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China in Africa: a critical literature review

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to critically assesses the major contributions to the academic literature on China's increased focus on Africa, from 2001 to 2011. It discusses the key trends concerning China's presence in Africa and draws conclusions on the significance of the studies by emphasizing and contrasting the prevailing positions.

Design/methodology/approach – Based on a qualitative approach using an integrative and comprehensive literature review, the authors performed a content analysis of high-impact, peer-reviewed papers.

Findings – The paper questions and repositions some of the existing controversies. The results from existing studies remain questionable, requiring further clarification and more theoretical backing. It, moreover, highlights the notion that behind the explicit neutrality views of China's presence in Africa, implicit assumptions may exist. These are often the differences in narratives conveyed by Western and Southern stakeholders.

Research limitations/implications – Most of the conclusions drawn from this paper need to be re-explored and supported by additional research. This could be done by widening the scope of the analysis. Studies need to provide more empirical support for their assertions through quantitative data and evidence-based qualitative analyses – all within a framework that considers more cultural, social and historical dimensions. The paper also suggests that an institutionally based view appears most relevant in better explaining China in Africa.

Originality/value – This paper reviews a decade of research on China in Africa and presents a snapshot of the current state of knowledge. It also raises concerns to be analyzed by future research and proposes new avenues for better understanding China's presence in Africa.

Keywords China, Developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, African industrialization, Intra-African trade, Sino-African cooperation

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The past decade has seen a rise in China's global ambitions as well as an increase in research on China's global growth. The emergence of Chinese internationalization has been carefully scrutinized not only by academics and business leaders but also by press professionals (Wang, 2010). China's increasingly strong foreign directives have been studied to determine the reasons, and regions, in which China is likely to selectively orientate its program of expansion (Sanfilippo, 2010). However, China's entry into Africa is subject to numerous questions among the research community, frequently seeking to explain why, and on what basis, the country is investing in Africa. Many of the

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conclusions drawn by research exploring China's presence in Africa are negative, particularly with regard to the consequences for the African economy (Chemingui and Bchir, 2010; Elu and Price, 2010; Wang, 2010). The few studies (Wu and Cheng, 2010; Yin and Vaschetto, 2011) that have identified positive benefits are vastly outweighed by the quantity of literature that asserts that Africa is being undermined by its Chinese counterparts. However, the results of many of these scientific studies vary, frequently, because the studies adopt micro-orientated perspectives, not to mention that they are often conducted in very different environments within Africa. Consequently, their results, conclusions and even recommendations vary, leading to a multiplicity of positions among scholars and practitioners across the disciplines (Okoro and Oyewole, 2011), which increasingly contribute to delicate controversies between many key stakeholders (Carmody and Van Dijk, 2011).

Despite numerous questions being raised in recent years, there is still a decided lack of empirical evidence that supports many of the key views. Speculation has become intense in academia, with China's move toward Africa – an emerging and sensitive topic. Wang (2010) has argued that many of the key ideas have only been explored by research papers of a low standard and press articles from partisan journalists. As a result, there have been numerous reports across the world stating that China's presence in Africa is substantially and negatively impacting the whole continent. Because few academic papers have rigorously dealt with the steps China has taken in its project of internationalization in Africa, many of the articles have originated in business press and glossy magazines (Wang, 2010; Ajakaiye and Kaplinsky, 2009). Accordingly, many Sino-African controversies, such as the allegations that China employs prison labor in its construction projects, should be critically questioned. This is because:

> […] the information is anecdotal, and often highly prejudicial, generally generated by journalists from the West writing for an audience that is increasingly feeling the competitive pressure exerted by Chinese economic and political actors in Africa (Ajakaiye and Kaplinsky, 2009, p. 479).

Many studies (Carolina and Murphey, 2009; Shinn, 2007, 2009; Taylor, 2006) also questionably regard China as an opportunistic ally, without self-reflecting on what Martin and Frost (1996) have referred to as a "struggle for intellectual dominance". As a result, some authors may strategically intend to have their claims believed by major stakeholders for their own advantage. The consequent trend of supporting uncritical conclusions has already been noted, as succinctly highlighted by Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2009, p. 601). Indeed, the authors state that "the figures are extremely speculative and lend themselves to inflation and purposeful misinterpretation", and these "naturalized statistics" need to be critically examined. For instance, Bräutigam (2009) has pointed out that in 2008 journalists "inadvertently" misled the World Bank. In an official report, the bank had referenced an inaccurate press article by the Dow Jones. The article had claimed that former Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, had announced that China had given \$44 billion to Africa. However, the currency that Wen Jiabao had referred to was the Chinese Yuan (RMB), rather than the US dollar. Therefore, instead of \$44 billion in aid, the correctly converted amount was only \$6 billion.

Various research findings, from an increasing number of scientific publications on China in Africa, do exist (Maswana, 2009; Morris and Einhorn, 2008; Shen, 2013; Wang, 2010). However, to date, there has not yet been a systematic analysis or evaluation of the significance and coverage of the literature. A complete evaluation of the most prominent studies should allow for a better understanding of the current state of research on China's presence in Africa. This is all the more urgent, considering that "the actual developmental role and impact of Chinese investment is often either misunderstood or misrepresented" (Jing, 2009, p. 584). Research publications on the Chinese in Africa are mostly oriented toward findings that highlight a win-lose paradigm, precisely because earlier studies viewed Sino-African bilateral trade as having a negative impact on Africa's development (Anshan, 2006).

