Reflections on the China-in-Africa Debate:
Mercantilism, Partnership or Resurgence of Hegemony?

Ezirim, Gerald Ekenediri Chukwu
Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ekenezirim@yahoo.com

Abstract
China's recent surge into Africa has become an issue. In this paper, we have tried to argue that though African States are enjoying Chinese largesse, there is bound to be a backlash, and hence the need to be careful in accepting them with open arms. China is fighting a double-edged battle of sustaining her hard-earned booming economy via the exploitation of Africa's extractive resources, while at the same time trying to checkmate the West's rampaging hegemonic domination of the global socio-political structure. We noted, however, that China does not have any inhibitions fighting it out with the West in the bid to gain ascendancy in world politics in the tradition of the Cold War. Using the dependency theory, we noted that Africa might well be content in abandoning her traditional benefactors who though constitute severe obstacles on her governance and development agenda even as African governments court economic and political ties with China.

Introduction
The current debate about China's intention in its high-pitch feverish quest to dominate Africa has been ongoing for some time now but without any meaningful conclusions as the babel of opinions have made the discourse confusing, and more so, given the fact that China is not letting on her major reasons for wanting to engage in this African large-heartedness. The suspicion of African scholars and commentators is that there is more to the issue than meets the eye.
1.3 billion is a fifth of the world population of being the world’s most populous nation in the world (www.wikipedia.org).

The recent influx of China into Africa becomes a topic for serious discourse among scholars. These scholars view it as a continuation of the Cold War between the West and East, as the United States is also pushing in given its traditional role as the benefactor of the African nation and most of the Third World nations. As noted by Simons et al. (2007), the American effort to build unified military commands for the entire African continent (AFRICOM) has been noticed and is being effectively counter-balanced by China’s diplomatic offensive in the region with the visit to more than 17 countries in the last fourteen months. Hu Jintao, their leader, based on military cooperation as well as other ties. Thus, we notice that not only has geopolitics become a permanent feature of foreign interests in Africa; it has also become global having affected two very influential countries in the world. Also, given the Chinese involvement in the space programme despite America’s effort to shut them out, it is clear that the African continent is not just for gifts and donations.

China’s quest for oil is no longer hidden; this search for energy and extractive resources wherever it may be is pushed virtually all her actions as a nation now and her foreign policy is such that is driven by this insatiable quest given her population. It had not always been this way but the current situation has warranted it. As Alterman (2007) notes: China was self-sufficient in oil until 1993 and its oil imports have been growing ever since. China now imports about 3 million barrels of oil per day and that number is growing about 500,000 barrels per day every year. While some Chinese experts talk about conservation, alternative fuels and so on, anyone driving on China’s impressive highway system and sitting for hours in Chinese traffic knows that China has embraced the internal combustion engine with a vengeance. Oil is a transportation fuel, and China has abandoned the bicycle and gotten on board the automobile.

The above is corroborated by Sautman and Yan (2007) who noted that energy security is an explicit goal of China’s foreign policy... there is a
This study employs the Dependency Theory in charting the course through the complex web of the relationships between China and Africa. Dependency theory is a critique of the western capitalist nations and their relations with the third world. The theory has been used in several discourses on the relationship between the Third World and the industrialized nations, even the newly industrialized countries, but the most concise and frequently quoted definition of dependence is that of the Brazilian scholar, Santos (Quoted in Gilpin:1987:281):

By dependence we mean a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected, the relation of interdependence between two or more countries and between these and world trade, assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and can be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which can have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development.

The major components in dependency theory include analysis of the nature and dynamics of the capitalist world system, the relationship or linkage between the advanced capitalist countries and the less developed countries and the internal characteristics of the dependent countries themselves (Gilpin, 1987:283).

