging Popular Perceptions and their Economic and Political Determinants," *Afro-Barometer Working Paper* 117, January 2010, 5.

originally and solely owned by Africans.²⁹ Also, in a bid to minimize costs and maximize benefits, Chinese firms began to produce textiles in African countries in which there were no duties on exports towards large-scale consumers in Europe and the US.³⁰

It is apparent in this case that China's trade policy is detrimental to the development of African textile industries because of the former's comparative advantage in textile production. It appears that while China is offering development aid, it is at the same time causing stagnation in the development of African textile industry (deindustrialization).³¹ African textile producers will never be able to compete on the international market when they cannot even handle the influx of cheap textiles from China at the domestic level. The African textile industry is still at a fragile stage and its markets are still developing. Thus, they may not be ready to compete with China's already fully-established market.³² Within Africa, South Africa has the highest level of trade with China and proportionally the highest losses in the textile industry. The South African government led by the African National Congress (ANC) is unwilling to impose quotas on imports from China because China supported the ANC against the apartheid regime.³³ Also, South Africa is a member of the WTO and cannot go against WTO principles on free trade by imposing any restrictions on Chinese goods.³⁴ The low exchange rate of the yuan also contributes to the asymmetric competition between Chinese and African-made textiles in the African market. South African economists Mduduzi and Lumengo believe that South Africa's domestic policy will have the onus to stop the loss of jobs in the sector by promoting export.³⁵

Under pressure by the South African government, China placed voluntary restrictions on textile exports to South Africa for two years to allow South

African textile producers to regenerate and to encourage competition.³⁶ However, if prices of Chinese goods remain extremely low and continue flooding the market, temporary restrictions on exports will not solve the problem, making the two-year period insufficient for the recovery and competitiveness of South African textile producers. Furthermore, the voluntary restriction on the exports deal was made only with South Africa, which has a more advanced economy than other textile producers in Africa. This leaves other textile-producing African countries facing the same problem in questionable condition.

Technology and Infrastructure

"The Chinese are doing more than the G8 in making poverty history."
*Sahr Johnny, Sierra Leonean Ambassador to China.*³⁷

According to a 2007 poll by the Pew Institute, Africans who view China unfavorably are a minority.³⁸ Through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China has made large contributions to the development of technology and infrastructure in Africa, one of the factors contributing to the overall positive perspective of China. In the area of telecommunications, electricity and transportation, countries like Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Angola have also benefitted immensely from China.³⁹ Because of agreements between Nigerian and Chinese companies like Alcatel Shanghai Bell and Huawei and Zhongxin Communications, Nigerians have been able to have better telephone and Internet services.⁴⁰ Nigeria's government-funded telecommunications are known for being outdated and poor because of internal corruption.⁴¹ China's assistance has helped to change the sector; the same can be said for the rest of Africa. China was also instrumental in launching Nigeria's communication satellite NigComSat-1 in 2004.⁴²

29 Felix de la Klutze, "China Takes African Market by Storm," Daily Guide, November 25, 2009, <http://www.modernghana.com/news/2/251159/1/china-takes-african-market-by-storm.html> (accessed January 10, 2011); Alden and Alves, "China's Africa Policy," 53.

30 Meine Pieter van Dijk, "The Role of China in Africa: Chinese Foreign Direct Investment," African Studies Center: Panel 76, AEGIS European Conference on African Studies, 2007, 2; Alden and Alves, "China's Africa Policy," 29.

31 Ampiah and Naidu (eds), *Crouching Tiger*, 133.

32 Alex Vines, "China in Africa: A Mixed Blessing?," *Current History* (May 2007): 219.

33 Schuller and Ascher, "China's Engagement in Africa," 23.

34 Biyase Mduduzi and Bonga Lumengo, "The Impact of Chinese Imports on South African Employment: An Empirical Perspective," The African Institute for Economic Development and Planning Selected Papers, University of Johannesburg, 2006, 6; Weping He, "The Balancing Act of China's Africa Policy," *China Security* 3, no. 3 (2007): 26.

35 Mduduzi and Lumengo, "Chinese Imports," 10.

36 Ibid., 183.

37 de la Klutze, "China Takes African Market," 29.