Furthermore, a consensual view is emerging in the literature regarding the presence of China in Africa. This literature almost always argues that Chinese investments in Africa are frequently motivated by the exploitation of Africa's natural resources – raw materials and oil – and that these are extracted to sustain only China's development (Taylor, 2009). Methodologies used in these studies tended to focus on data collected from a national level. In more recent years, studies on Chinese development in Africa have also tended to focus on isolated case studies, a methodology that is, at best, minimally representative (Yin, 2009). Despite these methodological limitations, research conclusions have been frequently generalized to many, if not all, of African countries (Mohan and Tan-Mullins, 2009). Accordingly, this paper focuses on, among other things, the tendency toward generalization implicit in the methodological approaches used, and the implications thereof. With the above observations forming the basis of a systematic critique, this paper discusses some of the major and controversial trends in research on Sino-African business cooperation.

Research approach

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach. It is built upon an integrative and comprehensive literature review, as envisioned by Galvan (2006), who sees such an analysis as an exercise that should go beyond summarizing the relevant literature and include a critical analysis of the relationships between various studies. Congruently, Hart (1998) also considers a literature review as an exercise that should allow the researcher to assess the major issues and debates on a topic, and to analyze the merits of particular studies to evaluate whether the existing knowledge is rigorously structured and organized.

Our review is based on research analysis spanning a decade. To the best of our knowledge, all peer-reviewed articles published on China's presence in Africa, from 2001 to 2011, have been identified for content analysis. China became a full member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, coinciding with its rapid move toward Africa. We collected all the publications related to Sino-African business cooperation through institutionally accessible research databases at the time of publication, which were published between December 2001 and December 2011. To identify such publications, we conducted a general inquiry through EBSCOhost and ProQuest's databases, listing all the peer-reviewed academic articles. From these databases, we then selected 110 of the most relevant articles. We used keywords and their associated synonyms (such as China, Chinese, Africa, African, Sino, Afro, Afr*, Chin*) to query publication titles, while ensuring that all the relevant papers were identified, and we applied all the techniques and tips suggested by every database's search engine to exhaustively identify the relevant articles.

To maximize the reliability of the search, a database specialist from Laval University's library was consulted to confirm the accuracy and completeness of the query. They identified the same set of articles. Based on the relevance of the papers' abstracts, 41 articles were finally listed, among which 90 per cent were published between 2008 and 2011. Furthermore, we performed a detailed content analysis by adopting the perspective of Lasswell (1977), who urged that researchers question "who says what to whom in what channel with what effect?" At this stage all of the selected articles were classified by the specific concepts with which they used to refer to the main issues to avoid bias in the categorization. After the papers were selected and categorized, the key authors' findings, positions and ideas were identified in each article. Finally, the views of each author were analyzed by examining the iteration of select controversies in the literature.

The 41 articles were classified according to the journal they were published in, the ranking of which was determined by three prestigious institutions: the Australian Business Deans Council, the Association of Business Schools and the "Comité National de la Recherche Scientifique". Table I classifies the number of publications on China's presence in Africa according to the journal of publication and its ranking, which enabled us to determine whether the selected articles were published in high or low ranking journals, and to evaluate their significance, primarily based on the journal's rigorousness.

Analysis and discussion

None of the most relevant articles had been published in the *Financial Times*' top 45 journals. This fact provides the seed of speculation that during the past decade, very few high-quality research papers have been published on China's presence in Africa. Moreover, the specialized journals focusing on international business (IB) do not generally appear interested in issues related to China in Africa. In fact, among all sources, there is no specialized IB journal that has published any paper on China's presence in Africa. This indicates how new, or at least how marginal, the research related to China's engagement in Africa is. One of the reasons for such a lack of interest is likely related to the novelty of the topic, primarily because Chinese investments in African countries have only become significant in the past decade. Another reason for the lack of publications on the subject is the difficulty of conducting research in Africa, particularly when it comes to collecting accurate and current data from businesses. Chinese businesses are often reluctant to provide data related to their activities, even in China, and so it is not at all surprising that they export such reticent behavior and practices to Africa. This attitude has several consequences, among which is the fact that many published papers (other than the 41 articles we reviewed) are authored or co-authored by Chinese or African researchers, primarily because respondents are more likely to trust their Chinese or African counterparts when sharing sensitive or confidential information. Furthermore, in offering advice to Western researchers in Africa, Erinosho (2008) has commented on this challenge by suggesting that it is the researcher's responsibility to adapt their methods to the cultural context of their research subject to obtain the necessary information. However, the reality is that many papers are not published in notable IB journals, but rather in African or Chinese journals that are neither internationally ranked nor accessible worldwide. Because very few papers have been published in ranked journals by some of the key actors, namely

Article's origin by journal name	Rank/Institution	No. of articles
Foreign Policy	A*/ABDC	1
International Affairs	A/ABDC	1
World Economy	A/ABDC	1
Subtotal: category A		3
Global Economy Journal	B/ABDC	1
Competition and Change	B/ABS	1
Development and Change	B/ABDC	1
European Journal of Development Research	B/ABDC	8
International Finance	B/ABDC	1
Subtotal: category B		12
International Journal of Business Research	C/ABDC	2
Journal of Public Relations Research	C/ABDC	1
Subtotal: category C		3
African Development Review	D/CNRS	8
Governance	D/ABS	1
Subtotal: category D		9
Chinese Economy	NR	4
Journal of World Economics and Politics	NR	1
The Journal of Modern African Studies	NR	3
Journal of International Affairs	NR	5
Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies	NR	1
Subtotal: category NR		14
Total	–	41

Notes: ABS: Association of Business Schools (2010 ranking); ABDC: Australian Business Deans Council (2010 ranking); CNRS: Comité National de la Recherche Scientifique (2011 ranking); NR, not ranked; the A* in Table I means the journal is an A-Star journal

Table I.
Classification of published papers

African and Chinese stakeholders, De Haan (2010) has underlined the numerous research opportunities focusing on Sino-African cooperation.