The underlying assumption of this theory is that the infusion of foreign private capital into the Third World countries has led to the siphoning of these surpluses from these less developed countries to the metropolitan center of world economy. According to Borenstrom and Hettne (1985:34), this ideological development was first proposed by Baran (1957:6). Indeed, Baran made significant contributions by using the concept of economic surplus and how surplus has been created and utilized in different social systems. He further explained that the investment of multinationals in the economy of Third World countries is designed to utilize the cheap labour and abundant raw materials therein to generate
More recently, there was a China-Africa Summit held between 4-6 November 2006 and which capped what commentators have termed ‘China’s Year of Africa’. During the Summit, China signed 156 cultural cooperation contracts with African countries, and more than 50 cultural groups representing the Chinese government have visited Africa. Over 170 African States’ cultural troupes have reciprocated the visit to China. The year 2006 marked the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of diplomatic relations between the People’s Republic of China and African countries (Ngwaiwai, 2006). These interactions have come with a lot of packages that are meant to be beneficial to both parties.

To encourage and support Chinese enterprises to go to Africa for investment and cooperation, the Chinese government has taken various measures, including setting aside special funds and providing concessional loans. Previously it was difficult for private businesses to get policy, capital, information and personnel support for their ventures. These resources were concentrated in public institutions or state-owned enterprises. With domestic market competition tightening at home, Chinese private businesses view Africa as a viable market with a lot of opportunities. The Chinese enterprises pledged to help their African counterparts strengthen local infrastructure and improve living standards.

According to Walls (2007), China intends to provide about $20bn in infrastructure and trade financing to Africa till 2010, thereby eclipsing many of the continent’s traditional big donors by a single pledge. The scale of China’s accelerating financial largesse show that China is beginning to outstrip individual contributions from traditional donors, including multilateral development agencies. Their combined pledges towards a special fund intended to assist sub-Saharan Africa to tackle shortfalls in electricity supply, roads and other infrastructure are about $7bn.

However, the import of this grant by China becomes very pronounced when we notice that “while grants and soft loans to Africa from Europe, the US and Japan still exceed China’s, they come with conditions attached and often fail to materialise when these are not met. African countries endowed with
2005 (Ngwawi, 2006). With Jinping doling out a lot of money to African countries - $100 million in grants and soft loans to Cameroon, a sports stadium for Zambia, a military hospital for Guinea-Bissau, China’s trade with Africa has increased by 45%, having already quadrupled since 2001. It reached $45 billion in the first ten months of 2006. China recently surpassed Britain as the continent’s third-largest trading partner, after the United States and France (Kirchick, 2007). This is corroborated by Ding (2006) - “the trade volume between China and Africa, a mere $12 million in 1950, jumped to $10.5 billion in 2006, $29.4 billion in 2004 and nearly $40 billion in 2005”.

According to Economy and Monagahlan (2006), the Chinese have been very busy in the African continent over the past couple of years. They note among others, the various trade and investment indices that now abound the African continent as a result of the Chinese largesse:

Skyrocketing trade and foreign direct investment have made China a major player in Africa’s economic development. Two-way trade has quadrupled in the last five years to reach $40 billion in 2005, making China Africa’s third-largest trading partner after the European Union and the United States. While China’s voracious demand for commodities has driven investment priorities, it is diversifying into the apparel, food processing, telecommunications, and construction sectors. At $1.2 billion, Chinese FDI in Africa is small compared to the $20 billion total recorded last year, but if the influx of Chinese firms is any guide, a ten-fold increase since 2003, future capital inflows likely will multiply.

The tables below illustrate the extent of China’s investment in Africa since the late 1970s to the present.
China's Africa Policy
According to China's official website, (http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxx/t230615.htm), China's Africa policy is hinged on a lot of advantageous and mutually agreeable indices. As noted by the government, enhancing solidarity and cooperation with African countries has always been an important component of China's independent foreign policy of peace. China says it would unswervingly carry forward the tradition of China-Africa friendship, and, proceeding from the fundamental interests of both the Chinese and African peoples, establish and develop a new type of strategic partnership with Africa, featuring political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange. The general principles and objectives of China's African policy are as follows:

- **Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity.** China supports African countries' endeavour for economic development and nation building, carries out cooperation in various forms in the economic and social development, and promotes common prosperity of China and Africa.

