

## The Chinese Enterprise in Africa: A Review from a European Perspective

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### Abstract

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This article reviews the key aspects of Chinese presence in Africa in order to reflect on the strengths and contradictions of this involvement. By analyzing the grounds and legitimacy claims which sustain Chinese endeavors in Africa, the sectors in which is based and notably the instruments utilized to fulfill Beijing's objectives in the continent, the essay attempts to reflect on the historical role that China plays in Africa, and how it relates with the European view on the matter.

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**Keyword:** China, Africa, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Beijing's consensus, Washington's consensus

In his maiden foreign tour as president of China in March 2013, Xi Jinping combined the traditional visit to Moscow – inaugural destination for Mao Zedong (1949), Liu Shaoqi (1960) and his predecessor Hu Jintao (2003) - with a visit to several African states, namely Tanzania, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The importance attached to the neighboring diplomacy implicit in Xi's Russian visit was nonetheless matched by what the official Chinese media described as an "historic" scale in Africa, which the Chinese leader described as an "all-weather friend", a term usually reserved for Pakistan, China's strong partner in South Asia and the Islamic world (*Xinhua*, 2013).

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The high-profile visit to Africa indeed marked a zenith for the increasing Chinese presence in the continent. Far from the revolutionary proselytism of Mao's era, this brand-new enterprise, particularly accelerated in the last decade, has elevated China's economic salience in Africa, aimed at serving international strategic interests, notably securing the long-term supply of materials and gaining international political influence and diplomatic leverage.

China, therefore, seems to lead the way in Africa where it offers an alternative development model under the tacit agreement of non-interference in the internal affairs and sovereignty of the African countries. As Xi explained it during the tour, "whether the shoes fit or not, only the wearer knows" (*Xinhua*, 2013).

Known as the Beijing Consensus (Cooper Ramo, 2004), this combination of communist and capitalist policies enveloped in Confucian values –which acts as the Chinese recipe for development- is leading a profound transformation in those African regions where development remains to be materialized, and more particularly in those countries with French, Belgian and Portuguese colonial tradition, where China's investment and construction enterprises are changing the picture (Unceta & Bidaurratzaga, 2008).

This is controversial and disturbing for the West, notably for the once key player in the region Europe, whose aid mode with political preconditions contrasts with Chinese pragmatism. Indeed, as Liu puts it, "*when some Western Politicians were debating on ideological principles, China had joined forces to work*" in Africa (Liu & Yang 2009, p. 45).

However, in spite of the trade numbers, which reflects the Chinese economic achievements in the continent, concerns have also been voiced from Africa over a model –the exchange of primary goods for manufactured ones- which recalls colonialism, as pointed by some African leaders (Buckley, 2013).

The debate exits, therefore, on whether what China does in Africa is just old imperialism with new clothes (Paltiel, 2007).

## 1. Grounds and Legitimization of China's Presence in Africa

China's engagement in Africa has been legitimized on anti-colonialist and anti-hegemonic grounds (Taylor, 2006) as well as on a friendship tradition of more than fifty years (Liu & Yang, 2009). The ideological justifications for the presence of China in Africa and other areas of the developing world, like Latin America (Jiang, 2011), are not far from what China argued during Mao's era: a similar historical experience against colonialism, a desire for multilateralism in international relations and solidarity among developing countries.

Where China sees a solid argument for legitimization, some authors perceive the disguising with new clothes -those of equality and democratization of the international arena- of old forms imperialism based in a normative and moral sense of superiority (Paltiel 2007, pp. 240-242). The unbalanced commercial relations between the re-born 'Middle Kingdom' and the African countries, which will be approached throughout this article, support those suspicions on Chinese narratives of legitimization, normally raised from Western perspectives (Palacios & Ramírez 2011, pp. 153-155).

Whatever the arguments for legitimization are, this diplomatic offensive in Africa and other parts of the developing world cannot be disentangled from the imperative needs of Chinese economic growth. As Van Dijk summarizes (2009, pp. 200-204), the main objectives of Beijing's African enterprise are to ensure the supply of raw materials, including agricultural products; create a market for Chinese products and services; obtain land for agricultural purposes and to promote Chinese migration to the region.

Under these guidelines, Chinese presence in Africa reaches out a wide range of economic and social fields: energy, infrastructures, science and technology, infrastructures, agriculture, education, health projects, poverty alleviation or development aid amongst others (Emerging Market Monitor 2011). With this vast network, China grounds the legitimacy for its fifty years old enterprise in the continent by providing an alternative to Western development and cooperation models aimed at gaining the diplomatic support of the African countries in the international arena so as to strengthen the status of China as a global superpower.

