

Dependency theory – a conceptual lens to understand China’s presence in Africa?

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Abstract

This conceptual article explores the evolution of dependency theory and deploys the theory to understand China’s contemporary presence in Africa as a case study to provide new insights about the usability of this theory and its fundamental concepts. To this end, this article provides commentary to dependency theory and develops further its theoretical foundations from the viewpoint of this case example. In an attempt to understand and explain the phenomenon of contemporary Sino-African engagement, we explore dependency theory in order to unpack the complexity inherent in China’s contemporary presence in Africa and ask whether this ‘system-level’ relationship is likely to end in a similar fashion as espoused by dependency theorists in their analysis of North-South relationship. This paper concludes that straightforward deployment of dependency theory does not suffice in the light of contemporary Sino-African engagement. We opine that China-Africa relationship suggests a case of growing interdependency. We conclude that beyond the economic partnership, cooperation and solidarity, China’s presence in Africa presents Africa a challenge to question the status quo, re-orient their values, and to adopt an inward focus on their developmental needs and priorities.

Key words: dependency theory, China, Africa, development, economic engagement

Introduction

Dependency theory emerged in the late 1950's in response to concerns of the gap between rich and poor countries and that economic growth in the advanced industrialised countries did not lead to growth in the poorer countries (Ferraro 2008). Studies carried out by Raúl Prebisch, the then Director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (UNECLA) and his colleagues suggested that economic activity in the advanced countries does not benefit the poorer countries but often resulted in serious economic challenges in poorer countries (Ferraro 2008). Dependency theory thus became an important tool to analyse development and underdevelopment in the international political economy (Namkoong 1999)

As succinctly put by Brown (1985), "...there is no single coherent body of thought that can be described as 'dependency'" theory. Instead various theorists stress the key notion that some countries are conditioned in their development by their dependence on other countries (or economies)". Assessing Brown's viewpoint 30 years later it is reasonable to still think that, despite the rich intellectual ideas, debates and writings from dependency theorists of different leanings, there is still no single unified theory of dependency.

Despite the intellectual disagreements among dependency theorists there remains some basic agreements among them, namely the view that the world is divided into two parts, the centre-industrialised countries and the periphery/the underdeveloped countries, and that this structure also exists within a state, while they do not all employ the use of the term centre/periphery, their approach to the structure of the international system remains the same (Namkoong 1999). They argue that trade between the centre and periphery is characterised by unequal exchange, which has resulted in underdevelopment of the periphery. They agree that underdevelopment in third world countries can be linked to the expansion of the world capitalist system. In order to shed more light on the diversity of ideas that constitute dependency theory, a breakdown of dependency theory seems appropriate. This will be done by separating the theory into two strands: the Marxist and non-Marxist frameworks.

This paper's contribution is based on the need to re-think dependency theory from a very specific point of view – that being China's presence in Africa. Karl R. Popper (2005: 38) wrote in *The logic of scientific discovery* that "theories are nets cast to catch what we call 'the world', to rationalize, to explain and to master it [...]". In an attempt

to understand and explain the phenomenon of contemporary Sino-African engagement, we try to follow Popper's footsteps. In this paper, we explore dependency theory in order to unpack the complexity inherent in China's presence in Africa. To this end, we ask: Is this relationship likely to end in a similar fashion as espoused by dependency theorists in their analysis of North-South relationship or is it one of self-reliance, the '*unity of thought and purpose*' shared by the third world in charting their development course as referred to by Haq (1976) in the opening chapter of his book *The Poverty Curtain*?

The principal question this paper addresses is whether China's presence in Africa fosters a new dependency in other words diversifies dependency within the global south or furthers Africa's socio-economic development. In order to do this, a systematic literature review of dependency theory is carried out and applied to understand China's presence in Africa. This paper offers a different perspective to the use of dependency theory in understanding China's presence in Africa. This is important because China's presence in Africa in aspects of trade, aid and investments will continue to rise and thus remains of interest to leaders, policy makers and scholars as it will undoubtedly have effects on Africa's development trajectory. Some studies have largely analysed China's presence as reiterating dependency (Taylor 2014) and as the 'new face of imperialism' (Lee 2006), however within the dependency literature, we see a role for China as being not the new 'centre' but a catalyst for a rethink on Africa's development.

Our paper is organised as follows. First, we focus on dependency theory *per se* – what are the origins of the theory and how it has developed? Secondly, we explore the main criticisms presented against dependency theory. And thirdly, we analyse the theory in the light of China's current presence in Africa. We conclude this paper by summarising our reasoning as well as putting forward an agenda for future research.

Schools of thought on dependency theory

Dependency theory has been under debate since the 1960's. The main aim of the scholars has seemed to be to explain the cause and result of the dependent status of the global south in the international political and economic systems. Scholars such as Mahbub ul Haq and Raúl Prebisch have approached the question of dependency from a *non-Marxist perspective* while the likes of André Gunder Frank, Theotino dos Santos and Immanuel Wallerstein's views on dependency reflect a *Marxist orientation*. For example, Mahbub ul Haq (1976: 3) expresses his concerns regarding the dependent

status of the south in the opening chapter of his book *The Poverty Curtain*. He writes, “A poverty curtain has descended right across the face of our world, dividing it materially and philosophically into two different worlds, two separate planets, two unequal humanities, one embarrassingly rich and the other desperately poor.”