- **Mutual support and close coordination.** China will strengthen cooperation with Africa in the UN and other multilateral systems by supporting each other's just demand and reasonable propositions and continue to appeal to the international community to give more attention to questions concerning peace and development in Africa.

- **Learning from each other and seeking common development.** China and Africa will learn from and draw up upon each other's experience in governance and development, strengthen exchange and cooperation in education, science, culture and health, supporting African countries' efforts to enhance capacity building. China will work together with Africa in the exploration of the road of sustainable development.
billion. In Angola, she has invested over $2 billion in infrastructural development, and same goes for Zimbabwe, Kenya, etc.

According to Manji and Marks (2007) China’s involvement in Africa has provoked much debate and discussion, provoking such questions as to whether China was simply the latest imperial power out to exploit Africa’s natural resources, putting its own economic interests above environmental and human rights concerns. They also questioned the fact of China’s engagement or extension of ‘South-South solidarity’, enabling African nations to free themselves from the Western debt peonage, conditionalities in granting aid, unfair trading rules and political interference in the guise of working towards good governance. As is well known, however, the existing literature on China-in-Africa focuses on the vested interests of the West, and the authors, therefore, presented social, cross-continental perspectives on Chinese involvement in Africa.

It is on record that the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), after its ideological rift with Moscow attempted to export its own brand of socialism to the African continent. The apogee of which was the construction of the Tazara Railway, which involved a formidable piece of engineering; laying 1,680km of railway track across Central Africa linking Zambia to the Tanzanian port of Dar es Salaam. It was completed in 1975. This was a project that Western governments had refused to undertake, considering it too difficult and too expensive. Thus, there is no doubt China has provided assistance to the best of its ability to African countries, while African countries have also rendered strong support to China on many occasions. However, some commentators have argued that sincerity, equality and mutual benefit, solidarity and common development are the major principles guiding China-Africa exchange and cooperation and the driving force to lasting China-Africa relations. We beg to differ with these opinions though.

China and Sudan:

In Sudan, China has very substantial interests having obtained oil exploration and production rights in 1993 when the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) bought a 40% stake in the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company.
providing economic aid to the latter since 1961. Cooperation between China and Morocco was initiated in 1983. Presently, China's projects in Morocco primarily involve fishery cooperation. The commodities that China exports to Morocco mainly are light industrial products, textiles, green tea, and mechanical and electronic products. China imports phosphates, chemical fertilizer and cobalt sand. China dispatched its first medical team to Morocco in September 1975. The China-Morocco agreement on medical cooperation was renewed in 1998. Currently, there are 120 medical workers working in different medical stations in Morocco. China-Morocco trade reached about $149 million in 2005, increasing 28% from the previous year (Large, 2006). The relationship is not equal as China benefits more from its imports from Morocco.

China and Zimbabwe

The two countries have had a very long relationship but in recent times, the image issue has been foremost in the global perception of the two countries given Mugabe's blatant human rights records and mismanagement of funds, and China has been fighting to get rid of this cloak of supporting repression and misrule. Most Chinese diplomats claim that they were doing so because 'in China, friendship is a tradition' (Russell, 2007). However, this constant defence of their attitude to poor leadership reinforces the growing perception in Harare that Beijing is quietly scaling down its relationship with Mugabe's regime as it is affecting their investments in other nations where they want to do business, and this is worrisome to them as China is a newcomer in the world of global trade.

Ever since Mugabe launched his "Look East" policy in 2003, Beijing has refused to condemn his repressive socio-political and economic policies and has provided much-needed loans to help prop up the crumbling economy. In the latest tangible sign of support, Jia Qinglin, a senior Chinese Communist party official, toured Zimbabwe in late April 2007 promoting the arrival of a batch of 424 Chinese tractors and 50 trucks, which are needed in the country's agriculture sector that has all but collapsed since Mugabe expropriated most of the commercial farms as part of his
Commission in 1972, and a new chapter was opened in their bilateral relations with emphasis on economic and technical cooperation between the two nations. The balance of trade has continued to be in favour of China, with the level of imports from Nigeria to China declining sharply in 2001 to US$227 million after registering consistent increases every year from mid 1990s and hitting an all time high in 2000 (Chibundu, 2003:4-5). On the other hand, "the value of Chinese exports to Nigeria increased tremendously during 2001 hitting US$917 million" (Chibundu, 2003:6).