Domestic imperatives are therefore a guiding factor in China's presence in Africa. Beijing demands a sustained annual 8% economic growth which at the same time depends on a constant supply of raw materials. Without it, industrial production and urbanization levels would be jeopardized and with them China's social stability (Ming 2010, p. 203).

## **2. The Quarters of Chinese Presence in Africa**

What Africa means to China accounts for a small percentage of the current global economic endeavors of the Asian power. Chinese trade with Africa does not reach the 4% of total Chinese global trade and, while presenting a steady growth in the recent years, it is well below the overall figures of global trade growth between China and the rest of the world (Titiloye, Bankole & Adewuyi, 2009). On the other hand, what China means to Africa is very different in size and importance. China is currently Africa's largest trading partner, having surpassed the US, UK and France in 2009 (Ighobor 2013, p. 6). In its crucial search for energy to support its position of global factory, China has been forced to explore those slots left by the Western powers in geopolitically unstable regions such as Sudan, Nigeria or Angola. Notwithstanding, as a potential market of 900 million people and a substantial wealth of valuable resources and raw materials, Africa emerges as an excellent trading partner for China.

Besides, the particular conditions of the African economy allow the Chinese wholesale export of competitive low-cost manufactured products without requiring industrials imports in exchange.

Instead, the most relevant Chinese investments in Africa are directed to the fields of oil and other fossil fuels, in line with the wealth of the continent, and also behind many of the critics against the Chinese enterprise in Africa, something acknowledged by Chinese analysts (Zhao 2008, p. 112).

According to the BP World Statistical Review of World Energy (2011), Africa has 9.5% of the world oil reserves, of which 70% are located in West Africa, between Ivory Coast and Angola, significantly in the Gulf of Guinea (Esteban, 2010). One out of five barrels of crude oil (bbl) consumed worldwide is extracted from reserves located in the Western and Southern regions of the continent and in the future one of each barrel will have the same origin (Wu 2009, p. 17).

This development of the bilateral exchanges in the energy sectors is seen in Beijing as parallel to the global evolution of the energy markets and as a legitimate pursuit of resources, in face of what is perceived as the "oil politics" of the West (Liu & Yang 2009, p. 211). The emergence of China in the world oil markets, somehow 'unsettling' to the West, started with the control of only 2% of the oil reserves of the continent. However, after the intensification of the diplomatic exchanges and its economic growth, Africa now contributes to 30% of China's oil demand, with Sudan being the most prominent supplier (Alden, Large & Soares de Oliveira, 2008).

An assessment of the investment tactics implemented in Africa by the major Chinese oil companies - that is China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation (Sinopec), China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) - shows their major projects are based in Sudan, Angola, Nigeria, Gabón and Ethiopia.

Chinese presence in Sudan started in 1997 in the midst of an international embargo and today it buys 60% of the country's crude oil. Sudan resources are so relevant for China's fossil fuel procurement strategy that Beijing is embarked in a complex diplomatic balance aimed at internationally backing antagonistic Sudan and South Sudan (Naidu, Corkin & Herman, 2009, pp. 109-110; Hardenberg, 2011).

CNPC also headed the Chinese arrival in Nigeria in 1998 by securing the rights to explore oil wells in the Niger Delta Basin. From this oil base, it has diversified its action entering the business of hydroelectric and building the biggest refinery in the country (Vines, Wong, Weimer & Campos, 2011).

Meanwhile, Sinopec monopolizes Chinese endeavors in Angola, which stands as the more sophisticated Chinese business model in Africa based on a 'resources in exchange for aid', or viceversa.

In March 2006, it established a joint venture with state-owned Sonangol to form Sonangol Sinopec International (SSI). Sinopec is reported to have a 55 per cent stake in the \$3bn project, while the remaining 45 per cent is held by Sonangol. In May 2006, Angola had overtaken Saudi Arabia as the largest exporter of crude oil to China (Hare, 2007).

Ethiopia and Gabon also form part of this strategy. In 2004, China became the third largest consumer of Gabonese crude oil after the US and France (Pollock, 2007). In Western Ethiopia, the Chinese petroleum company Zhongyuan Exploration Bureau is drilling on behalf of of Petronas, the Malaysian state-owned oil company, and is engaged in other drilling operations in the Ogaden region in Eastern Ethiopia (Jansson, Burke and Jiang, 2009).

