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Old Actors, New Drama: Chinese Engagement with Africa and the Implications for the United States

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Premise

Twenty years ago, the concept of active and constantly evolving Chinese engagement with African states appeared obsolete, with the exception of the remnants of post-communism relationships following the Cold War. Within the past decade, the decline of Western attention on African states and negative memories of Western colonialism has created the opportunity for China to establish a more prominent presence on the continent, and in recent years Sino-African relations have only escalated. A variety of consequences have begun to emerge from the rapidly growing presence of China in less-than-developed countries, both positive and negative; however, China expresses its intent to cultivate mutual cooperation among nations.

While preoccupied predominantly in the Middle East, the United States of America has failed to maintain a personal rapport with the governments of most African states. Far from the frequent, in-person visits to African heads of state by Chinese military leaders and diplomats, the United States had shifted its focus from the continent until recently, as it has begun to realize the growing influence of its strategic competitor, China. The U.S. and China have maintained at the least a peripheral awareness of each other's actions on the global stage, including their interactions in the United Nations Security Council. As China continues to gain influence as a political actor in an increasingly multi-polar world, the United States has experienced unfamiliar limitations of its power and grows more conscious of Chinese strategies and objectives. The venue for Sino-U.S. interactions has begun to shift from the Far East, where China has labored to ameliorate its status as a developing nation, to the African continent where China may emerge as a strategic competitor to the globally hegemonic United States.

No longer an adversary, nor a partner, the Sino-U.S. relationship is marked by strategic competition for the ever-changing responses to current events on a global stage. In order to assess the implications of a shift in venue in the political arena for China and the United States, one must explore the current strategies of Chinese engagement in Africa and attempt to determine the nation's goals on the continent. One must examine why China has chosen to engage this region, at this time, and what its long-term motivations and incentives may be. Currently, China and the United States have intertwined political and economic interests, and an analysis of China's impact in Africa can help determine where the U.S. and China have an opportunity for mutual cooperation in the future.

Equally important to U.S. response are the global implications of a Sino-African relationship. As often depicted in research, analysts consider the mutual benefits or consequences of Chinese engagement in Africa. No longer solely an economic endeavor, research either lauds the cultural and political—even military—interactions between China and many African states, or it disparages Chinese practices, including the One-China policy. The One-China policy offered African states the opportunity for a partnership without Chinese interference or strings attached, as long as the African government recognized China's legitimacy (with its capitol in Beijing) over any ties to Taiwan. In light of China's amplified activity on the African continent in both the economic and political realms, it is becoming more evident that China seeks to rise as a global power in the international arena.

Today, news media outlets tend to portray the ascent of Chinese power in Africa as a negative phenomenon, and while the U.S. may face the threat of sacrificing full immunity in its future actions to the greater international interest, the chance to collaborate between major world powers could reap benefits for African states and the international community. In areas that the Chinese relationship succeeds and trumps Western strategies (which are often marked by adherence to the "Washington Consensus" plan), the United States and international community can work to cooperate and promote positive practices; on the other hand, one must determine how to combat the detrimental results of Chinese involvement on the African continent in a way that will not jeopardize opportunities for mutual cooperation between all parties. Overall, among the progressive relationship between China and Africa, an predominant theme causes one to wonder how the United States fits—if it does at all—into the larger perspective of Sino-African relations and where it can move forward as alliances have begun to emerge, and more successful than those attempted by Western powers.

Regarding strategic competition, the United States has the opportunity to apply a range of its power to protect its own interests in cooperating with China, especially through its position as a dominant global leader. China may be a rising world power, but it still has flaws where the United States can apply leverage; in particular, Chinese investment and relationship building revolves around its non-interference, One-China policy. Thus, Chinese business relations—especially in the realm of arms proliferation—often contribute to investments in corrupt governments that commit human rights atrocities against their own citizens without any stipulations or condemning statements from the Chinese. On the other hand, African

governments have more of an opportunity today to take control of their countries' needs and desires, and China's strategic interactions entice many African leaders over Western principles for engagement.

As it rises to power on the global stage, is China ready to face the responsibilities of the international community to protect individuals when their governments will not offer safety? Indeed, China has begun to orchestrate a charm offensive that includes soft power strategies and minimizing criticism so as to assert a better image to the rest of the world. However, it has a variety of motivations for engaging Africa, which this paper will examine, and it still interacts with corrupt governments much to the chagrin of the international community. Currently, China touts a strict policy of protecting state sovereignty and non-interference in a country's affairs; yet, even this line grows blurrier as Chinese initiatives in Africa include infrastructure, health, and even education practices in an almost neo-colonialist endeavor. Furthermore, cultural exchanges and aid investment have begun to ameliorate African debt and promote understanding and optimism between continents.

As it begins to entrench itself ever deeper into the African continent, China has an advantage with the African people that the United States lacks. Along with the strong qualities that the United States possesses in the international realm, its relations with China could provide for compensation each other's weaker traits and provide a real opportunity for change and cooperation in Africa. Where China's endeavors might negatively affect the African people, namely in the fueling of human rights offenses, the United States has the opportunity to respond in a way that can create leverage and seek progress for the international community's protection of citizens. While it may take a paradigm shift for China to readjust its concepts of political sovereignty and non-intervention, the potential of strategic competition to turn into mutual cooperation can offer the United States a chance to uphold its declared ideologies of civil liberty and build upon its current relationship with China and Africa to move it in a more positive direction, while respecting the desires of the African communities.

To begin, one must determine the context of Chinese goals and motivations for engagement, beyond mere economic pursuit, and examine how Chinese strategies differ from those of the West. Furthermore, the Sino-African relationship requires assessment to determine its positive and negative aspects in order to discern opportunities for a mutually beneficial relationship and to dispel negative practices that harm African citizens and the international

community. Finally, the U.S. must inspect the range of options for dealing with a shift in the international political venue to the African frontier, as well as the pragmatism and validity of its potential responses to the Sino-African relationship in a shifting world order. This paper will take into consideration the aforementioned aspects of Sino-African relations and assess within that framework the implications and options available for the United States.

Literature Review

China's interest in the African continent has increased in the last decade and major players in international politics, including the United States, have grown increasingly more aware and speculative about China's actions and intentions. Western media has started portraying Chinese engagement with Africa as alarming, but an understanding of China's purpose in Africa is lost amidst the assumptions and lack of up to date information. Scholars have lately begun to delve into progressively more complex nature of Sino-African relations and how the partnership affects other players that have interests in the region. Leading up to the year 2011, the information available has increased in accordance with China's mounting presence on the African continent. Research for this paper in particular has incorporated Chinese, Western, and African perspectives.

Because the Sino-African topic is an emerging area of study, the nature of China's engagement with Africa constantly changes and significant questions remain under examination throughout available resources on the subject. Approaches for examination differ in degrees of broad to more narrow focuses, and may illustrate the effects of Chinese engagement in specific regions of Africa or overall. Discord exists between the information fed to the Western world from the media and a sound framework of scholarly analysis. Researchers ponder topics such as the purpose/intent of Chinese penetration—is it marked with underlying factors or more explicit and obvious? In what areas and with what types of influence is China exerting? What resources does China pursue, and does that pursuit reflect a general approach or specialized tactics in specific regions or states? How does Chinese intervention affect intra-state conflicts and corrupt governments and leadership, either subliminally or through backdoor diplomacy—and with strategies ranging from arms dealing to fueling armed conflict with investment? How does

China's approach clash or identify with U.S. foreign policy tactics, and the countries' relationship as strategic competitors?

Furthermore, political scientists and economists tend to contemplate the consequences or mutual benefits of this rising global South-South alliance for not only China and African states, but for the Western world and the United States. The media of the Western world relies on sensational stories and plays upon the idea of a Chinese threat to nations like the United States or the collective European Union. With more in depth analysis, however, scholars portray either a negative or positive perspective when approaching any aspect of Sino-African observation. With the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship to emerge among African states and the Chinese government, optimism surfaces and sheds an encouraging light upon the range of opportunities China can offer to underdeveloped countries. Nevertheless, academics have condemned a few Chinese practices, including its arms dealings with volatile regions in Africa, and have exposed the need for improvement and pressure from the international community to maintain accountability for human rights issues. Due to the emerging and still ambiguous nature of Chinese motives and African responses to the developing relationships, no collectively distinct view of African intellectuals exists. However, independent analysts and activists among African civil society groups have begun to form perceptions of Chinese engagement, especially reliant upon a commitment to human rights and social justice.

Even more disconcerting for promoters of democracy, China has established rapport with governments without the precursory recommendation of a democratic government. The Chinese model of aid, which has involved the cancellation of numerous African debts and given wealthy gifts to improve African infrastructure, education, and health care capacities, professes no prior stipulations to assistance. Scholars have noticed successful investment relationships emerging in the midst of oppressive regimes, which leads to speculation about previous proclamations that democracy must be established to ensure a state's success and economic development. Despite unorthodox Chinese tactics, no longstanding examples of African success stories have exhibited that democratic tendencies can be ruled out altogether as an option for stability and sustainable development.

In accordance with China's unique approach to non-interference, government aid, and now its soft power policies, the questions surrounding Chinese aid for African states contributes to the discussion of motive and incentive for engagement on the continent. As studies begin to

indicate Western flaws in their approaches to foreign aid, how does China's approach to assistance differ? Do Chinese investment and trade practices harm local economies, or do aid packages ease burdens to alleviate poverty and spur African states into self-reliant development? It is necessary to examine the ties that bind China to Africa surrounding generous gifts, as well as to determine the implications or the opportunities made available for African states.

Further analysis permits one to discern Chinese needs versus desires in engaging the African continent. Authors may examine the extent to which China partakes in cultivating an intimate relationship with African heads of state and the possibility of neocolonialism; assertions arise that China wants to modify its image, potentially disguise policy goals, and try to avoid the impression of imperialism as it seeks to rise as a global power. Indeed, it has set itself apart from previous Western approaches in Africa with its own unique Chinese model of engagement, but the full extent of the effectiveness of such a model remains debatable. China can relate to many African states in a global South-South context due to its own history of development and a past marked by divisive warlords, Maoist communism, and its changing economic policies.

In uncovering motivations and rationale for Chinese partnerships with African nations, researchers have only just begun to develop a proper U.S. reaction to the blossoming political, cultural, and economic changes resulting from Sino-African relations. For example, could the U.S. provide leverage to either cooperate or reign in China concerning human rights abuses or threats to U.S. investments? China's actions are constantly under review, especially with the historical context of its own fears of foreign influence and how it values its identity and state autonomy. It has begun to set itself apart with its One-China policy of non-interference in African states' government affairs, and its initiatives on the continent differ from past Western tactics and methods of colonization. Undoubtedly, research reveals the similar backgrounds between African states and China, from past struggles to current desires to overcome challenges and rise to prominence by working together.

An ever-impending question, spectators of the Sino-African phenomenon wonder about the impact of such relations upon the United States' interests as a strategic competitor of China. Depending upon the positive or negative outlook assumed by analysts regarding the global implications that stem from this budding relationship, one must consider the nature with which global powers conduct their foreign policy initiatives and responses. For example, fostering cooperation between the U.S. and China in the region may prove necessary for mutual

coexistence and preserving each party's interests, but at the same time, political leverage is a valuable tool for more sensitive topics like genocide. Within this emerging field, research studies involve such aspects as development and alliances in the Global South, changes in global and local markets, environmental consequences, and energy policies. An added complexity, intra-state conflict and the acknowledgement of Chinese arms deals emerge as a more prevalent topic of concern in research and news media reports.

Though investment and global trade are key contributors to the analysis of Sino-African and U.S. foreign policy relationships, this paper will also examine the political motivations of China and its strategic approach to the African continent. It will assess the relationship China shares with African governments and civil society groups in order to highlight opportunities for mutual cooperation and understanding, and then it will compare the U.S. strategy in the region to determine the implications of the Sino-African relationship in an increasingly globalized world. Academics have noticed that China recognizes and allies with African states in international forums and venues, such as the United Nations, to promote shared values and policies. Furthermore, China gives African states the chance to participate in global affairs, and it promotes their input and opinions on a predominantly Western international stage. The Sino-African partnership possibly represents hope for a multi-polar world in which a plurality of powers can exercise influence in international policymaking. As an additional note, China's intent to ascend in the global arena corresponds with the assertion of influence by other developing nations like Brazil, Russia, and India. China's actions merit attention from the United States because the two powers often cross paths as strategic competitors in the international community, but they are not the only power that seeks to increase its influence in the nations of the Global South.

Thus far, I have unearthed a wealth of relevant journal articles, books, and miscellaneous sources for the implementation of my research. I had primarily focused on Western reactions to Chinese engagement in Africa, but I have also acquired an anthology of African perspectives that rely upon independent analysts and activists in order to provide a context of civil society reactions to the Chinese presence on the African continent. I have explored both positive and negative responses to the Sino-African partnership; especially interesting are the denouncements that continuously comprise the negative analyses of Chinese practices, because a timid pattern has begun to draw attention to Western hypocrisy and its less-than-angelic actions from past to

present. It is important to correctly factor in colonial practices from Western international relations to foster an understanding and sensitivity involving Western accusations against China opportunities in order to develop effective accountability tactics for the rising global power.

Primarily, the research for this paper involved the perspectives of key scholars in the Sino-African field like Deborah Brautigam, Ambassador David Shinn, and Zhiqun Zhu. In Brautigam's recent book, *The Dragon's Gift*, the author sorts through myths surrounding Chinese motivations and attempts to illustrate a realistic portrayal of China's engagement with the African continent. This paper draws heavily from her research, as Brautigam provides a thorough background of China's past relations with Africa, current practices in the context of Chinese culture, and the effects of Chinese aid as a part of its larger goal to rise to global prominence.

In addition, I included a variety of articles, op-eds, and even interviews from George Washington University's Ambassador David Shinn, who has had firsthand experience with both Africa and China. For the past decade, he has analyzed the fledgling Sino-African partnership and his research provides documentation and a framework for the evolving nature of the present-day Sino-African relationship. On the other hand, Zhiqun Zhu has observed the ever-changing tactics in Chinese diplomacy since the 1990s, and he discusses Africa as a part of China's global extension in his book *China's New Diplomacy*. The subtitle of his book, "Rationale, Strategies and Significance," explains his predominant focus in assessing China's approach to the African continent. Both Zhu and Shinn have examined China's movements in the past two decades and can offer insight into how China operates as applicable to Africa; the two scholars have provided a large amount of research and ideas for this paper.

Aside from a variety of other journal articles, another critical component of my research involved a collection of African responses to Chinese engagement in the anthology *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. The conglomeration of texts represents the most important players in the nuanced relationship with China and the Western world: the Africans themselves.

Such a variety of contexts for Sino-African study and the implications stemming from the blooming relationship have offered a broad basis for analysis. Mixed perspectives have appeared on all sides of the spectrum concerning China's mingling with African states. While studies often rely heavily upon an economic component for portraying the Sino-African relationship, this paper will examine a variety of Chinese motivations and African responses, the

overarching theme of positive versus negative repercussions for the Sino-African relationship, and attempts to shed insight into U.S. reactions and the global implications that have begun to emerge in the past decade.