38 "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, Washington DC, June 27, 2007, 39.

39 Kuang Mamung, "The New Chinese Migration Flows to Africa," *Social Science Information* 47 (2008): 648.

40 Mduduzi and Lumengo, "Chinese Imports," 203.

41 Kunle Aderinokun, "EFCC to Past Probe MDs of PHCN, NITEL," Thisday News, May 26, 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201005260157.html> (accessed May 28, 2010); Sam Olukoya, "Nigeria's Digital Mobile Bonanza," BBC News, August 28, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1512949.stm> (accessed May 28, 2010).

42 Schuller and Ascher, "China's Engagement in Africa," 200-1.

In terms of infrastructure and technology, China has come through where the West failed. In Ghana, for example, China has signed an agreement to construct a 400 megawatt dam for \$600 million.⁴³ It also supported the paving of 80 percent of roads in Rwanda.⁴⁴ In 2006 as part of the FOCAC, President Hu Jintao also promised to establish ten agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa to enhance agricultural production;⁴⁵ China has already made contributions to agricultural technology in Zambia and Tanzania.⁴⁶ These contributions to agricultural development in Africa might be what the continent needs to progress amidst the world economy. While creating business for Chinese companies, the average African is also benefitting from access to technology and infrastructure. China's investment in telecommunications and infrastructure has helped African currencies to rise in value.⁴⁷ China's technological support has helped to open new markets and increase consumption in Africa. In this sense, both China and Africa benefit from cooperation on technology and infrastructure development.

However, this cooperation is not without problems. Infrastructure development deals are usually used as leverage to increase mining and oil deals with African countries; China's "oil for development" model in Angola and "minerals for infrastructure" in the Congo are just a few examples.⁴⁸ Chinese companies have won over \$30 billion for infrastructure development in Africa; however, there has been little transfer of skills and technological know-how to their African counterparts. Instead, the displacement of African workers has been prevalent.⁴⁹ There is an estimated 1 million Chinese workers in over 800 Chinese firms in Africa working on different technology or infrastructure-related projects.⁵⁰ Future maintenance problems of the Chinese-built infrastructure may arise for Africans as a result because of the lack of skill transfer. This phenomenon is already creating tensions in Zambia and Tanzania, and China is

only slowly realizing that it is difficult to separate business from politics.⁵¹

Nevertheless, it appears that the benefits from technological and infrastructural development far exceed the costs for Africans, at least in the short run. This is because Africans feel its impact most directly in their daily lives. The perception of China's contributions in technological and infrastructural development is still very positive; one can say that the benefits are mutual in this sector. It will be up to African governments to pressure China to live up to its 2006 FOCAC promise of information sharing and transfer of technological know-how.⁵² It will also be up to China to carefully use the positive perception to enhance its global foreign policy.

Mutualism and Parasitism: Conclusion

The impact of Sino-African relations is massive and far-reaching. This essay has attempted to look briefly at three unique sectors in Africa that have been affected profoundly by China's increasing rapport with the continent. In low skill, labor-intensive industries like textiles, China is more likely to be detrimental to Africa because of the comparative advantage it has in the production of such goods. In the textile industry, China is already a mass producer and exports to large consumers like the US. In the timber industry, China's demand is so high that its companies are willing to bypass the rules and regulations to feed the domestic demand; African countries are ill-equipped to appropriately control the situation. In high-skilled sectors there are more benefits for Africa in terms of development, technology and education. To say that China is absolutely parasitic in its interaction with Africa would be to articulate that Africa has no strategic importance in the relationship. This also overlooks the numerous positive aspects of the relationship; to assert that only China is benefitting would be entirely false. Africa is benefitting in terms of infrastructural and economic development and the revival of some industries like agriculture, with no strings attached. China also has made some positive steps to address the negative impact it has had in its interaction with Africa in both the timber and textile industries.⁵³ This serves to better the image of China on the international level and goes hand-in-hand with China's goal in establishing itself as a peace-

43 Naidu Sanusha, "The Forum on China-African Cooperation (FOCAC): What Does the Future Hold?," *China Report* 43 (2007): 283-8.