In the same vein as other dependency scholars, Haq (1976) identifies the roots of the inequality between developed and developing countries to be their historical past. According to him, the era of colonialism exacerbated the disparities between the rich and the poor countries by placing the rich countries of the North in the centre of the world and the poor countries of the South at the periphery, supplying raw materials to the North. He argues that these exploitative links evident in the economic dependence and intellectual slavery remains despite decolonisation. Within the context of this paper, this theory can be used to speculate that rampant exploitation would less likely occur between equal partners than unequal partners. In other words, the exploitation reported in North-South economic engagement has its foundation in historical inequality. Haq (1976) in his writings focused on providing a solution for altering the existing relationship that serves to benefit both the industrial countries and the global south. He argues that if the present unjust order continues, then a rebellion in the third world that can lead to damages to the western world’s interests is inevitable. Haq (1976) further identifies that poverty is a global problem in the sense that it is not only related to poor nations but also to poor people within these nations, thus it is a problem that has to be dealt with. To do this he suggests a two-pronged offensive as the only way to eliminate inequality, where the national governments in developed and developing countries share this responsibility, developing countries on their part must ensure an equality of opportunity for developing countries to fully engage in and benefit from the international system. Also, developing countries on their part should carry out internal reforms to provide the same for their poor so as to remove domestic structural biases. In short, Haq sees a shared interest in North-South cooperation as the basis for mutual cooperation, a point where he differs from the other dependency theorist with Marxist views.

Haq’s view is similar to that of Prebisch, whose views were outlined in various policy papers during his time as the secretary general of UNECLA. Prebisch’s argued that the South’s dependent status is caused by the historical development of centre-periphery relations. His views differ from Haq in that while Haq emphasised on the impact of

colonialism, he was more concerned with the impact of western industrialisation on the position of the poor states.

Prebisch (1968) argued that the rapid industrialisation of the North as well as export competitiveness created a divide between the global North and South resulting in declining terms of trade for the South and eventually dependency of the South on the North. As a solution to the problem of dependency, Prebisch proposes third world countries accelerate industrialisation by adopting import substitution (O'Brien 1975). Import substitution as prescribed by Prebisch (1968) would only be effective if the South have developed the capacity not only to substitute imports but also to add value to natural resources, which can then be exported in the form of processed goods. Similarly, the rapid industrialisation of the North, which created unfavorable terms of trade for the South, was made possible through the abundance of certain capacities particularly their control of technology (Shrum 2001). Similar to Haq, Prebisch identifies a shared political and economic interest between the North and the South and argues that it is not just morally imperative for this inequality to be redressed but that it is in the North's self-interest to do so. He maintains that the centre is not immune to the increasingly obvious economic and social tensions in the periphery and thus should make deliberate efforts to stimulate development in the right direction in these countries.

Haq and Prebisch share similar views that set them apart from the Marxist school of dependency theorists. Bokhari (1989) states three major point of views that sets them apart from the Marxist school. Firstly, their argument that the existing international economic system can be reformed to accommodate countries of the global South thus creates no need for southern countries to create a new system or leave the present system in order to overcome dependency. Secondly, Haq and Prebisch due to the perceived shared interest between the North and South, argued that the North ought to introduce system reforms to safeguard its own interests. Thirdly, their views and solutions were influenced by their backgrounds and professional experience as top officials at the World Bank and the United Nations agency respectively. They unlike the Marxist school of thought recognised that the international economic system has benefits to offer to facilitate the global South's development needs and that the developed world should facilitate these needs as it is of interest to them if they do. The Marxist perspective views the system as based on the excesses of capitalism, which is

controlled by the North (Ferraro 2008). Unlike the non-Marxist theorists they argue that the system cannot be restructured to accommodate the South as the benefits from the prevailing system is largely accrued by the North. They consider the notion of the existence of a shared North-South interest as unrealistic given the inability of the South to modify the system (Hoogvelt 1984).

One of the most prominent writers in this viewpoint is André Gunder Frank, a sociologist whose thesis 'Development of Underdevelopment' gained wide attention in this discourse during the 1960's. In line with the non-Marxist scholars of dependency theory, Frank also argued that underdevelopment is a product of historical, economic and political relationship between the North and the South. He writes; 'Historical research demonstrates that contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed metropolitan countries' (Frank 1966: 28).

He further claims that this relation is an integral part of the world capitalist system. According to him, the capitalist system has put in place a rigid international division of labour, which is responsible for the underdevelopment of many areas of the world. This division, he claimed determined the economic, political, social and cultural values in the dependent states in line with the interest of the dominant states. This division he maintains, will remain as it serves the purpose of absorbing surplus capital from the dependent states to the benefit of the dominant states. He argues that a similar division also exists within the underdeveloped states. Frank argues that the most impressive results of development in underdeveloped countries were recorded at periods when their ties to developed countries were the weakest citing countries like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile during the Napoleonic wars and the two world wars as examples. Frank in his writings also made a distinction between a state of being 'undeveloped' and being 'underdeveloped'. He argued that developed states were in the state of undevelopment in the past and were free of the structuralist constraints faced by the underdeveloped states. Thus, stating that the route to development as adopted by the developed countries is not viable for underdeveloped states. He proposes that loosening of ties of the South to the North gives the South a greater probability of achieving development. According to Frank, independence and not interdependence is the way to get out of dependence.

