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Journal of Liberty and International Affairs | Volume 8 · Number 2 · 2022 | eISSN 1857-9760
Published online by the Institute for Research and European Studies at www.e-jlia.com

(*) Corresponding author
Peer review method: Double-blind
Received: 11.03.2022
Accepted: 24.03.2022
Published: 14.06.2022
Review article
DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2282223p

How to cite:
Pattnaik, Jajati K., and Chandan K. Panda. 2022. "CHINA'S GEO-ECONOMIC INTEREST IN AFRICA: A SHORT OVERVIEW". Journal of Liberty and International Affairs 8 (2):223-39. https://e-jlia.com/index.php/jlia/article/view/608.

CHINA'S GEO-ECONOMIC INTEREST IN AFRICA: A SHORT OVERVIEW

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Abstract: *The article examines China's geo-economic interest in Africa. China intends to exercise its leverage over both coastal frontiers for trade and defense and its hinterland for rich mineral, metal, and fossil deposits. Furthermore, the debt trap seems to be one of the methods through which China intended to bargain with Africa to bag as much advantage as it could gain. The question that emerges from this critical engagement with China-Africa relations is to look into how the reality of Africa's narrative of development is projected both from outside and within and the contradiction embodied in that projection. China used the narrative of development to set its feet on African soil. This paper discusses China's penetration into Africa by offering interest-free loans and its gradual emergence as a neocolonial power through expanding its network. The method used in the study to establish China's monopoly and interfering streak in African affairs through BRI is the analysis of available data based on which the objectives and the conclusions are drawn.*

Keywords: *Africa; China; BRI; Debt Diplomacy; Geo-Economics*

INTRODUCTION

China in Africa is not an overnight phenomenon. It understands Africa and African needs. On the other hand, Africa needs any investing nation to give its collapsing economy at least a semblance of strength. There seems to be a serious asymmetry between its increasing demography and poor GDP, which "accounts today for around 17% of the world's population, but only 3% of global GDP" (Coleman 2020). To secure a balance between its rising population and fragile GDP, it indubitably needed the investors to at least seemingly overcome the crisis. The resource-rich Africa was technologically handicapped to convert its assets into an economy. Therefore, the African dependencies invited many investors such as the USA, Europe, China, etc. China committed to better deals and faster delivery among its overseas investors, tactically sidelining the quality aspect of the projects earmarked for faster completion. The apparent appetite for African markets, the need for modernization and industrialization of Africa, and its geostrategic significance as a global middle seem to have provided China the field to actualize its ambition to emerge as a singular global power. This tendency of China triggers the rivalry between the USA and China. Here unstoppable China meets the irremovable USA. This unholy and antithetical engagement leads them to the brink of the historical 'Thucydides trap', "a deadly pattern of structural stress that results when a rising power challenges a ruling power" (Allison 2017).

Therefore, it would be too naive to suggest that the China-Africa interface is structured to achieve comprehensive development in Africa and fulfill the vision of reciprocal growth. Africa, on the contrary, seems to have become the meeting point of two rival powers vying for supremacy. China's percolation into Africa is assumed to have been arranged to pose a significant challenge to the seemingly protective and receding USA. Beijing, therefore, intensifies its Africa ambition through its robust BRI structuralism. However, there is no denying that Beijing's intervention in Africa has triggered massive infrastructural and communication-related development. Having outlined the emerging scenario that emanates from Africa with China's intensification of geo-economic attention through BRI, the competition it presents to the USA there, and the ramifications of the entire ongoing exercise on Africa, the paper discusses BRI in Africa, bilateral trade, and its implications, the impact of mining on ecology, debt distress, port infrastructure and reactions from Africa. The discussion of these areas crystallizes China's interfering proclivity under the banner of development as Africa expresses urgency for it and the repercussions of the profit-driven pursuits of the former on the latter and the geo-political churn the geo-economic enterprise unleashes in the region.

THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

The BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) as a Chinese government global infrastructure development framework started in 2013 with a comprehensive investment plan extended to 70 countries. It was earlier known as OBOR (One Belt One Road). The BRI constitutes the nucleus of Chinese foreign policy under President Xi Jinping. The BRI flagship project taken up by China in Africa includes railway, port and road construction, energy projects, power stations, telecommunication networks, defense, etc. Xi Jinping's craftsmanship triggered global connectivity and expanded Chinese outreach. It is an investment and infrastructure-building tool (Herbert 2021). The inclusion of Africa into the BRI was formalized in 2013 to transform the African economy and infrastructure. China gave dreams to Africa to revive the fading and decaying infrastructural leftovers from its colonial antiquity.

