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**AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON CHINA-  
AFRICA: GAUGING POPULAR  
PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR ECONOMIC  
AND POLITICAL DETERMINANTS**

*by Aleksandra Gadzala and Marek Hanusch*

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## **African Perspectives on China-Africa: Gauging Popular Perceptions and their Economic and Political Determinants**

### **Abstract**

China's recent political and economic inroads into Africa have generated much excitement in the current literature, with scholars and policymakers endeavoring to assess the merits and risks implicit in this renewed engagement. Absent from the literature, however, are systematic analyses of African perceptions of the rapidly growing China-Africa links and their underlying determinants. This article fills this void by examining indeed not only African attitudes towards China's African presence, but deciphering the very considerations informing these views. Employing multi-level modeling techniques, we estimate the effects of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, Sino-African trade, and African notions of democracy and human rights on African attitudes regarding 'China-in-Africa.' Our results suggest that the negative rhetoric emanating from much of the surrounding literature tells only part of the story, as African perceptions of China are found to be near equivalent to those held vis-à-vis Western countries. The results contained in this study further illustrate the adverse effects of increasing Chinese imports on African attitudes, and the negligible impact of FDI in this regard. In keeping with mainstream literature, this article further finds that Africans who attach particular value to human rights and democracy are overall largely critical of the burgeoning Chinese presence across the continent. These results are predicated upon a data-set containing twenty African states supplied by Afrobarometer Round 4.

The Chinese are doing more than the G8 in making poverty history. If a G8 country had wanted to rebuild the stadium, we'd still be here holding meetings.

The Chinese just come and do it.

- Sierra Leonean Ambassador to Beijing

What do Africans think of the burgeoning Chinese presence in their respective countries? To what extent do Africans believe China can aid their countries, especially as compared to Western and other African actors? Are African perceptions as negative as often portrayed in Western media,<sup>1</sup> or is the outlook in fact more favorable?

The debate over the implications of China's engagement with Africa has been waged for decades among scholars and policymakers alike, intensifying in the last few years with the augmenting scale and scope of China's African activities. Especially since the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in Beijing in November in 2006, China has been heavily engaged in trade with and investment in the African continent. Trade between China and Africa reached an all-time high of US\$106.8 billion in early 2009;<sup>2</sup> Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) outflows to Africa rose to US\$17.8 billion in 2006, and are expected to reach \$72 billion by 2011.<sup>3</sup> In October 2009, too, China overtook the United States to become South Africa's biggest export destination in the first half of 2009,<sup>4</sup> reinforcing the Asian country's push to build trade links with Africa.

Such overt expressions of China's augmenting economic and diplomatic presence are being met with a diversity of reactions, ranging from "excitement to panic, disappointment and uncertainty, and not just from Africans but from the whole international community."<sup>5</sup> China is, for instance, regarded as a welcomed competitor, positioned to provide Africa with leverage towards traditional donors and address the structural imbalances of the international economic system within which many African states are facing marginalization.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, China is also seen as exploiting African economies, with little genuine concern for their sustainable economic or political development. Rival voices in the literature point especially to the damaging effects brought with the influx of cheap Chinese commodities into African markets;<sup>7</sup> the substandard working conditions maintained by many Chinese firms;<sup>8</sup> and the detrimental

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<sup>1</sup> For examples see: Serge Michel, "When China met Africa," *Foreign Policy*, 1 May 2008; Ali Askouri, "China's Investment in Sudan: Destroying Communities." Pambazuka News, 2006; Elizabeth Economy and Karen Monaghan, "The Perils of Beijing's Africa Strategy." *International Herald Tribune*, 2 November 2006; Sharon LaFraniere and John Grobler, "China Spreads Aid in Africa, with a Catch." *The New York Times*, 22 September 2009;

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua News. "Chinese-African trade volume hits all time high to reach \$106.8 bln." January, 2009.  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/19/content\\_10684845.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-01/19/content_10684845.htm)

<sup>3</sup> The Economic Intelligence Unit. "World Investment Prospects To 2011: Foreign Direct Investment and the Challenge OF Political Risk." 2007. [http://www.eiu.com/site\\_info.asp?info\\_name=eiu\\_world\\_investment\\_prospects\\_2007&rf=0](http://www.eiu.com/site_info.asp?info_name=eiu_world_investment_prospects_2007&rf=0)

<sup>4</sup> Reuters. "China becomes S.Africa's top export destination." October, 2009.

<http://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJOE5910FS20091002>

<sup>5</sup> Chidaushe, Moreblessings. "China's Grand Re-Entrance into Africa - Mirage or Oasis?" In Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks (eds.), *African Perspectives on China in Africa*. Oxford: Fahamu, 2007. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Davies, Penny. *China and the End of Poverty in Africa - Towards Mutual Benefit?* Sundbyberg, Sweden: Diakonia, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See: Harry Broadman, "China-African Trade and Investment: The Vanguard of South-South Commerce in the Twenty-First Century." In *China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, 87-108. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009; Gregor Dobler, "South-South business relations in practice: Chinese merchants in Oshikango, Namibia." Working Paper, Institute for Social Anthropology, Universitat Basel: 2005; Andrea Goldstein, Nicolas Pinaud and Helmut Reisen, "China's Boom: What's in it for Africa? A Trade Perspective." In *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, ed. Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 36. London: Hurst & Company, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance: Ching Kwan Lee, "Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves." *The China Quarterly*, 199(2009): 647-66; Paul Hare, "China and Zambia: The All-Weather Friendship Hits Stormy Weather." *The Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, Vol VII /Issue 5 (8 March 2007 2007); Serge Michel and Michel Beuret, *China Safari: On the Trail of Beijing's Expansion in Africa*. New York: Nation Books, 2009.

ramifications of China's disregard for human rights standards and Beijing's persistent courtship of the continent's rogue regimes.<sup>9</sup>

One essential missing component in the debate over the place and implications of China's contemporary engagement with Africa, however, is the lack of systematic empirical evidence gauging not only African popular perceptions of China's influence, but indeed the very determinants of these perceptions. Few studies have yet to explicate African attitudes towards China; when accounted for, such views are articulated through anecdotal reporting,<sup>10</sup> with little genuine attention paid to their underlying motivations. Findings emerging from the limited number of systematic studies on African views of China suggest that the largely negative rhetoric emanating from much of the literature may indeed be exaggerated.<sup>11</sup> In making such claims, however, these studies fail to account for why this is the case, leading senior academics and policymakers to question "how much we really know about African publics' perception of China."<sup>12</sup>

Drawing on survey data collected in Round 4 (2008) of the Afrobarometer, we address the question of what Africans<sup>13</sup> think about the Chinese presence in their respective countries and why, in so doing disentangling the factors informing the expressed views. We operationalize 'presence' in terms of two key economic macro-variables - trade and FDI - examining the effects of both on African attitudes. In keeping with the primary cleavages informing the China-Africa discourse, concomitantly with economic factors we consider also political ones, namely human rights and democracy. The importance Africans attach to both issues arguably directly influences their views of the place and implications of China's involvement in their respective countries. Finally, we investigate if and how African perceptions of China's African engagement diverge from attitudes towards that of other international actors: the West (the United States, as well as Britain, Portugal and France - i.e. the former colonial powers included in the study) and other African states, Nigeria and South Africa in particular. The answers to all of these questions bear important consequences for our understanding of not only how Africans perceive outsider - and especially Chinese - activities in the continent, but also the particular policy issues they identify as most salient vis-à-vis such external influences.