In addition to crude oil, China is interested in other natural resources such as copper, cobalt, diamonds, titanium, and timber. It has recently replaced the United States as the world's largest consumer of copper, which it buys from Zambia, where it has heavily invested in the mining sector (Gondwe, 2010). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and despite rampant instability and civil strife, China is active in the extraction and export of cobalt and copper. Similarly, China seeks diamonds in Sierra Leone and secures titanium in Kenya; it cultivates timber in Mozambique, Equatorial Guinea and Liberia, where it is also interested in rubber. China also imports more than 70 percent of the forest products of Gabon, Central African Republic, Mozambique, and Liberia, often employing methods that Western environmentalists see as devastating to stable environmental standards. Such practices include the use of unlicensed loggers, who often cut down undersized trees and leave deforested areas in a barren state (Ndumbe Anyu & Afam Ifedi, 2008).

Besides oil and closely related to the agreements for his extraction, the second field in which China has a strong position in Africa is that of infrastructures, which plays a crucial part in the bilateral economic relations. In fact, those entities designed at the FOCAC summits have been instrumental in implementing this cooperation (Zhang Z., 2009). In the so-called African Year in China (2006), Beijing agreed on investing US\$ 7 billion in the construction of infrastructures in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2007-2009, it provided the continent with three billion dollars in soft loans and two billion in preferential loans to enable 38 big-scale projects, amongst them hydroelectric power plants, airports and highways<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> In this sense, China has combined socially-oriented projects such as schools, hospitals or affordable housing units like the Kilamba social housing project in Angola -carried out by the China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC)- with major transport infrastructures such as the Algerian East-West Highway, with participation of China Railway Construction Corp (CRCC) and China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC); the Abuja-Kaduna rail project, also in Nigeria and undertaken by China Civil Engineering Construction Company (CCECC); or the Addis-Nazareth expressway, a rail project by a subsidiary of China Railway Construction Corp Ltd. Other

Cooperation in science and technology is another necessary aspect of Chinese involvement in Africa. Despite Chinese companies are very protective of their know-how (Elu & Price, 2010), the export of technology is of interest to them since it may help increase the demand for Chinese products. However, for this technological transfer to happen, the involvement of several sectors is required, and this is something which is not taking place so far. Chinese private companies are not eager to transfer their knowledge and they must coordinate their actions with research institutions in order to suitably manage R&D programs. This is a long-term process in which China is still clearly positioned behind the EU, Japan or the US.

Another relevant yet irregular facet of Chinese involvement is the **construction of the seven Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in Africa**, following Deng Xiaoping's model for the reform and opening up domestic policies (Palacios & Ramírez 2011). Established under bilateral agreements with African governments, they are aimed at attracting foreign investment under advantageous tax regimes and competitive industrial lands. So far, their performance has been modest (Brautigam & Tang 2011; Mangra, Sperdea, Celenkovic & Cojocar 2011) and only those in Zambia and Egypt are operative<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the field of **agriculture**, which has grown steady since 2006, accounts for a small proportion of the 3% of Chinese investments in Africa, with 4.5 billion USD channeled through state-owned enterprises, general partnerships, joint-stock companies, limited-liability companies, etc. They reach 81% of the African countries in areas such as forestry, livestock or fisheries (Li, Xu, Xu & Li, 2009).

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infrastructure projects are energy-related such as the North-South Sudan oil pipeline, by CNPC; the Mambila Hydropower Project in Nigeria, by Synohydro; or the Merowe Dam Project, by China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corp. Other projects, like the African Union Conference Center and Office Complex (AUCC) in Ethiopia, have an accentuated diplomatic significance.

<sup>4</sup> The zones in Mauritius, Ethiopia, Algeria and Nigeria are stranded in the construction process or on the brink of suspension. The sectors these zones aim to promote also point us the Chinese interests in the continent: copper and cobalt mining and electric power (Zambia); textile/garments industry, electrical equipment production and automobile assembly lines (Egypt); steel products and building materials (Ethiopia); automotive sector and building materials (Algeria); textile, household appliances and automotive industries (Nigeria); and finally a Sino-African logistic and business hub to assist the whole bilateral exchange (Mauritius).

Besides this officially sanctioned grand strategy, Chinese presence in Africa has another powerful arm, that of **Chinese provincial and private enterprises**, which are expanding their operations in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Botswana and South Africa.

These are basically oriented to the trade of goods, but also to light industries such as the textile one. These companies -specifically the private ones- started their presence in Africa in the 1980s, right after the reform and opening up process. To them it is attached the 'black legend' projecting an unfavorable depiction of Chinese involvement in the continent based on their disregard of local and international labor legal norms as well as on their heavy environmental impact.