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), organized in Beijing in the year 2018, witnessed the participation of 55 countries from Africa. The Beijing Summit issued a declaration highlighting stronger China-Africa ties, comprehensive development, working towards a shared future, security, happiness, and common cultural prosperity with "cohesiveness, vitality and creativity" (FOCAC Summit 2018). A promise was given for comprehensive and enduring development in Africa. President Xi Jinping emphasized China's commitment to "adhere to the principle of sincerity, real results, affinity, and good faith, and uphold the values of friendship, justice, and shared interests" (FOCAC Summit 2018). He announced a $60 billion package for Africa. Eight major initiatives were undertaken to kick-start growth in Africa as part of the China-Africa Cooperation -"industrial connection, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, green development, capacity building, health care, people-to-people exchanges, and peace and security" (Tiezzi 2018). The list seems quite lengthy. Boosting agricultural productivity, increasing employability through the revitalization of vocational training, and governmental scholarships and exchange programs could be added to the list.

The FOCAC in 2018 witnessed the real flair of Chinese engagement in Africa and embodied the symptoms of success that BRI could procure for China. Looking back into history, the FOCAC was established in 2000 to promote China-Africa economic cooperation through infrastructural development. This initiative was originally designed to map African reality and develop a policy framework to address the infrastructural deficits of Africa and the effective utilization of its resources. Furthermore, the introduction of BRI in 2013 and its subsequent expansion into Africa was a major initiative emanating from understanding African aspirations through FOCAC. FOCAC provided an organizational framework to facilitate BRI in the African theatre. Be that as it may, the 'win-win' cooperation, the major highlight of the FOCAC in 2018, and China's declarative niceties of inclusive Sino-African advancement are supposedly the manifest reality exteriorized to synthetic image-crafting. Knowing China's intent in its Africa journey, the BRI has much more in it beyond its projected reality. The success of BRI lies in its promise and advertisement of low-interest Chinese loans. Africa and many developing nations have fallen for it but could never rise once they got into it. Therefore, the case of much-hyped Beijing's role in Africa as a catalyst of transformation is also juxtaposed with a narrative of the debilitating effects of debt and the painful loss of autonomy, biodiversity, and natural resources.

BILATERAL TRADE

The China-Africa bilateral trade offers the narrative of success. African nations under BRI are perceived to have benefited significantly from this bilateralism. In 2018, China's trade volume in Africa was $185 billion, and it reached $192 billion in 2019 (John Hopkins China-Africa Research Initiative 2021). Angola, South Africa, and The Republic of Congo have become the largest exporters to China, whereas Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt remain the prominent buyers of Chinese goods. The following chart (SAIS-CARI 2021) offers the China -Africa export-import trade trajectory from 2002 to 2019:

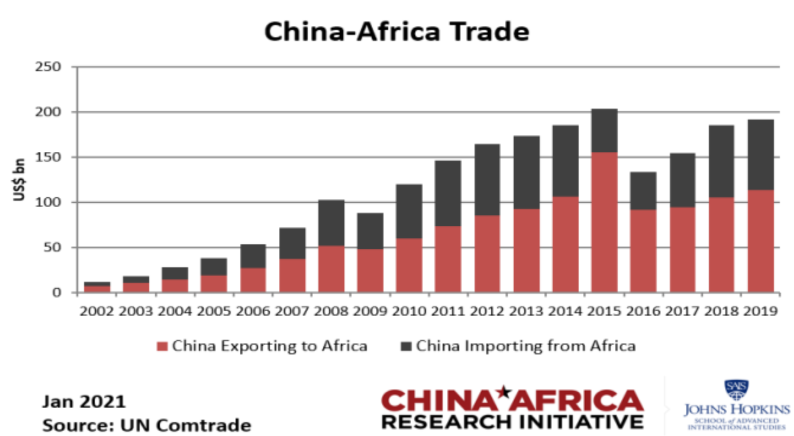

Figure 1: China-Africa Trade
(Source: John Hopkins (SAIS-CARI) - Boston University Global Development Policy Center 2021)

SAIS-CARI (China-Africa Research Initiative at John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies) presents an estimate that Beijing signed 1141 loan commitments worth US$ 153 billion between 2000 and 2019 with African countries. The following diagram presents the China-Africa loan commitments (SAIS-CARI 2021). The volume of the loan given to Africa from 2000 to 2019 is given below (SAIS-CARI 2021):