Bilateral relations have achieved a smooth and steady development ever since. China and Nigeria signed a number of agreements on trade, economic and technical cooperation and scientific and technological cooperation, as well as an agreement on investment protection. The two countries have set up a joint economic and trade commission. Up to now, China has established more than 30 solely funded companies or joint ventures in Nigeria. Cooperation over a wide range of sectors is growing rapidly, with the bilateral trade volume hitting $2.83 billion in 2005, increasing 29.6% from the previous year (FOS, 2006). China is at the centre of Nigeria-Asia relations, which is shown by the fact that Nigeria's Communications Satellite (NIMCOASAT 1) was launched in China on 13th May 2007, she obtained loans from China under questionable circumstances (Jumme and Okorie, 2007), and China was equally invited to rehabilitate Nigeria's rail-lines that have become concomitant for decades. On the NIMCOASAT 1 launch in Xining, China, which was not only designed and built but also funded by China, Vardh (2007:4) reports Professor Song Dingli of Fudan University, Shanghai, as saying: "It gives substance to Sino-African relations. Not only does China buy raw materials, but also we sell something."

The China National Offshore Corporation (CNOOC), has acquired a 45% working interest in an offshore enterprise, OML 130, for $2.3 billion; the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has invested in the Port Harcourt refinery and there is also a further $2.25 billion to rehabilitate the Kaduna refinery; and a joint venture between the Chinese Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and the L.N. Mittal Group, plans to invest $6 billion in railways, oil refining, and power in exchange for rights to drill oil. The Nigerian government is increasingly turning to China for weapons to deal with the worsening insurgency in the oil-rich Niger Delta.
Investment from China, which offers aid without demands for good governance, unlike the United States and other Western donors. This reflects China's no-strings stance, which allows Beijing to ignore human rights abuses, corruption and political repression. As shown by the present developments, China is moving to consolidate its involvement in East Africa in an effort to extract resources to fuel its booming economy. Trade between China and Kenya totaled $475 million in 2005. Of this amount, China's exports to Kenya totaled $457 million in 2005 - a 30% increase from the previous year - while Kenyan exports to China barely reached $18 million. Critics fear that cheap Chinese imports will flood Kenyan markets, endangering the fragile livelihoods of many Kenyans (The World Bank, 2004).

China and Mozambique
Their relationship dates back to the mid-1960s when the PRC supported the Marxist-oriented FRELIMO party in its struggle for independence against Portuguese colonial rule. After independence in 1975, the two countries' relations remained friendly although in a limited manner as the FRELIMO government moved closer to the far more powerful Soviet Union as their foremost patron. At the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, China lost interest in the East African country as it shifted focus to domestic priorities and its immediate neighborhood. Since 2003, however, and not surprisingly China's involvement with Mozambique has been meteoric. In 2004, two-way trade stood at US$20 million, reaching US$510 million in 2006 (Kirchick, 2007).

One of the most interesting things about the China-Mozambique relations is that while it is modest when compared with the former's trade with other African states such as Angola and Sudan, the fact that trade between the two nations tripled in only two years, makes it one of the fastest growth rates experienced by any single nation's trade with China. The second particularity lies in the fact that unlike China's trade with its major partners in the continent such as Nigeria, Angola and Sudan, its rising trade with Mozambique is not centered on raw material imports to the PRC, such as oil and natural gas. China's trade with Mozambique is dominated by imports of agricultural products, fisheries, forest products
friendly aid; built various important government buildings free of charge; and has recently in February 2007 announced that it would finance the construction of a new national stadium at a cost of US$15 million and provide the FADM with US$1.7 million in assistance. In recent years, China has also sent large numbers of professionals to Mozambique as part of its assistance programme, including doctors and nurses, engineers, farmers and teachers. As variously noted by various sources, the number of Chinese nationals in Mozambique is between 7,000 and 13,000 as of 2006. In cultural affairs like education, according to Hosta (2007), China offers the largest number of scholarships to Mozambican students. The extent of China’s rising importance as a source of inspiration for the Mozambican government can be seen in the decision taken by the Mozambican government in late 2006 to make Mandarin a compulsory foreign language in high school in addition to English and French.