44 Zhiqun Zhu, "China's New Diplomacy in Africa," Conference Paper, International Studies Association 48th Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, February 28, 2007, 15.

45 Sanusha, "China-African Cooperation," 289.

46 "Landless Chinese Farmers Migrate to Africa in Search of Agricultural Opportunities," *Biopact*, December 2, 2007, <http://news.mongabay.com/bioenergy/2007/12/landless-chinese-farmers-migrate-to.html> (accessed May 28, 2010).

47 Schuller and Ascher, "China's Engagement in Africa," 5.

48 Mduduzi and Lumengo, "Chinese Imports," 14-15.

49 Foerstel, "China in Africa," 3-4; Schuller and Ascher, "China's Engagement in Africa," 4; Aderinokun, "Past Probe," 28.

50 Mduduzi and Lumengo, "Chinese Imports," 4.

51 *Ibid.*, 28.

52 "Landless Chinese Farmers," 46.

53 With the increasing pressure from environmentalists, Beijing set regulations for Chinese logging companies in foreign countries to carry out their logging activities transparently in 2009. Jing Li, "Green Rules Eye Chinese Firms Abroad," *China Daily*, May 29, 2009, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/bizchina/2009-05/29/content_7952605.htm (accessed January 10, 2011); Mduduzi and Lumengo, "Chinese Imports," 183.

ful global power.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, China's claim of a partnership with Africa would be weakened if China allows its resource needs to dominate the relationship. If China is really committed to a relationship of mutual benefits and equality, then the current competition with the sectors in a weak or fetal stage in Africa needs to be controlled. China's trade policy of using Africa as a market for export goods like textiles contradicts its development policies because it leads to deindustrialization and dependence. It also increases the potential of future conflict with local populations. In the timber industry, it would be much more beneficial if China promoted transparency. In that way, the relationship will be sustainable. African states also have a role to play in stemming the illegal timber trade by tightening the criteria for the registration of foreign logging companies, enforcing tariffs on timber exports and promoting development of local timber industries. African economies need to diversify from exporting primary resources to producing secondary products in order to truly be equal with China economically. This will be possible only if there is considerable investment in research and development. Research must be done on how the diversification of African economies will benefit both China and Africa in the long run. Sino-African interactions driven by capitalism and globalization is still at an early stage. Therefore, Africa and China still have a great deal to learn about the costs, benefits and implications of close relations. Specifically, Africa must understand China and develop a general policy towards China and protect its interests.⁵⁵

For a sustainable relationship with the African continent, China has to forgo short-run benefits by investing in the improvement of human capital and technology and by supporting stability in the continent. Only when African economies are truly developing and succeeding, will there be true mutualism. The mutualism of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, the core of Sino-African relations, cannot exist when there is one-sided benefit only for China.

PEAR

54 Alden and Alves, "China's Africa Policy," 1.

55 Foerstel, "China in Africa," 21.

THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER: THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND FOUCAULT

Majid Rafizadeh

University of California, Santa Barbara

Introduction

Religious movements in the modern era claim to bear a superior social order as opposed to that presented by the secular nation-state system.¹ They claim to be searching for a new social order, which begs the following questions: what is the alternative social order and how has it been implemented? How have people reacted to this forced social order? In order to address these issues, this essay will analyze the social order created by one of these religious movements which have obtained power: the Islamic State of Iran. The essay will utilize Foucault's three fundamental modes of control in order to examine the different apparatuses employed by the Iranian government to bring about a new social order of control as well as explore the character of Iranian popular resistance to this Islamist social order.

"Modes of Control:" Disciplinary Power and Biopower

Since the Muslims' rise to power, the Islamic Republic of Iran instituted a new social order by applying the three modes of power described by Michel Foucault.² In order to solidify their power, the Islamist government employed various apparatuses of control based on Foucault's three fundamental modes of power: disciplinary power, biopower and sovereign power.

Disciplinary power is a form of surveillance and control over the individuals' behavior and comportments.³ It is disseminated and constantly operated throughout the day in order to produce and diffuse an array of social practices. It is even presented during basic daily interactions. This kind of power func-

1 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (University of California Press, 2008), 3.

2 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge* (London: Penguin, 1998), 92-102; see also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 140.

3 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195-228.