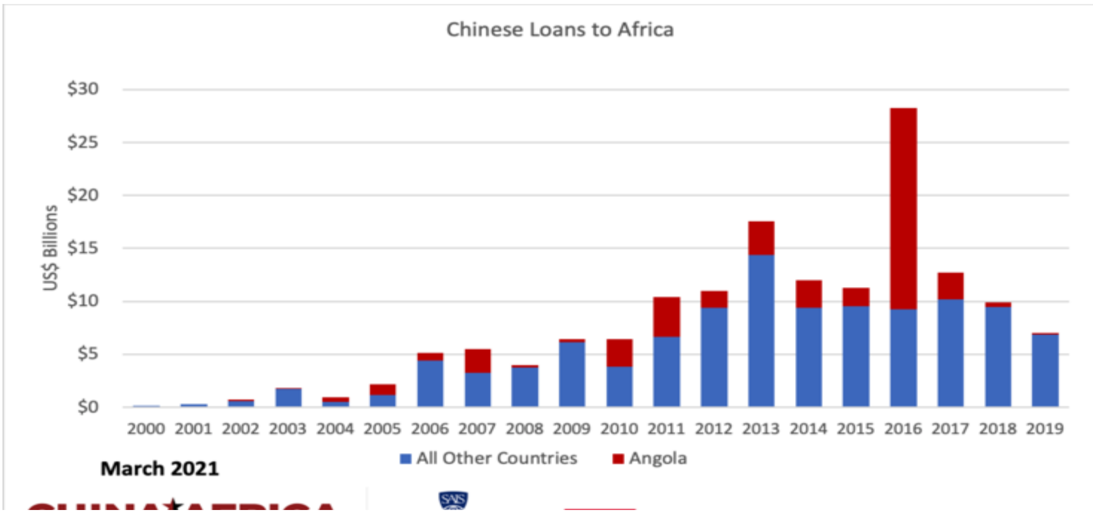

Figure 2: Chinese Loans to Africa
(Source: John Hopkins (SAIS-CARI) – Boston University Global Development Policy Center 2021)

The volume of the loan given to Africa from 2000 to 2019 is given below (SAIS-CARI 2021):

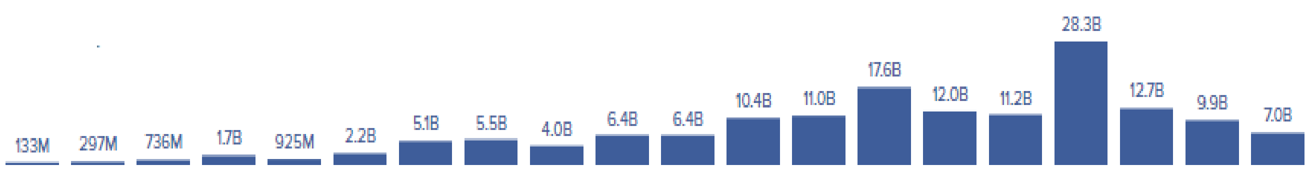

Figure 3: China's volume Loan given to Africa from 2000 to 2019
(Source: John Hopkins (SAIS-CARI) – Boston University Global Development Policy Center 2021)

The loan volume given to Africa began gaining acceleration from 2006 onwards. In 2013 and 2016, Africa received $17.6 billion and $28.3billion loans, respectively. In the year 2016, the loan volume reached a record high. The areas, along with the volume of investment made by China between 2000 and 2019, are depicted in Figure 4. China's primary investment sectors include transport, power, and mining.

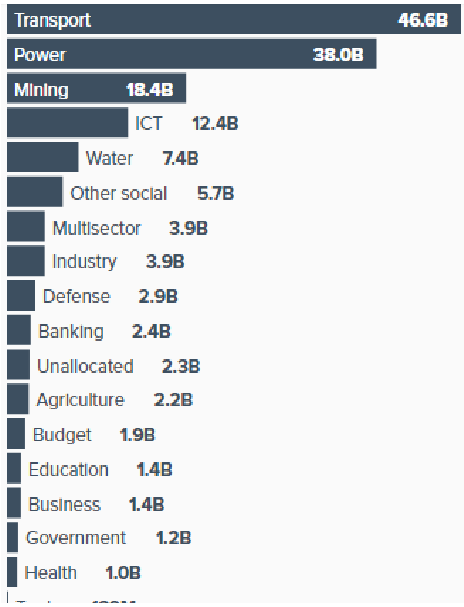

Figure 4: Investments made by China in Africa between 2000 and 2019
(Source: John Hopkins (SAIS-CARI) – Boston University Global Development Policy Center 2021)

However, the question arises, why does China express its over-enthusiasm with Africa? What is China's real intent? The Chinese money coming in grants and interest-free loans coincides with heavy terms and conditions and stringent legalities. The obscurity surrounding the loan parameters is a major issue that raises serious concerns among the African think-tank. Therefore, there is some ulterior motive behind China's enthusiastic investment in Africa and its 'win-win' narrative.