The article proceeds as follows. After briefly examining theories from the existing literature, we posit our theoretical assumptions of how Chinese trade and FDI, as well as African attitudes towards human rights and democracy, are likely to influence African perceptions of China. Employing multi-level modeling techniques we then test our hypotheses with individual-level data from Round 4 of the Afrobarometer. To extract the nuances of the political factors, we further compare African attitudes towards China with views held of other international actors. We conclude with general observations and considerations for future research.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example: Mario Esteban 'The Chinese *Amigo*: Implications for the Development of Equatorial Guinea', *The China Quarterly*, 199 (2009): 667-85; Donovan Chau, "Political Warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: U.S. Capabilities and Chinese Operations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa." Carlisle, PA: Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2007; Human Rights Watch. "Sudan, Oil and Human Rights." Brussels, London, New York, Washington D.C.: 2003; John Blessing Karumbidza, "Win-win economic cooperation: can China save Zimbabwe's economy?" In *African Perspectives on China in Africa*, ed. Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks, 87-106. Cape Town, Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu, 2007; Stephen Brown and Chandra Lekha Sriram, "China's Role in Human Rights Abuses in Africa: Clarifying Issues of Culpability." In *China into Africa: Trade, Aid and Influence*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, 250-271. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> For examples, see: Firoze Manji and Stephen Marks, ed. *African perspectives on China in Africa*. Cape Town, Nairobi and Oxford: Fahamu, 2007; Carol Wang and Danielle Flam, "Bridging the gap: experiences and attitudes in Sino-African relations." *China Rights Forum*, February 2007: 196-208.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance: Pew Research Center, "Global Unease with Major World Powers: 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," 27 June 2007; Bob Tortota, "Early Impressions: Africans on US, Chinese Leadership," 9 November 2006; Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links." *The China Quarterly* 199 (2009): 728-759.

<sup>12</sup> "China's Africa strategy: a new approach to development and diplomacy?" Carnegie Endowment, 12 December 2006. <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=941>

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this article the term 'Africans' is used in reference to individuals from the twenty countries surveyed in this study: Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South African, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

## THE MULTIFARIOUS FACES OF CHINA-AFRICA LINKS

Existing literature on Sino-African relations is highly polarized, with scholars on the one hand extolling increased Chinese investment as a means of stimulating economic development in each of Africa's fifty-four countries with which Beijing now enjoys diplomatic relations, and opponents on the other hand cautioning over the potentially detrimental repercussions of such investments and their inevitable political ramifications.

According to theories emanating from the former, sympathetic literature, despite the surrounding dubious business practices, China's 'oil-for-infrastructure' contracts<sup>14</sup> are providing Africa with what it needs - "quality capital that actually funds investment, jobs for its people and that elusive growth."<sup>15</sup> These are, as Dambiso Moyo observes, "things that [Western] aid promised, but has consistently failed to deliver."<sup>16</sup> Over the past few years China has indeed invested in a multitude of construction projects across Africa, diversifying in recent years beyond its initially narrow focus on the continent's oil and mining industries. Projects now span a broad range of sectors: roads in Ethiopia, hospitals in Kenya, national radio and television broadcast buildings in Congo, and communications satellites in Nigeria - these are but several examples of the innumerable billion-dollar projects China has undertaken in recent years.

Because a sizable portion of Chinese FDI is directed into African construction and infrastructure sectors, too, China is furthermore seen as opening new trade routes across the continent - or indeed reopening pre-existing ones. In Kenya, for instance, the Chinese corporation China Wu Yi is rebuilding a 530km road from Isiolo to Moyale, linking Kenya's farms and ports to landlocked Ethiopia. The stretch of road is one of the last unpaved sections of the Great North Road, a British colonial dream to connect Cape Town to North Africa. Yet where Britain and post-independence Kenyan governments failed, China is leading the way, helping to rebuild a major trade route that will open up the northern half of Kenya, a region that has effectively been sealed off for one-hundred years.<sup>17</sup> Especially for landlocked countries which incur high transport costs, the provision of such trade corridors - and the ensuing access to new and varied markets - is celebrated as facilitating economic development in previously "hopeless"<sup>18</sup> states.

Accordingly, in a recent survey of 250 African university students and faculty across nine countries,<sup>19</sup> Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong<sup>20</sup> found that respondents in all countries are on average 'satisfied' with Chinese companies that work on large projects in their respective countries, with a majority further observing that China's policies in the continent are 'somewhat beneficial' overall. Similarly, a 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Survey (entitled *Global Unease with Major World Powers*) finds that favorable views of China outnumber critical judgments by two-to-one or more in every country save for South Africa, where opinion is divided. In both Mali and Ivory Coast, more than nine-in-ten (92%) hold favorable views of China; positive opinions similarly overwhelm critical judgments in Senegal and Kenya, where 81% view China favorably. Three-quarters of those surveyed in Ghana and Nigeria also hold an approving view, as do two-thirds of Ethiopians.

The argument emerging from one sub-section of the China-Africa literature is thus that "China's African role is wider, more sophisticated and more business-like than any other country's at any time in the post-war period."<sup>21</sup> Employing Chinese state rhetoric, the relations are said to be of "mutual benefit."<sup>22</sup> In the face of increasing Chinese FDI inflows into the continent, we would thus expect Africans to be more likely to favor

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<sup>14</sup> Such contracts grant Chinese companies access to a country's oil reserves in exchange for the construction of various projects, generally selected by the recipient state. For more see: Dunia P Zongwe, "Ore for Infrastructure: The Contractual Form of Economic Complementarities Between China and Africa." *The China Monitor* 42 (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. 111.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Hull, Bryson. "Chinese build new highway to 'lost' Kenya." *International Herald Tribune*, 22 August 2008.

<sup>18</sup> "Mobile Phones and Development: Calling an End to Poverty," *The Economist*, July 9, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia

<sup>20</sup> Sautman, Barry and Yan Hairong. "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links." *The China Quarterly*. 199, September 2009. 728-759

<sup>21</sup> Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid*, 106.

<sup>22</sup> The Irish Times. "Ambassador insists 'mutual benefits' underpin relationships with Africa. 26 August 2008. <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/world/2008/0826/1219679952506.html>

links with China as such investments endow the continent with key inputs other international actors have hitherto been unable to successfully provide. Chinese investments in Africa are not, however, always so enthusiastically extolled. Dot Keet cautions that “whatever good intentions the Chinese government may say it has, the objective and fundamental problem is that these relations are based upon highly uneven levels of development and a very different capacity to benefit from such interactions and cooperation [...] there cannot be genuine win-win development scenarios in such a situation.”<sup>23</sup> Even with respect to Chinese infrastructure projects, which we expect will elicit positive perceptions of the Chinese among Africans, there exist palpable imbalances which indubitably contribute to mounting displeasure regarding China’s augmenting role across the continent. Namely, Chinese firms in Africa hire the largest percentage of workers from China, accounting for 17 per cent of total employee numbers.<sup>24</sup> While emerging evidence suggests that, on average, Chinese construction firms employ an equal number of Chinese and local workers,<sup>25</sup> locals are overwhelmingly confined to manual labor work, with managerial positions filled by Chinese nationals. Of the senior management team at Chambishi Mine in Zambia, for instance, eleven are Chinese and just one is Zambian.

Disapproving observations of the China-Africa partnership are furthermore rooted in the perceived damaging effects of the persistent trade imbalances between China and individual African states, as well as the detrimental effects of China’s “cheque-book diplomacy,”<sup>26</sup> which pays little heed to matters of governance or human rights. With respect to the former, scholars stress the damaging effects of Chinese imports from Africa - confined as they are to the continent’s extractive mining and forestry industries - which may derail the endeavors of African commodity producers to diversify away from traditional exports. The influx of cheap Chinese commodities into African markets further undercuts local manufacturers and entrepreneurs, particularly in the very few labor-intensive low-skill sectors where Africa could indeed diversify away from commodity production. Among the most affected of the continent’s producers is the textile industry, with foreclosures documented in states as diverse as Lesotho and Kenya. In South Africa, for instance, more than 800 firms and 60,000 workers have become unemployed as a result of the influx of Chinese textiles.<sup>27</sup> In Zambia, where Chinese sell their goods at often one-third of local prices, local producers face similar hardship. A former Zambian textile factory worker observes: “The cost of production for a single Zambian-made shirt is four to five times higher than a shirt from China. Even though the quality of locally-made clothes is better, a consumer will still opt for the cheaper products because of the low wages that the majority of people in Zambia earn.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, despite the losses being incurred by many of the continent’s producers, “urban consumers [...] enjoy higher purchasing power as import prices [on Chinese goods] are lower compared to prices of previous import sources or domestic products.”<sup>29</sup> The influx of cheap Chinese commodities into African markets thus carries divergent welfare implications across varying population segments.