Finally, the Sino-African relationship fascinates me because I have an interest in the complex history, politics, and culture of China; especially because I traveled to China for three weeks and learned from a native Chinese professor and my interactions with Chinese students. Contrasted with my undergraduate study of African politics and my work for an organization that constantly remains updated on human rights concerns on the African continent, I pull from my own understanding and backgrounds concerning both China and Africa and meld that with my personal heritage as a citizen of the United States. In my thesis, I seek to reconcile the information I have researched and have placed into a framework from firsthand experiences to gain a better understanding of the Sino-African relationship and apply it as relevant to the United States.

Abstract

Recently, the U.S. and China have entered into the realm of strategic competition; Africa now serves an additional venue for their nuanced relationship. In an increasingly multipolar world, China's rise as a prominent international power shifts global dynamics, and implications for the United States have begun to evolve. All three parties have interests at stake. While this paper will examine Chinese motivations and the United States response (or lack thereof) to engagement of Africa, it will also consider African interests and a need to avoid exploitation. China intends to successfully cultivate relationships that African leaders will turn into alliances; thus, it expresses the desire for such relations to be mutually beneficial. Following the initial examination of China's approach to Africa, this paper will assess the potential for mutual benefit to flourish between nations. Furthermore, in the context of an increasingly multipolar world it will assess the implications for the United States as an international power and why the Sino-African relationship requires attention. Most importantly, the United States can improve its own strategy in Africa and learn from the Chinese, as well as collaborate within the framework of strategic competition so that it can protect its interests abroad.

Old Actors, New Drama:

Chinese Engagement with Africa and the Implications for the United States

By Megan R. Wanee

Intro

“America’s absence in Africa is ‘as noticeable and prominent as the Chinese presence,’ commented then Senator Barack Obama (D-Ill.) in 2006.”¹ Although seemingly exaggerated, United States President Obama’s observation of China’s growing engagement on the African continent contains elements of truth. Evermore, China’s influence emerges throughout the African continent, while the United States’ legitimacy seems to wane. When considering the rate of growth among Chinese endeavors compared to the lack of progress the United States faces with African nations, one must wonder what exactly it is that the Chinese are doing and how their approach generally affects the African states. Obama’s statement perhaps reflects a dismal foreshadowing of the decline of United States’ influence in the international arena; yet, as China begins its ascent as a world power, are such fears unfounded?

China and the African states exist on two separate continents, and at first it seems that the two regions have little in common. Both contain developing nations whose budding relationship appears to have little pertinence to the United States. Ranging from scholars to average individuals, Chinese and African relations call forth mixed reactions. Often, the average American perceives the idea of Chinese engagement of Africa as distant and irrelevant to the United States. However, those who are on a sort of “China watch,” keeping an eye on the movements of China as it rapidly grows and its influence expands, portray Sino-African relations as an emerging frontier in a growing struggle between the United States and China—even sometimes as a threat. Despite the attention of non-profit and public policy groups, the media typically portrays the continent as hopeless and wrought with conflict. It has even begun to decry China as a threat to United States’ dominant position in the international arena. While a variety of factors, including China’s own internal affairs and efforts to develop, prevent it from achieving the caliber of international influence that the United States exercises, it will no longer remain confined within its own borders. Looking ahead, the United States must not ignore the

¹ Zhiquan Zhu, *China’s New Diplomacy: Rationale, Strategies and Significance* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2010), 42.

movements of China and the nature of its relations with Africa if it strives to maintain its own relevance and the power it enjoys in the international arena.

Emerging as hot topic of study and occasional source of sensational media stories, Chinese and African relations are often described as a recent phenomenon. However, China has interacted with African states as far back as the 15th century; it simply does not share the same exploitative and intrusive history as the European colonial powers who have left deep, nuanced scars across the continent. In recent years, China has escalated its previously nominal role in Africa: “Only since the mid-1990s has China re-discovered Africa’s economic and diplomatic values and begun large-scale investment and trade. The basis of Sino-African relations has evolved from politics and ideology in the 1960s and 1970s to economics and pragmatic cooperation today.”² During the 20th century, China involved itself primarily in ideological struggles during the Cold War. Its strategy has since shifted because in the 1990s, China began to experiment with capitalistic tendencies in its own economy and witness some internal stabilization and growth. Eventually, it recognized an opportunity to extend more than its political ideology abroad, and it expanded its focus on new markets available in Africa, a continent that Western opportunists have gradually vacated.

During the economic crisis of the 1980s and the winding down of Cold War tension, the United States had largely begun to pull out of Africa and create a vacuum for investment that the Chinese saw as an opportunity. Arriving in post-independence Africa to construct infrastructure and manage state-owned factories, China’s exertion went unnoticed by Western donors; however, African states recognized Chinese presence and many granted the Chinese legitimacy and credibility for their work.³ China and the United States vary in their own patterns of development and in their approach to international politics and business with Africa. Unfortunately, the United States often perceives the African continent as conflicted and hopeless, while the Chinese have begun to experiment ways to collaborate with African leaders—and to mounting success.

² Zhu, 22.

³ Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon’s Gift: the Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 310.

As the Western world begins to notice a more prominent Chinese presence on the African continent, analysts question why the Chinese have chosen this particular region of the world in which to focus their attention as of late. China has had an extensive history of relations with African states, but they have taken a less intrusive form than Western colonial endeavors. After the African economic crisis of the 1980s deterred international investment on the continent, the U.S. attention in the region has diminished. Private groups and non-profit organizations have certainly drawn attention to humanitarian crises on the African continent; however, the economic disaster of the 1980s proved a setback to African progress. Originally, the United States had an array of ventures and investments in African states, but with post-independence and the economic crisis of the 1980s, they began to turn their attention elsewhere: “Aid for manufacturing and infrastructure dropped to historic lows. The traditional donors left a vacuum, and who was there, ready to step in? The Chinese.”⁴ China recognized an opportunity, and stepped up their role in Africa to fill the holes left by Western powers. The post-Mao recovery and development of China’s own economy had sidetracked China from its ability to focus on foreign aid let alone develop any lasting strategic involvement in Africa. However, China never completely left Africa alone, though its giving and investment may have slowed.

This paper will address the motivations and strategies of Chinese engagement of Africa, and its significance for the United States as a strategic competitor of China. The nature of strategic competition does not entail direct antagonism; it implies a relationship in which each party protects its own interests and remains knowledgeable about its opponent’s actions in order to remain a viable contender—in this case, for international prominence. China’s swelling power cannot yet match that of the United States, but it may in the future: “Nonetheless, Beijing’s global outreach does appear consistent with longer-term political goals to promote a multipolar world and to protect itself against the preeminent power of the United States, while placing itself in a position to potentially balance against, if not compete strategically with, the United States once China achieves greater strength.”⁵ China seeks to match U.S. power in the

⁴ Brautigam, 77.

⁵ Fred C. Bergsten, Bates Gill, Nicholas R. Lardy, and Derek Mitchell. "Global Strategic Competition." *China Balance Sheet*. CSIS & Peterson Institute. http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080916_cbs_1_globalcomp.pdf. (accessed 25 April 2011).

long-term. While the African continent does not always appear the most appealing location for foreign policy engagement and the U.S. often wonders what it can gain from giving attention to under-developed states, the U.S. should not abandon its interests in Africa because China has set its attention on the continent as a part of its strategic competition. If the United States' foreign policy fails on the African continent and China becomes the predominant global partner in the region, China will have the advantage of a wealth of markets and resources, as well as the diplomatic support necessary for alliances in the international community. Clearly, the United States and China do not share a common background, nor do they share basic beliefs in how a country should approach politics and human rights. In spite of their differences, China and the United States do not face a zero-sum game. While each country has differing intentions and tactics, they can minimize the potential for conflict and in some instances even cooperate with each other.

Gradually, the United States has realized that strategic competition extends to the African continent as China's focus grows there and it begins to assert its advancement towards international leadership. In the context of its role with the United States, it is necessary to examine the implications of China's strategy in Africa and how it differs from that of the Western powers. One must study the motivations of China's engagement of Africa and the strengths and weaknesses that have thus far ensued. Because China often lacks transparency in its interactions with African leaders, the United States tends to take a speculative, skeptical approach to Chinese actions in Africa. Indeed, China has not had a very clean record with its internal relations and human rights. Yet, the United States must examine its own past and present with African states. It must also strive for greater understanding of Chinese strategy and motivations on the African continent to determine the context for the assumptions it makes and to construct an appropriate response. Additionally, this fledgling field of study requires an examination of China's assertion to create a mutually beneficial relationship with Africa, and if the United States can leverage its interests in upholding a similar policy.

Naturally global dynamics constantly shift, but the United States' role as dominant figure in international politics no longer remains completely secure, at least in the forward-looking perspective. Evermore, African nations view China as an alternative to their previous reliance on

Western powers. The United States must reexamine its role in the international arena, assess opportunities for self-improvement, and determine areas in which it can uphold its beliefs and promote its interests to the *benefit*, rather than the detriment, of other states (especially in Africa). As a part of strategic competition, the U.S. must protect its interests abroad to maintain the power it currently enjoys in the global arena; but it must work on building a more positive image and partnerships with states that will be mutually beneficial. The Sino-African relationship, as it grows, will further encourage the United States to realistically reexamine its policies and goals. A little competition could prove healthy to spur the United States into trying new approaches and becoming more understanding and aware of how it conducts its relationships with other states. African states have begun to lose faith in the United States strategy, whereas China experiments with different approaches that they constantly revise in hopes of finding the correct combination of efficiency and effectiveness.

Overall, as China cultivates its relationship with African states and begins to build a long-term presence on the continent, discussions have emerged questioning the implications for Africa and for the United States as a global leader. Will China's presence resemble the colonialist exploitation of previous powers that have tried to partner with Africa? Is China simply looking for new markets, or is it attempting to pursue a bigger strategy that could have implications for the United States? Clearly, the venue for U.S. - Chinese relations has now expanded from their own borders to include Africa as a playing field in the international arena, and it competes both economic and diplomatic interests against one another in strategic competition. As globalization amplifies and alters international relationships, the United States and China face an increasing overlap of interests and tense up at the possibility of conflict; yet, opportunities for collaboration exists. In order to determine an appropriate reaction of the United States to Chinese engagement in Africa, one must evaluate their current foreign policy approaches. *This paper will analyze the roles of three very different players in the international arena: China, the United States, and Africa. It will examine the motivations of Chinese engagement of Africa within a positive or negative framework, as well as the possibility of a mutually beneficial relationship between the two parties. Finally, it will assess the implications of the Sino-African relationship in the context of strategic competition between the United States and China in an increasingly globalized world.*

Part I.

While the African continent may seem an unusual location for China to focus its attention, the region is increasingly growing into an opportunity. With the ever-rapid pace of globalization, the U.S. faces the rising influence of the European Union and the BRIC nations: Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Especially in the context of the changing international arena and the precarious perception of the United States' future on the continent, the U.S. must at the least recognize the potential for competition from these developing entities; it must also ponder how China's assertion of power beyond its borders will affect the polarity of the world order.

To place the recent escalation of Chinese engagement of Africa in context, note that the United States is only recently beginning to fully comprehend the complexity of China's presence on the continent: "Aid to Africa would increase, even as it dropped in other significant regions, such as Asia. This gave China a steady presence, credibility, and a strong foundation that Beijing would build on in the years after 1995. China's increased visibility in Africa today should be seen in this context: *China never left, we just stopped looking.*"⁶ Indeed, China has more recently increased its assertion of influence, but it had maintained steady positive relations with the continent for years before it began to do so. They have played at the least a minor role in African foreign policy and development, and the United States should not be surprised that the Chinese have escalated their strategy for engagement. Recognizing a gradual drain of United States' support and investment over the past decades, China began to modify and amplify its own strategy to effectively build rapport with the African states: China's policy statements on Africa began encouraging enterprises to invest and help build infrastructure, "something the West has been reluctant to do in recent years. And it promised to help Africa raise the level of tourism, reduce its debt, and increase economic assistance. The policy statement called for comprehensive cooperation in the fields of education, science and technology, culture, medicine and health, media, the environment, and disaster relief."⁷ Though the Chinese have had a longstanding rapport with Africa, it has not amounted yet to the same level of intimacy between African states

⁶ Brautigam, 54.

⁷ David H. Shinn, "An Opportunistic Ally: China's Increasing Involvement in Africa," *Harvard International Review*. (5 Aug. 2007): 1-6. <http://hir.harvard.edu/print/courting-africa/an-opportunistic-ally> (accessed 10 Nov. 2010), page 2.

and traditional Western donors like the United States. Nonetheless, in a constant struggle to fully develop and maintain self-sufficiency, the African have states gradually noticed the intensification of Chinese engagement as opposed to growing Western disengagement.

More and more, the United States' attention has shifted over the past couple of decades from combating Cold War tension to the Middle East and counterterrorism. Even Sino-U.S. relations have escalated, as the Chinese economy rapidly grows and morphs into a perceived international contender in the global arena. Contrastingly, Africa has descended on the priority list of the United States as a promising venue for investment, mostly due to the high levels of poverty, unstable governments, and risks that may outweigh the benefits of conducting successful business ventures: "Unlike American business people, who are generally risk-averse and spoiled in terms of the personal lifestyle they expect, the Chinese take economic risks for the prospect of gain, and Chinese workers will go and live anywhere. In contrast, American companies have always had difficulty finding people to work in Africa."⁸ Whereas the United States no longer needs African business to thrive, China has had to explore available options for new markets.

China has intensified its relationship in align with a refinement of its own goals and strategic interests because it *can* do so now. Its internal shift to a more capitalist economy has led to an opening of China and availability of exchange, as well as a search for new markets. As China has seized the opportunity to strengthen its presence and relationship with Africans, it introduces new competition to the Western presence on the continent. The Chinese have initiated a campaign for increased global participation and renown, and the United States has recognized them as a viable counterpart and potential contender for global influence. Now, the United States has another location in which the Chinese seek to match and potentially one day exceed their efforts at alliance-building and economic endeavor.

Should increased Chinese engagement alarm the U.S. or African players involved? "A huge concern is that currently China and Western relations with Africa are being approached from a competitive point of view. A way should be sought to combine these efforts to maximise

⁸ Zhu, 36.

the benefit for Africa.”⁹ Indeed, concern for competition and the protection of each side’s sovereign interests has emerged in Sino-U.S. relations, but it is also necessary to examine the way in which such competition or collaboration affects the African people. While a venue shift has occurred, the inhabitants of the venue must not suffer at the hands of competing interests. As previously noted, Western media tends to portray China’s presence in Africa as negative. While China’s approach is not perfect, sensationalism has racked up insecurity and alarm on behalf of the U.S. Nevertheless: “Following talks in Beijing at the end of 2005, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer, commented that she did not believe the U.S. is in direct competition with China in Africa. She added that it would be a mistake to ‘consider China an adversary in Africa.’”¹⁰ The United States should not allow the media to distract it during its analysis and dealings between Africa and China; rather, it is necessary that it guards its interests and is pragmatic, while keeping an open mind for opportunities to collaborate for mutual benefit amongst the three key parties involved. The United States must remember that China’s intent to ascend to global prominence is not unusual: “First, China’s activity is part of its continuing emergence as a truly global player, and as such is no different from what major powers traditionally have done.”¹¹ Rather than nurture bitterness, it must assess the complexities of China’s motivations and strategies to determine the positive and/or negative aspects of engagement and how it can be interpreted for the African people and the United States’ own strategy.