China is seemingly a late-comer in Africa in comparison to its western competitors. In 2011, China's investment share in Africa was 3.2% out of the total stock of investment of $629 billion involving multiple investors made under various Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) (Chen *et al.* 2018). By the end of 2013, China's Overseas Direct Investment (ODI) reached $26 billion compared to the USA's investment of $22 billion in the same year. China is no longer a small player in Africa. China's high-profile deals in Africa include Sicomines iron mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo, CNPC's gas investment in Mozambique, China's mining investment in Guinea, Sinopec's oil and gas acquisition in Angola, and military base in Djibouti, etc. The prime destinations for its ODI in Africa are Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Ethiopia, and Egypt. Nigeria takes the lead. It represents 12% of the deal (Chen *et al.* 2018).

Beijing concentrates its attention primarily on the East and South Africa. It intends to emerge as a big player in the Indian Ocean region from the geo-economic and geostrategic perspectives. Its major attention seems to be on East Africa. It offers China the necessary access to the Red Sea area and its long-term ambition of connecting itself to the Mediterranean Sea through Eretria, Sudan, and Egypt. China manifests that ambition by amplifying its presence in Djibouti.

Moreover, in Central and West Africa, the Chinese dominance seems to be relatively low, except in Nigeria. China's control over East Africa, such as Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya, is essentially for geostrategic reasons, not in terms of rich natural deposits compared to the rich Southern African countries such as Angola, South Africa, and Zambia.

However, in East Africa, China invests in the port and military infrastructures to rebuild its signature maritime silk route. The number of Chinese firms operating in Africa is 1597 (China's Ministry of Commerce Transaction-level ODI Data, taken from Chen *et al.* 2018), while Nigeria tops the list. The intensification of Chinese investment corroborates the increase of Chinese firms and workforce. Therefore, speculation is extremely rife that Nigeria is much to lose as it has opened up everything for Chinese intervention.

PORT INFRASTRUCTURE

China's investment profile prioritizes port infrastructure as it promises rich dividends. It chooses those African nations along the coastlines primarily. Out of 49 countries China has signed MOUs with, 34 of them, constituting 70 percent, are found to be the countries sharing coastal areas (Venkateswaran 2020). The ports built by China in Africa are Djibouti Port (Djibouti), Port Sudan (Sudan), Port Said-Port Tewfik (Egypt), Port Ain Sokhna (Egypt), Zarzis Port (Tunisia), and El Hamdania Port (Algeria). They serve China's expansionist ambition and meet its dual purpose – maritime trade and military. The oil refineries in Sudan are well connected to Port Sudan and Dakar Port. The petrochemical and phosphate transformation industries in Tunisia are connected to Zarzis port. Better connectivity has reached the Santa Clara port from Belinga Iron Ore (Venkateswaran 2020).

These trade networks have been created to facilitate the import-export processes. The African railway projects are designed in such a manner to enhance connectivity with the ports. However, the question arises here about how the African nations will benefit from these infrastructural developments and connectivity facilitation. The narrative of growth in Africa seems to be not even satisfactory. The BRI benefits China the most, as expected.

Nevertheless, Africa gives itself away to China and gets nothing substantive. The industry and energy projects undertaken by Beijing almost deplete African natural resources. Even after trading its natural deposits and resources, Africa does not seem to be rising above its debt pressure. Something seems fatally wrong. That invites attention to China's intentionality in opening the floodgates of investment in Africa. Much needs to be brought to the light of the day in connection with China's investment procedures and the asymmetry between the Chinese promise and its execution. The railroad and connectivity and port infrastructures are built to extend China's proximity to the areas where resources are available. China does not just essentially confine itself to the proliferation of its market and flushing out its surplus. Its eye on the import of African resources cannot be ignored.

Tanzanian President John Mugafuli, for instance, calls the Chinese BRI project towards constructing Bagamoyo port "exploitative and awkward" (Chaudhury 2019). The agreement Tanzania went ahead with was that of 99 years of Chinese control over the port on account of its investment in the construction of the port. Unfortunately, the agreement does not authorize Tanzania to exercise its power to determine the nature of investment happening in and through the port and the agents who invest there. These are the tough conditions China includes as part of the BRI agreements. Moreover, Beijing ensures that no other ports are built 'from Tanga to

Mtwara South'. Therefore, Beijing's coordinated attention to building port infrastructure enriches connectivity in Africa and inheres to the dragon's aspiration of extending its claim over the African resources.

THE IMPACT OF MINING ON ECOLOGY

To have access to the resources requires deep mining. Application of the advanced and cutting-edge technology to facilitate quick access to the resources buried deep in the earth causes irrecoverable injury to the ecology. It is roughly estimated that Africa possesses 30% of the world's rare soil. China conducts mining activities to unearth those rare metals having high value in the international market, making minimal investment and obtaining high profit. This kind of mining intervention causes massive damage to the environment regarding radioactive sludge running off into the water supply (NBR 2019). The poor post-processing mining activities exacerbate the ecological safety of the mining areas. Those rare metals include neodymium and praseodymium, used in electric car batteries (NBR 2019). These are critical materials needed for the production of batteries. China's interest in Angola and South Africa is to procure these rare soils, which have acquired dramatic significance in the international market. Battery production has gone exponentially high in recent years. Global attention seems to be moving towards finding alternatives to the fossil fuel dependencies. China understands the mood of the market and works towards dominating it. Africa provides these resources to China to thrive in the global market.