As a result, there are many questions about China's presence in Africa that are yet to be answered. The current state of knowledge makes it difficult to provide definitive facts about China's purpose for entering Africa, its internal processes and the success or failure of its efforts. These recurrent questions support the idea that China's efforts in Africa are still controversial, with little accurate information about China's cooperation with African countries emerging.

China and African relationships: win-win or win-lose?

Many studies have argued that Sino-African cooperation is mutually advantageous (Aguilar and Goldstein, 2009; Carolina and Murphey, 2009; Jing, 2009; Wu and Cheng, 2010; Zhao, 2008). Yin and Vaschetto (2011) explained that the interests of China and Africa have been reconciled through beneficial, exploratory and win-win business partnerships. Benefits include the additional revenue that is generated, improved infrastructure in Africa and a boost in African social and economic development. Moreover, Africans have the opportunity to develop economically on their own terms.

In addition to these benefits, China is a member of the United Nations Assembly and has a seat on the Security Council. This makes it an invaluable ally and allows many

African countries to access an intermediate voice with which to make their concerns heard. Furthermore, and in recent years, China has cancelled the debts of several African countries that are of strategic importance to the Chinese economy (Yin and Vaschetto, 2011). China has also continued signing a number of unconditional loans and contracts with African states, in contrast with the traditionally tough conditional financing methods, such as International Monetary Fund loans and the World Bank's structural adjustment programs that were largely imposed in the 1980s. Moreover, Africans have taken a strategic approach to negotiations with China and gained more bargaining power *vis-à-vis* its traditional creditors through China's increasing role as Africa's financier. In this regard, Shinn (2007, p. 56) has stated that "Africans are generally quick to criticize the conditionality of Western assistance and praise the Chinese [...]" Opportunistically, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis that caused many traditional development partners to decrease their aid and official assistance to Africa, China announced [at the 2009 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)] the cancellation of 168 debts owed by 33 African countries (Schiere, 2010b). These annulments translate into African leaders' increasing trust and appreciation toward the Asian rescuer.

It is, however, legitimate to question whether the benefits of cooperating with China will be long lasting. On this issue, Cheru and Obi (2011) see economic advantages only in the short run, leaving Africa's long-term plans either unknown or at risk. One of the World Bank's economists, Levy (2011, p. 188), balances this view by arguing that "in an interdependent world, China's involvement could turn out to be a valuable asset for African countries". On a macro level, Wu and Cheng (2010) have argued that Africa could learn from some of China's entrenched policies and practices. These include the government-led and development-oriented anti-poverty programs that have significantly contributed to reducing poverty in China.

The controversy surrounding the relationship between China and Africa as a win-win certainty cannot be solved when all of the African countries are aggregated. According to Schiere and Walkenhorst (2010), this is because the intensification of trade with China does not influence all African countries to the same extent, and the fact that 70 per cent of Africa's exports to China originate from only four countries (Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Africa) differentiates the nature and scope of business relations across the continent.

As Chinese private and state-led investments do not follow the same strategy and patterns, they do not impact the African economy in an equal way. However, many papers have failed to consider, or even notice this bias when presenting their research findings. As Yin (2009) has warned, concerning the risks inherent in generalizing case studies, any research framework that tends to theorize on the basis of mixing a number of private and state-led businesses, across various sectors, risks generating controversial conclusions. Such biases are easily noted in research papers, such as the one published by Bräutigam and Xiaoyang (2009). Here the authors drew their conclusions for an entire continent based solely on an analysis that focused on a few cases in the agricultural sector. They simply ignored the risk associated with considering all investors, businesses and economic sectors alike. To avoid such bias, it is necessary to differentiate the types of investors whenever discussing the outcome of Sino-African cooperation. To highlight such a risk, Figures 1 and 2 below show that the nature of Chinese investment is directly linked to the investor's choice in deciding which specific sector to invest in.

Analysis from data generated by researchers like Bräutigam (2009) has indicated that China is actually "winning" the economic and political game in Africa because it has already taken the place of most of the major Western players with interests on the continent. In this regard, China is expected to achieve in 10 years (2010-2020) what was initially expected to be achieved in 20 years, and it will come to dominate Africa in terms of business gains (Chemingui and Bchir, 2010). The growing importance of China in Africa caused McKinnon (2010) to state that the "Beijing consensus" has displaced the "Washington consensus" through the comprehensive Chinese policy toward Africa that counterbalances the influence of Western financiers. There is no doubt that during the past decade, a sensitive issue that continues to embarrass Africans is the sermon-like approach of Western leaders, as evidenced by the paternalistic attitude of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who, during his visit to Senegal in 2007, asserted that Africa is underdeveloped because of Africans' incapacities (Jeune Afrique, 2012).