In an attempt to better understand Chinese strategy in Africa, one must primarily sift through the motivations backing engagement and determine to what extent they are optimistic. The West has portrayed Chinese engagement as both positive and negative—with opportunities for mutual benefit for the two parties involved. Often, the misconception emerges that China has a malevolent plan, or some grand scheme that guides their actions. However: “This belief in the ‘grand strategy’ also underpins assumptions that the investments of Chinese companies are

⁹ Moreblessings Chidaushe, "China's Grand Re-entrance into Africa - Mirage or Oasis?" *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 111.

¹⁰ David H. Shinn, "Africa and China’s Global Activism." *National Defense University Pacific Symposium*, Fort Lesley J. McNair: 20 June 2006, 8.

¹¹ Hany Besada, *The Implications of China’s Ascendancy for Africa*. Working paper no. 40. Centre for International Governance Innovation, Oct. 2008, 30.

masterminded by Beijing, with the single-minded goal of channeling natural resources back to China.”¹² Initially, one might assume that China has solely amplified its courtship of Africa to take advantage of its vast wealth of resources and minerals. Of course, such a benefit is only one factor of longer-term goals that China has begun to develop over the past decade.

It is becoming increasingly clear that while China may not have a masterminded plan that dictates its interactions with the African states, it has set its focus upon long term engagement in Africa, reaffirmed by Brautigam: “[China’s] embrace of the continent is strategic, planned, long-term, and still unfolding.”¹³ China has asserted its intention to strengthen its ties with African states, as the West missed the exact moment in which China began to intensify its engagement. Suddenly, China seemed to come out of nowhere as a legitimate, growing presence. Despite initial skepticism: “As should be clear by now, Beijing’s engagement with Africa involved a well-thought-out and long-term strategy, not the hasty, desperate scramble familiar from media headlines.”¹⁴ Reiterating what analysts of Sino-African relations have deduced, China has now made it known that it will take risks to ensure the success of its diplomacy and economic investment abroad. Furthermore, China intends to shape the path of its engagement so as to minimize risks and promote sustainable partnerships. In particular, China seeks to harvest stability in order to cultivate healthy business relationships, rather than encourage exploitation. Africa’s globalization strategy seeks business opportunities, not merely natural resources: “The Chinese are linking business and aid in innovative ways.”¹⁵ China’s overarching approach to engagement involves the development of an environment in which efficient business and trade practices can occur and continue. African states have struggled with stability in the past and that has hindered their progress, but China wants to invest in their future. Clearly China has glimpsed opportunity in Africa, and it wants to capitalize upon that potential.

Along with the explicit economic intent of Chinese engagement with Africa, a compilation of motivations drives China’s approach. Primarily, three basic components comprise Chinese incentives: economic, diplomatic, and geo-political. The United States must

¹² Brautigam, 277-78.

¹³ Brautigam, 311.

¹⁴ Brautigam, 78.

¹⁵ Brautigam, 310.

attempt to understand the fundamentals of the Chinese approach in Africa to ascertain that which they value. The more that the U.S. comprehends Chinese intentions, the better it can apply that knowledge during efforts to collaborate or to use in leverage.

Most apparent to those outside the Sino-African relationship, China's economic endeavors appear to fuel engagement. China's own economy has experienced a rapid escalation of growth, and it has begun to expand its ventures to new markets that include Africa's. It has identified its need to pursue markets through overseas investment, the establishment of factories and brand names for the global recognition of Chinese companies as well as property acquisition. In accordance with most of the world, China desires the vast array of rich resources in Africa, too; it seeks to develop sustainable access to commodities such as oil, copper, and cobalt. Zhiqun Zhu explains that "[...] a top priority of China's diplomatic activities in Africa is to acquire energy and raw materials to fuel China's galloping economy." In accordance, "China is relentlessly searching for new sources of oil globally. China's fast-rising involvement with Africa grows out of its immense need for natural resources [...] China often uses infrastructure projects to sweeten oil and mining deals."¹⁶ China contrives useful projects and loans supported by resource acquisition to satisfy its needs, but it also orchestrates such deals to the benefit of Africa. Swiftly outgrowing its supply base, China must step outside its comfort zone to seek new markets. Mark Sorbara states "Investing in African extractive industries is a risky business, but China is desperately in need of raw materials to feed its booming economy, hence the government is willing to shoulder most of the risk for Chinese companies looking to invest in Africa."¹⁷ Contrary to the United States, who has established partners for trade in natural resources, China has to find new partnerships without a strong base of support or the luxury of a safety net.

Though it may seem contrary to widely held perceptions, China does not target resource-wealthy locations as a main tenet of its economic approach, as suggested by critics of Chinese investment overseas. Resources certainly are a priority, but not an endpoint or the primary

¹⁶Zhu, 23.

¹⁷ Stephen Marks, "Introduction." *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 9.

motivation for Sino-African engagement. More important as an incentive for the somewhat daunting task of engaging African states is China's diplomatic interest:

Why does China give aid? The conventional wisdom is: to get access to resources. Yet as I hope this book [*The Dragon's Gift*] will make clear, this is *at best* a partial and misleading answer. Fundamentally, foreign aid is a tool of foreign policy. China is not an exception. All donors give aid for a variety of political, commercial, and moral reasons. Understanding the balance between these motives gives us one of the keys to unlock the black box of China's aid program.¹⁸

China intends to build diplomatic and friendly alliances with as many of Africa's 53 states as possible. Indeed, the search for new markets and a drive for economic expansion comprises a significantly beneficial portion of Chinese strategy on the African continent, but China has not undertaken a mere resource quest; instead, underlying objectives involve more diplomatic and political tendencies. China views African states as fellow developing nations and potential allies in the global arena to further Chinese political objectives. Because China has had its own wobbly past in interacting with foreign powers, especially the West, it now seeks to gain support and representation for its beliefs in international organizations and forums through alternative methods.

Originally, China courted African states to shift attention from Taiwan and secure for itself Taiwan's seat on the United Nations Security Council: "But two other developments in the 1980s would be far more influential in shaping the evolution of aid in China: the ratcheting up of diplomatic competition with Taiwan, and China's decision to join the World Trade Organization (WTO)."¹⁹ Chinese aid to Africa stems from its desire to achieve influence and international acclaim. It would be unrealistic to think that China's present-day rationale for engaging African states would be based upon simply altruistic motives, as has been suggested. Though China provides African countries with strong soft power initiatives, such an approach comes from a desire to create positive relations in the eyes of African leaders and civil society groups. Firm relationships with African leaders allow China to advance its goals in the global arena. For example China once needed support in order to join the World Trade Organization (WTO): "As

¹⁸ Brautigam, 17.

¹⁹ Brautigam, 66-67.

China entered the new millennium, its leaders' economic concerns continued to center on the United States, Europe, and Japan. Gaining access to the advanced technologies of these countries was a key reason why China applied to join the World Trade Organization."²⁰ Joining the WTO would enhance China's ability to modernize and become more competitive on an international level.

Economic and diplomatic advancement comprise part of China's motivations, but Chinese engagement with Africa emanates from its fundamental aspirations to rise as a global power. Self-interest is masked in its attempts to earn respect with the African people. While it does not seek to create policies that would harm the African people, China has a larger geopolitical perspective for its objectives and will promote its own well being first and foremost. Though debate exists concerning the nature of Chinese aid and policy initiatives, obviously states will look out for their own best interest. China is currently experimenting with its strategy for African engagement and will take more risks. It is attempting to win allies through altruistic gestures and attentive responses to African needs; nevertheless, it is important to note that China has historically placed its interest above all, whether it explicitly displays its intention or hides it behind a smile. Moreblessings Chidaushe explains such a seemingly obvious idea within the context of other world powers' self-driven ideologies: "But it is critical for Africa to be cautious and take time to analyse the implications and real benefits of China's policy. After all, China is advancing aggressive superpower ambitions and may in the long-term harden its stance to ensure their achievement. As with the United States, Chinese ambitions and national interests will come first."²¹ Evidently, China has multiple priorities in African engagement. China's role in Africa is certainly nuanced, but it aligns with China's intent to advance a long-term strategy for becoming a more prominent international power. One must look beyond the semi-accurate sensationalism garnered by the media surrounding China's intentions, but must also not forget that China could assert an element of antagonistic competition if it so desires. Whether or not China poses a threat to the African communities or the United States, the next two parts of this paper will examine. Understanding the driving forces behind China's active courtship of the African continent, one can examine more in depth how China executes its strategy, how it differs

²⁰ Brautigam, 74.

²¹ Chidaushe, 112.

from that of the West, and how Sino-African relations impact the United States (who has had its own interesting history of foreign policy in Africa).

Part II.

Upon examination of China's motivations, one can answer why it pursues African engagement; however, how does China conduct its foreign policy, and what distinguishes it from other powers that have relations with African states? This section will explore the existence of a Chinese model and how it differs from other forces at work in the African continent—particularly the U.S. strategy. It will also examine the African responses to both Chinese and U.S. presence on the African continent, and opportunities for the differing powers to learn from one another.

Obviously China sought to develop a more extensive foreign policy approach on the African continent and it now has the capacity to do so. The Chinese have experienced paradigm shifts in governance and ideology over the course of the 20th century, and have only begun to see increased modernization and growth in the decades leading into the 21st century. Great hardship has plagued China's massive state, and various political decisions made during the Mao Zedong era caused a detrimental setback for several decades to the advancement of Chinese economy and culture. Following Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping assumed power and faced the challenge of reconciling Maoist ideology, a mix of Communism and Mao's personality, with the reform needed to combat China's regression and decreasing relevance. Deng began to encourage economic reforms that gradually opened China to more technology and opportunities for modernization. Over the past couple of decades, China has experienced rapid development; now, it has the opportunity to expand its focus beyond its own borders.

Whereas many African states fall short of success stories and China's promising growth is attractive, African leaders and Chinese experts on Africa generally agree that China's development model is not appropriate for the continent.²² By no means is China an expert on development, and it constantly experiments with its approaches until it finds one that best fits with its ideological principles and yields benefits. Much can be learned from the Chinese, but

²² Shinn, "An Opportunistic Ally," 4.

the African states cannot replicate the methods that brought them success, as expressed in the skepticism of former South African President Thabo Mbeki: “[Mbeki] said in 2005 that his country would not follow the Chinese development model. He argued that Africa can not replicate China, which benefits from massive private capital inflows that fuel rapid export-led growth. African countries simply do not have access to this capital.”²³ Though it shares a common history with many African states as a developing nation, China cannot serve as a model for African states because it faced different obstacles and opportunities. Where China has enjoyed a degree of success economically, it can only lend portions of its experiences to the African people and cannot attempt to impose its approach on the African continent. Far from trying to do so however, it instead has sought different avenues to reach out to African states in order to cultivate distinctive relationships rather than one universal method for all. Some similarities in China’s strategic engagement with African states exist, but China also attempts to approach each state as a different case.

For several decades, Western colonialism shaped Africa’s interactions with external powers as well as their own internal affairs within their states. The methods of U.S. engagement with African states have largely followed similar protocol established in what is known as the “Washington Consensus,” or a general collection of neoliberal policies geared toward developing economies. The United States has used this particular approach in its interactions with Africa, and contrary to China it has not adapted its strategies to work with states to develop best practices for both parties involved in policymaking: “In contrast to the Washington Consensus, the Chinese model rejects shock therapy and the big bang in favour of a process of gradual reform based on working through existing institutions. It a process of selective learning, or cultural borrowing and drawing on foreign ideas, including the neo-liberal American model, as well as many that are home-grown.”²⁴ The U.S. has relaxed its relationships with African states and sometimes gives the impression that African states are not worth much. Especially when its

²³ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 6.

²⁴ Patricio González Richardson, “China and Africa: A Mutually Opportunistic Partnership? (ARI).” *Real Instituto Elcano*. Fundación Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 17 June 2010. http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GL_OBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari99-2010. (accessed 10 Nov. 2010), 7.

values clash with African ideals, it assumes the approach that it does not need to waste its time dealing with African governments that do not want to adapt their ideas.

On the other hand, China has stepped into the picture and is giving African states attention and listening to them: “[Former foreign editor at *Time* magazine Joshua Cooper] Ramo argued that China’s mix of pragmatism and idealism was an alternative model, rivaling the central tenets of a “Washington Consensus” rooted in the ideas championed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan.”²⁵ Noticeably distinctive from Western presence on the African continent, China provides an alternative to the long-accepted “Washington Consensus.” In spite of U.S. presence on the continent China is beginning to observe U.S. shortcomings and work to develop its own image in the eyes of the Africans. China has observed U.S. practices, noted where failures and successes have occurred, and then made strategic moves: “The Chinese are experimenting, hoping that the profit motive will make these efforts sustainable, releasing the Chinese government from having to return again and again to resuscitate its aid projects. They will continue to change, and grow, and learn from these experiments, and we [the U.S.] would do well to follow this progress and learn from it too.”²⁶ Where the Chinese store their knowledge and experiences to use in the future, the United States does not always evaluate its approach nor does it make adaptable changes to remain progressive. Contrastingly the Chinese, as a part of their thousands-of-years-old culture, execute calculated decisions whenever possible. They value patience and respect in relationships thanks to the Confucian ideology in their culture for hundreds of years, and such cultural values meld with their tactics to acquire what they have deemed desirable. More importantly, China has asserted an approach for the African states that rivals that of the U.S.: “Chinese diplomacy in Africa has introduced competition of development models to the region.”²⁷ No longer are the U.S. and the Western powers the sole directors of African international relations and economic ventures. China’s unique approach now serves as a gradually growing contender to that of U.S. strategy.

Nevertheless, China has still not implemented a strategic approach to the African continent that perfectly projects its success. Experimentation remains a significant component of

²⁵ Brautigam, 16.

²⁶ Brautigam, 310.

²⁷ Zhu, 29.

Chinese practices in engagement, and it constantly learns in the process: China's turn to the market involved an approach best described as "*cross by feeling the stones.*"²⁸ China does not necessarily know the most advantageous way to handle its strategy, but it moves slowly and feels its way along in the process. When China began to open itself up to economic reform, it assumed a cautious attitude so that it could make deliberate choices based on what it learns as it proceeds. It applies this technique to its engagement of Africa, and can use its own experiences as an aid recipient and developing nation to enhance its understanding of African states.

Though still in its experimental stages, Chinese presence on the African continent serves as a clear contrast to that of the U.S. Each approach differs in its strengths and weaknesses. Contrasting in backgrounds and styles, both have elements of foreign policy that resonates with the African people. Primarily, China has the advantage of sharing similar struggles with African states. Though China and Africa experienced different histories, they can relate to one another as developing nations. China has earned respect and awe among Africans:

As a CSIS report suggested, China emerged from colonial encroachment, internal chaos, and economic destitution to achieve spectacular economic growth and infrastructure development. Chinese leaders and strategists believe China's historical experience and development model resonate powerfully with African counterparts, thereby creating a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the West.²⁹

China can certainly find allies on the African continent with its background of struggle and its preoccupation with achieving advancement and prestige. Though it has faced challenges, China has turned them into opportunities rather than setbacks—a positive example for Africans. Hany Besada further describes China's unusual position that earns it an advantageous element over the U.S.:

China's position is strategically unique, given its ability to remain involved on issues both as a developing country and a former member of the Non-Aligned Movement and as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. As such, China shares the developing nations'

²⁸ Brautigam, 45.