Consequently, Africa's rapid and extensive mining activities, undertaken to generate high revenue and fodder for the new market without paying heed to the sustainability factor, push Africa to the brink of an ecological crisis. The development, which Africa aspires through Beijing or a host of other investors by progressively handicapping its natural endowments by applying heavy technology, is, on the contrary retrogressive from an ecological standpoint. Generating revenue by exploiting the natural resources without considering the renewability aspect is a recipe for a greater calamity. Therefore, Africa's escape from one calamity (economy) is to arrive at another (ecology).

The Mombasa-Nairobi SGR project in Kenya was planned to tear through Nairobi National Park. This irked the citizens as they found that no restraint was exercised to safeguard the landscape and wildlife in Nairobi under the pretext of development. For cost-minimization and convenience of connectivity, other considerations such as landscape protection and wildlife security were ignored. The coal power plant in Lamu Island did not receive public approval as they found it might involve a serious ecological crisis. The protestors in Cameroon complained against the demolition drive towards the construction of the Kribi Deep Sea port. They protested against the lack of employment opportunities for the people. In Chad, the residents expressed their disappointment over Chinese control of the job market, poor wage, and inhospitable workplace. In Ghana, the Chinese have percolated into its fishing industry. The environmental compliances in coal mines in Zambia are flouted by Chinese companies leading to the cancellation of the license of that company by the Zambian government in 2018. China's BRI proposal of the construction of an oil pipeline between Uganda and Tanzania stretching almost 1445 km to fetch crude oil to the port of Tanga in Tanzania received a severe objection from the environmentalists as they could anticipate risk to the environment and the wildlife and the communities living along that line (Chaudhury 2021).

Moreover, China extends its trade network in Africa as Chinese surplus and overproduction are too much to be consumed within the country. Chinese promotion of infrastructure programs in Africa transfers the volume of extra production. China used around 6.4 gigatons of cement between 2011 and 2013 (Swanson 2015). It used cement in a disproportionately large quantity to boost its urbanization project and to accelerate the construction projects under BRI. This explosive productivity in cement, steel, aluminum, shipbuilding, etc., is undertaken to outsmart the USA, its global competitor, giving the least attention to their quality and completely heedless to their ecological impact. Ana Swanson (2015) anticipates the hazard to ecology in China's madness for over-production: "The waste that occurs with too much top-down economic planning and the environmental toll of growth at all costs. China's cement splurge is impressive, but it may hold the seeds of a more ominous story". The Chinese overproduction has made Africa a significant recipient of quality-compromised products. Being the unequal partner, Africa's compulsion to receive makes China funnel into Africa whatever it thinks fit without giving due attention to the ecological hazards those products may cause. BRI helps Beijing to distribute its over-production successfully. The ecology of Africa, in the process, gets the hit. Beijing seems least worried about the eventualities those sub-standard products inflict on African sensitive ecology.

To move further, with the rise of China's middle class, there emerged a strange demand for possessing ivory jewelry and carvings. The social prestige associated with the possession of ivory was the impetus behind the boom in the ivory trade between Africa and China. More than 20,000 elephants are killed every year to meet China's demand (WWF 2019). The poaching epidemic that was unleashed reduced the elephant population in Africa. Beijing's ban on the ivory trade on 31 December 2017 seems to have given the necessary breathing space to the killing spree. Africa's biodiversity seems to be in grave danger owing to China's bizarre demand for ivory, pangolin, and other endangered species. Africa under the Chinese debt burden remains a witness to the incremental degradation of its rich biodiversity.

THE DEBT DISTRESS

Debt distress relates to stress emanating from the non-payment of a loan taken. In the African context, China pays the loan; and in the event of non-payment, the debt trap becomes seemingly frightening. It is not a secret that China has been accused of throwing 'debt traps' in offering loans to developing nations to boost infrastructures and strengthen their economy. This is termed China's 'debt trap diplomacy' and its neocolonial aspiration in Africa (Tiezzi 2018). On her visit to Africa during the Obama administration, Hillary Clinton cautioned the African nations: "beware of new colonialism of China" (Reuters 2011). There is a growing asymmetry between loans disproportionately given and poor payback capacity. This seems to have been done to burden the African nations with debt so that the Chinese factor is brought into the determinacy of policy decisions there.