A Marxist analysis of dependency theory can also be found in the works of Immanuel Wallerstein. Wallerstein argued that a 'modern world system' called the Capitalist World Economy emerged from the European feudal system in the 16th century. He is classified as a 'world system theorist' due to his analysis. He argues that this system had resulted in divisions of the world into three, the 'core, periphery and semi-periphery' regions creating a new international division of labour where the economically and politically strong states at the core achieved their status at the expense of the states at the periphery. He attributes this new division of labour to the rise of capitalism, which he argues still, exists in the world today and is the source of exploitation of the periphery states. Wallerstein argues that dependency can be overcome only via revolutionary socialism within a unified world system.

Another prominent Marxist analysis of dependency theory is found in the works of Theotonio dos Santos. His views are quite similar to that of Frank in that he sees dependency as a 'conditioning situation' that causes peripheral countries to be backward and exploited and this status is caused by the international division of labour perpetuated in the capitalist system which allows development to occur in some countries while restricting it in others. Dos Santos (1970) distinguishes between three forms of dependency, which the now underdeveloped nations have gone through namely, colonial dependency, financial-industry dependency and a new type of dependency. Dos Santos labelled this new form of dependency as technological-industrial dependency, he asserts that this has further deepened the structure of dependency in the third world. In a view similar to Frank, dos Santos (1970: 235) considers the reformist ideas of Prebisch and Haq as ineffective to destroy 'these terrible chains imposed by dependent development' and proposes a social revolution as the solution to dependency.

The Marxist view of dependency has some historical validity. However, developments in Asia suggest the North-South economic engagement can lead to positive outcomes in terms of economic and social development. The rapid industrialisation of South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia are some examples of this process.

Critiques of Dependency Theory

As no theoretical approach to the study of social science is without critiques, dependency theory also attracted some criticisms of its own.

Proponents of free-market economics criticise dependency theory for failing to account for the endogenous factors involved in a country's development and attributing blame entirely on external factors (Namkoong 1999). Tony Smith (1979), one of such liberalists contends that the main misconception of dependency theory is its insistence that the key causes of underdevelopment of third world countries are not internal factors but external i.e. the structure of the international system. He asserts that "dependency theory represents a historically concrete attempt of Marxism to absorb southern nationalism into a kind of ideological united front" (Smith 1979: 83). This claim is by no means uncommon, giving the Marxist persuasions within Dependency theory. While any interaction between nations have the inherent risk of exploitation, at least in the beginning, international economic system was not set up for the purpose of exploitation. To do that is to negate the concept of a 'system'. Actors in a system must have symbiotic relationship otherwise the system will collapse and destroy the actors. Having said that, actors must work hard to determine and correct excesses of the system by building the capability to detect and correct the excesses.

Indeed, when confronting situations where rapid development has occurred such as in Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan, the theory encounters some difficulties as it generally accounts for an impoverished South on a global basis, a development that would not have been possible to achieve anywhere if the argument was valid (Moles 1999).

Sanjaya Lall (1975) also criticises the theory, arguing that the concept of dependency is defined 'in a circular manner' i.e. less developed countries are poor because they are dependent. He asserts to the impossibility of defining the concept of dependency and thus cannot be proved to be 'causally related to continuance of underdevelopment' (Lall 1975: 808).

Traditional Marxists have also criticised dependency theory for 'seeking to become a Neo-Marxism without Marxism' (Cueva 1976). The theory is criticised for replacing class conflict with national and regional contradictions (Namkoong 1999), as succinctly put by Thomas Angotti; "While the ultra-'left' line (in the dependency school) fails to consider the contradiction between nations as a part of the international class struggle, the rightist line reduce the class struggle to nothing more than a struggle between nations." (Angotti 1981: 90)

Also, Marxists criticised the view held by Non-Marxist dependency theorists that international trade (unequal exchange) is the key cause in the rise of dependency and underdevelopment, they argue that while it may help to extend underdevelopment it does not create it, that capitalism creates underdevelopment (Weaver and Berger 1973).

In spite of criticisms of dependency theory, it is impossible to deny that dependency theory gave a new perspective on the realities of international political economy and put the underdevelopment status of the global South on the radar. Ideas emanating from dependency scholars have been the source of motivation for a focus on development needs of the global South. Their arguments stressed that the under developed South will remain in their underprivileged state unless drastic measures are taken to provide an equality of participation in a system which was designed to benefit the North. It is this idea that fueled the creation of the Group of 77, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) (Bohkari 1989). Also, the Non-Marxist ideas have been instrumental in defining ways that the countries of the global South can develop while remaining within the current international system. They have stressed the existence of common interest between the North and the South in terms of mutually beneficial industrial production, expansion of trade, supply of raw materials, and technological transfer. They have identified that there is a need to attend to those common issues, areas where the North cannot maintain absolute independence, an important point that holds true in present day economy.