²⁹ Zhu, 29.

sense of humiliation, a determination to take control of their own destiny, and the need to restore dignity following the decades of economic colonization and exploitation.³⁰

In the face of the United States' declining ability to uphold an engaging relationship with many African states, China's atypical characteristics reinforce its mounting presence on the continent. It has received a great deal of credibility for the way it conducts its affairs with Africa and for its increasingly adaptive approach. Contrarily, the U.S. practices a more idealistic approach that Africans find unflattering and unfeasible at times: "While the West had an image of the future that aid ought to create, China was the first *developing* country to establish an aid program."³¹ It portrays itself as understanding, but often spins unrealistic visions for Africa; moreover, it does little to reconcile its views with African perceptions. Yet, China knows what appeals to underdeveloped nations because it has not forgotten its historical roots.

Furthermore, African states can learn from interacting with China because of its past role as an aid recipient. As it gives foreign aid, China uses approaches that it remembers from its own experiences to relate to African states and direct the nature of aid in a direction that the African people will find beneficial:

[...] China's aid system and economic engagement today reflect what the Chinese learned from their experiments of the 1980s *and* from their own experience as a recipient of aid and the business that was linked to aid. The new tools brought the practice of economic cooperation for mutual benefit to an entirely new, intense level. As China's reforms deepened, aid would become even more about business; the Chinese would continue to "do well by doing good."³²

While not an appropriate model for development for African states, China serves as a sort of role model for having experienced challenges that its African partners must also undergo. It attempts to project an empathetic and more sensitive sentiment that will maintain the alliances established in Sino-African engagement.

³⁰ Besada, 1-2.

³¹ Brautigam, 33.

³² Brautigam, 70.

Coming from similar backgrounds, Chinese-African relations also encourage partnerships within the global South,³³ known as South-South cooperation, for marginalized nations. Essentially, such a concept indicates that developing nations can work together to further shared interests, rather than relying on unequal relationships with wealthier (and sometimes exploitative) powers: “Close Sino-African ties are a successful example of ‘South-South’ cooperation between developing countries in promoting their mutual development. As the largest developing nation and the largest developing continent respectively, China and Africa do not have any historical grievances against each other.”³⁴ The promotion of solidarity allows the two regions, with a shared past of victimization by Western powers, to confront challenges of peace and work towards development in 21st century.³⁵ Cooperation amongst China and Africa gives developing nations an optimistic perspective that they can find an ally among those who have experienced similar histories of hardship.

In addition, China can credibly assert a spirit of solidarity on the African continent because for the most part it has a clean record: “Chinese officials are quick to point out that as far back as the fifteenth century when Admiral Zhen He made his famous voyage to the East African coast, China has never sought to subjugate, colonize, or enslave.”³⁶ China stresses that its aims align with African desires, and it can do so with Africans feeling less threatened because it upholds policies of respect for states’ autonomy. Chinese diplomatic tactics receive reinforcement from the promising notion of South-South cooperation. Even more appealing to the African states, an alliance with China allows them to have a guardian against Western interests they must find distasteful: “For their part, African governments look at China’s position on the United Nations Security Council as potential protection against occasional harsh measures proposed by western members of the council. China and African countries facing human rights criticism defend each other in various organs of the United Nations.”³⁷ South-South cooperation

³³ The terms global South and North have replaced the Cold-War classifications of first and third-world countries, as global South incorporates developing nations and contrasts with the developed dominant powers in the international community (the global North).

³⁴ Zhu, 41.

³⁵ Zhu, 41.

³⁶ Cooke, Jennifer G. "China's Soft Power in Africa." *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. 10 March 2009. <http://csis.org/publication/chinas-soft-power-africa>. (accessed 10 November 2010), 31.

³⁷ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 2.

extends beyond a diplomatic strategy and a basic ideological partnership; it carries into the international arena and in decision-making forums. China's gradually impressive standing among African states detracts an element of legitimacy from the United States' often-disconnected approaches to developing nations.

Since African states have lately begun to identify more with China, a shift of their faith in the West now moves towards curiosity in what China can offer them. Chinese strategy is viewed as an alternative to Western approaches, especially because it reopens opportunities to the African people and gives them another chance to work with foreign powers. Perhaps China simply has the benefit of not engaging in imperialistic endeavors on the African continent in the past: "Yet, overall, I [Deborah Brautigam] frequently hear comments like this, from a thoughtful Nigerian diplomat in Beijing: 'The Chinese have an advantage of not having a colonial hangover. Whatever the Chinese do for Africa is very credible in our eyes. You have to understand this. We think maybe we can learn something from the Chinese.'"³⁸ Understandably so, Africans react warily to foreign powers unless they have something to offer that will not cause detrimental effects for their countries. Western models of the past 20th century have either taken the form of charitable donation and aid projects, or exploitative trade. Stipulations imposed as a part of Western foreign assistance weigh down upon African governments, and African states begrudgingly accept the terms to international deals without really having the means or intentions to fulfill their end of the agreement. In this context, it grows increasingly clear that: "Very few African countries have succeeded by adopting the Western models. China sees itself as offering something different from, and perhaps superior to, the standard Western prescription for African development."³⁹ China realizes African disillusionment with past foreign relations experiences, and it knows it will offer different approaches that will better appeal to the African people. Supposedly, the Chinese can provide agreements that will work to the benefit of both parties. Still, challenges remain in determining the most effective ways to maintain sustainable relationships with African states, due to the jaded nature of the African outlook resulting from past grievances with Western powers. Ultimately, though, China has the advantage in at least offering an alternative for African states: "Those countries that have the

³⁸ Brautigam, 10.

³⁹ Zhu, 29.

greatest difficulty establishing close ties with the U.S. and members of the European Union are most likely to seek collaboration with China.”⁴⁰ Obviously, negative memories of Western powers will stimulate African states to explore different avenues of assistance when the option arises.

Naturally, Africans tend to feel hopeful in light of the mounting power and success of China, and proud that such a mighty country focuses its attention on a region of the world with a large number of marginalized states. So often, the rest of the world perceives Africa as a failed continent: “By the late 1980s, the West and Japan were already seeing Africa as the ‘failed continent.’”⁴¹ Not much expectation exists for their advancement towards a prosperous and self-sufficient future. For the African people, such an absence of expectation does not encourage best practices and the confidence necessary to move towards self-sufficiency in an increasingly globalized world. On the other hand: “China’s role in Africa is making what once seemed a lost continent more relevant than ever before.”⁴² Relevance in the international arena is exactly what both the Chinese and the Africans seek today. Contrary to the pessimistic image of Africa and the outlook that it will remain unable to rise to its potential as well as African wariness of foreign intervention, China’s amplified engagement of late has captivated many on the continent. In *The Dragon’s Gift*, Deborah Brautigam recounts a conversation she had with an African colleague that illustrates an optimistic perspective:

But as we strolled in the hallways during a break, Ndubisi told me that part of him welcomed China’s interest: “You remember,” he said, “a few years ago, *The Economist* did a cover story on Africa: ‘The Failed Continent.’ My friends and I, we talked about that for weeks. It was depressing: ‘Africa, the failed continent!’ And now China comes, and they are talking about business, about investment, about win-win cooperation.” He smiled a bit ruefully: “Who knows? Maybe this change will be good for Africa.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 2.

⁴¹ Brautigam, 69.

⁴² Richardson, 2.

⁴³ Brautigam, 2.

China portrays exciting expectations to result from their engagement with Africa, and thus far they are finding ways to incorporate their strategic motivations with what the Africans interpret as appealing. Such an advantage also serves Chinese expansion interests.

Furthermore, as China seeks to rise as a global power it represents for many underdeveloped and marginalized nations the hope for the restoration of a multipolar world—perhaps even the recession of the United States as a forefront global leader. The United States appears to lack an element of foresight in Africa, and China has begun to make the most of Africans exhaustion with the “Washington Consensus.” Ndubisi Obiorah, the very colleague with whom Brautigam discussed dismay over Africa’s label as a failed continent, explains in his own writings that Western dominance and a unipolar world has caused discomfort for many Africans. Obiorah further describes that China’s emergence as a global power gives hope to marginalized countries that a multipolar world may develop. African leaders and intellectuals would like the opportunity to have a greater role in the international arena, and do not want to be overwhelmingly influenced [or exploited] by one power.⁴⁴ Of course the African nations desire to have some influence in the international arena; China shares the same goal, and it makes significant strides to achieve respect. In the spirit of South-South cooperation, the developing states intend to use each other to promote their ascent to greater relevance: “All African governments like high level attention from the world’s most important countries. China has developed this aspect of its relationship with Africa more effectively than any other major power, including the U.S.”⁴⁵ Because China seeks to rise as a global power, it understands how to strengthen its relationships with African states by catering to their longings to have clout in the international arena. Yet, China has a long way to go yet before it can amount to its full potential to match the United States on the international stage; the United States still has the advantage of leading the free world, but African perceptions factor into strategic competition.

As opposed to the strategy of its contemporaries, China follows through with the hopeful values it represents for African states with an attractive style of approaching their needs.

⁴⁴ Ndubisi Obiorah, "Who's afraid of China in Africa? Towards an African civil society perspective on China-African relations," *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 40.

⁴⁵ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 2.

Effective and quick, China assesses African needs and addresses them through the promotion of modernization and business deals backed by infrastructure: “Many African governments and ordinary Africans regard China as a model of modernization that is more responsive to African needs than is the West. Chinese companies have proven that they can build roads, dams, railways, and bridges efficiently, quickly, and at relatively low cost.”⁴⁶ For the states that do not necessarily have the means to develop appropriate transportation networks and construction projects, China produces tangible returns for its business with African states. Unequal partnerships often hold African states back from developing successful business ventures, and China recognizes the limits of the Africans: “The key trade dynamic between China and Africa is that of natural resources in exchange for cheaper and more affordable Chinese products than those the West can offer and Africans are currently able to produce.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, Africans possess a disadvantage matched with Western trading partners—they have a pressing need to get basic products at cheap, affordable prices, and China can deliver. At the same time, Africans seek to promote their economies and avoid reliance on external powers. China assists with assignments tailored to creating stability and sustainable business.

Compared to African perceptions of the Western motivations, China ties other factors in to the quest for resources; an example of the African perspective of strategic desires. Brautigam learns from a Nigerian diplomat firsthand the sentiment that Chinese strategy differs from that of the West: “The Chinese are trying to get involved in every sector of our economy. If you look at the West, it’s oil, oil, oil, and nothing else.”⁴⁸ Resource acquisition is not the dominant motivating factor in Chinese engagement with Africa, but indeed sustainable alliances and stable market economies fall into China’s strategy for long-term relations with the African continent. China contrives innovative ways to deal with a need to facilitate stability. Both China and the United States seek to improve African conditions as a part of diplomacy, but Chinese strategy concentrates largely incorporates offering affordable goods and services. Africans are at a disadvantage matched with Western trading partners; they have a need to find cheap basic products; on the other hand, they eventually will need to foster conditions right for good governance long-term. The West focuses on the latter perspective, which the Africans may

⁴⁶ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 6.

⁴⁷ Richardson, 4.

⁴⁸ Brautigam, 279.

perceive as less popular, and understandably so. Yet, just because the Western approach concentrates upon a different and equally important aspect of African need does not mean that they should forget some of the priorities of the African people and work to accommodate their concerns, as well.

Also unique from Western project management is China's commitment to maintaining development and finishing projects that it initiates. While every foreign power faces challenges once it turns projects back over to the native people of a state, China has chosen to follow a different route. Comparing Chinese strategy with that of the West, one can see that China diverges from traditional methods of handling problems:

Throughout the lost decade of the 1980s and well into the 1990s, China focused the bulk of its aid on rehabilitating the dozens of former aid projects that had collapsed or were barely limping along, and developing ways to make their initial benefits sustainable. For every new project launched during this period, three were being consolidated (repaired, renovated, reconditioned). [...] *Being responsible to the end* became a new slogan for aid.⁴⁹

China follows through with its projects, regardless of any stipulations unmet by African governments in initial agreements. Contrastingly, the United States chooses more carefully whom it will assist, and prerequisites and benchmarks exist for project and aid recipients to follow. China seeks to consolidate its projects, maintain long-term success, and gradually weans itself out of aid projects to ensure that its endeavors thrive, rather than collapse once the recipient governments reaccept the responsibility. Such a method has received praise, despite the multiple facets that contribute to China's approach: "China still has a way to go and is still a relatively poor country on a per capita basis but it can without question lay claim to the greatest poverty-reduction programme the world has ever seen."⁵⁰ By no means is China's method of conducting business and aid assistance flawless, but the United States can certainly learn from the way in which China seeks to encourage self-sufficiency while balancing productivity. China itself is skeptical of Western tactics and seeks to avoid certain practices it thinks will dissuade Africans from engagement, as Brautigam describes based on her interactions with Chinese scholars:

⁴⁹ Brautigam, 57.

⁵⁰ Richardson, 1.

The Chinese have gone to a great deal of effort to position themselves as an alternative to the aid business as usual, particularly in Africa. “How can you reduce poverty, but live in a five-star hotel?” a Chinese scholar asked me rhetorically during a meeting in Beijing. Western critics might easily retort: “How can you finance a presidential palace for Sudan and call it foreign aid?” There *are* differences, even in areas as basic as terminology. “We are not very comfortable with the word ‘donor’,” a researcher in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told me in Beijing. “The recipient’s hand is always below the donor’s hand.” But in other ways, surprisingly, it seems the Chinese are a lot more like the traditional donors than either side is willing to admit.⁵¹

Both China and the United States find flaws in each other’s approaches, due to different mindsets. Nevertheless, opportunities for learning and collaboration exist as a part of their relationship as strategic competitors rather than direct enemies. It is important to remember that both China’s and the United States’ practices leave room for improvement when dealing with marginalized states that are at risk of dependency on the hands that feed them.

While Chinese presence on the African continent grows more attractive, the United States’ manner of conducting foreign policy relationships with African states unfortunately has lost appeal. In light of increased Chinese engagement, the United States must examine its own strategy to better understand why the Africans find it unappealing. Primarily, Western nations tend to link public foreign policy with a need for good governance practices; Africans feel restricted by the imposition of conditions upon aid and development policies. Often, the notion that Western powers understand how an African state should be governed sends a superior and condescending message to African states:

Where the West regularly changes its development advice, programs, and approach in Africa (integrated rural development in the 1970s, policy reform in the 1980s, governance in the 1990s, and so on) China does not claim to know what Africa must do to develop. China has argued that it was wrong to impose political and economic conditionality in exchange for aid, and that countries should be free to find their own pathway out of poverty. Mainstream economists in the West

⁵¹ Brautigam, 132.

today are also questioning the value of many of the conditions imposed on aid over the past few decades.⁵²

Where the West typically claims that it knows best in Africa, it has not produced adequate proof to back its statements; many in Africa grow progressively more disillusioned with the ability of the West to offer valuable assistance. Western approaches represent idealistic aims that they may never achieve, whereas China assumes a more realistic attitude: “For many among Africa’s ruled who are physically and intellectually exhausted by two decades of economic ‘reform’ supposedly adopted by African government but driven by Western governments, donors and the IFIs, China represents hope that another world is possible in which bread comes before the freedom to vote.”⁵³ For years, Western powers have proclaimed to have the answer to lifting African states out of poverty, and they do not like to accept when their policies prove otherwise. Instead of creating a mutually advantageous relationship, an unequal balance of power leads to either exploitation by the West or often-imposing charitable assistance—two extremes. No specific or uniform mechanisms for realistic goals of sustainability have worked particularly well across the board.