China offers interest-free loans to African nations as the latter urgently needs them to develop their economy and provide the essentials to their fast-growing population. The debt diplomacy that China intends to play in Africa involves a greater deal of obscurity. It is murky and not transparent. The lending banks in China, such as the China Development Bank and the China Exim Bank, hardly disclose the lending terms and conditions (Carmody *et al*. 2021). The distinction between an interest-free loan and commercial rates is not crystallized properly. There are enough gaps and indeterminacies involved in Chinese financial deals. It raises both doubt and confusion. The repercussions of such messy financial commitments and contracts may be fatal for the borrowing nations precipitating 'debt distress' (Carmody *et al*. 2021).

To give some concrete examples, the BRI project in Kenya for the 485-kilometer-long railroad project towards the construction of the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) cost around $3.6 billion; it was funded by China Exim Bank (Carmody *et al*. 2021). The project was a failure contrary to the Kenyan government's optimistic anticipation of greater profit from it. The cost of transportation from Mombasa to Nairobi by road was found to be cheaper in comparison to the transportation by SGR. The huge debt from China for Kenya's SGR project under BRI did not make any difference in increasing Kenya's GDP or facilitating an economic boom. It led Kenya to China's trap. China gets the much-needed latitude to exercise its full presence in Kenya as the latter fails to address payment compliances against the loan.

Djibouti's debt service ratio was shockingly high in 2017, reaching 57.8% (World Bank in Carmody *et al*. 2021). Its geostrategic significance attracts China's attention. Beijing intensifies its investment there in order to develop the Ghoubet salt port, the Damerjog livestock export port, the Addis–Djibouti Railway, Djibouti–Ethiopia Water Pipeline, and the Doraleh Container Terminal/Multipurpose and Djibouti Port as the terminal of the Ethiopia–Djibouti Railway (Carmody *et al*. 2021). Djibouti is necessary for China's ambition to expand its trade tentacles in the Red Sea region. Therefore, it significantly steers its allocation to augment port infrastructures and their capacity expansion to secure a strong military and trade foundation and mercantile mastery. This aspiration received a concrete shape in 2017 when Beijing established a naval base in Djibouti. It confirms China's propensity to involve itself in African security and military matter:

> Djibouti's PLA outpost has a role in securing China's Maritime Silk Road, particularly in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, halfway between East Asia and Europe. This role goes far beyond anti-piracy operations and is also part of a strategy to increase China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean (Cabestan 2020, 740).

Looking into the debt trajectory in Djibouti, IMF (2017, 7) report suggests:

> Djibouti remains at a high risk of debt distress (…) solvency, and liquidity risks are significant over the projection horizon, and all the debt burden indicators breach their respective policy-dependent thresholds by sizeable margins (…) All the solvency debt burden indicators exhibit protracted breaches of their respective thresholds. In addition, liquidity risks have increased significantly compared with (…) 2015 (Carmody *et al*. 2021).

A small rent-based economy like Djibouti fails to bear the overwhelming debt burden coming from one single source. Its economy gets weaker as it is asymmetrically distributed. Its income goes straight away to debt repayment, and as a result, social spending hardly receives adequate attention. It hardly has sufficient assets to get over the debt burden. As a result, it risks being liquidated for failing to make timely remittance compliances. If this happens, China will succeed in interfering with Djibouti's autonomy and achieves its objective of emerging as a neo-colonial force in Africa.

This is how China spreads the debt trap under BRI, claiming development in Africa as its main priority. China's cunning resurfaces as the reality in Africa under Chinese tutelage is extremely dire. Now African nations are running after the Beijing administration to extend the repayment duration. The recent pandemic in the form of Covid-19 has also ruined African debt-paying capacity. Africa finds itself in greater distress. Its development aspirations place it in the debt grind: "As of 2020, the countries in Africa with the largest Chinese debt are Angola (US$25 billion), Ethiopia (US$13.5 billion), Zambia (US$7.4 billion), the Republic of Congo (US$7.3 billion), and Sudan (US$6.4 billion)" (Broadman2020). If this is the emerging reality that Africa gets increasingly aware of, reactions from the continent are likely to be seen.