Relatedly, of course, is the impact of Chinese imports from Africa on African perceptions of the Chinese. Studies posit the expansion and diversification of a country’s export sector as a “robust, empirical determinant”<sup>30</sup> of long-term growth in many developing countries. Exports, it is argued, will lead to faster economic growth by increasing the rate of capital formation; increasing specialization and expanding the

<sup>23</sup> Keet, Dot. “The role and impact of Chinese economic operations in Africa.” In *China’s New Role in Africa and the South: A Search for New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy-Grace Guerrero and Firoze Manji, 78-86. Oxford: Fahamu, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Broadman, Haryy. *Africa’s Silk Road: China and India’s New Economic Frontier*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2007

<sup>25</sup> Chen, C. *et al.* “An Empirical Analysis of Chinese Construction Firms’ Entry into Africa.” *The CRIOCM 2007 International Symposium on Advancement of Construction Management and Real Estate*, Sydney, Australia, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Wachai, Njorge. “China doesn’t serve our interests.” *The Nation*, 27 April 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Alden, Chris and Martyn Davies. “A Profile of the Operations of Chinese Multinationals in Africa.” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 13 (2006): 83-96.

<sup>28</sup> Mpundu, Mildred. “The Last Zambian Textile Factories?” *PANOS*, 14 December 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Goldstein, Andrea, Nicolas Pinaud and Helmut Reisen, “China’s Boom: What’s in it for Africa? A Trade Perspective.” In *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, ed. Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 36. London: Hurst & Company, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Villanueva, Delano. “Exports and Economic Development.” IMF Working Paper. International Monetary Fund, Middle Eastern Department: May 1993.



efficiency-raising benefits of comparative advantage; offering greater economies of scale; affording greater capacity utilization; and inducing faster technological change.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, outward orientation and export-led growth have been long celebrated as rational and efficient alternatives to other strategies of development. In keeping with this literature, then, assuming a favorable balance of trade between China and individual African states we would equally expect Africans to hold favorable views of the Chinese. The current trade balance between China and its African partners is, however, weighted largely to China's advantage: neither does the import of Chinese commodities support the development of local industries, nor does the distinct nature of Chinese exports from Africa assist in diversifying away from the continent's traditional export base. The scale of African exports to China is furthermore so nominal such that the expected economic perquisites are not being materialized. Indeed, though invaluable to the continent's development generally, African's trade links with China seemingly further Chinese, rather than African, objectives in terms of key material and financial gains. The benefits accruing from these links further often pander to the particular wants of the continent's hardened autocrats, without meaningful spillover to the populace at large.

Indeed, economics and politics in Africa do not constitute clearly demarcated distinct spheres,<sup>32</sup> such that "even if one were to assume that the eagerness of African governments to build closer ties with China was primarily driven by anticipated economic benefits, this would be likely to have political implications too."<sup>33</sup> Many of China's African projects are, for instance, secured via secret government-to-government agreements, with contractors often selected through closed-door bidding processes in Beijing. In 2007, for instance, the World Bank proposed a railway construction project in Nigeria, which entailed measures aimed at combating the corruption which crippled the country's railway system. Just as the \$5 million project was about to be signed, however, the Chinese government offered Nigeria \$9 billion to rebuild the entire rail network - no bids, no conditions, and no need for reform.<sup>34</sup> Whilst the lack of any such conditions on the one hand enables China to "just come and do it"<sup>35</sup> when it comes to the country's overseas ventures, its 'no strings attached' investment philosophy is not without drawbacks.

Critics often identify such surreptitious Chinese business practices as undercutting attempts at heightened transparency and improved governance across the continent, further pointing to the damaging effects of China's 'non-interference' policy which leaders in Beijing oft cite as justification for their engagement with unsavory regimes as those of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe or Omar al-Bashir in Sudan. Because China's return to Africa is occurring at a time when many countries in the region continue to undergo difficult political transitions from authoritarian to democratic political systems, too, closer ties between China and Africa are seen as potentially undermining attempted democratic reforms across the continent. Indeed, "revenue from [Chinese] trade, development assistance and other means of support (i.e. diplomatic backing) is likely not only to reduce the leverage of Western donors; it also widens the margins of maneuver of Africa's autocrats and helps them to rein in domestic demands for democracy and respect for human rights."<sup>36</sup> In other words, Africa's autocratic or semi-autocratic leaders benefit from close relations with China, while ordinary citizens are likely to be negatively affected by this relationship. Subsequently, we expect Africans who attach particular importance to democracy to look with disfavor upon increasing Chinese involvement in Africa. For this category of respondents, too, we expect greater support for Western involvement as compared to that of the Chinese.

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<sup>31</sup> See for instance: Kavoussi, R. "International Trade and Economic Development: The Recent Experience of Developing Countries." *Journal of Developing Areas* 19 (1985); Ram, R. "Exports and Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Evidence from Time Series and Cross-Section Data." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 36 (1987)

<sup>32</sup> Robert Bates, *Markets and States in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Nicholas Van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)

<sup>33</sup> Tull, Denis M. "The Political Consequences of China's Return to Africa." In *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, ed. Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 112. London: Hurst & Company, 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Naim, Moises. "Rogue Aid." *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Sierra Leonean Ambassador to Beijing, as qtd. in Serge Michel and Michel Beuret, *China Safari: On the Trail of Beijing's Expansion in Africa*. New York: Nation Books, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Tull, Denis M. "The Political Consequences of China's Return to Africa." 124.



We hold similar expectations apropos human rights, considering especially the subpar labor conditions maintained in many Chinese firms, which bear direct, inimical consequences for African employees. In Zambia, for instance, workers employed in the country's Chinese-owned Chambishi Mine are paid less than minimum wage and are often laid-off before their period of work reaches the stipulated six-month minimum. Many workers further don't wear helmets as they are often required to pay for their own safety equipment, which they are unable to afford. In April 2005, a blast at Bgrimm Explosives Plant, owned by NFC Mining Africa PLC, killed all fifty-two Zambian workers inside. None of the fifty-two workers had any training in handling hazardous materials - and received none from their Chinese employers - and fifty of them were crammed into a workshop designed to accommodate fewer than one-third that number.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, in the face of such realities - of which the Zambian case is but one example - we expect Africans who express concern for matters of human rights to be critical of the mounting Chinese presence in Africa. This, owing not only to the persistently sub-standard labor conditions maintained on Chinese-operated projects, but also to China's continued courtship of rogue African regimes whose leaders frequently turn a blind eye to Chinese violations of domestic legal regulations for the sake of monetary and other material gains.

To assess where in this discourse we can situate African views, we have analyzed African attitudes towards the Chinese employing survey data from Round 4 of the Afrobarometer. Advancing beyond existing studies, we further account for the detriments of the expressed views. Indeed, we are not just interested in *what* Africans think, but *why* they think it. We have also examined the divergences in opinions between views of Chinese engagement and those of Western and other African actors. It is notable that the current literature contains no systematic attempts to examine any of these factors, and but a few studies account for African views at all. For purposes of China-Africa policy formulation, however, this seems a crucial part of the story. At minimum, if Africans hold generally negative views of the Chinese, this suggests that China's charm offensive is not entirely a 'win-win' scenario, after all. To capture individual-level African perceptions of China's mounting engagement, we estimate multi-level models of African perceptions of the Chinese on both economic and political dimensions. The ensuing section outlines specifically what we expect our models to show.

#### **EXPLAINING AFRICAN VIEWS OF CHINA'S AFRICAN ENGAGEMENT**

The debate over both the economic and political ramifications of growing China-Africa links has become an increasingly salient dimension in African politics in recent years. In Kenya, for instance, China's political activities came under scrutiny after the country's 2007 presidential election, when China not only attributed post-election violence to the persistence of the country's democratic system,<sup>38</sup> but further supplied the Kenyan government with weapons during the turmoil. In Zambia, too, the crux of the 2006 presidential campaign hinged on the 'China question,' with opposition candidate Michael Sata vowing to expel all Chinese traders from the country if elected.