In part, the inequality of matching Global North and Global South partners together hinders Western intentions because each has a different focus. According to Serge Mombouli, Congo-Brazzaville ambassador to the U.S.: “[...] China provided tangible things, while the West pushed for something less tangible: better governance. ‘We need both. We cannot be talking just about democracy, transparency, good governance. At the end of the day the population does not have anything to eat, does not have water to drink, no electricity at night, industry to provide work, so we need both. People do not eat democracy.’”⁵⁴ Indeed, good governance is a valiant and necessary goal to long-term sustainable development for impoverished African states; however, China addresses the more urgent needs of under-developed states and can produce substantial results. Rather than aiming to promote a specific ideology, China aids in development to create stability: “If you look at Chinese aid, it is very different—they do very little emergency food aid in Africa and a little bit in the health area, but mainly big infrastructure

⁵² Brautigam, 308.

⁵³ Obiorah, 38.

⁵⁴ Brautigam, 287.

projects.”⁵⁵ For the benefit of both Africa and China, building sustainable mechanisms within African states will help them develop, and it ensures long-term access to raw materials and markets in the future for China. Such a method can ameliorate poverty and promote progress and stability, factors that need establishment in order to combat corruption and encourage better governance practices.

In accordance with African perceptions that U.S. strategy for the most part comes across as generally unattractive, external affairs also influence African public opinion. If the United States asserts its power in the international arena, it no longer can worry solely about the opinion of the American people; it must also incorporate the opinions of other people it encounters and those with whom it seeks to cultivate relationships. In order to conduct effective foreign policy and diplomacy within the African continent and international community, the U.S. must listen to African views and maintain awareness about its international image. Though seemingly irrelevant, the United States’ recent excursions into the Middle East have filtered into African concepts of credibility:

Finally, global developments have an impact on African opinion. The U.S. war in Iraq, the abuses of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib, and perceptions of U.S. unilateralism continue to take their toll and undermine U.S. rhetoric on democracy, human rights, and U.S. intentions. The current financial meltdown may ultimately have an impact as well, as Africans calculate that they may be better off staking their bets on Asia’s burgeoning economies.⁵⁶

Negative incidents that complicate U.S. foreign policy reflect poorly even on unrelated operations in other regions of the world. Though not enough to strip the United States of its legitimacy, Africans want what they interpret as best for their well-being. Actions have not harmonized the rhetoric of stated U.S. moral beliefs, which does detract from a sense of trustworthiness that the U.S. had originally proved marketable and attractive. Overall, U.S.

⁵⁵ David, Shinn. "Africa Expert David Shinn on China's 'Overwhelming Effort' to Invest in the Continent." Interview by China Knowledge@Wharton. *Public Policy & Management*. Wharton, University of Pennsylvania, 29 Apr. 2010. <http://www.knowledgeatwharton.com.cn/index.cfm?fa=viewfeature&languageid=1&articleid=2214>. (accessed 10 November 2010), 3.

⁵⁶ Cooke, 39.

operations in Africa have begun to lose a sense of allure and prestige in the shifting global order and in light of Chinese experimentation of alternative approaches.

Part III.

Despite the pessimistic stigma that has gradually materialized around U.S. relations with Africa, China's approach to the region can provide an alternative through which the U.S. can explore more effective methods of its own engagement. Essentially, the U.S. can learn from China's experimentation, just as China has observed Western successes and failures on the continent and used them to enhance its policy construction. Because China is not perfect in its engagement of Africa, this section will examine the positive and negative aspects of China's approach. China has expressed that it desires for both parties a mutually beneficial relationship, where neither side has more of an advantage. Whether or not China continues down the path of its stated aims, this section will explore through the context of this positive versus negative framework of the Sino-African relationship.

Currently, China's overarching strategy appears ever more attractive and African leaders plan to seize such opportunities. Chinese practices in aid, business relationships, soft power initiatives, and its overall strategies for engaging the African continent have evolved as it learns from experimentation of what works most effectively in dealing with African leaders and communities. With China predictably on the rise, African states want to take advantage of a partnership with projected benefits: "[...] the cachet of China as a rising global superpower is profoundly appealing and drives a desire to tie African economies more closely to China's ascension to global economic preeminence."⁵⁷ Again, China represents the hope of an increasingly multipolar world, one in which African states will have more influence—or at least more input. At the moment, the hope for a more inclusive relationship appears as an incentive, contrasted to Africans' past experiences.

Whether or not it will help promote good governance and high standards for development, Africans find China's only major stipulation of strategic engagement perhaps the most appealing: the non-interference policy. Unlike Western powers, China proclaims that it

⁵⁷ Cooke, 27.

practices aid and partnerships with no strings attached. Liu Guijin, China's special envoy for Africa once proclaimed: "We don't attach political conditions. We have to realize the political and economic environments are not ideal. But we don't have to wait for everything to be satisfactory or human rights to be perfect."⁵⁸ After years of external powers projecting their opinions onto African states, naturally African governments find a stated respect for sovereignty appealing. The Chinese approach expresses faith in the African governments to do what they please and make decisions suitable to their country, without asking questions. As long as some level of stability exists, which the Chinese attempt to cultivate through infrastructure and aid projects, the Chinese concern themselves more with business ventures and building positive diplomatic alliances with all African states. Contrarily, the United States often expresses that it will only assist states if they meet conditions for good governance and uphold human rights, at least in public; sometimes U.S. diplomacy is spurred by ideological, security, or economic interests, rather than its expressed values of democracy and freedom. No such criterion exists on behalf of China to distinguish whom it will help or recognize as a friend.

Furthermore, China incorporates the notion of mutual respect through all areas of its policy. The Chinese attempt to understand that which the Africans desire, and give political leaders attention and recognition. Brautigam discovers that African leaders perceive that the Chinese are better at providing an atmosphere of respect than Western powers: "China gives Africans more respect than they get from the West.' I was struck by how many other ambassadors nodded vigorously in agreement."⁵⁹ China itself has expressed its intention to convey a sense of mutual respect and equality to African leaders, especially because it has noticed sentiments of subjugation surrounding past relationships with the West. Explicitly stated: "[Current Chinese President Hu Jintao] said 'China did not, does not, and will not impose its will or inequality on other countries, as well as do anything that would harm the African people.'"⁶⁰ As opposed to Western statements of the same sort, China has the history to back its claims; it has not provided any reason for African states to distrust that it will respect their autonomy and that it will avoid making Africans feel inferior.

⁵⁸ Brautigam, 284.

⁵⁹ Brautigam, 68.

⁶⁰ Zhu, 40.

In a refreshing move for foreign policy on the African continent, China instantly makes itself a more viable candidate for partnership and economic ventures. As a part of its long-term strategy, China seeks to incorporate a sense of sensitivity to its relationship Africans:

According to Chinese Special Representative on African Affairs Liu Guijin, China's relations with Africa are based on three principles: equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect. Chinese investment comes with no demands for making democratic reforms or promoting human rights. While Western countries have tried to impose a market economy and multiparty democracy on developing countries that are often not prepared, the Chinese are trying to separate politics from business. China's development model emphasizes political stability and economic growth first and foremost.⁶¹

China works to cultivate relationships with African states that will produce efficiency in business and positive politics. Surely the U.S. can learn from such a focus; China already has made great strides in implementing such an encouraging strategy through high profile visits made by Chinese officials and the creation of forums in which African states can actively participate. Whereas U.S. Presidents and high level officials will venture to African maybe once or twice during their terms in office, China conducts a different policy as emphasized by Amb. David Shinn: "In addition, significant members of African leaders will visit China; most of them have been to Beijing before. This is a low cost way to develop strong personal relations with African officials."⁶² High-level interactions between government officials fortify diplomatic ties and strengthen the credibility of Sino-African relationships. China ensures that it gives its counterparts on the African continent an adequate amount of attention. It even cultivates a sense of camaraderie and welcome for all to participate in decision-making that relates to the Sino-African future. The Chinese host forums and conventions specifically designed for African states. Over the past decade, China has held several times the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), a forum that provides a place for the discussion and offering of deals, as well as for the establishment of formal relations.⁶³ Such a mechanism can only improve the nature of Sino-African partnerships, and it sends the message from China to the African people

⁶¹ Zhu, 38.

⁶² Shinn, "Africa and China's Global Activism," 3.

⁶³ Shinn, "An Opportunistic Ally," 1.

that it has a vested interest in nurturing an effective and mutually beneficial relationship for years to come.

Additionally, the way in which China conducts its deal-making and business endeavors expresses the notion that Africans exist as partners rather than the recipients of charity. In another positive move for their relationship, China intends to move away from practices that may humiliate African states; instead, it seeks to build up their confidence and their abilities to move toward self-sufficiency through a win-win relationship: “Finally, the win-win notion implies that Africans are free to negotiate the terms of the arrangements, and that China will be responsive to African demands.”⁶⁴ In the analysis of whether or not China can cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship with Africans, one can observe that China certainly works toward providing mechanisms that serve to support African interests. The way in which China conducts business also serves as a positive factor in Chinese-African relations; debt relief and a focus upon infrastructure aims to encourage African development and a move towards sustainability: “As Deborah Brautigam points out, ‘In poor, resource-rich countries, which are often cursed rather than blessed by their mineral wealth, resource backed infrastructure loans can act as an agency of restraint, ensuring that at least some of these countries natural resources wealth is spent on development investments.’”⁶⁵ China provides vital funding for projects that develop African nations, like paving roads, building railroads, and even constructing communication networks. Such a focus on African needs and the development of a stable environment for economic growth serves as a positive benefit for African well-being.

Overall, China also incorporates a lot of soft power initiatives into its strategy of engagement, maybe more so than the U.S. By investing in communities and in Africans’ potential, China promotes growth and development. In addition, it encourages positive alliances and fosters better diplomacy due to its wide range of soft power initiatives. Using such an optimistic approach aligns with China’s desire to rise as a respected world power: “In this new expanded phase of engagement in Africa, China has placed special emphasis on soft-power aspects of its engagement, playing both to African audiences and to a broader international stage,

⁶⁴ Cooke, 32.

⁶⁵ Richardson, 5.

where it seeks to portray itself as a nonthreatening, responsible global power.”⁶⁶ Often overlooked by the media’s depiction of Chinese greed and self-interest through its engagement in Africa, little emerges about the positive practices China implements. Ranging from almost all sectors of African daily life, China provides assistance—without conditions attached—in the medical, education, and even peacekeeping fields. A focus upon increasing education, in particular, prepares Africans to reduce poverty and work towards achieving sustainable development. Explained well by a Confucian metaphor, Chinese reasoning for soft power initiatives aligns with its long-term goals on the African continent:

Around 500 years before the Christian era began, the ancient Chinese sage Confucius said: “If you plan for a year, plant a seed. If for a hundred years, teach the people. When you sow a seed, you will reap a single harvest. When you teach the people, you will reap a hundred harvests.” Since 2000, the Chinese government has accelerated the training component of its foreign aid, focusing in part on transferring information about China’s own experience with urbanization, economic growth, and poverty alleviation.⁶⁷

China’s focus on education and trading information builds understanding and helps Africans, as well as the international public image of China. Through scholarships, tourism, training, and the exchange of ideas, China and African create greater tolerance between two very culturally different regions of the world. Investment in humans, especially students, encourages peaceful interaction and prepares future generations for the maintenance of proposed long-term partnerships. Increasing peacekeeping operations also help combat the negativity associated by China’s non-interference policy, which this section will further assess momentarily. Due to its neutrality with African political leaders’ affairs, China avoids entanglement in African conflict but will send peacekeepers to promote its image as responsible in the international arena because it receives criticism for not encouraging better governance and conditions that will foster increased freedoms and democracy.

Nevertheless, China seeks to strengthen bilateral relations rather than unilateral policies with African states: “Realizing the important role cultural exchange can play in bilateral

⁶⁶ Cooke, 29.

⁶⁷ Brautigam, 119.

relations, China has conducted educational exchange and cooperation programs with almost all African countries.”⁶⁸ It finds that soft power initiatives and cultural sensitivity prove more advantageous to Chinese-African relationships, compared to the more meddlesome perception of how the West conducts its business in Africa. Thus far, the overarching strategy of China conveys constructive and beneficial implications for the African people, a sentiment that no amount of Western criticism can repudiate.

On the other hand, the positive factors of Chinese engagement cannot overshadow the flaws that still remain in such experimental policy. Western powers criticize China in part because of underlying feelings of jealousy and threats to their own stakes in Africa; but their stated disapproval finds grounds in inevitable challenges that the Chinese have already begun to encounter. While Chinese engagement possesses an allure for some Africans, they should still proceed cautiously and consider the larger perspective of foreign entanglements: “Approving China’s investment in his country, Sahr Johnny, Sierra Leone’s ambassador to Beijing, notes: ‘We like Chinese investment because we have one meeting, we discuss what they want to do, and then they just do it. There are no benchmarks and preconditions, no environmental impact assessment.’”⁶⁹ Indeed, speed and productivity in the face of pressing needs for development attract African partnerships. However, pros and cons exist in every scenario, and Africans should assess the the consequences of a project before jumping into quick deals with the Chinese. Even though efficiency appeals to Africans who do not want to answer many questions or handle sluggish bureaucratic nuisances, they must still appraise the impact of their actions.

By now, the Chinese have begun to see some limitations to their strategic attempts of engagement on the African continent. Opportunity and charms cannot completely eradicate the Africans’ sense of wariness about foreign involvement and powers yearning for their goods. Rebel uprisings have introduced security risks that the Chinese must now accommodate into their plans, especially in conflict-prone areas. For example, when governments who have invited China into their territories ignore civil society groups’ voices, already volatile citizens may take a more forceful approach to project their message. One such instance occurred when the Justice

⁶⁸ Zhu, 32.

⁶⁹ Obiorah, 39.

and Equality Movement (JEM) in Sudan seized Chinese oil facilities in their attempt to warn China to cease military and political support to its capitol, Khartoum.⁷⁰ Khartoum forged an agreement with China, but the government receives a lot of criticism for its role in state-sponsored militias that terrorize and murder civilians. Thus, China must explore its own range of consequences when making deals with African states, and it should assess the sentiments of civilians in addition to its negotiations with political leaders.

Part of the United States' decreasing role in many regions of the African continent is due to the costs outweighing the benefits of involvement and the ability of African conflicts to quickly escalate to the detriment of U.S. interests. At the outset of China's more in depth engagement with Africa, it took more risks to establish its partnerships. Now it has begun to take a more selective approach, altering its strategies to incorporate security threats: "Anger at China's presence has already been translated into violence in some parts of Africa, creating security problems for Chinese workers in Africa. [...] China may have to respond to security threats to Chinese property and personnel in the region by relying on its own military. The dilemma is if China sends ground forces to Africa, it may be creating the image of a threatening power."⁷¹ Only time will tell how much of a threat China will encounter in the future, and how it handles such risks without sending a militaristic message when protecting its own security interests. African states may perceive any military response as combative and contradictory to China's peaceful, non-interference statements of engagement, so China needs to develop a contingency plan for emerging hazards.