The bulk of this private presence is made up of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) –more than 2,000 by 2008- which, according to Jing, are marked by "a strong entrepreneurial spirit", a high capacity of adaptation to local conditions and a noticeable competitiveness amongst them (2009, pp. 573-576). The majority of them initially established contact with the Chinese diaspora in Africa before undertaking their investments but the majority of the employment is drawn from the local labor force, while usually keeping Chinese individuals in the managerial positions. Addressing the local society remains a task for these businesses, the majority of which stand on the edge of the African civil society, echoing the extraterritoriality practices of old colonial powers. While this move may seem appropriate at an early stage of their presence, it can be very damaging to Chinese interests in Africa if not reversed in the medium-long term.

In conclusion, and in spite of the different degrees of success achieved depending on the strategy, the general trend of Sino-African economic and trade relationships since 2000 is that of constant progress.

They have combined a fast growth in trade exchanges; a diversification of the products exported to Africa; an increased Chinese investment in commerce, manufacturing and processing, and the development of natural resources, agriculture and processing of agricultural products (Zhang X., 2009).

### 3. The Instruments of Chinese Presence in Africa

To maximize its presence in Africa, China has developed a series of instruments which pertain to the operational and ideological realms. In the first case, China has developed the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) as an organizational platform aimed at defining and materializing the bilateral relations. In addition, and with the objective of maximizing this tool, Beijing has put its domestic corporate muscle at the service of its African enterprise through what some authors have defined as *China Inc* (Fishman, 2005). In parallel, China has promoted a rather diplomatic and ideological corpus directed at the legitimization of its investments in Africa by raising an alternative development model, known as the Beijing Consensus, and accompanying its purely economic efforts with *soft power* programs.

#### 3.1. Focac: A Mechanical Core for Sino-African Cooperation

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) remains at the core of Chinese strategy in Africa. An international organization, it was launched in 2000 as a meeting of the External Affairs and Finance ministers of the African countries with their Chinese counter-parts every three years<sup>5</sup>. In the 'China's African Policy' document published in 2006, the first of its kind in China diplomatic history, the FOCAC is described as "*an effective mechanism for the collective dialogue and multilateral cooperation between China and Africa*" and "*an important framework and platform for a new type of China-Africa partnership featuring long-term stability, equality and mutual benefit*" (FOCAC, 2006).

In this sense, Liu sees FOCAC as a solid platform for the development of Sino-African relation whose strength lies in two areas (Liu & Yang 2009, p. 41).

First, it proposes a Chinese long-term approach to Africa which provides FOCAC with leverage over similar institutions designed by Japan or the European countries. Secondly, its cooperation mechanism encompasses a wide range of development ideas, strategic agreements and policies which were absent in previous initiatives towards Africa.

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<sup>5</sup> Ethiopia (2003) and Egypt (2009) have so far alternated with China (2000, 2006 and 2012) as host countries of the event, which pushed bilateral relations to a new and higher level in 2006, when the forum was attended by African heads of state or government from 43 African countries.

Thus, the first ministerial meeting in 2000 resulted in a document, the *Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Economic and Social Development*, which outlined the structure, objectives, functions and policies of the forum. This was followed in 2003 by the *Addis Ababa Action Plan*, which assessed the whole plan, outlining successful projects and correcting those deficient lines, and similar declarations and action plans for the 2007-2009 and 2010-2012 periods, aimed at paving the way for a maturing *Sino-African Cooperation Partnership*.

To China, this regularity makes FOCAC a mechanism established according to the principles of modern, open, transparent and inclusive international relations. Moreover, it sees FOCAC as the proof that Sino-African relations are not a mere solemn declaration but a challenging set of projects. The establishment of FOCAC in 2000 has resulted in a fast development of Sino-African cooperation due to the wide range of agreements launched through the platform. Significantly, by 2006, Africa had become the second China's largest oil supplier, the second largest procurement market and the third largest destination of Chinese investment.

### 3.2. China Inc.: Domestic Muscle for an International Strategy

To maximize the FOCAC instrument and serve China's primary objective in Africa, Beijing has integrated the national financial (banks), economic (state companies and parastatal corporations), and political (the executive arm of the Chinese government) entities into a single solid body directed towards achieving the national objectives at the international level. The domestic muscle, therefore, works towards securing the long-term supply of materials to China, ousting the competence and gaining political influence.

In this sense, the investment tools utilized by China are the "policy" banks. China has three such entities: the China Development Bank (CDB), the Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM) and the Agricultural Bank of China (ABC).

The one with the highest political dimension is the EXIM, under the command of the State Council the only Chinese institution with the capacity of providing "soft loans" or preferential loans for import-export activities, thus covering the dual aim of promoting Chinese exports in a diplomatically-savvy way.