THE REACTIONS FROM AFRICA

The Africans have started understanding China's ambition. The BRI projects have not been very successful from the point of view of development in Africa as they are thought to be initially. Some African nations have expressed their anger over the crafty Chinese operation in Africa. In Nigeria, protests erupted due to the non-payment of compensation to the displaced people for the Lagos-Ibadan Railway line in 2017. Abuja in Nigeria seems to be on the brink of losing its sovereignty to China over the unusual pressure that comes from Chinese debt (BW 2021). Nigeria is writhing under pain of repayment of $400 million to China. The loan was taken to build the Nigerian National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure Backbone. The project was signed in the year 2018. Due to lack of loan repayment, there arise apprehensions that Nigeria may give itself away to China or lose its autonomy. China exercises its neo-colonial ambitions by making such huge investments in African nations, and by doing so, it spreads its traps to make them come under its grip. The current China-Africa trajectory suggests that it may not be too far in time before China may ask for collateral to repay the loan. It is quite typical of the lenders who freeze the borrowers' assets if the latter fails to make repayment. China may freeze Nigerian assets, for instance, oil fields, etc., as collateral, though it has denied such speculations. Nevertheless, speculation in this direction is gathering strength.

Seeing such development taking place or yet to occur, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) urges Nigeria not to fall for Chinese interest-free loans and its promise of modernization through industry, port, road, railroad infrastructures, and other critical infrastructures (RFI 2019). Nigeria gave away 50% of its revenue collected from its oil resources on loan repayment in 2018. Nigeria's growth story, therefore, becomes quite dismal. The debt taken from China ruins its growth: "Business Hallmark adds a frightful dimension to the debt controversy. If the amount is divided by the country's 198 million population, then each Nigerian owes China 15000 Naira" (RFI 2019).

The local traders in Uganda expressed their angst over the intrusion of Chinese traders into their localities as their business ventures suffered losses in the presence of smart foreign competitors. The protests in Tanzania led to the suspension of the Bagamoyo port project. The

Chinese mining activities in Madagascar and the demolition processes undertaken by Jiuxing Mines caused unrest there. China's investment in the blue economy in African waters raises serious concerns and alarm among the communities who traditionally depended on the sea for their livelihood.

The large number of Chinese people settling in Africa owing to the robust BRI projects generates apprehension among the Africans. The number of Chinese living in Africa is between a million or two (Hairong 2020). The number that is given here is not static or saturated. It is just an assumption, and the process of migration is dynamic. The apprehension that the Africans have are based on the creation of pockets of Chineseness or the "enclosures of Chineseness" (Hodzi 2019). These places appear distinctly Chinese as they were crowded with Chinese restaurants, shopping malls, etc. Mandarin seems to have been exceedingly used there. Obert Hodzi (2019) writes: "Exclusive Chinese restaurants, China towns, and Chinese shopping centers in Harare, Johannesburg, and Accra are emerging as places that resemble the Chinese migrants' attempt to establish their own identity as the Chinese islands in Africa" (p. 4).

China's textile imperialism and flooding of cheap textile products in Africa severely affect the African local textile production. The local textile production fails to compete with the cheap Chinese textile available there. The textile industry in Nigeria experienced significant growth in the 1970s and 80s, but its decline began when Beijing began exporting its cheap textiles to Nigeria. By 2008, almost 160 textile factories in Nigeria were closed down, and it was a severe blow to the Nigerian textile economy (Muhammad *et al.* 2017). This led to the rise of unemployment in Nigeria and increasing unrest and reaction from the Nigerians.

China has emerged as a major player in recent years in terms of the global arms trade. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2020) suggests that "China is the second-largest arms producer in the world, behind the United States but ahead of Russia". Between 2010 and 2020, Africa received almost 19.1% (3.2 billion TIV) of China's total arms export (China Power 2021).

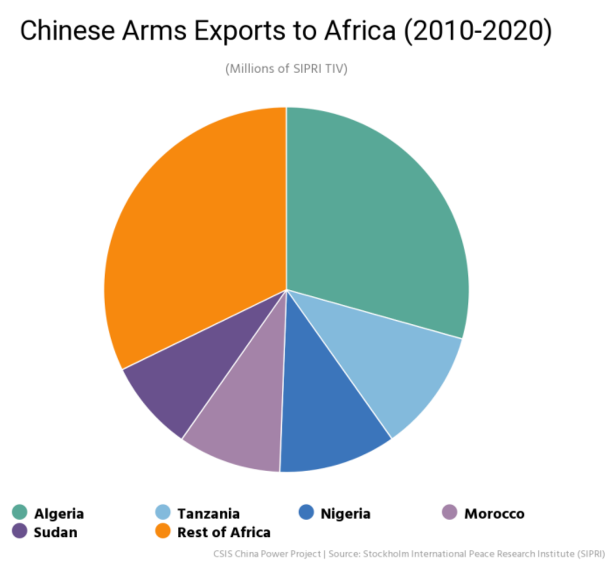

Figure 5: Chinese Arms Export to Africa (2010-2020) (Source: CSIS China Power Project |Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2020)

The volume of arms Algeria, Tanzania, Nigeria, Morocco, Sudan, and the rest of Africa got from China over the last decade are of 29.4% (928 million TIV), 10.9% (343 million TIV), 10.4% (328 million TIV), 9.1% (289 million TIV), 8.1% (255 million TIV) and 32.2% (1,018 million TIV) respectively (China Power 2021). The following pie chart (SIPRI 2020) explains China's arms export to Africa between 2010 and 2020.