In addition, recent dilemmas have emerged concerning challenges in Sino-African business projects and states' markets. While Africans embrace investment and cheap goods and services, they do not anticipate the Chinese to flood their markets and take their jobs: "A number of African countries have expressed concern that Chinese textile exports are flooding their markets and undercutting local mills. Cheaper Chinese textiles also eliminate Africa's ability to compete in American and European markets."⁷² Healthy competition with local establishments and fledgling businesses would promote quality products and make strides towards African self-

⁷⁰ David H. Shinn, "Chinese Involvement in African Conflict Zones." *ChinaBrief* IX.7 (2009), 9.

⁷¹ Zhu, 48.

⁷² "Africa and China's Global Activism," 3.

reliance. The Chinese must cultivate a delicate balance for each individual African state on how to venture into the economy without infringing upon African interests and attempts to become self-sufficient. Furthermore, no state wants to increase unemployment by losing jobs to foreigners; African states are no exception: “Africans also complain when Chinese investment and aid projects result in the arrival of large numbers of Chinese workers to do jobs that Africans are capable of doing.”⁷³ An emerging Chinese Diaspora in Africa is not received with always welcome, and racial segregation sometimes results from not fully bridging the wide cultural gap. China must consider the potential for its negative aspects of strategy to take hold and threaten to alter its course of progress in Africa. As outsiders, the Chinese must constantly work to maintain the expressed level of respect for their African counterparts and their culture, as well as avoid cultivating African dependency on China’s demand for exports.

Initially, too, China’s seductive non-interference policy sounds like a good idea. However, flaws exist even to that area of China’s strategy. More and more, China finds that the non-interference policy could become a sort of trap as they rise in the global arena; it limits their actions and ability to influence their allies: “But, as Ian Taylor sceptically remarks, ‘for how long...China can maintain its position predicated on “non-interference” is a crucial question, particularly as it becomes more and more integrated into the global order and assumes the responsibilities that come with this involvement.’”⁷⁴ Along with the acceptance of more power comes a greater need for responsibility and accountability in partnerships; China is no exception. In particular, the international community has its focus on China, and China’s actions will not evade critical speculation. If other international players pressure China to hold their allies accountable for morally unjust actions, China remains bound to its non-interference trap and enters into a dilemma, caught between external forces. For example, China’s non-interference policy has raised fears that Western progress on fighting corruption and improving governance will be nullified, “[...] implying that the problem of corruption in Africa is solely an African problem.”⁷⁵ The international community has a vested concern in African instability as a threat

⁷³ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 3.

⁷⁴ Samuel J. Spiegel and Philippe Le Billon. “China’s Weapons Trade: from Ships of Shame to the Ethics of Global Resistance.” *International Affairs* 85.2 (2009), 331.

⁷⁵ John Rocha, “A new frontier in the exploitation of Africa’s natural resources: the emergence of China,” *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 26.

to security, from the threat of terrorism to internal uprisings that may jeopardize the acquisition of resources. Western powers fear the implications of instability and do not want to see any of their efforts to promote good governance reversed.

Beyond the dual-standard of non-interference versus accountability, critics also ponder the feasibility of non-interference. In any relationship, expectations exist: “[...] the Chinese do not seem to make governance worse, and although it is popularly believed that aid comes with ‘no strings attached,’ economic engagement usually *does* come with conditions, some of it even (indirectly) governance-related.”⁷⁶ In some areas of engagement, sacrifices will ensue from either party. China cannot ignore the repercussions of its actions if it seeks to achieve global clout, and naturally, expectations will result from economic engagement. Though the Chinese do not seek to sway their African counterparts into performing based on Chinese persuasion, the non-interference policy may recede a bit in the future as relationships become more complex. China will face challenges in maintaining support for its partnerships if it scales back its non-interference policy.

Not everyone in Africa approves of China’s entrance into the realm of intensified engagement practices; in particular, African leaders typically make deals with China, while the civil society groups and individual civilians may remain skeptical of foreign interference or courtship. A common fear surrounds the notion of the power of the purse; the suppliers of aid must expect something in return, no? Africans might expect China to give, but they equally anticipate that it will exert its manipulation and wonder what underlying motives the Chinese seek. In one perspective, an African leader expresses his opinion of China’s strategy:

“It is a voluntary colonization...a danger for our security,” Anil Gayan, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and opposition member of parliament, had written in January 2008 op-ed in a local paper, *L’Express*. “This is money from the People’s Republic of China. The Chinese state, Beijing in fact, will decide the contours and the content of the project. What were their intentions, their strategic designs, when the Beijing authorities chose Mauritius?” he wondered darkly.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Brautigam, 21.

⁷⁷ Brautigam, 102.

While the Chinese provide opportunities, Africans may not always have a clear concept what the Chinese find appealing in their states. They grow wary of external powers and anticipate exploitation, as they have experienced in the past. Since Africans typically embody the disadvantaged party in unfair pairings of power, they have license to express distrust:

Former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano charged that donors frequently form “a common front in an unbalanced power relationship that may have dire consequences to the recipient country.” A Ugandan official was more charitable: “The fact that a country gives you aid makes them think they have a license to tell you how to run your affairs. These conditions are probably well-intentioned, but they are humiliating.”⁷⁸

Once again, African sentiments reaffirm fears and questions that stem from Chinese engagement. While over the past decade Chinese aims have grown clearer, the African people still need constant reaffirmation that a partnership with China will help them. The expressed desire for a mutually beneficial relationship remains somewhat ambiguous, and the extent of the benefits for Africans varies from state to state. The relationship between African and Chinese political leaders has not completely resonated with average Africans; it has yet to trickle down the expected advantages to the average people. Even in China, the people have not experienced the predicted benefits of China’s rise to prominence, according to Dorothy Guerrero in the Introduction to *African Perspectives on China in Africa*: “The majority of the Chinese people are not too concerned about when China will become the world’s largest economy. Rather, they are asking, ‘When will the benefits of China’s rise to superpower status start to affect our lives positively?’”⁷⁹ China’s rapid economic growth and its expansion of power to another continent only serves as the initiation of a mutually beneficial relationship; experimentation and challenges still confront the Chinese, and general public opinion in both African states and China reflect that fact.

Further criticism for Chinese strategy comes from the international community and its fear of China reversing previous goals at improving African governance. In particular, the West perceives the non-interference policy as a sort of endorsement in the actions of some African

⁷⁸ Brautigam, 148-49.

⁷⁹ Marks, 12.

governments and their controversial actions. Apprehension has emerged over the perception that China facilitates corruption and prevents democracy from taking hold. China's unfortunate record on human rights and its history of entanglement in arms deals with corrupt governments have marred the face of its African engagement. In its current position, China has still the ability to affect the future nature of its relations with Africa: "Managed well, China can significantly contribute to Africa's development; managed poorly, it may encourage bad governance and human rights violations."⁸⁰ Still in its trial and error stages, China has experience with both positive and negative consequences to its actions and in different regions of the African continent. If it seeks to maintain global recognition and respect as a rising power, China must relinquish a little of its stubbornness and the opacity it enjoys in its relationships: "On the other hand, China, in its trade with developing countries, must pay more attention to issues such as increasing transparency, enhancing governance, protecting the environment, and improving basic human rights in those countries."⁸¹ While not entirely responsible for Africa's future, it certainly can contribute in a positive manner (seen by the good it has already accomplished with African relationships) to good governance and development practices. In turn, enhanced stability and progress will benefit China's own investment endeavors and support the goal of a mutually beneficial relationship.

Moreover, China values what the international community thinks about its actions and it has grown increasingly aware of its image. Previously, when China kept more to its internal affairs, it shunned the public opinion of the world. Now, as it seeks to augment its global influence, it has become even a little self-conscious: "While the Chinese government may not have to pay much regard to domestic public opinion, the Chinese government is historically very sensitive about its international image."⁸² Perhaps because China cannot stifle criticism abroad like it attempts to do within its borders, it hears condemnation and perceives it as a challenge to its ascent to global prominence. Indeed, the international community holds China to high standards; Western powers typically share moral obligations that China does not practice. Though it attempts to portray itself as a peaceful power that holds African interests at heart,

⁸⁰ Zhu, 50.

⁸¹ Zhu, 51.

⁸² Obiorah, 52.

China does not practice the same rhetoric and careful attention with its own citizens at home. Chinese strategy in Africa is appealing, but in the international community questions credibility.

While the Chinese approach to engagement in Africa provides an alternative path of development for many nations, China rarely wonders if its approach is in the long-term interests of the parties involved. China seeks respect as a re-emerging global power, but “Chinese commercial-driven policy towards Africa, with little interest in improving governance and human rights, undermines China’s own efforts to be seen as a benign global power.”⁸³ China’s credibility is at risk, as international scrutiny increases and its “non-interference” policy—including its arms dealing—does not decrease. China comprehends that it falls short of global standards and that as a rising power it gains responsibility to the international community. Its soft power initiatives not only intend to build its image in the eyes of Africans, but to seek legitimacy in the international arena. China harbors sensitivity to global perceptions of its level of competence and respectability. In accordance with striving for commendable practices, China must assume responsibility for some of its dealings with corrupt governments and the repercussions of such relationships. It is important to note, however, that the United States cannot fully condemn China for its shortcomings due to its own less-than-impeccable record in deal making with governments around the world, especially during the Cold War. Rather, it must lead by example and be careful to stress transparency for China’s relationships with African states if it does not want to maintain the same sense of transparency. Overall, China does hear the disapproval from Western powers and has already begun to shift its policies to accommodate it; Obiorah states: “As global branding and reputation become more important to Chinese companies, they may become less willing to be associated with human rights abuses and repressive regimes in Africa and elsewhere.”⁸⁴ Though too early to tell, the nature of Chinese engagement may change as it continues to work to acquiring esteem in the international community.

In a significant move to build strong alliances and cultivate its image on the African continent, China has expressed its desire to produce mutually beneficial partnerships between the two very different regions. After examining both the positive and negative results thus far in the

⁸³ Zhu, 49.

⁸⁴ Marks, 10.

Sino-African relationship, a win-win approach cannot stem from one side; rather, both the Chinese and African states must communicate their own desires and establish cooperation in their dealings and exchanges. Most importantly, the African people are largely responsible for the outcome and impact of Chinese engagement on their continent. Having the advantage of distinguishing themselves from Western approaches, which have not always kept in mind the concept of mutual benefit and representation of African interests, the Chinese have taken a different route and have learned from Western shortcomings and Asian successes: “Like the Japanese, the Chinese believe that the best antidote to conflict and instability is sustained economic development. This is the strategy they adopted at home, and this is the theme of China’s current strategic engagement in Africa. They also believe that Africans will accept that aid can be offered in a frank exchange, as part of a relationship of mutual benefit.”⁸⁵ Africans will only accept the terms of Chinese strategy and the professed mutual beneficial partnership if they feel like China listens to them. Rather than sizing up the benefits that either China or Africa can gain from their partnerships, benefits for both stem from creating sustainable economic engagement for long-term development. In addition, Chinese aid is not proportional to the amount of resources a country can offer. While resources are significant factors in the appeal of African markets, “[...] China’s ‘mutual benefit’ approach is about generating *business*.”⁸⁶ Therefore, it is up to both China and the African states to work together and develop business practices that complement one another; in theory, the mutually beneficial approach can contribute to stability and self-sufficiency for Africa and diplomatic and economic notoriety for China’s rise as a global power.

In order to have the mutual benefit they say they want, China must first and foremost continue to learn and listen to African responses. Such an approach not only incorporates African needs into the big picture, but it allows China to correct flaws in its experimental methods of engagement: “However, if China hopes to be able to maintain its strong influence on the continent and continue to reap the benefits of the loose relationships it has established with African states, it will have to balance its own economic and strategic interests with the

⁸⁵ Brautigam, 21.

⁸⁶ Brautigam, 279.

complaints and criticisms that continue to be levied against it.”⁸⁷ China cannot address flaws and move forward without significant input from those it seeks to engage. It desires to improve its strategy to make it sustainable long-term, and can only do so with African feedback. Civil society reactions to Chinese presence on the African continent often go unnoticed, but they still represent an important aspect of those affected by China’s policies: “The fact that many African leaders welcome China does not mean that average Africans all benefit from China’s investment. [...] For some, China’s Africa policy, although advertised as neutral and business-friendly, is becoming as immoral as those of Western colonial powers.”⁸⁸ China not only needs to cater to African political leaders, but it must look beyond leadership and assess the nature of individual African states, their cultural heritages, and the level of support they harbor for their government. Civilian satisfaction can contribute to stability, which the Chinese value more than the nature of governance practiced by political leaders. For instance, the Chinese should listen to accounts from average citizens when they make deals with governments: “Many Congolese are deeply skeptical of the deal [between a Chinese corporation and the Congolese government], the full details of which are sketchy, particularly given the levels of corruption within the government. ‘It may be win-win,’ said one Congolese student, ‘but it is China and the government in Kinshasa that are winning, not us.’”⁸⁹ Not everyone feels that their opinion matters in decisions to make deals with Africa. If the general populace finds itself dissatisfied with foreign policy, it may lash out in violent reactions, as China has experienced with its security challenges.

On the other hand, if China receives a wide base of support for its endeavors, it may find that the partnership generates more successful business and benefits for the parties involved. According to Amb. David Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, China and Africa still have many difficult issues to discuss and address. Such challenges include the promotion of good governance, the improvement of human rights, the reduction of corruption, the assessment of environmental impact, the termination of illegal trades in products like ivory or endangered species, the enhancement of worker safety and labor practices, the training of African

⁸⁷ Shinn, “An Opportunistic Ally,” 6.

⁸⁸ Zhu, 48.

⁸⁹ Cooke, 31.

manufacturing to enable it to compete in the global market, and the monitoring of arms sales.⁹⁰ Opportunities exist for more dialogue and understanding to improve the Sino-African relationship. Already China seeks to incorporate areas of concern into its overarching approach to its engagement with Africa, and it intends to improve wherever it can so that the most productive and beneficial partnership will ensue.

Whether or not the Chinese and Africans have established and can maintain a mutually beneficial relationship remains a matter of time. With such a rapid increase in the past decade of Chinese presence on the continent, no concrete conclusions will competently predict the nature of Chinese relations with Africa for the years to come. All the same, assessment of the present can teach lessons for future improvement. China's economic cooperation with Africa has proved mutually beneficial to an extent, thanks to its investment in Africa's infrastructure; the vast potential market and strategic value of African nations assist China's rise as an international political power. Nevertheless, China must take a sensitive approach to improve governance practices and human rights, as well as engage local business, non-governmental, and civil society sectors to improve mutual understanding and its image among African citizens.⁹¹ China has a hefty task ahead; its role on the African continent grows ever more complex as it tries to develop the best method for building and maintaining effective foreign relationships.

Gradually, the African people have begun to adjust to an increased Chinese presence on their continent. The civil society response resulted in calls for an increased African role in foreign partnerships, whether they harm or benefit the people. African civil society groups understand that both the Chinese and the African people want to cultivate a mutually beneficial relationship, and that the Chinese certainly look out for their own best interest; should not the Africans do the same? Kwesi Kwaa Prah explains in an interview with Pambazuka News that "China wants to pursue policies that are in its best interests and what we have to do in Africa is also to trade and pursue policies that are in our own interests. It's as simple as that—all states do

⁹⁰ Shinn, David, and Joshua Eisenman. "Responding to China in Africa," Washington DC: American Foreign Policy Council, 2008. *American Foreign Policy Council*. http://www.afpc.org/publication_listings/viewPolicyPaper/236. (accessed 10 November 2010), 7.