Chinese policy banks take advantage of the strict control of capital outflows affecting the noticeable savings of Chinese citizens, which are behind the cheap financing bonds offered to state companies to undertake their global endeavors, as well as of the foreign currency China holds<sup>6</sup>, which is distributed by the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) according to risk, strategic and profitability criteria. Citizen savings and foreign currency reserves are therefore at the service of the internationalization of Chinese companies and their presence in the international markets.

In short, China's policy banks are guided by Chinese geo-strategic interests rather than strictly commercial motivations. They constitute the financial arm of China's diplomacy through billion-dollar loans aimed at the strategic targets cited above. In this sense, the agreements between China and the African countries can be summarized in a simple equation: *African natural resources in exchange for Chinese credits and infrastructures.*

A sample case of this strategy is that of the so-called China's 'Angola Model', a direct exchange of infrastructures for oil, which Beijing claims Japan used during the 1970s and 1980s in exchange for Chinese oil. The bilateral agreements between Luanda and Beijing operate on the basis of a simple deal: Chinese construction companies execute their works in the African nation and are paid directly by the EXIM –in the best China Inc. 'fashion'- while Angola sends through the joint venture Sonangol the stipulated amount of oil to pay the Chinese credit.

To Angola, this represents a revolutionary model since, according to the agreements, the infrastructures –railways, roads, universities, hospitals, etcetera- erected by China will not be free, but paid through Angolan oil.

At the same time, and from a legal point of view, this represents a insecure agreement since lender, seller and customer are in fact the same entity, that is, the Chinese state, which operates without a the absence of a check-and-balance state counterpart.

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<sup>6</sup> Chinese foreign exchange reserves added \$ 2.85 trillion at the end of 2010 and come from four basic flows: foreign direct investment, trade surplus, tourism and the process called "sterilization" of its currency (buying dollars to keep a given exchange rate).

Similar model agreements with deep Chinese penetration can be found in both Sudanese states or in the Democratic Republic of Congo, countries left to their fate by the international community. In her strategy in Africa, Beijing is filling those spaces where the other powers in the continent –such as the US or the European Union ‘cluster’ (mainly France) - are rather absent. In fact, in the Angolan case, China made an appearance in a country ravaged by decades of war, and started delivering what others, such as Portugal, the US or Spain, had promised to do (Marques de Morais, 2011). Something analogous takes place in Congo, abandoned by Belgium, France and the US; or in an internationally isolated and embargoed Sudan, prior to its division. It should be equally noted, on the other hand, the scarce or more balanced agreements –paradigmatically the case of South Africa- that China has signed with countries in the Anglo-Saxon orbit (Corkin 2008).

No matter the setbacks, China emerges undeniably as an essential factor in African current affairs. Through a competitive investment model marked by affordable credit, immediate implementation of projects and financial efficiency, it prevents the –to a greater or lesser degree- corrupt African administrations from profiting from Chinese funds. Indeed, the African investor rarely receives the credit, which goes directly from the bank to the construction company, both Chinese.

### 3.3. The Beijing Consensus: An Appealing Alternative to Western Policy

As the ideological core of China’s strategy, the ‘Beijing Consensus’ emerges as an alternative model to Western policy towards Africa, epitomized by the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 2004) and mainly based in fair market prices, a close trade relationship and no ideological agenda, that is a policy of non-interference in the African domestic realms.

Cooper Ramo describes the Beijing Consensus as one in which reform and development must be implemented in a gradual, non exponential path, with innovation and experimentation as key features of this development and a central role given to the growth of exports.

It is accompanied by the creation of a state capitalist model similar to that of China, halfway between socialist planning and free market capitalism, and by authoritarianism as the political model, as opposed to democracy or autocracy (2004, p.4).

China's political approach in Africa is aimed at strengthening the stability of the local governments, discarding the democratic model as not applicable to the current stage of social development in Africa. Therefore, China's presence promotes the establishment and stability of authoritarian regimes such as those of Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan or Zimbabwe. Following the Chinese model, these governments must plan the economy without stifling the private initiative, which is equally crucial for development.

Chinese support for these polities is shaped through programs of development cooperation in which economic aid is lent or awarded without preconditions under the doctrine of non-interference, which has traditionally guided Beijing's foreign policy for developing countries. This is a principle of which China expects reciprocity for its own domestic arena. As recent China's Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi (2007-2013), stressed in the UN, "China does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries or impose its will on others, and China does not allow outside forces to interfere in its internal affairs" (UN, 2012).