More recently, China has lent the Democratic Republic of Congo the sum of $5 billion to modernize its infrastructure and develop its mining industry. DRC will borrow $3 billion to construct a major highway, a railway, 13 hospitals, 145 health centres and 2 universities. The remaining $2 billion will be used to upgrade its aging mining infrastructure through joint ventures with Chinese companies (The Daily Sun, September 28, 2007, p. 11). In the same vein, Zambia and China have signed an agreement in September 2007 for the construction of a 40,000 seater stadium in Ndola, estimated to cost about $70 million, and the billed picked by China.

The trade balance between Africa and China cannot really be exhaustively treated in this paper. However, we must state that it has been extensive as China now accounts for 60% of all exports from Swaziland and 35% of those from Angola who accepted a $2 billion loan from China. Chinese firms mine copper in Zambia and Congo-Brazzaville, cobalt in the Congo, gold in South Africa, and uranium in Zimbabwe and consuming 46% of Gabon’s forest exports, 60% of timber exported from Equatorial Guinea, and 12% of timber exports from Cameroon (https://socialistbanner.blogspot.com/2007/04/chinese-capitalism-exploits-africa.html). Although it is really...
Finally, the rise of Sino-African relations is clearly part of China's strategic global positioning in its competition with the West (read U.S.). This is concretely noted by Ding, (2006) when he says:

Whatever reservations may have been expressed about China's mercantilist-driven push into Africa, African countries have generally found their development partnership with China more concretely beneficial and more satisfying than their experience with the Western donor countries. These donors appear to be experiencing profound disquiet over China's growing influence in Africa. China's approach to its aid and trade relationship with Africa attaches no strings in the face of issues such as human rights. It is viewed as offering far more practical and concrete kinds of support, such as infrastructural development that is essential for Africa's development, but has been neglected by traditional donors. China funds or undertakes projects decided by African countries rather than dictating priorities, and is quicker to deliver on aid promises than Western countries.

Moreover, recent debates about the state of Sino-US relations show that the muscle flexing between the two nations has reached a level yet to be attained in their history, and experts say it is as a result of China wanting to reach certain levels in global dominance. According to experts, Bush has left a lot of the diplomatic job to go to jintao who is now using it perfectly to get what China has always sought for in world politics.

Possibilities in the China-Africa Relations

There are certain possibilities inherent in the relationship between Africa and China. This is because there would be no need for such a relationship to be sustained if there is nothing to gain from such. Thus, we delineate some of these possibilities hereunder.

China's preaching of non-interference in domestic affairs of countries it relates with may likely fall in Africa as there is bound to come a point in which the African leaders will go against the grain of China's
foreigners individually. It would be to
their best interest, as they would have
got what they want from each without
being totally dependent on any in the
long run.

Conclusion
It is an in dubitandum that
China’s great inroad into Africa has
been largely successful and meant to
give her leverage in the never-ending
realty between her and the West.
However, in the bid to accept her good
fortunes, African states have walked
straight and blindly into the yawning
chasm deliberately created by the
Chinese to make Africa totally
dependent on her in order, not just to
spite the West, but also, to exploit the
abundant resources that are in Africa.

To help meet its demand for fuel,
China purchased more than half of
Sudan’s oil exports in 2006. Critics
charge that profits from these sales
have enabled the Khartoum
government to buy weapons with
which to continue its military
operations - both directly and by
proxy - in the nation’s Darfur region.
The Sudanese military and
concerned government-aligned Janjaweed
militia forces stand accused by the
United Nations and the global
community of carrying out war crimes
against the area’s civilian population.
The chaos engulfing Darfur has
claimed an estimated 200,000 lives,
mainly civilians, since 2003.
Moreover, China supplied the arms,
and so she defends Sudan in the
United Nations by vetoing the
imposition of sanctions.