National attention to China's growing African links may indeed be an important factor informing Africans' views of the Chinese, as it in part determines the extent of their knowledge about the issue. To this end, Sautman and Hairong<sup>39</sup> observe that the primary factors underpinning African perceptions of China are not social factors, but rather the national political discourse on China-Africa in individual African states. Yet while this finding may be valid among the small sample of African university students and professors they surveyed in nine African countries,<sup>40</sup> the influence of national discourse cannot be said to be of equal consequence among those Africans who are largely removed from national politics. Of greater importance among this segment of the population are the discernible Chinese activities being pursued in all of the continent's fifty-four states, as well as their perceived economic and political repercussions.

Most pronounced among these undertakings are the bilateral investment relations between China and independent African states (this, as distinct from trade relations). Between 2000 and 2005, Chinese direct

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<sup>37</sup> Michel, Serge and Michel Beuret. *China Safari: On the trail of Beijing's expansion in Africa*. New York: Nation Books, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> The Global and Mail. "China says Kenya violence proof Western democracy unsuitable." 14 January 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links," 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Zambia

investment to Africa totaled US\$30 billion; as of mid-2007, Chinese FDI to Africa rose to US\$100 billion. With a significant percentage of Chinese FDI targeting especially the continent's foremost export industries - iron ore and platinum in South Africa; timber in Gabon, Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville; mining in Zambia; and textile factories in Lesotho, among others - and further contributing to the construction of key infrastructure projects in a majority of countries in which Western aid has largely failed to deliver in this regard, China is seen as not only bolstering African development, but indeed doing so to the exclusion of the West and other international actors. Especially among those who regard FDI as indispensable to economic development, China's African investments are looked upon with great favor. This leads us to our first hypothesis:

**HYPOTHESIS 1** The greater the levels of Chinese foreign direct investment in African states, the greater the level of African support for Chinese involvement in the continent.

This hypothesis implies that Africans appreciate the country-level developmental benefits accruing to their respective states as a consequence of Chinese investment, placing particular import on especially the various infrastructure projects underway across the continent.

Related to Chinese FDI inflows are the trade relations between China and each of its African partners, each of which is affected differentially by both the inflow of imports from, and the trade balance with, China. Complementary effects are possible in certain cases, as African producers benefit from increased Chinese demand. This is particularly the case with respect to Chinese demand for raw commodities. Since 2000, African economies with a large share of oil, metals and agricultural products in their total exports have gained the most from recent increases in Sino-African trade. In other cases where China indirectly diverts investment resources away from African economies and competes with nascent local manufacturing sectors (i.e. textiles), however, interests are competitive rather than complementary. Overall, however, inflows of Chinese imports into African economies are widely perceived as damaging to local economies owing to the competition exerted by Chinese products vis-à-vis local producers.<sup>41</sup> Equally, the undifferentiated nature of Chinese imports from much of Africa is seen as thwarting individual country efforts aimed at diversifying export bases; African exports to China are furthermore on such a nominal scale so as not to herald significant economic advantages. These observations lead to our second hypothesis:

**HYPOTHESIS 2** Increasing levels of Chinese imports into Africa negatively impact upon African popular perceptions of the Chinese.

This expectation implies that African perceptions of China's engagement in their respective countries are largely predicated upon their understanding of the effects of Sino-African trade on local industries, which are generally most affected by foreign trade relations. This observation is distinct from, yet parallel to, that pertaining to the perceived positive effects of Chinese FDI on African economies.

Whilst Chinese investment as an expression of FDI is indeed generally viewed quite favorably by some observers, the aforementioned labor conditions maintained by Chinese employers on many projects funded by this investment have heralded much criticism amongst both human rights activists and African laborers alike. Indeed, there exists an inextricable link between the economic and political elements of Chinese engagement in Africa, wherein which the former bears direct consequence upon the latter. This leads us to our third hypothesis:

**HYPOTHESIS 3 (A).** Africans are more likely to express unfavorable views of the Chinese if they attach particular importance to matters of human rights.

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<sup>41</sup> On competition exerted by Chinese products in African regional markets vis-a-vis local producers, see P. Kamau, "The Development Impact of Asian Drivers on Kenya with Emphasis on Textile and Clothing Manufacturing." *The World Economy* 32 (2009): 1586-1612.

Given further the Western emphasis on improved governance across the continent, we further hypothesize that:

(B). Africans who express concern for matters of human rights are more likely to favor Western as opposed to Chinese involvement in their respective states.

Note that we do not expect Africans to express similar approval of the involvement of other African states over that of the Chinese when human rights are of concern. Human rights standards maintained in a majority of African countries fare no better than those upheld by the Chinese, save with few exceptions. In Nigeria, for instance, among the most prevalent human rights violations are: human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution and forced labor; societal violence and vigilante killings; child labor and exploitation; discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, region and religion, and; restrictions on freedom of assembly, movement, press, speech and religion.<sup>42</sup> These allegations diverge little, if at all, from those waged against China.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, we do not expect the relationship between human rights and average African support of other African states to be equally strong as that between human rights and China and human rights and the West. Owing further to the fact that the debate in the literature is largely confined to questions over the ramifications of Western vis-à-vis Chinese influence on African governance, African attitudes towards both actors are our primary interest, with African opinions of other African states being of only a second-order concern.

If it seems reasonable that Africans may be more likely to express support for Western as opposed to Chinese involvement when human rights are of import, then we might also expect that African attitudes will be more favorable towards the West vis-à-vis China if respondents attach particular value to democracy. In other words, we expect a negative relationship between African support for democracy and support for the Chinese, and a positive relationship between African support for democracy and support of the West:

HYPOTHESIS 4 (A). Africans are more likely to express negative views of the Chinese if they are supportive of democracy.

(B.) Africans are more likely to prefer Western over Chinese involvement if they are supportive of democracy.

To summarize, if Africans ascribe particular value to the development of local industries, human rights and democracy, then they will tend to look unfavorably on Chinese involvement in their respective states. The following section describes in detail how we test our hypotheses empirically.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data employed in this study is drawn from Round 4 of the Afrobarometer. Surveys were conducted in twenty African countries (Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South African, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Each country is represented by a randomly drawn national probability sample in which every adult citizen has an equal chance of inclusion. Sample sizes range from approximately 1200 to 3600 respondents per country.

In Afrobarometer Round 4, the question pertaining to perceptions of outsiders - inclusive of the Chinese - was posed to respondents as follows: "In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say: {x}?" where '{x}' is in turn replaced by each country in question: China, the United States, the former colonial powers (Britain, France, Portugal), Nigeria, and South Africa. The *China* variable is the dependent variable informing our study. Responses are measured along a

<sup>42</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "2008 Human Rights Report: Nigeria." 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119018.htm>

<sup>43</sup> See: Michael A. Santoro, ed. *Profits and Principles: Global Capitalism and Human Rights in China*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000.

four-point scale, which we treat as interval (0=do nothing; 1=help a little; 2=help somewhat; 3=help a lot). We infer that the more an individual regards China as being advantageous to her country generally (i.e. the more China ‘helps’), the more favorably she regards the Chinese presence in her country.

To examine the determinants informing popular views of China’s African engagement, we engage in a two-pronged analysis examining, first, African perceptions of the Chinese in isolation, and secondly African perceptions of the Chinese vis-à-vis the other external actors. Since the Chinese presence in Africa is palpable in both economic and political respects, we consider economic macro-variables as well as respondents’ attitudes towards democracy and human rights to examine how they affect average African support of China’s African engagement. We identify the economic macro-variables of interest as being: (1) *Sino-African trade*; and (2) *Chinese FDI per capita* in individual African states. 2008 data on Chinese imports into Africa are drawn from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and UN Comtrade; FDI statistics for 2007-2008 are taken from UNCTAD, the World Investment Report and the 2008 Statistical Bulletin of China’s Outward Foreign Direct Investment. To construct FDI per capita measures, we obtain population data from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators.