Dependency theory has been most influential in discrediting some western ideas about development in the third world particularly policies and ideas that failed to appreciate the specific developmental needs of the third world. This has shaped discussions in development studies today, raising an awareness of the need to examine the patterns of economic development specific to third world countries and strategies that recognise the specific needs of these countries (Bohkari 1989). This discussion can be linked to the popularity of South-South cooperation, which criticises those misplaced western ideas regarding development in the global South and the conditionalities placed on countries of the South by the West, conditionalities that do not necessarily meet the development needs of these countries (Amanor 2013). The idea that developing nations of the South might find more appropriate and sustainable solutions to development by

collaborating with other developing countries of the South underlies South-South cooperation (Fordelone 2009, Rosseel et al. 2009).

An increasingly cited example of South-South cooperation is Chinese engagement in Africa. Following China's unprecedented growth is its increasing presence in Africa evident in its engagement in the continent on levels on trade, investment and aid. As China-Africa relations continue to evolve, there continues to be a debate on just what China's presence in Africa means for Africa's development. Is China a development partner or Africa's new coloniser?

The next section addresses China's presence in Africa and we shall attempt to understand this phenomenon using dependency theory.

Case – China's Contemporary Presence in Africa

Background

The growing relations between China and Africa have been accompanied with intense scrutiny. There has been a lot of interest from academia, the media, development agencies and western governments, negative and positives views have been expressed, conjectures and accusations have also been made of China's ongoing presence in Africa being an attempt to 'neo-colonise' Africa. Former British foreign secretary, Jack Straw stated that "most of what China has been doing in Africa today, is what we did in Africa 150 years ago" (as cited in Stevenson 2006). Making similar insinuations about China's presence in Africa, then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, in an interview stated "We don't want to see a new colonialism in Africa". Similarly, academics have raised concerns over China's motives and presence in Africa (Taylor 2006). Given the sentiments surrounding China's presence in Africa, we shall attempt to critically view this phenomenon using dependency theory. Firstly, a background of China-Africa relations both historical and at present will be discussed in the subsequent paragraphs, followed by an analysis of the phenomenon from the dependency theory point of view.

China in Africa: retrospective view

Chinese engagement with Africa is not a new phenomenon. Discourse on contemporary China-Africa relations often invokes history as a common reference point (Large 2008), thus we shall begin with an overview of the historical links between China and Africa. Chinese contacts with Africa are believed to date as far back as 140–87 BC during the Han dynasty (Gao 1984). Contacts between China and the African continent predating

1949 were as a result of transnational trade flow with other merchants such as the Arabs and Persians (Alden and Alves 2008)

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 saw China as having no negative record of dealings on the African continent but in fact, it shared a common past with Africa as it too suffered hardship under western imperialism; a point that Beijing is often apt to point out (Alden and Alves 2008, Cooke 2009). China saw the newly independent African states as natural allies and its 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' appeared appealing to these new states (Alden and Alves 2008). Thus, China renewed interests and established official contacts with these states following the Bandung Conference of 1955 (Renard 2011). According to Alden and Alves (2008), the Bandung conference which was aimed at promoting Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and opposing colonialism was a unique platform for China to present itself to African and Asian states as a model of self-reliance, as well as a supporter of Asian-African unity and the independence movements around Asia and Africa. China's relations with Africa during the period of the cold war, which also marked the post-colonial period for Africa was one that was based on ideology (Zhang 2013). Mao's 'Three Worlds Theory' positioned China as a third world nation along with other Asian, African and Latin American countries that chose not to align with neither the United States nor Russia (Alden and Alves 2008). Africa was seen by Beijing as the ground for ideological competition with the United States, the Soviet Union and other European influences, as well as a place to export its brand of socialist revolution to (Alden and Alves 2008, Renard 2011). In this period, China signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement with Guinea in 1960, granted Ghana an interest-free loan of US\$20 Million, established diplomatic relations with Mali upon its independence, and trade relations the following year (Renard 2011). China also gave diplomatic and military support in Southern Africa particularly to liberation movements ideologically aligned with Maoist China and not the Soviet Union (Alden and Alves 2008).

In North Africa, relations were also established with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Sino-African relations were maintained in the early 1960's, however by 1966 China's relations with some African states had turned sour, as China was increasingly viewed with suspicion that it was seen trying to export revolution into some of the countries resulting in Chinese diplomats being expelled from some African countries and

diplomatic ties severed by other countries (Alden and Alves 2008), also the cultural revolution in China contributed to the decline in Sino-African relations in that era. However, relations did improve in the late 1970's with Beijing normalising diplomatic relations with all African countries irrespective of their ideological differences and increasing its overseas development assistance. African countries welcomed financial aid and technical assistance from China, they were seen as offering more advantages than those of traditional western donors (Ayodele and Sotola 2014). As adeptly put by Alden and Alves (2008: 20), "The West's employment of conditionalities, merely the latest in the decades of humiliating experiences at the hands of former colonial powers and the United States, echoes the humiliations of the 'unequal treaties' foisted on China by the West in the nineteenth century. Indeed, China's ability to recognise this is part of the genius of its foreign policy endeavours toward Africa". Notably, China's development aid to Africa during this period was concentrated in fewer countries and on highly visible projects such as the Tazara railway –a railway line linking Tanzania to Zambia– a project which several western powers declined to fund (Renard 2011). China's commitment to providing development assistance and technical support to African countries was seen as quite remarkable as China itself at the time was quite poor compared to some African countries (Renard 2011). This renewed relationship contributed to China gaining admission into the UN with votes from 26 African countries. The introduction of economic reforms in China by Deng Xiaoping during the post-Mao era led to a shift in Sino-African relations, while the official principles of engagement remained the same, relations were no longer based on ideological interest but on commercial interest (Larkin 1971, Schiere 2011).