The Chinese are keenly aware of the failures of the Western approach, and accordingly, deal with Africa in a more pragmatic manner. With respect to Bräutigam's (2009) analysis, the major criticisms against China's presence in Africa are frequently based on Western countries' aspirational and ideological standards. These include, but are not limited to, how aid should be delivered, how donors should engage developing countries and how private companies should conduct IB. Furthermore, based on these same criticisms, Bräutigam has noted that there is no clear evidence of how many non-Chinese investors and donors have adopted acceptable standards when doing business in Africa, despite the fact that major criticisms are frequently addressed to China's investment in Africa. More critically, some scholars, such as Wissenbach (2009),

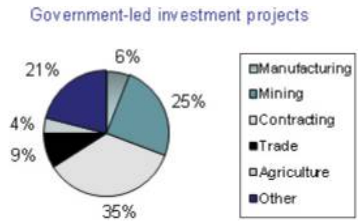
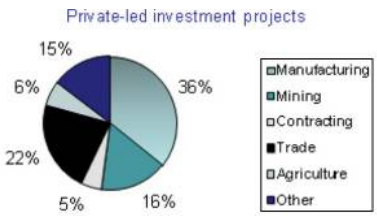


Figure 1.
Chinese investments in Africa in 2011



Source: Shen (2013)

Figure 2.
Chinese investments in Africa in 2011

have even argued that China's policy toward Africa is not fundamentally different from that of the Western world. This is because it is based on economic and strategic considerations that follow the same logic of Western capitalism operating in an interdependent world (Taylor, 2006), ultimately with the North competing with the South in African countries.

Regarding the long-term viability of this win-win perspective, it is not clear whether China's engagement will substantially improve Africa's prospects for development (Tull, 2006). This is despite the fact that China's engagement in Africa mostly takes place through permanent entry modes, thus supporting the idea that China has both long-term ambitions and a strategic approach to Africa. Based on a survey of 35 Chinese contractors operating in Africa, short-term entry modes were not China's most frequently used means of entering into African countries (Chuan and Orr, 2009). China, rather, prefers long-term engagements using large state-owned enterprises to sustain its strategic advantage in Africa (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2009). However, in supporting these views, Cheru and Obi (2011) have argued that it is too early to conclude whether China's growing interest in Africa will constitute a new, dynamic model of South–South relations. This is in spite of researchers, such as Bansal (2011), seeing Sino-African cooperation as a new and fascinating path toward an emerging program for South–South relations. According to Cheru and Obi, the basic condition for Africa to entertain a win-win business partnership with China depends on the African leadership defining thoughtful frameworks for bilateral, fair and balanced cooperation. This idea is even more defensible when it appears that Africa does not have a single and coherent policy for cooperating with China at this stage, while the latter has a clear and goal-oriented policy to its presence in Africa (Kaplinsky and Morris, 2009). Extending these questions to Africa's readiness to engage in sustainable partnerships with China, Bansal (2011) has broached the issue of how well-equipped African institutions are to work with Chinese companies. Moreover, Schiere and Walkenhorst (2010) have suggested that to have a mutually beneficial partnership with China, Africa needs to develop its own domestic policy framework. Table II summarizes the major observations about China in Africa.

From a broad perspective, to better understand and solve the key equations of win-win or win-lose cooperation, we need to answer the following questions:

Q1. Does China trade with Africa only to exploit the continent's natural resources, and does it have colonial ambitions?

Q2. Does China care about human rights, and does it use soft power strategies in Africa?

Q3. Does China favor Africa's industrialization rather than the weakening of local economies?

These questions need to be rigorously analyzed to draw a systematic understanding of China's activities in Africa, and to underline the (often implicit) positions amongst researchers.

China and Africa's natural resources

China's rapid development has been characterized by a vital need for natural and energy resources to sustain its growth. In its international quest for oil and mineral resources,

Authors (2001-20011)	Win-win or win-lose cooperation: major positions
Yin and Vaschetto (2011)	Mutually beneficial, but only if Africa capitalizes on previous partnerships with Western powers
Chemingui and Bchir (2010)	Even with more open trade, China–Africa cooperation will be a win-lose situation
Brenton and Walkenhorst (2010)	African companies cannot have a win-win partnership if the African partner is not subsidized
Elu and Price (2010)	Increasing trade with China does not lead to win-win cooperation
Sanfilippo (2010)	China is concerned only with its own interests in Africa; win-lose
Schiere (2010b)	Huge potentialities for a win-win deal, but complementarities need to be built
Wu and Cheng (2010)	Africa wins in learning from China's policies on poverty alleviation
McKinnon (2010)	China is using a financial strategy to cooperate with Africa; win-lose
Wang (2010)	Commodities for infrastructures, but not win-win cooperation
Jing (2009)	Africa gains skills and technology transfers, but African elites are not aware of China's ambitions
Adisu *et al.* (2010)	Africa is winning, but China wins more; Africa should renegotiate
Aguilar and Goldstein (2009)	Win-win only for African political leaders and China
Ajakaiye and Kaplinsky (2009)	China's potential impact is dangerously harmful to Africa's economy
Ademola *et al.* (2009)	China wins over Africa in the long run
Giovannetti and Sanfilippo (2009)	China exports more than Africa; Africa is vulnerable to China's competitive threat in textile and manufacturing industries; win-lose
Kaplinsky and Morris (2009)	To enjoy a win-win situation, Africa needs an integrated response
Mohan and Tan-Mullins (2009)	Chinese have moved from investors to agents of modernization in Africa
Wissenbach (2009)	Trilateral win-win cooperation: China–Africa–European Union
Desta (2009)	Win-win, but Africa can do better with a more efficient response
Maswana (2009)	China is an engine of growth, and an export destination for Africa; win-win
Shinn (2009)	Mutually beneficial, and China is not dictating Africa's behavior; win-win
Sperbee (2009)	Win-lose; but equal-to-equal principle in China–Africa negotiations
Carolina and Murphey (2009)	Complementary business partners; win-win
Morris and Einhorn (2008)	Toward a win-win situation in the long-term
Zhao (2008)	China's engagement takes into account the interests of Africans; win-win
Geda and Meskel (2008)	Cooperation between China and South Africa; a real win-win with an even higher competitive advantage against China
Pratt and Adamolekun (2008)	Win-win partnership
Taylor (2006)	China has an oil diplomacy in Africa; win-lose