Our economic variables are each operationalized in two distinct ways. For the *Trade* variable we consider: (1) the inflow of Chinese imports to the continent; and (2) the balance of trade (i.e. exports minus imports) between China and each of its respective African partners. Imports are a measure of the Chinese presence in absolute terms. They may, however, tell only a part of the story as Sino-African trade relations can boast positive implications for African perceptions of the Chinese if the relations are balanced such that they support the continent’s export-led development. Accordingly, we consider the balance of trade as a relative measure of the Chinese economic presence.

Our *FDI* variable is likewise operationalized in two ways: first as an expression of logged FDI per capita statistics and secondly as the change in FDI inflows between 2007 and 2008. Logging the FDI statistics is necessary as the data are quite widely dispersed such that the relationship between this variable and African perceptions would be largely driven by outliers. Considering the variation between FDI inflows further enables us to gauge the immediacy of China’s African economic presence and the potential implications its visibility has on African perceptions. A substantial, rapid increase in Chinese FDI per capita over the twelve-month period may, for instance, call greater public attention to China’s increasing economic presence as compared to FDI which increases at a steady, protracted rate. We do not employ longer timeframes to calculate such changes for two reasons: first, Chinese FDI flows are highly volatile - in most cases there is no clear trend in FDI flows which could gradually affect African attitudes. Changes in attitudes are thus most likely caused by the short-term changes in FDI. Moreover, data coverage increases over time, such that considering changes in earlier periods would result in a reduction of cases that would in turn render econometric analysis futile.

With respect to political factors, we isolate *Democracy* and *Human rights* as the key independent variables informing African perceptions of the Chinese. Again, we employ two operationalizations for both variables. With respect to *Democracy*, Afrobarometer contains two relevant questions, the first pertaining to respondents’ support of democracy as a political system,<sup>44</sup> and the second to the importance they attach to elections.<sup>45</sup> With respect to the former, respondents are asked to note whether they support democracy; whether a non-democratic government may be preferable under certain circumstances; or if they hold no preference in this regard. We interpret these responses as an ordinal scale where the first statement indicates the strongest support for democracy. Such an operationalization does, however, suffer from various drawbacks, among them the fact that the wording of the question fails to preclude the possibility of

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<sup>44</sup> Based on respondents’ answers to the question (Q30): “Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?: Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government; Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable; Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn’t matter what kind of government we have.”

<sup>45</sup> Based on respondents’ answers to the question (Q31): “Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2: Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections; Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders.”

democracy supporters expressing preference for non-democratic rule under certain situations as, for instance, a national emergency.

So as to mitigate against this hindrance, we employ a second operationalization which is arguably closer to our definition of democracy. This variable is predicated on the importance respondents attach to elections. The more respondents agree with the statement that their country's leaders should be chosen via elections, the higher we code them on our *Democracy* variable. Conversely, the more respondents agree that another form of selecting leaders is preferable, the lower we code them on this variable. Such a system provides us with an index of support for elections. Whilst employing both operationalizations of *Democracy* in our analysis, we place greater importance on this operationalization in particular.

Similarly, *Human rights* is likewise operationalized in two distinct ways, as the questions posed by Afrobarometer allow for a distinction between positive and normative attitudes towards this variable. In the positive sense, we consider the perceived human rights situation in respondents' respective countries.<sup>46</sup> To this end we construct an index containing several variables which describe the degree to which respondents feel their governments allow them to speak freely, join any political organization, and vote without external pressures. Normatively, then, we examine respondents' desirability of human rights, again constructing an index based on variables that capture whether respondents feel governments should guarantee freedom of association,<sup>47</sup> freedom of the press,<sup>48</sup> and freedom of speech.<sup>49</sup> All three components are central tenants of human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>50</sup>

Concomitant with our key independent variables, we further account for several aggregate-level controls which may have considerable impact on African perceptions of the Chinese. First, we include a standard battery of variables - age, gender, income, respondents' employment status as well as their level of education. Age is measured in years; gender is coded as 1 for females and 0 for males, respectively. Income is defined as a composite measure based on respondents' ownership of a radio, television, and motor vehicle. Employment status is coded as 0 when a respondent is employed, and 1 when unemployed. Education measures respondents' educational attainment on a five-point scale with approximately equally sized categories ranging from 'no formal schooling,' to 'post-graduate education.'

Along with these standard controls, we further incorporate several additional control variables. As we are concerned specifically with perceptions of the Chinese, we control for levels of exposure to information, constructing an index that measures the frequency with which respondents obtain news from radio, television and newspapers, respectively. Similarly, we control for respondents' subjective perceptions of their countries' current economic performance, both in levels as well as in change, which may taint their attitudes towards China's growing economic - and arguably political - engagement in their countries. Lastly, we control for overall African perceptions of international donors and investors to isolate support for the Chinese

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<sup>46</sup> Based on respondents' answer to the following set of questions (Q15A-C): A. In this country, how free are you: To say what you think?; B. In this country, how free are you: To join any political organization you want?; C. In this country, how free are you: To choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?

<sup>47</sup> Based on respondents' answer to the question (Q19): "Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2: Statement 1: Government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies; Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it."

<sup>48</sup> Based on respondents' answer to the question (Q20): "Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2: Statement 1: Government should be able to close newspapers that print stories it does not like; Statement 2: The news media should be free to publish any story that they see fit without fear of being shut down."

<sup>49</sup> Based on respondents' answer to the question (Q21): "Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2: Statement 1: Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority; Statement 2: People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be."

<sup>50</sup> United Nations General Assembly. "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." 10 December 1948.

specifically.<sup>51</sup> All variables exclude respondents who answer ‘Don’t know’ to any question. The descriptive statistics for all control variables incorporated in this study are found in the Appendix, Table 2A.

To test the hypotheses outlined in the theoretical section, we employ a set of multi-level models, where individual respondents are at Level 1 and countries are at Level 2. The individual structural model for African perceptions of Chinese is thus:

$$China_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 HumanRights_{ij} + \beta_2 Democracy_{ij} + \lambda' \mathbf{X}_{ij} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where the outcome variable, *China*, contains our measure of perceptions of the Chinese. As the *China* variable is treated as interval, we estimate a simple linear relationship. In the above equation, individuals are indexed by *i* and countries by *j*; the  $\beta$ 's are the parameters we wish to estimate. Our key individual-level independent variables are, *Human Rights* and *Democracy*, for which we employ the two different operationalizations noted above. The matrix *X* contains the noted control variables, and  $\lambda$  represents the corresponding vector of parameters;  $\varepsilon$  is an individual-specific error term.

At the country level (Level 2), we model the individual-level constant,  $\beta_0$ , as a function of macro-level variables - Chinese imports and FDI inflows (*Presence*) - that serve as proxies for the scale of China's economic engagement in each country, *j*:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} Presence_j + \eta_j \quad (2)$$

where the  $\gamma$ 's are the parameters we wish to estimate, and  $\eta$  represents the Level 2-error term. Our interest lies particularly with  $\gamma_{01}$ , which captures the effect of our macro-level variables on the intercept in the individual level equation.

Of course, we are not only interested in African perceptions of the Chinese alone, but also in how these perceptions compare to those of other international actors (the United States, former colonial powers, Nigeria and South Africa), particularly with respect to our political variables. In the second stage of the analysis, we thus recode our dependent variable into binary outcomes. The recoded variable focuses exclusively on respondents who assign different values to the Chinese and to the other external actors included in the survey data. The variable is coded as 0 if China obtains a higher value, and 1 if the other actor obtains a higher value. By employing such a coding system we forfeit approximately half of the data, as respondents who are indifferent are dropped from the analysis. The associated N's prove dependent on whether consideration is given to the 'power,' 'United States,' 'Nigeria,' and 'South Africa' variables, and are incorporated in Tables 1 and 2 below. The approach, however, is justified if one considers that many respondents do not discriminate between foreign actors. If we are interested in the degree to which perceptions of the Chinese differ with respect to other countries, this approach proves constructive.