China in Africa: today

The new era of Sino-African relations ushered in relations devoid of ideological interests of the past but a focus on practical results, mutual benefits and common development driven by China's developmental objectives and its increasing energy demand (Schiere 2011).

China's need to secure energy resources to sustain its economic development and its international push for new markets and resources has in part necessitated the commercial focus to its ongoing presence in Africa (Konings 2007). Chinese economic

activity on the continent involves both state and non-state actors, the Chinese Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce have been critical in establishing and maintaining bilateral relationships with African governments, several state-owned banks of China have supported China's presence in Africa. EXIM Bank (China Export-Import Bank) established in 1994 promotes Chinese FDI (foreign direct investment) and exports especially in the infrastructure sector (Wang 2007). China Development Bank (CDB) also founded in 1994, launched the China-Africa Development Fund in 2006 at the Beijing Summit of FOCAC (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation) to support Chinese FDI in Africa (SCIO 2013), SINOSURE (China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation) has provided insurance against risks involved in Chinese exports and foreign investment since 2001 (Renard 2011). The non-state actors representing China's presence in Africa include multinationals, small and medium sized enterprises, traders who are generally seeking economic opportunities (Osei and Mabiru 2010, Renard 2011) and their activities cuts across different sectors of the African economy.

China has become Africa's largest trading partner (Chen et al. 2015), bi-lateral trade between China and Africa rose steadily between 2000 and 2014. According to Eom et al. (2016), the volumes of China-Africa trade grew at a rate of over 40% between 2004 and 2009, and has since 2009, slowed to an average of 10% per year. In 2015, China's trade with Africa reached approximately US\$172 billion in 2015 (CARI 2016a), with its top five African trade partners being South Africa, Angola, Nigeria, Egypt and Algeria. Crude oil dominates China's imports from Africa, the continent being China's second largest source of crude oil after the middle-east in 2013, its top suppliers include Angola, Sudan, the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria (Alessi and Xu 2015). Other commodities such as iron ores, and copper also feature in China's imports from Africa (Eom et al. 2016).

Chinese investment in Africa while trailing behind China-Africa trade volumes remains modest (Eom et al. 2016). Data compiled by the China-Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University shows Chinese FDI stock in Africa came to a total of US\$32.35 billion in 2014 showing an increase from the 2013 volume which was US\$26 billion USD (CARI 2016b). While Chinese investments in Africa is growing, China remains a small player compared to other western countries (Chen et al. 2015), a report from UNCTAD shows that the flow of Chinese FDI into Africa during 2013–2014 amounts to about 4.4% of the total FDI to Africa. China invests in 49 African

countries (Chen et al. 2015), its top five destinations in 2014 were South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (CARI 2016b). These investments also cut across a wide range of sectors, according to China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), Chinese investments as of 2011 was largely in the sectors of mining (31%), banking and finance (20%), construction (16%) and manufacturing (15%) (SCIO 2013). Chinese investments in sectors such as manufacturing and construction is notable, according to Brautigam (2016) as at the end of 2014, MOFCOM approved a number of manufacturing projects in countries like Nigeria (128), Ethiopia (80), South Africa (77), Tanzania (48) and Ghana (44). Likewise, China has signed infrastructure-financing agreements with over 35 African countries, the largest recipients being Nigeria, Angola, Sudan and Ethiopia (Renard 2011). Investments in these sectors (manufacturing and construction) are particularly significant and have important implications for Africa. As apart from helping to combat Africa's deficient infrastructure, investments in these sectors could potentially generate human capital development gains through employment and opportunities for skills and technology transfer for local populace and firms. In terms of actors, Chinese state owned enterprises (SOEs) dominate strategic extractive sectors of oil, ores and infrastructures and are usually subsidised with grants from Chinese state owned banks. Chinese medium to large sized enterprises are mainly found in the manufacture of goods, business services, wholesale trade, telecommunications sectors while the small sized enterprises are found in the retail and light industry sectors (Renard 2011).