Table II.
Current literature on Chinese and African cooperation: summary of the studies' major conclusions

China has increasingly invested in many of the African countries that may possess these resources (Sanfilippo, 2010). Consequently, China's involvement in Africa is often seen as a rush to secure imports and commodities for the expansion of its own manufacturing sector (Schiere, 2010a). Empirically investigating the determinants of Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) in and across 41 African countries between 1998 and 2007, and based on an econometric analysis, Sanfilippo (2010) directly engaged with this issue.

The research provided strong empirical evidence that favored the controversial idea that Chinese FDI to Africa is driven by the two factors of natural resource endowment and market opportunities.

More specifically, Wang (2010) investigated the key determinants of China's investment strategy by analyzing the country's outward FDI flow to Africa between 2002 and 2007. Wang identified oil supply as the primary determinant in shaping Chinese FDI. In fact, out of the 56 African countries, China has thus far invested in all 45 nations that have large sources of oil, coal and gas. According to data published by the USA Energy Information Administration, the remaining 11 countries did not possess enough strategic natural resources to make Chinese investment sustainable. Through FDI into Africa, particularly in the mining, infrastructure and technology sectors, China has considerably increased its partnerships with African counterparts. Accordingly, at least 35 African countries have engaged with China to confirm infrastructure deals, with the biggest recipients being Nigeria, Angola, Ethiopia and Sudan (McKinnon, 2010). China's investment strategy has been formulated on a project-by-project basis, rather than a general policy basis traditionally preferred by Western countries (Levy, 2011). Yet, despite the resulting financial and technical aid that has been given by the Chinese government to help African economies develop their full potential (Yin and Vaschetto, 2011), the Chinese way of doing business with Africa has been constantly subject to criticism by Western partners. This is especially visible in the mining sector.

We see this approach as a strategic attempt by Western nations to depict China as an unpleasant partner in the eyes of Africans. This can be seen, for instance, in an observation based on a survey of impediments to FDI that has stated that, "unlike many Western investors, corruption, crime and bureaucracy did not seem to disturb Chinese investors particularly" (Jing, 2009, p. 578). Michel (2008, p. 45) mentioned that "China seems to have difficulty maneuvering in countries more democratic than itself". Ironically, Broadman (2010) has pointed out that it appears to be even more surprising to Western commentators when China continues to invest in big projects, while many Western partners still consider Africa a risky and even dangerous place to make such large investments. From an institutional theory perspective, the relative institutional advantage of developing-country multinational enterprises (Cuervo-Cazurra and Genc, 2008; Peng *et al.*, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2012) frequently appears to be relevant in explaining the success of Chinese firms in Africa. Indeed, the gap in institutional frameworks between China and African countries is smaller than that of between developed Western countries and those in Africa. As a result, Chinese multinationals tend to have more experience in navigating through the institutional environment of African countries, while multinational enterprises from the West see this same environment as too risky. Moreover, China's success as a developing country in reducing poverty and achieving rapid economic growth makes it an attractive and credible business partner for African countries that follow similar development trajectories (Bräutigam, 2009). It is thus understandable that these shared institutional systems bring Africans and the Chinese even closer. This advantage translates into what Wu and Cheng (2010) have referred to as Africa's opportunity to learn from the Chinese experience. This is both in terms of development policies and business practices, and appears to be an additional and important reason for Africa to welcome Chinese investment. Over and above this, Yin and Vaschetto (2011) have asserted that China has demonstrated an increasing awareness of the humanitarian implications of doing business with authoritarian and marginalized regimes such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea. Consequently, China has been acting in concert with international institutions, including the United Nations. Thus, it has started to more pragmatically consider international decisions by making efforts to control, for instance, the Sudanese crisis, while limiting its help to the Zimbabwean government.

While the academic literature frequently argues that the main reason China has invested in Africa appears to be its need to secure natural resources for its domestic market, a more fundamental question often arises in both the academic and general media: does China harbor colonial ambitions toward Africa?

Describing Chinese presence and ambition in Africa, Cheru's and Obi's (2011) analysis speculated that it would result in a form of modern colonization in many of the African countries where China had invested. In a study of ten African countries, Jauch (2011) also argued that despite some structural differences between Chinese and Western investments in Africa, Chinese businesses have mostly adopted a neocolonialist approach to resource extraction. This has included labor exploitation and the deployment of infrastructural projects that have not encouraged local development or the improvement of Africa's industrial and competitive capacity. Taking this into account, Jauch has further argued that China's increasing presence in Africa can be seen as a new trend toward the process of the re-colonization of the continent. While this contemporary re-colonization may be different from that of the past, it has the very similar aim of exploiting the continent. For Bräutigam and Xiaoyang (2011), this exploitation is partly embodied by the special economic zones set up by China in many African countries, such as Nigeria. Aligning their argument to the colonial thesis, Cheru and Obi (2011, p. 16) have concluded that "in the absence of visionary African leadership, concerted and well-thought-out African action, the relationship with the emerging Southern powers could turn out to be colonialism by invitation". This idea is further supported by the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's statement during the 10th Africa Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA-2011) forum in Lusaka where she asserted that Africans should be aware of China's neocolonialist ambitions and practices in Africa. Following this, African leaders have frequently rethought their current ties with China. In fact, during the 5th FOCAC meeting, the South African president, Jacob Zuma, warned that the current Sino-African way of doing business was unsustainable and that Africa's past economic experience with Europe should dictate a need for cautious cooperation.