Closely related, the win-win concept is part of the idea of building a 'harmonious world' (hexie shijie) which was at the core of the Chinese Communist Party discourse during the Hu Jintao mandate between 2002 and 2012 (Zheng & Sow Keat, 2007). Hu presented it during the 2005 Asian African Summit and subsequently matured it in other forums such as the General Assembly of the United Nations in September of that year (Zhang H., 2009).

The 'harmonious world' envisaged by China is a diverse one of cooperation for lasting peace, development and common prosperity. Themes such as mutual respect, balanced development, shared benefits, win-win progress, common cultural grounds and peaceful means permeate the 'harmonious' international society described by Hu (*Xinhua*, 2007).

For the specific case of Africa, the 'harmonious' enterprise promoted by China holds that African affairs should be determined by African themselves and calls for effective assistance so that African countries may achieve their economic and social development goals as well as the capacity to develop independently.

As outline by Chinese authors, Beijing demands the promotion of fair multilateral trade by the international community so the financial institutions and globalization in general favor the common prosperity of nations (Zhang H. 2009, p. 79).

#### 3.4. Chinese Soft Power in Africa

To strengthen its image in Africa, China has worked in parallel in a "soft power" strategy on the African societies<sup>7</sup> which began with the revolutionary era, when common arguments about anti-colonialism were the first and most basic attempts to pull on Africa into the Chinese sphere of influence, which characterized the pioneering dispatching of medical teams (Li 2011, pp. 9-13).

Nowadays, however, scholars interpret Chinese soft power as going beyond the cultural and ideological lines. The main sources of Beijing's soft power start therefore in the very Chinese model of development, its foreign policy and institutions and agenda setting. All are gathered together by three aspects: cultural diplomacy, multilateral diplomacy and overseas assistance programs (Fijalkowski 2011).

Chinese soft power is firstly related to its development aid efforts. A proper assessment of the dimension of Chinese official development assistance is difficult to obtain since Beijing does not release information on the matter. However, some estimates reported in the media point to the fact that China still lags behind other donors in a wider picture of aid flows into the African continent (Provost & Harris, 2013). At the same time, Chinese development aid is hard to disentangle from ulterior motives such as the opening of new markets for its products and the trade and investment policies undertaken in Africa, which are larger than the amounts of aid poured into African countries (Samy 2010). The tendency, however, appears to be upwards.

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<sup>7</sup> Soft power operates through the attraction produced by culture, when this is pleasing to others; values, when these are attractive and consistently practiced; and foreign policies, when these are seen as inclusive, legitimate and having moral authority. It may be exercised in two ways: directly through the promotion of the culture and values and the explanation of the foreign policy by a given country's government agencies; and indirectly when it emerges as a socioeconomic byproduct of a given society (Nye 2009, p. 164)

At the same time, through the FOCAC, China has launched a series of cultural, educational and legislative cooperation programs. The educational approach (Niu 2009, pp. 254-257) is probably the most publicized one, with active efforts involving academic exchanges and joint programs, the organization of seminars and courses for the heads of African universities and colleges or the teaching of Chinese language in Africa through the Confucius Institutes. This cultural and linguistic cooperation has its counterpart in the teaching of African indigenous languages in some Chinese universities (Sun 2009, pp. 270-278).

The importance attached by the Chinese state to this cultural influence is reflected in the intense ministerial and institutional bilateral exchange (Zhou H. 2009, pp. 292-293). Chinese cultural soft power is openly intended at gaining African friendship in the international arena. To reinforce its diplomatic position, China has pursued the support of African countries in delicate issues such as human rights and democracy, promoting its own vision of both realms in forums such as the 2004 *Sino-African Human Rights Conference*, attended by 27 African countries. The main topics of discussion there were the relationship between human rights and sovereignty, the protection of human rights in judicial practices and the international cooperation in the human rights arena (Ofodile, 2009). This effort is accompanied by programs of cooperation in legislative, judicial and domestic security issues, aimed at sharing experiences in tackling crimes and handling immigration.

Definitely, the face of China's soft power in Africa lies in the more than one million Chinese citizens residing in the continent, in the thousands of African scholars and students living in China or in the crowded African immigrant communities of Beijing, Guangzhou or Yiwu.

#### **4. The Impact of Chinese Presence in Africa: Results, Contradictions and European Criticism**

From the Chinese perspective, the last decades of the brand new Chinese involvement in Africa show a clearly positive balance, based in the fact that Africa can benefit from globalization following the Chinese track. The Chinese link seems to pull Africa out of the marginal role that presumably some analysts had expected it to play. The conclusion is clear and unequivocal: the growth of economic cooperation and cultural exchanges is positive for both sides and for a multipolar world.