China's development assistance to Africa is increasing. China is fast becoming an important aid partner in the continent. Be that as it may, China's aid is still very low in comparison to the traditional western aid donors (Brautigam 2011). China has had an African aid program since the mid 1950's, with its official development assistance to Africa provided through grants, concessional (fixed-rate, low-interest) loans, zero interest loans. (Zafar 2007, Brautigam 2011). At the 3rd summit of FOCAC, China promised to double its size of aid to Africa. China's aid to Africa appears to be focused on industrial and agricultural productivity, funds are mostly directed towards funding infrastructural development, agriculture, industry, public facilities and provided on a non-interference policy basis which means there are no preconditions on the receiving countries to implement certain democratisation policies or advanced human rights policies, etc. (SCIO 2013). While that of other traditional aid partners such as the USA

is often conditional and directed towards programs that support public health, democratisation efforts, counterterrorism cooperation, improvement of regulatory institutions and governance (Zafar 2007). According to data compiled by CARI (2016c), the Chinese government offered loans worth US\$86.3 billion to African governments and State owned enterprises between 2000–2014, with Angola being the largest recipient followed by Ethiopia (US\$12.3 billion), Sudan (US\$5.6 billion), Kenya (US\$5.2 billion) and the DRC (US\$4.9 billion). A sizable portion of these loans financed much-needed infrastructural projects in Africa such as the Addis Ababa–Adama expressway of Ethiopia and the Kribi deep-water port of Cameroon, and rebuilding war-torn infrastructure in Angola. From 2010 to 2012, China granted 18,743 government scholarships to students from several African countries including South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon, etc. Other projects include the building of schools, agricultural technology demonstration centres in (Liberia, Rwanda, Tanzania, etc.) hospitals and anti-malarial centres across several locations in Africa (Angola, Zimbabwe, etc.) (SCIO 2013).

The strong demand for oil and other mineral resources outside of Africa, particularly demand from China positively impacted the growth rate of certain African economies creating conditions for better terms of trade and a higher volume in exports (Besada et al. 2011, Chen et al. 2015). Similarly, Chinese investments contributed to the continent's growth rate (Ayodele and Sotola 2014). According to Chen et al. (2015), Chinese engagement in Africa has in part impacted Africa's growth rate positively, the average African economy realised a surge in per capita growth rate from 0.6% per annum in the 1990's to 2% in the 2000's.

As China undergoes a slow-down in economic growth as it rebalances its economy, it is expected that the volume of China-Africa trade and investments will also decline (Calabrese 2016). In 2015, China-Africa trade witnessed a slowdown in value from US\$222 billion in the previous year to US\$172 billion, the recent drop in commodity prices has also affected the value of Africa's exports all around with commodity exporters being hardest hit. However, Lin (2016) posits that opportunities still abound for Africa in sectors such as manufacturing particularly as China restructures its economy away from manufacturing, Africa could potentially capture some of the manufacturing jobs that will be relocated as labour and production costs rises in China. According to Calabrese (2016), projects like “One Belt, One Road initiative” could

potentially boost African economies particularly those of Kenya, Djibouti and Egypt as the inclusion of their ports in the silk maritime route will lead to more investments in infrastructure and an increase in regional trade. Commitments made at the 6th FOAC summit suggest continued economic partnerships between China and African countries.

As the relationship between China and Africa deepens, so does the scholarly interest on the relationship across different fields of study. The subsequent paragraph discusses China's presence in Africa through the lens of dependency theory.

Discussion: The case of China in Africa vis-à-vis dependency theory

Should China's presence in Africa then be viewed as detrimental to Africa's development, an attempt at neocolonialism or a 'diversification of dependency'?

We argue that a critical point, which dependency theorists pointed out as being the root of inequality between the North and the South, was their historical past, specifically colonialism and imperial linkages that persisted after decolonisation. Examining Sino-African relations under this assumption points out very important points of departure between China's relations with Africa and North-South relations. Firstly, China does not have an imperial heritage in Africa as colonialism under the West, rather it shares a common past with Africa as it too underwent hardship under western imperialism, a fact which as mentioned before, China is apt to point out in its diplomacy with Africa (Alden and Alves, 2008, Cooke 2009). Secondly, China's relation with Africa saw China stand in solidarity with African countries in its national independence movements, forging a new and thriving relationship with the continent (Renard 2011). Historical relations between China and Africa echoes Beijing's anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist stance, its support for newly independent states in Africa is often invoked to corroborate and assure Africa and the rest of the world that China is not out to control its economic and political systems (Mohan and Power 2008). Within the engagement between China and Africa is China's continued stress on South-South co-operation based on perceived 'similarities' between China and African countries. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during his tour of Africa in 1964 referred to China's support for Africa's struggles against imperialism as the 'poor helping the poor', while China's interactions in Africa during the cold war era was often linked to its ideological battle with the United States and the USSR. However, China's ongoing engagement in Africa is devoid of this ideological undertone, while largely commercial, it stresses a willingness to partner with Africa towards achieving their common development and

to foster a cooperation that results in helping and supporting each other on the world stage.

China-Africa engagement can be seen as a practical example of South-South cooperation (SSC). China is often seen as a more viable development partner for Africa based on the similarities of socio-economic condition and development issues in China and Africa, offering an access to appropriate technologies and solutions (UNOSSC 2015). China has carried out several SSC projects in Africa in cooperation with UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), namely the 'lighting up Rural Africa' project, a project aimed at providing electricity in rural communities in Africa, under the project, 14 small hydropower projects have been carried out in Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania, as well as the Shiwang'andu hydro power plant in Zambia. Other projects include agricultural projects, and technical exchanges and cooperation (UNOSSC 2015).