Excluding a significant number of respondents who fail to discriminate between the Chinese and other external actors (i.e. our dependent variable) however, raises the possibility of selection bias; we thus employ Heckman selection models to investigate this potentiality. As the *inverse Mill's ratios* for our models are consistently insignificant, however, selection bias is unlikely to be a problem. Our individual-level structural equation for African perceptions of the Chinese vis-à-vis other actors can then be expressed as:

$$Other_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_1 HumanRights_{ij} + \beta_2 Democracy_{ij} + \lambda' \mathbf{X}_{ij} \quad (3)$$

<sup>51</sup> We notice that support for the Chinese shifted a great deal with the other countries, likely as many respondents just think of the Chinese as foreigners, generally. By controlling for donors (i.e. countries that give) and investors (i.e. individuals) we can weaken this link and isolate support for the Chinese specifically.

where *Other* indicates whether a respondent prefers another country's engagement over that of the Chinese. Since our dependent variable is binary, we use the logit link function. Accordingly, since the residual error variance follows directly from the probability of success (i.e. that *Other*=1), the equation does not include an error term. Apart from these differences, equation 2 is identical to equation 1.

The second stage of our analysis does not include a Level 2 predictor owing largely to the fact that we do not proffer a theoretical explanation as to how an increase in China's trade presence as compared to that of other countries will influence Africans' perceptions of China. The Level 2 equation corresponding to our individual level equation (3) is thus:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \eta_j \tag{4}$$

We are thus estimating a simple varying-intercept model at this stage of the analysis. It should be noted that by excluding the Level 2 predictor, we further increase our sample size, as missing data in our Level 2 variables results in the loss of all individual-level observations for a single country with a missing data point at Level 2. In this analysis we thus derive results from all countries included in Round 4 of the Afrobarometer.<sup>52</sup>

**RESULTS**

Employing the survey data we first calculate the mean position of African attitudes towards China as juxtaposed with those of the former colonial powers (Britain, France, Portugal), the United States, Nigeria and South Africa. Figure 1 illustrates the variations between African preferences for each country in 2008.

The results are telling. First, we plainly see that approval of China's African engagement among respondents is overall positive (i.e. above the mean of 1.5 on the 0-3 scale depicted in Figure 1 below); the level of popular approval of China approaches the positive perceptions that Africans accord the former colonial powers, and is only slightly less than that of the United States. The biggest gap between African attitudes of outsider assistance is with respect to African states, Nigeria in particular. Overall, this figure clearly demonstrates that the negative China-Africa rhetoric emanating from a segment of the surrounding literature is not echoed among Africans generally. We employ the multi-level models outlined in the foregoing section to parse this finding in further detail.

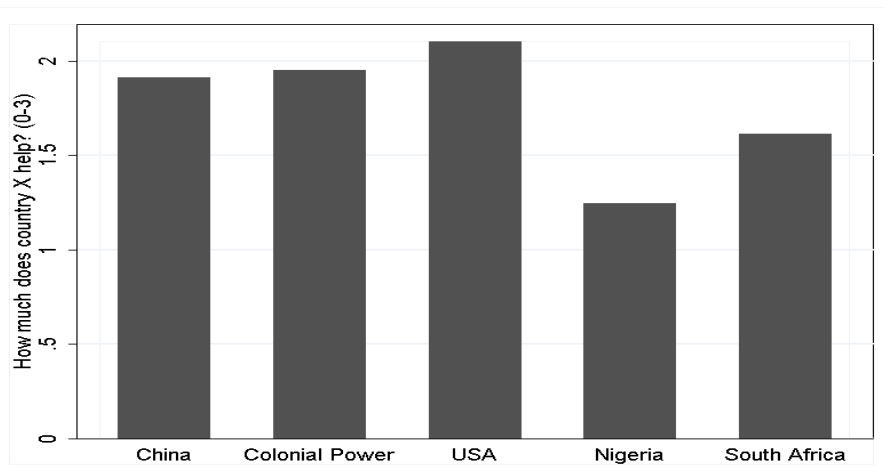


Figure 1. African perceptions of help from five countries

In Table 1 we present our results for our first set of hierarchical regressions with the Chinese presence as our dependent variable. In accordance with our operationalizations of key independent variables, we present four

<sup>52</sup> In all our analyses we use appropriate weights to guarantee representativeness.



models: (1) a model with the change in Chinese FDI inflows between 2007-2008; (2) a second model accounting for logged Chinese FDI per capita in 2008; (3) a third model with the balance of trade between China and each country surveyed; and finally (4) a model incorporating Chinese import figures.

In Model 1, we test our first hypothesis, H1, which suggests that increasing levels of Chinese foreign direct investment render China's African engagement in a more favorable light among Africans. The country analysis for this model is predicated upon a sample of 17 countries; Model 2 upon a sample of 19 countries. Whilst the positive slope signs on changing Chinese FDI inflows between 2007 and 2008 (Model 1) and Chinese FDI inflows in 2008 (Model 2) conform with our expectations that greater levels of Chinese FDI herald greater African approval ratings of the Chinese overall, the relationship between both variables is weak and altogether statistically insignificant. A potential factor influencing this outcome may be the fact that, despite its overwhelming importance for Africa itself, Chinese FDI in Africa remains a comparatively small proportion of its overall outward FDI (some 3-5%).<sup>53</sup> Among the countries surveyed in this study, Chinese FDI comprises a considerable portion of total FDI inflows in only four countries: Benin (13.2%), South Africa (8.0%), Zambia (12.1%) and Zimbabwe (18.2%).<sup>54</sup> For the remainder of the twelve countries for which FDI data was obtainable, Chinese FDI comprises between 0.1 to 3.1% of total FDI inflows (see Table 4A in Appendix). Arguably, Chinese FDI in Africa is not sufficiently pronounced so as to influence African attitudes towards the burgeoning Chinese presence across the continent. The paucity of good quality FDI statistics may be an additional factor affecting this outcome. As it stands, however, it appears that the impact of Chinese FDI in Africa may be exaggerated in much of the surrounding literature.

**Table 1: A Multilevel Model of African Perceptions of China's African Engagement**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Aggregate-level controls</i>				
Donors	0.20*** (0.01)	0.20*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.01)
Investors	0.29*** (0.01)	0.29*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.01)
News	0.01 (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
Gender	-0.04*** (0.02)	-0.04*** (0.02)	-0.04*** (0.02)	-0.04*** (0.02)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Income	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
Unemployed	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Education	0.01* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)
Economy	0.02** (0.01)	0.01** (0.00)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Δ Economy	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Individual level predictors</i>				
Human Rights (positive)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Human Rights (normative)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Support for Democracy	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Support for Elections	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
<i>Country level predictors</i>				
Intercept	0.73*** (0.11)	0.83*** (0.10)	0.97*** (0.13)	0.83*** (0.10)
Δ FDI	0.01 (0.01)			
FDI 2008		0.01 (0.04)		
Imports			-0.03** (0.01)	
Trade Balance				0.02** (0.01)
Countries	17	19	19	19
Respondents	12142	13790	13423	13423
AIC	31012	35504	34303	34303

\*\*\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \* p < 0.1; standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>53</sup> Alden, Chris, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, "Introduction." In *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace*, ed. Chris Alden, Daniel Large, and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, 13. London: Hurst & Company, 2008.

<sup>54</sup> See Table 4A in the Appendix

In the theoretical section we hypothesized that the flow of goods between China and its respective African partners will negatively affect African perceptions of the Chinese (H2), particularly when the trade balance is skewed in favor of the Chinese with imports into African states outnumbering imports from the continent. In accordance with this hypothesis, the results indicate that levels of Chinese imports have a statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level) effect on African perceptions of the Chinese, where every increase in Chinese import inflows has a negative effect on overall African favorability. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 2 below, which plots our regression intercepts taking into account the Level 2 equation; the vertical lines through each data point indicate 90 percent confidence levels. The negatively sloped line contained in Figure 2 clearly indicates that African support of the Chinese declines as the percentage of Chinese imports increases, thus lending strong graphical support for our proposed hypothesis.