Complementary economies and mutually reinforcing diplomatic support benefits both the weak African sovereignties and the Chinese international aspirations.

Indeed, Chinese involvement has allowed most African countries to finance themselves from external trade, receive soft loans and purchase industrial goods at affordable prices. The increased commodity prices are reorganizing some endemically ruined African economies while Chinese-built infrastructures are core for the articulation of markets and nations.

Chinese presence undoubtedly provides Africa with an opportunity to abandon underdevelopment and centuries of atavism and apparently provides an example to Africa of the fact that the path of development can be achieved (Edoho, 2010).

#### 4.1. The Contradictions of the Chinese Model as an Export to Africa

But Chinese presence in Africa and the apparent success of the enterprise also present a series of contradictions and reasonable doubts. They are mainly echoed by Western observers (social researchers and economists), both European and American.

To outline some, China's superpower role as one of the largest donors in Africa contrasts with its developing role as a recipient of aid for its Western regions (Fung, Izaka & Tong 2002). This results in Beijing balancing acts so Chinese development interests do not clash with those of African countries. At the same time, the Chinese government must figure out how to combine its vaunted policy of non-intervention with the protection of their investments, interest and citizens in Africa (Ríos, 2008).

Although China may enumerate a series of achievements under the FOCAC's wing, the Beijing consensus and the many bilateral agreements signed with African countries, there are some areas which escape to its control.

For instance, the growing role -promoted by Beijing- of China's private companies and provincial governments, with their related government-sponsored enterprises.

These two branches of Chinese investment in Africa have a common interest in maximizing their benefits while ignoring the laws and regulations of the African countries and even those of their own state, nurturing China's *black legend* in Africa in issues such as the environment or the labor rights of workers. The solution to these issues in Africa is complicated by the fact that Chinese companies will not apply in Africa regulations aimed at protecting the environment or labor rights which do not exist in China (Croll, Lebzen & Paes, 2008).

Along with these contradictions, a lack of transparency which affects the whole of Chinese development cooperation and aid, which, under the alibi of efficiency, do not go through the African recipient country, resulting in the erosion of its independence and property rights. In short, what these circumstances question is whether the 'Chinese model' or the 'Beijing Consensus' is a feasible and suitable alternative political and economic model for Africa's development, and several aspects point to the difficulties and risks of exporting the Chinese model to Africa.

Notably, the Chinese model of development is unique in as much it is a combination of historical and cultural conditions which cannot be easily transplanted to other countries. While strategic thinking, hard work and the seizing of opportunities are crucial elements for development which could be applied elsewhere, African countries lack a coherent long-term economic strategy and cannot play the same role China does in the global economy.

But more relevant, while at present China is instrumental to Africa's development, it must be noticed that Beijing 'globalizes' in its own terms, meaning that mutual benefits come at a price for the development of African countries.

For instance, bilateral agreements are usually defined on strict conditions such as fixed-low prices for long-term contracts of oil exports, or the purchase or lease of land by China for cultivation, which on the contrary hampers the development of African agricultural exports (Cardenal & Araujo 2011). This negative side is reflected in wider patterns such as the replacement of local workers with Chinese labor force; the erosion of the local competitiveness generated by Chinese companies and the resulting domestic unemployment; the financial uncertainty for the countries once resources are exhausted; or the reactionary which entails Beijing's support for dictatorial regimes.

While at first glance, a state-controlled system which reserves a role for the private sector and the market seems more appealing than a Western model in which aid is offered only under strict political and economic conditions, the Chinese development offer is not neatly advantageous. From this reality stems the criticism of China's African enterprise by Europe.

#### 4.2. European Criticism of Chinese Involvement in Africa

The European criticism of Chinese presence in Africa is notably influenced by factors such as the historical experience of European nations in the continent, its current political structure or the fact that nowadays Europe is (only) the third player in the region and therefore not a powerful or direct competitor of China there, unlike the US (Xu 2008, p. 17).

The old continent, represented by its main nation (Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain) has a poor colonial record that prevents its policies towards Africa of being as dynamic as China, United States or Russia. Accordingly, these policies are often interpreted as paternalistic or arrogant by African countries, which have not forgotten the colonial and post-colonial aggressive European presence in the continent.

In addition, the European political fragmentation is in itself a hindrance for European interests in Africa. As a supranational entity, the European Union (EU) does not present a coordinated strategy in Africa and three different European positions towards Africa -and towards China in Africa- can be detected.