Considering the scale and nature of trade, investments and aid, China's presence in Africa plays an important role in increasing developmental opportunities in Africa (Ayodele and Sotola 2014). While China has intensified competition in the manufacturing sectors in some African countries and its rising demand for oil and other raw materials raises the risks of further subjecting the continent to a role of supplier of raw materials and making some countries such as Angola, Nigeria, Gabon, etc. more vulnerable to volatile commodity price fluctuation (Ademola et al. 2009). African countries still stand to benefit from commodity revenues, and could potentially use their commodities sectors to spur industrialisation (Mohan 2016). Findings from research carried out by Morris et al. (2012) in their 'Making the Most of Commodities Program' (MMCP) suggests that by creating meaningful backward and forward linkages in their resource sectors, countries could actually foster wider industrial development as has been shown in the case of Nigeria (oil sector), Angola (oil sector), Botswana (diamonds) and Gabon (timber) where local content policies have been used to promote job creation, skills and technology transfer and value added production (Morris et al. 2012). Furthermore, China's exports into Africa actually cater to low-income populace in these countries and leads to reduction in prices of consumer goods in Africa something African low-income masses need (Ajakaiye et al. 2009, Renard 2011).

There have been a lot of criticisms on the volume of trade imbalances in Sino-African trade and this has often been compared to the great imbalances under North-South

engagement and echoes the concerns of dependency theorists. China maintains a trade surplus with Africa, however, there have been attempts from the Chinese government to address this, by gradually increasing its imports from Africa, also by granting 'zero customs duty' status to imports from some African countries (Danchie 2010). According to a UNOSSC (United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation) 2015 report on China's South-South cooperation, China removed customs duty to products coming from least developed African countries, products that make up to 93% of the countries' exports to China. In addition to that, China through its establishments of special economic zones (SEZs) in selected African countries supports export diversification. China could potentially be a catalyst for the promotion of industrial activity in some selected African countries where Chinese funded special economic zones have been established. Not only will this have an impact on the exports of African countries to China, it has the potential to further attract investments in much needed sectors, promote manufacturing, and diversify the economy from being majorly extractive (Brautigam and Tang 2011). According to Sandrey and Edinger (2011), these zones could potentially contribute to the backward and forward linkages in the host economies, also create massive employment opportunities and generate greater foreign exchange reserves through more diversified sources of income. While not all the zones have begun operations, some have and have been moderately successful, an example is the Ogun-Guangdong Free Trade Zone, one of the Chinese SEZs in Nigeria. The zone has had considerable impact on the economy of the local area in Ogun state, Nigeria, contributing to employment generation (currently employs about 4,500 local workers), considerable skills and technology transfer, and increased economic activity in the local area (Caruso et al. 2016).

Dependency theorists highlighted the highly exploitative relations in North-South relations and how the third world has been condemned to the role of supplier of raw materials blocking the chances for industrialisation. Given this, the range of relations within Sino-African relations suggests that Africa is not relegated to being just a supplier of primary commodities. While China possesses the main industrial productive capacity in this engagement, there are opportunities for Africa to also engage in productive activities within the engagement. As mentioned previously, as of the end of 2014, MOFCOM had approved a significant total number of 377 manufacturing projects in these five countries Nigeria (128), Ethiopia (80), South Africa (77),

Tanzania (48) and Ghana (44) (Brautigam 2016). These projects would contribute to the industrial capacity of these countries. Other examples of Chinese investments contributing to industrialisation in Africa include the case of the Huajian group, who set up a shoe manufacturing factory in Ethiopia in 2011 and has plans of setting up an industrial park. As at the end of 2013, the Huajian shoe factory had created 4000 jobs for locals and had begun manufacturing shoes in Ethiopia for export to the global market (Lin 2016). Another example is the Yuemei Group in Nigeria, which successfully set up a textile industry park in Nigeria in 2008 (Pigato and Tang 2015). Furthermore, in Rwanda, Chinese investors set up a garment manufacturing factory, C&H garments in 2015, and has so far employed about 500 workers, trained them and is currently exporting from Rwanda to foreign markets (Lin 2016). The aforementioned manufacturing investments would further increase Africa's capacity to produce and trade value added products and could provide opportunities for balancing China-Africa trade. Not only are such Chinese investments creating employment and training opportunities for locals but could also facilitate industrialisation in host countries in Africa. African governments can leverage Chinese investments for socio-economic development in their respective countries by using concrete industrial and localisation policies and strategy followed through with effective implementation. A few African governments have had a measure of success in exerting agency to direct Chinese investments to crucial sectors of their economy, as seen in the case of Ethiopia with the shoe factory and in the case of Rwanda with the garment factory. Officially, within FOCAC, there is a focus on cooperation to foster industrialisation in Africa, the Chinese President Xi in his speech at the FOCAC 2015 summit, announced a new 'China-Africa Industrialization Program', a program targeted at enhancing Africa's industrial capacity that signifies China's support for Africa's industrialisation and includes a pledge of US\$10 billion to set up a new China-Africa industrial cooperation fund. As part of the commitments laid out in FOCAC 2015, China plans to set up industrial parks, regional vocational education centres and capacity building schools. These commitments also include plans to train 200,000 technical personnel and provide training opportunities for 40,000 African personnel in China (Eom et al. 2016). While it will take a while for these commitments to be implemented, these plans suggest China's continued commitment to partner with African countries in fostering development.