From an opposing perspective, Yin and Vaschetto (2011), in comparing Western and Chinese business strategies in Africa, have argued that China's well-coordinated trade, investment and aid activities have been instrumental in building the infrastructure needed for sustainable economic growth in Africa. Thus, for these authors, the Chinese are creating their own rapid development, while showing their desire to help Africa increase its own prosperity. This idea is also supported by Kurlantznick (2007), who has concluded that China does not aim solely to exploit Africa, but rather to exploit the potentialities of mutual cooperation. Analyzing the business relationships that Africa has with its Western and Chinese counterparts, and based on a comparison between the colonial and post-colonial eras, Yin and Vaschetto (2011, pp. 43-57) found that China's strategy of noninterference and mutual growth has been largely successful. Accordingly, China's recent success in Africa is a product of both parties' interests in mutually beneficial relationships. This is particularly seen in China's political motivated self-marketing program of being a "like-minded ally". This is based on the idea that it shares a similar history of colonization with many African countries, and because of this respects their all-important sovereignty. Overall, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions regarding whether China is acting as a neocolonial ruler in Africa.

China and human rights in Africa

Based on a study of ten African countries, Jauch (2011) focused on the labor conditions at Chinese companies in the continent. His study underlined the fact that, despite some discrepancies amongst the African countries and industries regarding working conditions in Chinese companies in Africa, there are numerous common practices and trends that characterize them. These traits include tense labor/trade relations, hostile attitudes of Chinese employers toward African trade unions, frequent violation of workers' rights, poor working conditions and many other questionable labor practices. Jauch's conclusions highlight evidence of the tough Chinese business practices that have been implemented in Africa, partly because of Africa's limited bargaining power. This has also resulted in Chinese businesses unilaterally determining wages and working contracts, which often negatively affect workers' rights and social security needs. There seems to exist a tacit consensus that Chinese companies are amongst the lowest-paying companies in Africa, especially when compared to other foreign companies, including those from developing countries such as India and Brazil (Broadman, 2010).

Fundamentally, Jauch's study has argued that there is a salary discrepancy between Chinese and African employees, in that Chinese employees enjoy significantly higher wages and more benefits than their African counterparts, even when they undertake the same labor. In extreme instances, some studies, such as the research conducted by Baah and Jauch (2009), have argued that many Chinese employers violate workers' fundamental rights and the basic conventions of the International Labor Organization. This fact has been further highlighted by Jauch (2011), who has argued that Chinese companies frequently tend to only hire African workers for the most basic of tasks, at very low salaries, while importing Chinese managers and supervisors for higher paid positions. This is despite the availability of skilled Africans. Concluding his analysis, Jauch posits that Africa's ambition to attract more FDI from China is contributing to the destruction of national/international labor and environmental standards.

However, human rights in Africa are still only marginally respected, and this does not necessarily correlate with the increasing presence of China in African countries. Indeed, authors such as Jauch have indicated that Western and Chinese companies have very similar aims in the exploitation of the continent's business opportunities. Yin and Vaschetto (2011) have argued that China's turbulent history with human rights issues have made it more understanding of Africa's desire to deal with internal issues, without external intervention. Furthermore, Tan-Mullins *et al.* (2010) have concluded that the nature of Chinese labor practices in many African countries are frequently exaggerated, although they did note that some of these assumptions are applicable to large state-owned Chinese enterprises. For example, in several Chinese companies, more than 90 per cent of their workforce is made up of African employees (Jing, 2009), and in many countries, these businesses do affect the larger institutional environment. This is exemplified by South Africa, which has signed agreements to limit labor imports from China (Adisu *et al.*, 2010), and Egypt, which negotiated a ratio of one Chinese employee for every nine Egyptians in Sino-Egyptian contracts (Bräutigam and Xiaoyang, 2011).

However, overall, existing studies on the issue of human and employees' rights are based on incomplete evidence, because very few of the papers provided sufficient or undeniable data regarding Chinese labor practices in Africa.

The concern with human rights associated with China's developmental approach to Africa is frequently emphasized. This is linked to what researchers such as Aguilar and Goldstein (2009) refer to as China's soft power strategy. Implicit in such research is a sub-question that concerns human rights issues, and can be expressed thus: does China use soft power strategies in Africa?

Soft power refers to an indirect influence that a nation exerts on the conduct or interests of another nation, and it takes place through cultural or ideological means without using force or coercion (Kurlantznick, 2007). Thus, it differs significantly from hard power tactics, such as military or economic intervention. In this sense, researchers such as Taylor (2006) have concluded that China is using soft power strategies in Africa to internationalize its practices, values, culture and position toward African countries. Among other assertions listed, Yin and Vaschetto (2011) have argued that China's means of exerting soft power include the deployment of numerous Chinese medical teams to Africa, sending experts to deliver professional training and supplying agricultural support to increase self-reliance. Most importantly, researchers, such as Adisu *et al.* (2010), see China as exerting its soft power through infrastructural improvement projects, such as those undertaken at the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, which is decorated with traditional Chinese art. Another strategy is based on the principle of non-interference, in which China has frequently taken advantage of the discord sown in Africa by developed countries' paternalistic approach to the continent. China has proposed new perspectives and understandings to African nations, such as Angola, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This soft power approach has also advanced through the Chinese promotion of the concept of a "like-minded ally" (Yin and Vaschetto, 2011). The concept describes the perception of Africans feeling comfortable in dealing with a developing country that understands their history, realities and needs, despite the risk that Aguilar and Goldstein (2009) have described as the "Chinisation of Africa". Regarding the soft power controversy, McKinnon (2010) has even argued that African countries have responded by trying to emulate China's economic regime and thus become more closely aligned to a common Chinese vision of development. Our view on this issue is that soft power remains abstract, and thus its use is difficult to prove. However, we do believe that China is trying to influence Africa through multiple means including, for instance, cultural ones. However, this strategy is not necessarily specific to Africa.