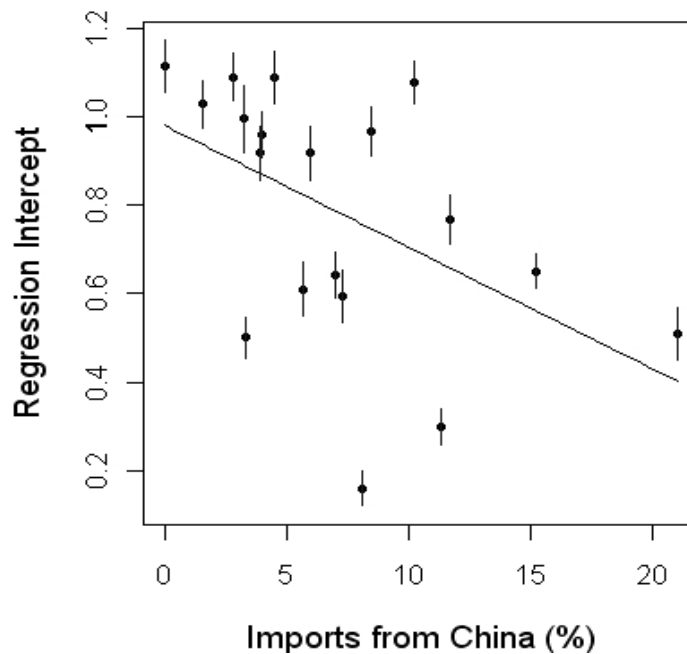


Figure 2. Chinese imports and African perceptions of the Chinese

Our relative measure of Chinese trade - the trade balance - also complies with expectations. The coefficient of this variable (Model 4) is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that as the share of exports to China increases relative to imports from China, the Chinese become more popular. The converse also holds, with African favorability of the Chinese decreasing as the share of exports relative to imports likewise declines. In a similar vein as Figure 2, Figure 3 illustrates this relationship.

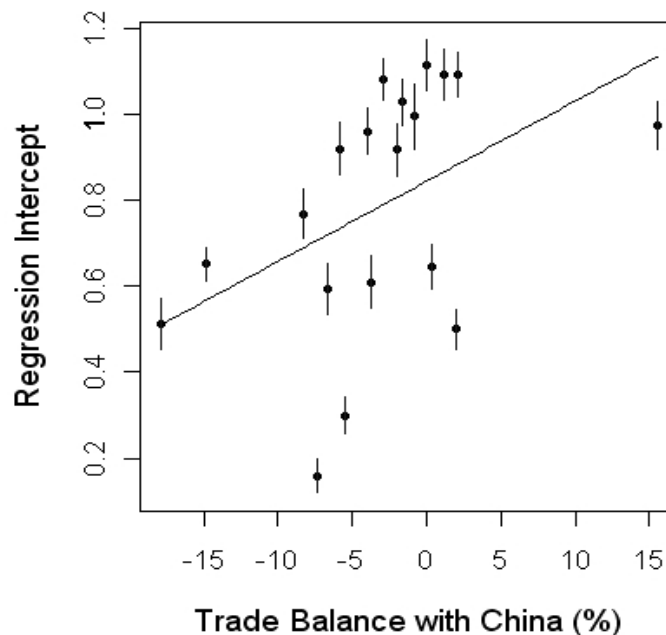


Figure 3. China-Africa trade balance and African perceptions of the Chinese

With respect to human rights, hypothesis H3, the empirical evidence is likewise supportive of our assumptions, with the coefficients correctly signed for both our normative and positive operationalizations. Recall that we expect a positive sign for the positive human rights index as we anticipate respondents to express greater displeasure towards the Chinese if they likewise perceive the current human rights situation in their respective countries in a negative light. For the normative operationalization of the variable, we in turn expect a negative sign implying that the greater value respondents attach to human rights, the less favorably they regard the Chinese. The results indicate [the statistical significance](#) of only one of our operationalizations of the *Human rights* variable: the positive operationalization for the former colonial powers, and the normative one for the United States. The effects on both are relatively small in magnitude; the lack of additional statistical significance may be a product of the reduced sample size. Nevertheless, the correctly signed coefficients and statistical significance for one of our two operationalizations lends confidence to our hypothesis, H3: whilst the effect is relatively small, the greater the import Africans attach to human rights, the more favorably they regard the West as opposed to the Chinese.

It is furthermore interesting to note that with respect to the *Human rights* variable, Africans regard South Africans in a similar vein as they do the Chinese; both operationalizations of *Human rights* are correctly signed and statistically significant. For Nigeria, however, we find a strong opposing effect, with African expressing favorability towards Chinese over Nigerian involvement in their respective countries. Whilst Nigeria's human rights record is altogether dire, with government officials at all levels continuously committing grave abuses,<sup>55</sup> it is beyond the scope of this study to hypothesize as to the factors driving this finding.

Contrary to our supposition that respondents' support for democracy subsequently results in their disapproving views of China's African engagements, however, this hypothesis (H4) does not find empirical support in Table 1. Both operationalizations of the *Democracy* variable have estimated relationships of zero (0). This finding may, however, be due to the fact that we expect the relationships between this variable and

<sup>55</sup> "2008 Human Rights Report: Nigeria". *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. United States, Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

African perceptions to hold particularly when considered vis-à-vis Western countries, as captured by hypothesis H4(A), rather than in isolation as is here the case.

African attitudes towards the Chinese vis-à-vis those towards other international actors are subsequently evaluated in Table 2. Here, we focus solely on the individual-level political variables, estimating four distinct models: (1) African perceptions of the Chinese when compared to the former colonial powers (Britain, Portugal, France); (2) perceptions of the Chinese when compared to the United States; (3) African attitudes towards China vis-à-vis Nigeria and; (4) African attitudes towards China vis-a-vis South Africa.

**Table 2: A Multilevel Model of African Perceptions of Chinese vis-a-vis Other International Actors**

	<b>Model 1: Former Colonial Powers</b>	<b>Model 2: United States</b>	<b>Model 3: Nigeria</b>	<b>Model 4: South Africa</b>
<i>Individual level predictors</i>				
News	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.03)
Gender	0.14** (0.06)	0.19* (0.06)	0.15* (0.07)	-0.02(0.06)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Income	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Unemployed	-0.16** (0.06)	-0.14** (0.07)	0.09 (0.08)	-0.12* (0.07)
Education	0.01 (0.03)	0.11** (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.03)
Economy	0.06** (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
Δ Economy	0.02 (0.03)	0.07** (0.03)	0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Human Rights (positive)	-0.03** (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.04** (0.01)
Human Rights (normative)	0.00 (0.01)	0.03** (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)
Support for Democracy	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.05)	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.05 (0.04)
Support for Elections	0.06** (0.03)	0.12*** (0.03)	-0.06* (0.04)	0.04 (0.03)
Countries	20	20	19	19
Respondents	5798	5563	10911	12599
AIC	7196	6426	5617	7841

\*\*\* p < 0.01; \*\* p < 0.05; \* p < 0.1; standard errors in parentheses.

The findings support both of our hypotheses, H3(A) and H4(A). In accordance with our supposition that Africans who support democracy generally favor Western over Chinese engagement in their respective countries, we find a statistically significant between one of the operationalizations of our *Democracy* variable - support for elections - and African perceptions of the burgeoning Chinese presence. Africans express particularly strong proclivity for especially the United States over China when elections are of concern. A similar though slightly less significant partiality is expressed towards the former colonial powers. The second of our *Democracy* operationalizations - support for democracy - is not statistically significant, save but in the Nigerian case in which respondents who support democracy hold increasingly favorable views of the Chinese as opposed to Nigerian engagement. We are thus confident in our claim that, at least in comparison with Western countries, Africans who value democracy are less favorable towards the Chinese.