Chinese investments in Africa open up opportunities for employment and training contributing to skill building, technology transfer and human capital development. Though there have been criticisms of Chinese investments in Africa, particularly on the potential of these investments to create jobs, to add value to industries in Africa (Ancharaz 2013), and the labour practices of Chinese companies (Baah and Jauch 2009, Flynn 2013). These criticisms have often not been based on concrete data (Oya and McKinley 2016). Research carried out by Sautman and Yan (2015) on over 400 Chinese enterprises and projects in 40 plus African countries found that over 85% of their workforce are local African workers, while there is some variation in countries, cases of lower than average localisation rate was mainly in Angola and Algeria due to years of civil war which has led to de-skilling of the populace and migration of skilled workers to Europe respectively. Chen et al. (2016) in their study of Chinese manufacturing firms in Nigeria and their potential for skills and technology transfer, found that firms sampled employ 80% of their workforce locally, and engage in workforce training. Their findings also showed cases of positive technology transfer and linkages to local suppliers in the firms surveyed. Their research concludes that not only can Chinese FDI in manufacturing generate local employment but can contribute to industrialisation by providing opportunities for skills and technology transfer, promoting linkages with domestic firms which could integrate local firms in global manufacturing supply chains and increasing opportunities for developing countries to upgrade their domestic production.

We argue that focusing rather narrowly on the misconceptions surrounding China's economic activities in Africa often leads to a short-sighted analysis of the relations between Beijing and the continent. China has chosen to engage Africa in a distinctive manner evident in the FOCAC. Using the platform of FOCAC, China seeks to differentiate itself from the 'prescriptive, intrusive and hierarchical (donor and recipient)' approach of western actors by emphasising that its engagement with Africa is one of mutual benefit, win-win engagement that promotes common development (Alden and Large 2011) espousing a spirit of partnership (Zhang 2013). Dependency theorists challenged both western and soviet models of development and ceased to recognise these models as ideal for development in the third world. They reject the notion that all nations can attain development by following prescribed stages and prerequisites to growth that have been prescribed by the industrialised world. China is

seen to promote what is referred to as the 'Beijing Consensus' in Africa (Besada et al. 2011), a 'model' that seeks to replace the widely-criticised and largely disappointing Washington Consensus, a *prescriptive, Washington-knows-best approach* to economic growth and development (Ramo 2004). This western approach espoused by western agencies often accompanied its financial assistance with conditionalities, which have not always suited the developmental needs of the recipient country and have in fact been detrimental to some developing economies (Stiglitz 2002, Rodrik 2006). African leaders and masses often see the western approach accompanied by their conditions, which are often centered on economic liberalisation, democratisation, human rights, as condescending and hypocritical (Cooke 2009). Thus, making China's 'respect for sovereignty' and policy of non-interference, which has often been questioned, one that appeals to many African leaders and masses (Cooke 2009).

Thus, China's approach is one that has offered and offers Africa an alternative in its choice of development partners and model (He 2013). China's rise in the world economy is thus seen as an example for Africa, China is seen as opening up new prospects for Africa's development (Ayodele and Sotola 2014). Africans often view China's engagement in their countries as being pragmatic with quick implementation and deliverables and in line with their priorities for the continent (Cooke 2009). More so, within China's engagement in Africa, there is 'room for negotiation' (Mohan and Lampert 2012) which is further supported under the FOCAC platform, something that was mostly lacking in North-South relations due to great power imbalance between the nations involved (Girvan 2007) a point echoed in the dependency literature. China's presence in Africa is not one that is totally lacking in African agency, according to Mohan and Lampert (2012: 109) "African actors have been able to shape these relationships in ways that advance their own interests and aspirations and or produce forms of wider social benefit", this signifies that China's presence in Africa gives the leeway and is being steered (Mohan and Lampert 2012) to be beneficial to Africa's development.

Conclusions

China's presence in Africa is an opportunity for Africa to practice self-reliance that translates not into the utopian ideal of Autarky but controlled engagement beneficial to the socio-economic developmental needs of Africa. We argue that what China's

presence means for Africa beyond economic partnership, cooperation and solidarity is a challenge to question the status quo, re-orient their values and adopt an inward focus on their developmental needs and priorities, letting that dictate their economic engagements with other countries after all China can be said to have towed the same road towards development. While the ideology, official discourse and framework guiding China-Africa relations hold the promise of a win-win relationship and indeed China has a lot to contribute towards Africa's development, we stress that, like any engagement between two or more actors there are risks and opportunities. As China-Africa relations continue to evolve, it is clear that in order for Africa to maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks in its relationship with China, African leaders need to assert more agency and ownership and approach the relationship with clearly articulated interests, policies and strategies that promote the welfare of their citizens and facilitate development in crucial sectors of their economy. It is also in China's interest to remain a responsible partner particularly in relation to regulating Chinese enterprises in Africa, promoting a more balanced China-Africa trade and addressing financial burdens that could arise due to China's loans to African countries. From the dependency point of view, we opine that China-Africa relationship suggests a case of growing interdependency. A new direction for future research should be from a viewpoint of increasing interdependency between systems and its implications for development.

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