⁹¹ Zhu, 50.

that.”⁹² African states must take a pragmatic approach, as the Chinese have, to guarantee that mutual benefits will indeed arrive. Other Africans tout the idea that Africans must take a larger role in ensuring their own success. For the past century, multiple intruding powers have torn African people apart, pushed them together, cultivated conflict, compromised identities, altered cultural heritages, and overall generated confusion for the continent. The people cannot and must not rely on external powers to direct their progress and assist in the development that they want and need. As Kwaa Prah explains: “Well, I think one of the things we have to learn is that advancement in our time must be home grown. First, Africans have to learn to pull themselves up by themselves. Second, this process has to be based on their own cultural pre-requisites. [...] Africans have to realise that the cultural base for development has to be their own.”⁹³ More than ever, African states must band together in the face of foreign investment; united groups of African people can better represent their desired interests to encourage successful partnerships with the Chinese that will lead to self-sufficiency. Though Africans still have a long way to go in some regards, the recognition that they can take a larger role in their future development has begun to emerge and inspire engagement so that it is not one-sided.

With an established framework for Chinese motivations and the nature of their strategy on the African continent, the best route for mutual benefit lies within the power of the African people. Ultimately it is up to the Africans themselves to direct the nature of engagement within their respective nations and through united efforts at protecting their heritage and interests. The majority of research that analyzes whether or not Chinese engagement of African states has positive or negative implications thus far has drawn the conclusion that African fate rests within African hands. African states can have a say in their own futures and they must practice this notion early in the Chinese-African relationship, differentiate Chinese presence from past colonial endeavors, and use it to their advantage in development. They should not take the relationship for granted and exploit the Chinese either, but they can and must assert their will to the best of their ability for their own good: “In the final analysis, the developmental impact of Chinese aid and economic cooperation will almost certainly vary country by country and sector by sector. The deciding factor in each case is likely *not* to be China, but individual African

⁹² Interview with Kwesi Kwaa Prah, "Africa and China: then and now," *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 59.

⁹³ Interview with Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 60.

countries and their governments.”⁹⁴ The African people prove most qualified in determining what they want, and they should assert that privilege more often—even to the extent of bargaining to establish quality standards early in engagement. Though it is the larger, globally emerging power, China is not in charge and it has not hinted that it would ever resort to the invasion of African states. In some instances, Africans have witnessed success against Chinese policies they may have disliked: “Pressures will mount on African governments to build a more robust and strategic approach to deals made with China. In several instances, civil-society groups have pushed back hard on their government for particular aspects of Chinese engagement, and in some cases China has subsequently shifted its approach.”⁹⁵ It is possible to influence Chinese policy, and Africans continuously learn that they have the potential to represent their will. In addition, African states must no longer point blame at foreign powers involved in their affairs; they must take responsibility for their own futures: ““It is futile for Africans to be pointing fingers whether at the West or at China. Africans have to organise their side of the story as best as they can in their own interests.””⁹⁶ In order for Africans to move forward and begin to tap into their potential for growth and success, African states must take responsibility for what they want and determine how they want to interact with foreign powers to uphold their long-term goals.

Nonetheless, Africa still remains limited in its ability to rise to the challenge of presenting itself as an equal to China. Rife with conflict and division, African states contribute to their own inferiority when they choose not to band together and assert shared goals:

For example Africa must diversify its economy by identifying strategic niches and insisting on local beneficiation; negotiating better terms of trade at a bilateral and multilateral level as well as using its natural resources endowment as leverage in political and economic negotiations with international partners. However, for this to be effective Africa needs to adopt a more coordinated and integrated approach in its dealings, whether at bilateral or multilateral level. Unlike the Chinas and other major economies of this world that are backed up by strong political and economic clout, Africa’s ability and capacity for leverage is rather limited.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Brautigam, 21.

⁹⁵ Cooke, 28.

⁹⁶ Interview with Kwesi Kwaa Prah, 59.

⁹⁷ Rocha, 32.

Africans often experience a disadvantage in their dealings with China because of lack of organization or peaceful coalition. Such limitations detract from mutually beneficial relationships, and continue to foster instability. However, Africans can use established institutions as forums for dialogue and bargaining with China; they can also strengthen their own diplomatic relationships with one another: “China is providing African nations with a tremendous opportunity and has made them relevant again to global policymakers, but it is up to Africa to capitalize and drive a hard bargain so that it finally comes out winning.”⁹⁸ With the opportunity China has given African states to make them ever more relevant in the international community, Africans must capitalize upon such optimism through their own means.

For the U.S., Sino-African pursuit of mutual benefit can provide a positive example from which it can learn. Inevitably, a reevaluation of its approach to Africa must occur for the United States. It suffers from declining legitimacy and a lack of cutting edge engagement with African states, and it can learn to respect African needs on the African continent rather than imposing policies that may not work or resonate with the people. The United States *should not* maintain its historical method of engaging the African people: “The current competitive approach [between the U.S. & China] is not beneficial to Africa and the West should not see China as a threat to its relationship with Africa. It should not see itself as Africa’s saviour but as its partner. The ‘saviour attitude’ is itself a cause of the competition.”⁹⁹ Obviously, the U.S. strategy has not worked well thus far, and it has deteriorated in light of Chinese advancement on the African continent. In order for the U.S. to remain relevant as a strategic competitor of China in the region, it must work towards cultivating more mutual respect and listen to African responses to develop a mutually beneficial relationships like China intends to facilitate.

At last, the goal of mutual benefit in the Sino-African relationship has positive implications as a model for the United States strategy on the African continent. Opportunities for mutual cooperation exist among China, the U.S., and African states. All three powers have vested interests on the African continent, and they must make the most of the different avenues of collaboration. China serves as a strategic competitor for the U.S., but both must also

⁹⁸ Richardson, 1.

⁹⁹ Chidaushe, 118.

incorporate the African interests and perceptions further into their strategy. Thus, “[i]t is essential that Africans are part of any U.S.-China dialogue aimed at suggesting collaborative policies toward Africa. It is equally important that the U.S. consult with its key allies, particularly the European Union, Japan and Canada.”¹⁰⁰ As a key international figure, the United States’ decisions affect the international community in more ways than it sometimes notices. Finally beginning to realize the extent to which Chinese presence has increased in Africa, now the U.S. has competition: “As Stephen Marks pointed out in a recent editorial in *Pambazuka News*, Western corporations and governments now face competition—there is an alternative to the dictates of the international financial institutions—and this can give African states more room for manoeuvre.”¹⁰¹ Perhaps a little rivalry will help the U.S. reexamine its own strategy so that it can viably match Chinese endeavors, build back up its image, and protect its interests. Especially through the framework of strategic competition, the U.S. can even work with China to improve its relations with African states and provide them with the most effective and advantageous results for partnership. Most notably, the U.S. has the opportunity to conduct damage repair after colonization and exploitative practices on the African continent that have left a truly unfortunate memory. It can encourage faith in the African people and support them by trying new methods for promoting stability and sustainable development:

Ultimately, it is up to African governments to shape this encounter in ways that will benefit their people. Many will not grasp this opportunity, but some will. The West can help by gaining a more realistic picture of China’s engagement, avoiding sensationalism and paranoia, admitting our own shortcomings, and perhaps exploring the notion that China’s model of consistent non-intervention may be preferable to a China that regularly intervenes in other countries’ domestic affairs, or uses military forces to foster political change.¹⁰²

No one likes to admit mistakes in foreign policy approaches, and the U.S. may be reluctant to do so with Africa. Now the venue shift in Sino-U.S. relations to the African continent will call for different rules and a reassessment of strategy on the playing field. After analyzing the nature of Chinese engagement and attempting to determine the potential for a mutually beneficial

¹⁰⁰ Shinn and Eisenman, 7.

¹⁰¹ Firoze Manji, "Preface," *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), viii.

¹⁰² Brautigam, 311.

relationship, one can see that if the Africans take a leading role in directing their foreign relationships they can promote more equal exchanges. Analysis of the Sino-African relationship applies to the U.S. – African relationship, and subsequently the strategic competition between the U.S. and China, which is less about goodwill and friendship than it is about striving to maintain global prominence. The next section of this paper will further address the implications of the Sino-African relationship for the U.S., and identify areas of collaboration and leverage. However, China and the U.S. must always remember the interests of the Africans if they aspire to lucrative policies and approaches are to be successful and in alignment with their rhetoric.

Part IV.

With Chinese presence ever intensifying, the United States must now develop a suitable response in order to protect its own interests and minimize the potential for conflict now that China has arrived as a strategic competitor in the African region. More than ever, globalization continues to shift the world order and China challenges the U.S. as a dominant international player. In uncovering motivations and rationale for Chinese partnerships with African nations, researchers have only just begun to develop an appropriate U.S. reaction to the blossoming political, cultural, and economic changes resulting from Sino-African relations. The U.S. can provide leverage to cooperate with China and reduce the threat it feels from China's rising influence, especially in the context of China's awareness of its global image. Historically, China has always dreaded too much foreign interference in its internal affairs; it values its identity and autonomy. As it moves into the global community, it will face compromising some aspects of the total control it tries to impose upon the home front.

Another perspective China provides for the Western world is its 5,000-years-old past, evident through China's practice of patience and focus on the bigger picture for long-term goals. Attempting to understand China's history and how it functions can help the United States make effective strategic decisions in the international political arena. Greater understanding between foreign players can serve as an instigator for reevaluation of strategies and for looking ahead to prepare for international competition. Furthermore, it can help identify areas of cooperation; despite areas of disagreement between the U.S. and China, an opportunity for collaboration exists. Cooperation must occur on such issues as "countering terrorism, organized crime, and

drug cartels and addressing global public health crises.”¹⁰³ Shinn elaborates further that for example, Africa desperately needs assistance in combating health problems, and Chinese experience matched with Western capital could contribute to the much-needed improvement in African health services. No single power has the ability to address all African problems, nor can one power create effective partnerships with all African states on the continent.

In order to make any progress in assisting the African people and cultivating sustainable development, the strategic competitor relationship must encourage powers to avoid violence and work together. Competing interests will only deepen the divides in Africa and intensify the struggle for each party to pursue and protect its own interests. This section of the paper will assess the range of options available to the U.S. and areas for collaboration with China, without compromising U.S. principles and opportunities for advancement. The premise is to learn about Chinese engagement so as to strengthen the U.S. as its strategic competitor, while avoiding militaristic entanglements and facilitating a mutually beneficial partnership with the African people. Above all, both China and the U.S. must recognize that the African continent belongs to the African people, and they should seek to engage in equal and respectful relationships, as they are the foreigners. Positive rapport will only lead to better economic and diplomatic ties. Thus, studying Chinese and African affairs helps offer a proper context for the United States to reassess its own role on the African continent as well as its association with China.

First, the United States must examine the negative and hypocritical aspects of its own presence in Africa. The Western world pressures China to improve human rights and promote democracy, but its statements lack credibility in Africa due to its own controversial past in the region. The U.S. should note in what areas it pushes African support away: “That said, some of the countries doing the criticising, most notably the US and France, have supported dictators and financed conflicts when it has clearly been in their interest. This is part of why China’s message and strategy resonates so strongly with many African nations and leaders, the appeal of their principle of non-interference in the affairs of sovereign states.”¹⁰⁴ While non-interference may not always serve as the best approach in Africa, at least it does not send ambiguous messages to

¹⁰³ Shinn, “Africa and China’s Global Activism,” 8.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, 6.

the international world like with the Western disconnect between its actions and words. Though it is sensitive about its image, China cannot be expected to shift its position entirely due to international pressure. The U.S. must practice more understanding and compromise in international relations, too. Sometimes the U.S. forgets that cultural gaps exist between it and other nations. The Chinese have different ideologies and rationale for their methods, and cannot be expected to conduct their foreign affairs in the same manner that the U.S. does: “It would be odd if the Chinese, who do not practice democracy at home, required it of others.”¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the U.S. places unrealistic expectations upon the Chinese that neither party can reconcile without greater understanding and communication. Nevertheless, cultural differences cannot serve as adequate rationale for abandoning issues like human rights altogether. The U.S. needs to sift through the nuances of Chinese rationale and strategies to address better solutions that both parties will accept. Additionally, the U.S. can take strides in Africa to improve its legitimacy. Samuel J. Spiegel and Philippe Le Billon suggest that critics of China could promote broader transnational responsibilities to reduce militarization and diminish violence by disarming themselves, rather than criticizing China and not following through with their rhetoric.¹⁰⁶ After enjoying decades of power and sometimes ignoring the consequences of its actions, the U.S. has the opportunity to readjust the negative stigma accompanying disengagement between its rhetoric and actual practices. Effective change and progress begins with constructive criticism and self-improvement.

In addition, the United States cannot continue to conduct its foreign policy in the same manner it has done for years; as the world changes, the U.S. must adapt accordingly to remain relevant. China has enjoyed a considerable level of success on the African continent, and the United States can learn from them. Indeed, China observes the U.S. and incorporates what they have ascertained into their own strategy. Now, the U.S. must try new methods, such as encouraging more U.S. businesses to invest in Africa and more formal collaboration between powers, as well as promoting more accountability and oversight in African institutions and governance.¹⁰⁷ Every African state possesses various problems, and no universal solutions exist. The U.S. can try to incorporate innovative ideas into its approach, as well as examples of

¹⁰⁵ Brautigam, 286.

¹⁰⁶ Spiegel and Le Billon, 325.

¹⁰⁷ Cooke, 41-44.

Chinese successes and failures. In accordance, the U.S. must increase dialogue with China on difficult issues. Instead of reverting to Cold War tactics to counter Chinese expansion, the U.S. can amplify its game through positive measures. Communication is essential to the effective coordination of assistance to Africa. According to Shinn and Eisenman, the U.S. and China will encounter conflicting interests and need to discuss how to work together. For example, some topics of discussion will include the coordination of emergency assistance projects, the diplomatic strategy to end conflict in Darfur, the need to counter terrorism, and the problem of illegal drug trades and money laundering.¹⁰⁸ Instead of allowing tensions to build, opportunities for collaboration must begin sooner rather than later. Because such problems plague African states as well as China and the U.S., at times tripartite dialogue would serve the best interest of all parties. Increased communication will promote better understanding and help determine the most appropriate solutions for combating global problems.