Supporters of the Chinese
invasion of Africa state that the
historical antecedents of China will
not allow them to act against the
African interest. This is clearly what
Jian (2007) tried to do when he stated
thus in defence of Chinese activities in
Africa:

China has not occupied any
African country. And a country
with a deep historial memory of
being colonized by Western
powers, China does not want to
counter Africa’s economic and
political systems. The Chinese
Government neither appoints
military consulates to African
governments nor constructs
military bases on the continent.
Moreover, China has not used
devious means to steal and exploit
African resources. Relations
between China and African
countries are grounded on
developing countries’ space programmes. Thus, China’s focus on satellites had become suspicions to the US as most of these satellites are dual-purpose technologies that have the capability for civilian and military applications. As enunciated by Yardley (2007):

For China, the strategy is a blend of self-interest, broader diplomacy and, from a business standpoint, an effective way to break into the satellite markets, as satellites have become status symbols and technological necessities for many countries that want an ownership stake in the digital world dominated by the West.

The resurgence of hegemonic and imperialistic tendencies has also been shown with the manner the Chinese government had been arming African nations. China has been accused of selling weapons to most African states, thereby fuelling the crises that have become virtually endemic on the continent. Fan (2007) reports that between 1955 and 1977, China sold $142 million worth of military equipment to Africa, and the pace of sales has picked up significantly since then. The Congressional Research Service reports China’s arms sales to Africa made up 10% of all conventional arms transfers to the continent between 1996 and 2003. They include:

**Sudan**: China has sold S100 million worth of Shenyang fighter planes, including twelve supersonic F-7 jets, and it is a well known fact that all the Janjaweed militiaman employ to assault civilians in Darfur comes from China.

**Equatorial Guinea**: China has provided military training and Chinese specialists in heavy military equipment to the leaders of the tiny West African nation, and this is primarily for oil which is abundant in the area.

**Ethiopia and Eritrea**: China sold Ethiopia and its neighbour, Eritrea, an estimated $1 billion worth of weapons before and during their border war from 1998 and 2000.

**Burundi**: In 1995, a Chinese ship carrying 152 tons of ammunition and light weapons meant for the army of Burundi was refused permission to dock in Tanzania.

**Tanzania**: China has delivered at least thirteen covert shipments of weapons
market noted that China has been flooding the country with cheap, fake and inferior products that are affordable: hazardous electronics and toys that have been found to be painted with lead which is a health risk; fake drugs which are being fought by the Nigerian National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and cloned electronics, phones and computers.

As Cohen states, and quoted in Kirchick (2007) "in Kano, a major city in Nigeria’s north, a Chinese-owned textile factory has forced the entire city’s other textile companies to close, and that the factory’s raw materials are purchased in China, not Africa. They tend to be like old-fashioned imperialists. For their part, African leaders get snookered into thinking they are in solidarity with the third world by tying their fates so closely to the Chinese. To that extent, China’s charm offensive in Africa appears to be working.”

Commentators have continued to insist that the China’s impact on Africa is potentially very large with the rapid domestic growth altering world prices for the goods Africa buys and sells. Also, as a generous lender and aid donor, it has given African states that have depended on the West for support wider choices. China is gradually changing the global financial power distribution. These are not debatable. However, as noted by Phillips (2007):

The limited evidence to date suggests, however, that the actual impacts have been large only for some African economies — particularly those that export natural resources. Direct Chinese investment in some resource-rich African economies has helped to increase demand and therefore push up prices. It has also contributed to signs of Dutch Disease. Those resource-rich African economies that are not selling directly to China have felt indirect impacts as Chinese demand has helped push commodity prices to new levels. However, in non-commodity exporting African countries, the presence of Chinese investment and lending has not radically transformed the economy, but has simply provided some new and not necessarily welcome financing options.
Young, Nick (2007) “China in Africa: A Relationship still in the Making”

China Development Brief, Tuesday, 3rd June.
http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/issue/1126