The last sub-question is related to the role of China in the industrialization of the African continent. Often contentious, the controversy revolves around whether China's attitude is helpful in accelerating Africa's industrial development, and to what extent this has impacted local economies.

China's role in the industrialization of Africa

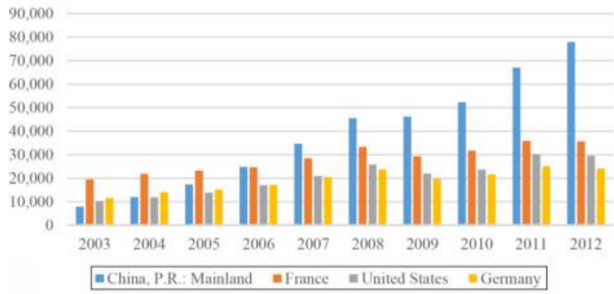
Several studies (Chemingui and Bchir, 2010; Giovannetti and Sanfilippo, 2009; Sperbee, 2009) have concluded that China is not willing to help Africa industrialize. In this regard, and to encourage African development, Robert Zoelick (the former president of the World Bank) requested that China attempt to direct its investments and partnerships toward more sustainable programs. In particular, he suggested that Chinese investments in Africa should go beyond the traditional scope of building infrastructure and begin to include the development of the African manufacturing industry. However, as stated by Ozawa and Bellak (2011), China's capacity to transform Sub-Saharan countries into industrialized manufacturing economies through FDI remains unrealistic, underdeveloped and quite restricted. These researchers have asserted that, currently, Africa's industrialization is dependent on attracting Western companies that are specifically interested in cheap labor sources, rather than Chinese investment. Indeed, many Chinese companies have started relocating their activities to African countries, like Ethiopia, to benefit from cheap labor. However, based on micro-level data from five Sub-Saharan countries, Elu and Price (2010) found that increasing trade openness with China had no direct effect on the growth of the total productivity in the country. This is despite the fact that productivity and growth are a crucial determinant of the economic success of a country in the long run. Indeed, their results suggested that increasing trade openness with China is not a long-term or viable source of development for many African countries. The same study revealed that for Sub-Saharan manufacturing firms, increasing their trade openness with China does not, in general, lead to a transfer of technology and skills that enhance firm-level productivity. Moreover, they concluded that in some cases it may even negatively affect total productivity, making it harder for Africans to work toward industrialization. Chemingui and Bchir (2010) have further added that even if China should offer more market access to African goods, the resulting trade potential will not significantly improve many countries that suffer from insufficient productive capacity and limited economic diversification.

However, we do think that Elu and Price's conclusions seem rather limited, precisely because an analysis of African industrialization based solely on offshore driven possibilities, themselves driven by low labor costs, seems restricted. In fact, African industrialization could occur through many means other than the exploitation of its labor pool. The potential for African industrialization should be primarily based on strategic investments in a number of key sectors. Thus, by establishing specific investment partnerships with China, African countries can stimulate local industrialization without requiring that China relocate its industries to Africa, all without mentioning that African labor costs are lower than those of many urban Chinese. Regarding the larger issue of Africa's industrialization, researchers and practitioners often question whether Chinese businesses are harming Africa's local economy and its development. We now turn to this question.

Before engaging in the analysis, the figures below illustrate the context of China's economic engagement with Africa, as compared with other investing nations. During the past decade, various research studies (Maswana, 2009; Morris and Einhorn, 2008; Shen, 2013; Taylor, 2009; Wang, 2010) queried China's reasons for entering Africa. In this regard, Anshan (2006) argued that one of the key reasons was that Africa's business environment had recently shown a high rate of growth and had thus attracted more foreign investment – particularly from China – than ever before. Disregarding for the moment the question of what the motives of the Chinese might be, a recent report from the Direction of Trade Statistics (IMF, 2013) stated that China has already taken the lead amongst Africa's top import and export partners, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

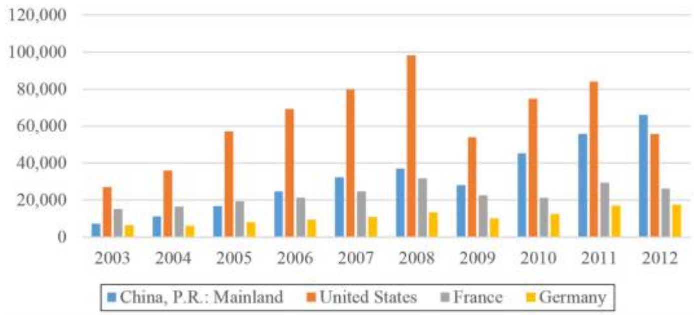
Such statistics awaken a researcher's curiosity. Accordingly, various papers (Brenton and Walkenhorst, 2010; Geda and Meskel, 2008; Jing, 2009; Schiere, 2010b) have questioned this increase in trade, as well as its impact on local African economies.