We encounter similarly mixed findings with respect to human rights. The results conform with our expectation that Africans concerned for human rights are more inclined to favor Western over Chinese involvement. Respondents express particular proclivity towards the United States and South Africa over China, both when they look favorably upon the current human rights situation in their respective countries and when they place significant value on human rights in the abstract. A statistically significant preference for the Chinese is conveyed vis-à-vis the former colonial powers - Britain, France, Portugal - when *Human rights* is positively operationalized. Overall, however, the political indicators perform as expected.

## CONCLUSION

This paper began by questioning what Africans think of the burgeoning Chinese presence in their respective countries. Findings contained in Figure 1 suggest that, overall, Africans regard the Chinese in a rather positive light. Such positive perceptions are, in turn, contingent upon a range of variables, both political and

economic in nature. On the former, it appears that Africans are rather wary of Chinese influence, particularly when human rights and multi-party elections are of concern. Equally, the Chinese economic presence evokes similar unease, with especial displeasure resulting from increasing imports into the continent's economies. Such findings notwithstanding, our findings indicate that favorable views of China outnumber critical judgments by two-to-one or more in nearly every country surveyed, with few exceptions (see Table 1A in Appendix).

Such findings do not entirely repudiate negative judgments emanating from segments of the China-Africa literature; rather they qualify these presuppositions, suggesting that Africans on the whole approach China's African engagement in a deliberate and nuanced fashion, assessing each of its components in its turn. Moreover, the evidence in this paper suggests that, contrary to much of the excitement surrounding Chinese FDI in Africa, Chinese investment is not a primary concern for Africans in their evaluations of the ramifications of China's African engagement. Of much greater salience is the influx of Chinese imports into African economies, many of which arguably stand to threaten the very industries in which a majority of Africans labor.

These results further lend credence to the argument that China's persistent disregard for human rights norms in particular bears damaging consequences for the continent's economic and political development. Similar sentiments are echoed by Africans, who not only object to increasing Chinese presence when human rights are of concern, but equally voice preference for Western involvement over that of the Chinese. At the same time, our findings suggest the salience of democracy as a determinant of African perceptions of the China's African presence, at least when the country's engagement is compared to that of other, Western, actors.

Nonetheless, we should be cautious in interpreting these results as suggesting overriding African disapproval for the Chinese. The China-Africa relationship is continuously shifting with changing Chinese priorities and increasing African agency in the partnership. Future research on African perspectives on the China-Africa partnership should thus incorporate a greater number of countries into the analysis, employing ideally time series panel data so as to examine changes in African perceptions over time. It would be furthermore beneficial to examine African perceptions of the Chinese across population groups, focusing especially on individuals employed in sectors in which there is particularly pronounced Chinese engagement (mining and resource extraction, for instance, as well as small-scale shops and local restaurants). In light of the findings emanating from our *Trade* variable, it would furthermore be valuable to investigate the opinions held by both consumers and producers vis-à-vis the Chinese, as both categories of individuals are indubitably differentially affected by the growing Chinese presence. Indeed, for as much as we know about the China-Africa partnership, there is much to yet be discovered. The distinct merit of this study lies in its contribution to the growing body of literature by way of both its explication of African attitudes towards China and - more importantly - their determinants, as well as in the foundations it lays for further research in this regard.

## APPENDICES

*Table 1A: African Perceptions of Chinese Engagement across Twenty*

Country	Do nothing	Help a little	Help somewhat	Help a lot	Total
Benin	39	101	281	358	779
Botswana	41	118	266	506	931
Burkina Faso	27	76	183	481	767
Cape Verde	6	201	493	362	1,062
Ghana	79	188	264	289	820
Kenya	141	163	316	192	812
Lesotho	140	25	100	711	976
Liberia	51	192	253	585	1,081
Madagascar	32	136	496	148	812
Malawi	67	43	128	262	500
Mali	71	130	235	584	1,020
Mozambique	81	161	191	388	821
Namibia	144	383	293	292	1,112
Nigeria	220	458	545	310	1,533
Senegal	90	93	226	400	809
South Africa	401	383	404	199	1,387
Tanzania	115	191	348	189	843
Uganda	413	518	378	150	1,459
Zambia	67	144	204	412	827
Zimbabwe	162	200	277	254	893
Total	2,387	3,904	5,881	7,072	19,244
Percent	12.4	22.6	30.6	36.4	100

*Note:* Answers given in response to the question, “In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven’t you heard enough to say: China?”

*Table 2A: Descriptive statistics*

Variable	Observations	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Min, Max
China	19,244	1.9	2.0	1.0	0, 3
Donors	19,573	2.1	2.0	0.9	0, 3
Investors	18,487	1.9	2.0	1.0	0, 1
News	27,683	3.2	4.0	1.3	0, 4
Gender	27,713	0.5	1.0	0.5	0, 1
Age	27,378	36.3	33.0	14.5	18, 99
Income	27,679	1.3	1.0	1.0	0, 3
Unemployed	27,613	0.7	1.0	0.5	0, 1
Education	27,669	2.0	2.0	1.3	0, 4
Economy	27,161	2.5	2.0	1.2	1, 5
ΔEconomy	27,096	2.9	3.0	1.1	1, 5
HumanRights (positive)	26,314	10.4	12.0	2.2	3, 12
HumanRights	25,574	9.4	9.0	2.2	3, 15
Support for Democracy	25,555	2.6	3.0	0.7	1, 3
Support for Elections	26,906	2.2	3.0	1.0	0, 3
Imports	26,513	7.8	7.0	5.4	0, 21.0
TradeBalance	26,513	-4.0	-3.7	7.6	-17.9, 15.5
ΔFDI	24,113	3.7	1.6	7.0	-5.8, 26.2
FDI 2008 (log)	21,650	0.3	0.03	1.8	-3.7, 4.7

**Table 3A: Questions and Coding**

Variable	Question #	Question	Value Labels
<b>Democracy</b>	q30	Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have	1=Statement 3: Doesn't matter; 2=Statement 2: Sometimes non-democratic preferable; 3=Statement 1: Democracy preferable
	q31	Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections. Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.	1=Agree very strongly with Statement 1; 2=Agree with Statement 1; 3=Agree with Statement 2; 4=Agree very strongly with Statement 2; 5=Agree with neither
<b>Human Rights</b>	q15(A-C) [positive operationalization]	A. In this country, how free are you: To say what you think?; B. In this country, how free are you: To join any political organization you want? C. In this country, how free are you: To choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?	1=Not at all free; 2=Not very free; 3=Somewhat free; 4=Completely free
	q19 [normative]	Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies. Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.	1=Agree very strongly with Statement 1; 2=Agree with Statement 1; 3=Agree with Statement 2; 4=Agree very strongly with Statement 2; 5=Agree with neither
	q20 [normative]	Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should be able to close newspapers that print stories it does not like. Statement 2: The news media should be free to publish any story that they see fit without fear of being shut down.	1=Agree very strongly with Statement 1; 2=Agree with Statement 1; 3=Agree with Statement 2; 4=Agree very strongly with Statement 2; 5=Agree with neither
	q21 [normative]	Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: Government should not allow the expression of political views that are fundamentally different from the views of the majority. Statement 2: People should be able to speak their minds about politics free of government influence, no matter how unpopular their views may be.	1=Agree very strongly with Statement 1; 2=Agree with Statement 1; 3=Agree with Statement 2; 4=Agree very strongly with Statement 2; 5=Agree with neither

*Table 4A. Percentage of Chinese FDI of total FDI inflows, 2007*

<b>Country</b>	<b>FDI (%)</b>
Benin	13.2
Botswana	0.4
Cape Verde	0.1
Ghana	0.2
Kenya	1.2
Madagascar	1.3
Malawi	0.4
Mali	1.9
Mozambique	2.3
Namibia	0.1
Nigeria	3.1
Senegal	0.3
South Africa	8.0
Uganda	1.1
Zambia	12.1
Zimbabwe	18.2

Sources: UNCTAD, FDI Online Database (March 2009); World Investment Report, 2008; 2008 Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment



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