Moreover, such positive strategies like the forums and conferences China hosts for African counterparts would contribute well to U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. can make a better effort to show African leaders prestigious recognition through creating an environment for dialogue and the exchange of ideas between regions. High-level official visits would also improve U.S. – African relations. Due to the expressed interest in the U.S. to promote human rights and democracy, many African civil society groups and activists retain their hope in the Western powers to protect them from corrupt governments. Western activists have mounted pressure on their own political systems in the past decade, especially for issues like the genocide in Darfur and the drafting of child soldiers in rebel uprisings. The exchange of Africans' personal experiences with citizens in the United States, who have the right to free speech, generates pressure and political will that will encourage the United States to offer civilians protection from unwarranted human rights atrocities:

The ability of African human rights activists to call on colleagues in Western countries to mobilise pressure on their governments to, for example, demand that imprisoned opposition figures be released as a pre-condition for further aid flows, has served as an informal life assurance for many African activists. Given that many African governments are increasingly

¹⁰⁸ Shinn and Eisenman, 9-11.

turning to China for political and economic cooperation, without the “human rights and democracy strings” often imposed by Western governments, it seems likely that a significant source of leverage over their governments by African activists and their Western allies may be eroded.¹⁰⁹

Despite the appeal of China’s non-interference policy with African political leaders, the United States still possesses bases of support and the means to offer assistance in Africa. The U.S. can use its clout in human rights issues to its advantage, and continue to use its leverage to build support in Africa. In the private sector, leverage of unfavorable Chinese practices can result from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) partnering together: “African NGOs can also work with Western NGO colleagues to mobilise threats of mass boycotts of Chinese-made consumer goods to protest China’s arms exports to repressive governments in Africa.”¹¹⁰ While China’s presence on the African continent has added a challenge to the U.S. strategy in the region, the U.S. still has a variety of favorable tools and remains a main leader in the international arena. It can mount leverage through representation more effectively than the African people can against China, especially when civilians cannot protect themselves against some of the corrupt governments in which China invests.

Instead of perceiving advancing Chinese endeavors in Africa as a threat, the United States can explore opportunities for preemptive conflict diminution. Despite negative perceptions (often amplified by Western media) that China’s ascent is malevolent and threatening, further examination counters that assumption and encourages constructive responses. Zhiqun Zhu explains that the strategic competition between the United States and China is not zero-sum; the United States must engage China and work with the international community to make sure that China rises peacefully and responsibly.¹¹¹ The U.S. can ensure a level of control and influence if it acts preemptively and with a realistic concept of Chinese intentions in Africa. It should initiate tripartite discussions to assert its role in collaborative efforts on the African continent at an early stage. Jennifer G. Cooke has expressed ways in which the United States can proceed. The United States should engage China and Africa in

¹⁰⁹ Obiorah, 49.

¹¹⁰ Obiorah, 50-51.

¹¹¹ Zhu, 51.

collaborative efforts involving governments, regional organizations, and civil society to prepare in advance for the amelioration of tension and conflicting interests. Long-term benefits through the investment of political will can result in collaboration, and could cover a vast array of sectors including health, agriculture, and peacekeeping: “[...] the United States should ensure systematic, senior-level engagement with Chinese and African leadership to find common ground and mitigate conflict.”¹¹² With three powers working together, surely the results will move toward fostering the best interest of the parties involved. Cooperation between China, Africa, and the United States can develop mechanisms designed to implement responses to conflict and promote peace processes, as well as ways to alleviate poverty and improve economic development.

Each case with individual African states will provide different challenges, but China and the U.S. should not avoid the possibility to contrive successful precedents and best practices. Further evidence that the U.S. needs to engage China and Africa stems from its inability to make effective, sustainable changes on its own in the African region:

There is also a growing realisation that traditional relations and partnerships with the West have not helped Africa overcome the structural obstacles to eradicating poverty and reversing its economic marginalisation. Rather than develop, Africa is haemorrhaging [sic] while the rest of the world accumulates wealth at its expense through the unbalanced exploitation of its natural resources and the enforcement of a distorted international economic system. Logically, strengthened cooperation with China is seen as a way of addressing some of these structural imbalances.¹¹³

As difficult as it may be for the United States to accept that its long-proclaimed strategies are no longer working well for the African continent, it will serve U.S. policy better in time to readjust its current approaches. Obviously U.S. and Western strategies have not successfully left Africa more improved, and the U.S. cannot continue to remain a significant international power if its policies grow obsolete. Just as education helps under-developed nations reduce poverty, a little education for the United States from other effective approaches can help it advance, too. Thus,

¹¹² Cooke, 28.

¹¹³ Rocha, 17.

the U.S. should give Chinese tactics a chance and consider incorporating some of what they learn into their own strategy. Rather than decry that which they do not fully understand, or become defensive as they so often do, the U.S. must accept that its way is not always the best way; it can meld its strategies and values with what it evaluates as successful and pertinent. Even while the U.S. invokes morals in its policies, it does not always accept responsibility for its past mistakes and it sometimes inhibits itself from successful growth by acting act like it knows best. However, China has 5,000 years of history over the U.S., so surely it can impart at least a small amount of wisdom to the rest of the world.

Just as the Chinese promote their economic and diplomatic motivations, the U.S. can reinvigorate its own policies in those areas. The U.S. must take on a proactive role to protect its own interests and remain a global contender. As China seeks to become a globally prominent world power, it is an opportune time for the U.S. to reenter the strategic playing field with vigor: “China’s expansion in Africa comes at time when U.S. interests and engagement in Africa are growing as well. Rising energy stakes, the global ‘war on terror’ with its emphasis on weak and failing states, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and new domestic U.S. constituencies interested and active on Africa and conflict resolution have all generated a dramatic increase in U.S. commitments.”¹¹⁴ Even while the media often influences public opinion within the U.S. on African issues and consistently portrays negativity, the private sector has recognized areas in which it can influence U.S. international policy to benefit the African people. Philanthropic NGOs and activist groups build a positive stigma around U.S. image, and the time is ripe for the U.S. to upgrade its promotion of diplomacy in Africa. Currently, the U.S. government struggles with its budget and it examines areas where it can cut extraneous costs; officials have largely categorized foreign aid as unnecessary. However, foreign aid proves one of the most effective tools for diplomacy and is widely used as a tactic of China to build rapport with underdeveloped states. While typically the U.S. only wants to give aid to the countries that support its policies and values, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton comprehends the need for proactive aid in foreign policy:

¹¹⁴ Cooke, 34.

Clinton responded that the United States needed to compete with other powers for influence in countries that may not currently support U.S. foreign policy, and said the president's fiscal 2012 budget for international affairs responded to the need for fiscal prudence. "We scrubbed this budget and made painful but responsible cuts," she said. "These [foreign policy] missions are vital to national security and I believe with all my heart that this would be the wrong time to pull back."¹¹⁵

As the United States makes critical decisions over the next few years in its foreign policy strategy and its aid to African states, it cannot retract aid from its toolbox of resources. Perhaps the more important question surrounding aid to Africa is not whether it should comprise a part of diplomatic strategy; instead, foreign policy analysts should discuss *how* the U.S. could use its aid to effectively to maximize its diplomacy and produce benefits for the African people. In addition, the U.S. could pair its diplomatic assistance policies with finding ways to maximize economic engagement: "The United States can do more to encourage economic engagement and infrastructure in Africa. In addition to missed business opportunities, the United States may be losing soft-power potential as more aggressive and forward-looking investors—in China, India, Brazil, and Russia—gain ground in Africa. The U.S. government could do more to encourage and support U.S. investors in Africa."¹¹⁶ With its recent struggles around an economic recession, the U.S. could perhaps improve its business ventures in Africa. Though they might not initially provide much return, diplomatic ties could also strengthen as a result.

Where the United States must examine its current engagement and attempt to reconcile the positive and negative factors of its impressionable history on the African continent, China had a positive, clean slate there from the beginning. It could try a range of different approaches to successful aid and development because it long-observed what Africans did and did not like; thus, China began to implement its experimental ideas. The U.S. can learn from the innovative methods China brings to Africa and developing states in general. For example, China has applied a business technique from within its borders to African states. Even though the overarching Chinese model is not appropriate for African development, the Chinese have

¹¹⁵ Josh Rogin, "Clinton: Libya No-fly Zone under Active." *The Cable*. FOREIGN POLICY, 1 March 2011. http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/03/01/clinton_libya_no_fly_zone_under_active_consideration. (accessed 25 April 2011).

¹¹⁶ Cooke, 28.

transported the more lucrative aspects to the new African venue. One such project, China's Special Economic Zones (SEZs), have widely emerged across the African continent: "In 2006, China's Ministry of Commerce announced that overseas economic zones would become key platform in the 'going global' program. China would support its companies to establish *fifty* overseas economic zones in countries around the world."¹¹⁷ In an unprecedented move, China undertook the large project of implementing its model of rapidly growing industrial zones to nations other than its own. Such a move is uniquely Chinese for its engagement with Africa.

While too early still to determine the success of the SEZs outside of China, the U.S. may need to attempt bold and inventive moves to match Chinese progress. Perhaps even the U.S. can coordinate with China within the SEZs. Either way, Deborah Brautigam reiterates that: "Exchanging views, rather than lectures, on lessons learned and approaches to aid and cooperation could lead to more useful engagement between China and the West."¹¹⁸ It is at least worth the attempt to cultivate better understanding between China and the U.S. If the U.S. struggles with its ability to provide a significant amount of foreign aid, it can learn from the creative ways in which China approaches aid. For example, China forgives large amount of debts; rather than spend more money on Africa, the United States could leave alone the money it has already spent and perhaps forgive a selected amount of African debts. Another lesson learned from China, the U.S. could back foreign aid with resources so that the Africans can find ways of repaying its debts in return for matching U.S. needs and interests. The Chinese think outside traditional donors' perspectives: their original ideas for approaching foreign aid serve as what Brautigam describes as a "catalyst for *investment*."¹¹⁹ The US needs to reevaluate its strategic interests in Africa and how it perceives aid as a tool so that in various situations with African states, it can devise the most appropriate economic and diplomatic response.

In order for the United States to effectively evaluate its policies in Africa and fully realize the extent of its strategic competition with China, it requires a shift in emphasis. The United States must become more open to new ideas and the possibility that it may not always be the leader of the international community. Already, globalization has metaphorically diminished the

¹¹⁷ Brautigam, 97.

¹¹⁸ Brautigam, 308.

¹¹⁹ Brautigam, 62.

size of the world, and global perceptions have changed in both the Global North and South. The United States' role is uncertain, but according to African civil society perspective the argument has emerged that China's increasing sphere of influence in Africa could diminish previous patterns of Western dominance and opportunities for leverage over the continent. Not only would China's presence challenge Western hegemony, but it could shift international dynamics.¹²⁰ While to an extent, Chinese advancement still has a long way to go to reach the level of influence that the United States enjoys in the international arena, its rapid growth and presence in the global community will challenge the United States eventually.

Recently, the world has already witnessed an escalation of under-developed nations defying perceptions of hierarchy and power with uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, and other states in North Africa. At the present, the U.S. has the opportunity to redefine its role after the ambiguous signals it sent to the world during the Cold War struggle. Its rhetoric did not align with its actions and its support for governments often proved hypocritical to the professed moral values and ideologies of the United States. According to Cooke, the United States uses too much rhetoric about the promotion of democracy, and it should work on strengthening governance and civil society through support of oversight and accountability in institutions as well as for civil society and the media. Such institutions can benefit citizenry, environments, and economics in the long-term for African states.¹²¹ Now more than ever, the U.S. can modify its international presence and improve its image. It must begin to shift from backing dictators to combating hypocrisy and promoting civil society and mutually beneficial relationships with lesser powers. Additionally, the U.S. can develop better mechanisms for oversight and responsible interactions with African political leaders, without imposing its will upon them. It can use positive techniques to build up Africa, rather than maintain its previously superior and condescending attitude. It is not too late for the U.S. to alter its position in Africa, and a little healthy competition from China should be channeled into reconstructing quality approaches.

Conclusion

¹²⁰ Rocha, 16.

¹²¹ Cooke, 28.

Seemingly a new phenomenon, the Sino-African relationship will only strengthen if the Chinese continue to appeal to African states and if they listen to the responses of the African people to create a mutually beneficial relationship. With more research emerging that encourages the African people to take control of their futures and direct the course of their relationships with external powers, one cannot predict in what state the Chinese presence will appear on the African continent in the next ten years. However, current indicators point to an increased Chinese presence in Africa as China finds ways to assert its power in the international arena and further expand its influence beyond its borders. At the same time, the United States role in Africa remains static and is more apt to decline than progress—unless the U.S. takes steps to reevaluate its standing and approaches to diplomacy with the African states. It must reinvigorate its own strategy if it intends to protect its interests in Africa as well as stay ahead of China in the realm of strategic competition. In addition, the African states need not to reduce their dependency on foreign powers like the U.S. or China by creating partnerships that promise to ameliorate their poverty levels and improve business endeavors. More important, they desire to interact with major world powers in order to participate more fully in the international community and make their voices heard; if the United States fails to respond to this adjustment, Africans will turn elsewhere. The same idea applies to China; it must maintain a riveting and beneficial strategy in the eyes of the African people because without their support, the Chinese will have no capacity to remain engaged in African business and diplomacy.

Ultimately, the United States can and should protect its international interests and goals, especially in Africa. It does not have to foster sensationalism and irrational fear around China's rise, but it should maintain a clear, focused perspective to develop an enduring strategy in response. China's extensive history and patient demeanor have always allowed it to harvest long-term point of view, while the United States usually plans for the short-term. Such shortsightedness is harmful to the U.S.; it is absolutely necessary that it take a more proactive, rather than reactive, stance in all aspects of its policymaking. If the United States concentrates too closely on temporary solutions for its policies, it will miss the larger picture and windows for advancement. Already, China has manipulated itself into an advantageous position. Horace Campbell explains the significance of China's movements in Africa: "[...] in less than a decade the decline of the US has accelerated and the Chinese have been able to break out of US military

encirclement without engaging the US militarily.”¹²² The United States cannot remain too nonchalant about the increasing Chinese presence on an under-developed continent; nor can it go too far in concluding that China has begun to prepare itself for direct conflict with the United States. Instead, the U.S. must seek valuable information and remain informed about China’s intentions and strategies. It must continue to evaluate its own foreign policy relations and incorporate what it learns from others to remain internationally relevant.

While the U.S. has preoccupied itself in other regions of the world lately, including the Middle East and even Asia, the Chinese have expanded the terrain for internationally strategic competition in a way that the United States has not yet experienced. The U.S. is not fighting proxy wars as it did with the Soviet Union during the Cold War; yet, China still constitutes a challenge. Shinn and Eisenman place the U.S. and Chinese strategic competition into context: “[...] Africa has never been central to either American or Chinese policy. While this will continue to be the case into the foreseeable future, the role of Africa is changing for both the U.S. and China.”¹²³ Even if Africa does not necessitate an immediate need for the United States to respond, China’s advance into the region does require U.S. attention. China has examined the Western successes and failures on the African continent for decades, and it has worked to set itself apart by incorporating the knowledge it has acquired into its strategies for cutting edge business and political engagement. It has a past with which other underdeveloped and marginalized nations can identify, and it facilitates a relationship that appeals to African states. Also, China is open to trying new methods of engagement with African countries, whereas often the West has preconceived notions of what will or will not succeed and does not reevaluate its policies based on contradictory evidence. Nevertheless, the U.S. has the means to promote progress and development in Africa, as well as to counter China in strategic competition. Furthermore, it has the opportunity to coordinate with China for the benefit of all parties involved. As China appears to gain traction in Africa, its bid for global prominence could present a needed wake up call for the U.S.; hopefully it comes early enough for the U.S. to understand the implications of Chinese engagement in Africa, and realize that it should act now.

¹²² Horace Campbell, "China in Africa: challenging US global hegemony," *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. By Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks. (Cape Town: Fahamu, 2007), 136.

¹²³ Shinn and Eisenman, 11.

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