In a study on China's impact on intra-African trade, Montinari and Prodi (2011, pp. 75-91) used what they termed the "gravity model" to question whether intra-African trade is being significantly impacted on by commercial exchanges with China. Their results have suggested that Sub-Saharan Africa's exports to China have had a negative effect on intra-African trade at the macro-economic level, but a positive effect at the micro-economic level. Another key finding of the study was that Africa's biggest oil partners tended to marginalize Africa's internal market as their exports to China increased. However, for African countries that are not oil exporters, the study found an increase in the correlation between intra-African trade and increased commercial cooperation with China. Montinari and Prodi explained this observation, in part, by the wealth-effect that leads non-oil producing countries to trade more substantially with other Sub-Saharan African countries, thus increasing the level of intra-African trade. Overall, even though China's presence is affecting the flow of bilateral trade between Sub-Saharan African countries, there is no uniform effect on the development of domestic multilateral markets in Africa.



Source: Adapted from data from the Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS, IMF Data Warehouse)

Figure 3.
Africa's major import partners (USA $, millions)



Source: Adapted data from the Direction of Trade Statistics (DOTS, IMF Data Warehouse)

Figure 4.
Africa's major export partners (USA $, millions)

From a more business-oriented perspective, Yin and Vaschetto (2011) presented a nuanced view of Sino-African business exchanges. China provides goods that Africans need, at a lower price than Western-made goods, which positively impacts Africans' living conditions. A side effect, however, is that the cheap Chinese products (particularly textiles) are competing with locally made goods, and Africans do not have a sufficiently strong competitive advantage to face Chinese competitors. Chinese companies are then displacing African enterprises in local markets, while creating fewer jobs for local communities (Cheru and Obi, 2011). However, in analyzing the possible cost adjustments, Brenton and Walkenhorst (2010) have emphasized that China's ascent (particularly in North Africa) cannot be seen only as a growing threat to competition in Africa, but should also be seen as an opportunity for local African businesses to enter into mutually beneficial ventures with Chinese firms.

Based on the arguments that we examined from the various authors, and in the context of the analyses of existing studies, it is clear that definitive answers dealing with China's presence in Africa remain mostly controversial. Table III presents the major positions, articulated by the research articles, dealing with the aforementioned controversies.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that we have had to omit some of the studies on Sino-African relations that were published in journals not yet accessible in Western libraries, this research review has undertaken a thorough exploration of the current state of knowledge on China's presence in African countries. The paper suggests that many of the research conclusions, in describing China's presence in Africa, frequently generalize specific issues affecting the whole continent. Publications on China in Africa are frequently oriented toward win-lose findings, although many lack substantive methodological rigor. We realize that many of the controversial topics are legitimate; however, many of the conclusions are neither evidence-based nor rigorous in their argumentation. Consequently, on one hand, it is a necessity that authors undertake more objective and less ideologically partisan research that requires them to moderate any desire of pursuing intellectual dominance. Even with this in mind, the key questions of whether the relationship between China and Africa is win-win or win-lose need to be addressed through further micro-level studies that focus on what local African enterprises have gained from the cooperation. These should be placed in contrast to macro-level studies. Furthermore, future undertakings need to expand and explore new research avenues. A primary concern is the concerted attempt to explain the increasing cooperation between

Question	Answer according to the positions of the literature
Is China–Africa a win-win cooperation?	Controversial
Does China only go to Africa for natural resources?	Yes
Does China have colonialist ambitions?	Controversial
Does China care about human rights?	No
Does China use a soft power strategy?	Yes
Does China encourage African industrialization?	Controversial
Does China's presence in Africa harm the local economy?	Yes

Table III. Literature prevalence on selected issues

China and Africa on the sole basis of inconsistently aggregated numbers and approaches that focus solely on China's need of Africa's natural resources. Researchers should, rather, focus on more institutional and theoretically demanding perspectives that explore the similarities and patterns of cooperation between the two partners. Studies should further engage in researching the mutual trust and alliances between China and Africa, especially when China has alternative options by which to extract natural resources, such as in Western countries. Finally, to overcome the major weaknesses discussed through this paper, researchers also need to consider the following directions in future research:

- *More empirically based studies*. Most positions are frequently the author(s) own views. There is no strong empirical evidence to many of the claims. No quantitative data (Aguilar and Goldstein, 2009) and no unquestionable statistical analyses at the macro-level on Africa exist at this stage. Despite the warning from authors like Yin (2009), many of the generalized conclusions are based on only a single case study, individual country analysis or news media sources and are frequently published in journals that are neither ranked nor IB-focused.
- *More culturally aware researchers*. Many important papers, which are published and cited in ranked journals, are authored by researchers who frequently marginalize, or somehow do not understand, the realities of a developing nation's cultures and values. Authors also need to moderate any desire for intellectual dominance because such motivation makes research analyses and conclusions questionable and ultimately biased, especially considering the current climate of speculation with regard to Chinese and African cooperation. Therefore, in line with De Haan (2010), we argue that to effectively understand China's presence in Africa, researchers need to develop an in-depth understanding of both parties' critical paths toward industrialization. Accordingly, researchers need to prioritize the cultural, social and historical dimensions of Sino-African cooperation.
- *More longitudinal approaches*. To define the relationship between China and Africa, research should be based on reasonable periods of time, as it took decades to conclude that some African countries were being undermined by their cooperation with the Western world. Thus, we strongly suggest that it is only in the long-term that studies can really discover whether Africa's cooperation with China is different from its cooperation with Western and former colonialist powers.

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