Caught in the whirlpool of chronic conflict, civil war, ethnic rivalry, and terrorism, Africa provides China with a needy market for its arms supply. Beijing's engagement with Africa seems ironically very comprehensive. It leaves no sector unattempted to flush its products - hard and soft - to Africa. China understands Africa's insecurities, fault-lines, and needs and cunningly caters to those areas. Knowing the sensitivity of ethnic conflict across the nations in Africa and the violent turn those conflicts lead to, Beijing's arms supply to Africa makes the issue all the more complex. Therefore, reactions from sensible Africans are mounting and simultaneously raising awareness against the purchase of arms, complicating the scope of achieving ethnic harmony. When the pain of poverty is too excruciating to bear, the fact of buying arms is a mockery of poverty and an act of serious myopia.

On top of it, the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's aggression against Ukraine taking the shape of a war that put the world under a nightmarish grip has sad stories in store for Africa. The Covid-19-induced inflation and the inflation related to the impending energy crisis due to the sanctions imposed on Russia for its preference for war in Ukraine will hurt Africa's fragile economy. Moreover, the economy of developing nations is in shambles. A series of lockdowns to prevent the infection of Covid-19 have put all business ventures and normal daily activities at a standstill. Africa's economy is extremely fragile under the burdens of debt taken from the World Bank, IMF, and China. It is to see how the creditors, primarily China, extend the moratorium period. The coronavirus crisis exacerbates the low-income countries in Africa. The vaccination drive seems to be pathetically poor. Africa may take a longer time to recover from the current corona crisis. However, the pressure of debt repayment seems to be mounting higher. There is skepticism about whether China innovates measures to offer debt relief as it holds 27% of Africa's 2021 debt payments (Anker *et al.* 2021). Research at the John Hopkins SAIS China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) suggests that China is restructuring the debt repayment modalities to ease the burden on African countries because of the current pandemic. Nevertheless, the clauses and conditions of such restructuring towards debt relief are to be looked into and how much it benefits Africa in real terms, not just official showcasing.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the paper has discussed China's geo-economic interest in Africa. Chinese BRI has acted effectively in this direction to realize this interest. However, apart from injecting the much-needed infrastructural growth in Africa, BRI has made African nations feel insure. The BRI-bound African nations have gradually aired their reservations about Beijing's proclivity for meddling. Beijing has not remained confined to the rules of the agreement. It has gone beyond the permissible limits of interference. The enthusiasm of Africa over the Chinese BRI project and low-interest loans have not induced desired growth as expected. Beijing's participation in the economic space of Africa has seemingly not given the required impetus to the African economy.

This study finds that the Chinese debt diplomacy has inflicted a serious blow to the African aspiration and the dream of a new Africa. Beijing is not addressing rejuvenating or modernizing Africa in the true sense through infrastructure and investment. It largely focuses on defining its authoritative role through debt diplomacy and expanding its coverage over the resources.

Furthermore, this study has shown that the Chinese developmental initiative neglected the required sensitivity toward ecology and African rich biodiversity. The debt stress experienced by the countries for not making timely repayment and the doubling-up effect of the loan taken with the steady addition of interest adversely impact their growth trajectory. There is no doubt that China, with its cutting-edge technology, has given infrastructure-weak Africa the strength to access its rich natural endowments. However, it seems, paradoxically, China has prioritized its geo-economic interest over the progress and success of African nations. The Chinese infrastructures in Africa secure its interest and seemingly neglect the latter's interest. To achieve its geo-economic aspiration, Beijing's arms export to Africa, in a sense, ruins the peace of Africa and indirectly adds to the intensification of ethnic conflict. However, it does not seriously intend it. These findings are important from the perspective of expanding socio-political and economic awareness against Beijing's interfering proclivities and profit-driven motives. The reactions from Africa have already started against these tendencies.

Moreover, the indication of this kind will certainly have some bearing on Beijing's policy formalism towards Africa. It is observed that China employs a host of methods, very subtle and secret, to amplify its interest in Africa. China's expansionist ambition may enable it to "write the rules of the next stage of globalization" (Mourdoukoutas 2019). The study addresses Beijing's monopoly in Africa in economic cooperation, progress, mutual growth, and shared future. It suggests the need for an effective reaction towards achieving a possible balance of interest. However, China's technological know-how is Africa's need, but a balance of interest is desired.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Acknowledgments:
Not applicable.

Funding:
Not applicable.

Statement of human rights:
This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any authors.

Statement on the welfare of animals:
This article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any authors.

Informed consent:
Not applicable.

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