First, each European nation presents a particular interest reflected in its bilateral relations with former colonies and spheres of influence. Secondly, the European Commission, as the executive arm of the EU, pursues a *realpolitik* policy aimed at cooperation with China in Africa without ignoring a condition of equal actor of the African nations. From this policy effort originates the attempt at a China-Africa-Europe triangulation, which however clashes with the interests of the first actor –the European nations- and the third one, the European Parliament. As the legislative arm of the EU, the parliamentary institution reflects the voice of the European political parties and the social values embedded in the European public opinion.

This accentuated ideological and idealistic component, as well as the shadows of the European colonial record in Africa, were reflected in the resolution adopted by the European Parliament (2008), which regarded China as 'a competitor' and urged the EU not to engage in trilateral cooperation should that meant compromising its commitments to human rights and democracy. This resolution shattered the foundations of triangulation cooperation launched by the European Commission in the EU, Africa and China conference, held a year earlier in Brussels.

Yet this fragmentation between idealism and *realpolitik*, individual or collective, should not erase the potential of cooperation between Europe and China, who can mutually benefit of each other in their strategies in Africa.

In one hand, Europe should not see China's emergence and economic prevalence in Africa as a conflict between the West and China since the commercial competence does not entail a "zero-sum game over access to African natural resources" (Marton & Matura 2011, p. 165). In other words, China and Europe can both sustain strong, numerous and satisfactory commercial exchanges with Africa at the same time.

At the same time, China must not interpret the old European colonialism in Africa as a "homogeneous block" of exploitation and abuse of native peoples of Africa. European colonial powers also sincerely believed their presence was positive and necessary for the development of the peoples of Africa.

In fact, most of the African emancipation leaders were educated in European education models and came from those layers of African society more benefited by the presence of European powers in their countries.

Therefore, a smart move would be for China to open a dialogue with Europe and the European critique and analysis of the colonial past. Cooperation by learning from past experiences would cast light in crucial arenas for Chinese reputation in Africa such as resources exploitation or environmental protection while taking into consideration Africa's development needs (Crossick & Reuter 2007, pp. 147-148). This would demand from China the same level of humility that critics hold Europe lacks in its paternalist approach to Africa.

On the other hand, the European openness to cooperate with China in Africa would dissipate the suspicions African peoples have traditionally had towards European policies in the continent.

## **5. Conclusion: China in Africa, an Ongoing Chapter in History**

China's aid to Africa, embedded in its self-interested presence in the continent, may be sincere in its aim of developing the countries in which it invests in exchange for the resources it demands. To Beijing, Chinese investments entail an opportunity that must be seized by African countries to escape the vicious circle of underdevelopment, and in doing so, they may reflect in China's economic miracle as an example.

However, in the Spanish tradition there is an old saying that goes "hell is paved with good intentions". Despite the obvious development nature of the bilateral exchange equation, the eradication of poverty, the creation of employment or the delivery of basic services cannot be accounted at present as primary objectives of Chinese presence in Africa. Since Chinese investments lack a consistent practical explanation or collide with the disintegration of African society so they are reminiscent of the old colonial and post-colonial Western enterprises thus casting reasonable doubts on the whole enterprise (Lumumba-Kasongo 2011).

The poor score of European colonialism, as perceived by the African peoples, must be taken in consideration by China if it wants to avoid a similar 'historical' defeat.

In this sense, in order to avoid the Europeans colonial wrongs, China must first of all become aware of the distrust that African peoples feel toward outsiders and recognize the long-term negative implications of the collateral damage brought by its investment in Africa. Besides, the exportability of the Chinese model is questionable since most African countries lack the resources and critical population mass that China had for this endeavor, or the solid geographical connections or the plus of determination unique to the longer national and civilizational aspirations of the European states or China. In this sense, China could direct its efforts at resolving the uncertainty which currently accompanies bilateral economic agreements to the eyes of the African population. Conceiving aid programs in Africa as a strategic expense rather than a mere economic cost would go in that direction (Zhang Y. 2009).

Besides, China should be equally sensitive in coordinating its foreign policy with that of its African partners, avoiding at all times that the latter feel "used" as pawns in the game the "big powers" play in the international arena. In parallel, the policy of noninterference in the domestic affairs of its partners serves to reinforce stable and clean governments, instead of corrupt or despotic powers.

In conclusion, the worst future scenario for Chinese interests in Africa is that the continent becomes the stage of a struggle of outside powers non-committed to the development of the countries, leaving a behind a territory divided into areas of influence, as happened in the past century. For China to surpass Europe's historical performance vis-à-vis Africa, the pattern of exports of raw materials and imports of manufactured products should be overcome (Wissenbach 2009). To that aim, real development should be at least on a par with hunger for resources as leitmotiv of Chinese's presence in Africa.

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