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Non-Interference 2.0: China's Evolving Foreign Policy towards a Changing Africa

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Abstract: China's non-interference policy has come under scrutiny in regards to its growing and deepening relations in Africa. The policy has come to represent an about-face from conditional assistance and investment associated with the Washington Consensus. Although often well received in much of the global South, this policy has drawn a lot of criticism from the West and others. These commentators have perceived non-interference as an opportunistic and often inconsistent instrument for enabling China's increasing access to African resources and markets. This article suggests that despite some consistent support for the rhetoric of non-interference, China's implementation of the policy has become increasingly varied and contextualized in reaction to Africa's ever-more diversified political and economic landscape since the early 2000s.

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Introduction

Lately, some good news has come out of Africa. Some African economies are posting impressive economic growth rates, and the landscape of political dictatorships and oppression is gradually giving way to the introduction and entrenchment of electoral democracy and civil liberties. These changes are largely unfolding thanks to the immense contribution of China and other Asian economies. China's stake in African economies has continuously grown over the past decade, with trade rising from 5 billion USD in 1997 to over 200 billion USD in 2012 (Taylor 2009; Wallis 2013). As the country endeavours to firmly ground its interests in Africa, the debate among stakeholders and academics has often centred on delineating the nature and intent of Chinese foreign policy towards the continent. Moreover, a great deal of attention has been paid to whether Chinese engagement either presents the continent with new opportunities or represents a new form of foreign exploitation. As a consequence, less attention has been paid to the particular policies and guidelines that have come to define this critical twenty-first-century partnership.

China's non-interference policy is one such policy that has received the aforementioned treatment in most literary circles. In contrast with Africa's relations with the EU and North America, China has largely deployed economic aid and investments with the principle of no strings attached (Hess and Aidoo 2010; Clapham 2006). This policy strategy is attributable to its principle of non-interference and its desire to provide an alternative to Western-style, conditional giving and investments under the Washington Consensus. The principle of non-interference, a well-known but nebulous strand of Chinese foreign policy, has featured prominently in its relations with African countries as it has in the larger developing world since the 1950s. While frequently well received throughout much of the global South, this policy has drawn a lot of criticism as the West and others have perceived non-interference as an opportunistic and often inconsistent instrument used by China to increase its access to African resources and markets.

This article suggests that despite its consistent support for the rhetoric of non-interference, China's implementation of the policy has become increasingly varied and contextualized in reaction to Africa's increasingly diversified political and economic landscape since the early 2000s. Whereas non-interference may have guided the initial interactions of Chinese officials with their African counterparts, the application of the policy has subsequently shifted and adapted to meet local conditions. Chinese engagement was initially received warmly by a diverse array of African leaders, who welcomed Beijing's non-conditioned, hands-off approach to aid, assistance and economic partnership. However, as Sino-African economic linkages have deepened, relations that were once widely embraced as mutually beneficial have become more complex. This has occurred as African economic sectors that compete with Chinese investment and goods have become increasingly hostile towards Beijing's engagement with the continent, which has placed new pressures on China's African partner states.

Moreover, Africa's political transformation over the last several decades has complicated Beijing's foreign policy overtures towards Africa. As China's presence has become established in an increasingly diverse set of political regimes in Africa, including Ghana's high-capacity democracy, Nigeria's low-capacity democracy, Ethiopia's low-capacity non-democracy, and Angola's high-capacity non-democracy, its foreign policy approach has developed accordingly. In non-democracies, Beijing has developed dense linkages with incumbent parties and provided stalwart support against opposition forces. In more democratic regimes, Beijing has forged relationships with incumbent and opposition parties, hedging risk in anticipation of leadership turnovers. In low-capacity regimes, Chinese officials have formed bonds with incumbents but have increasingly avoided confrontations with powerful opposition forces. In instances of opposition breakthrough, Beijing has quickly and aggressively courted new leaders, even leaders such as Zambia's Michael Sata, who had previously espoused anti-Beijing sentiments.

In short, the practical implementation of non-interference has differed across political contexts – the overarching aim being to sustain stable economic and diplomatic relations with African partners and avoid disruptions in the face of possible political changes or upheavals. Interestingly, this strategy has thus far enabled Chinese interests to weather political change in democratic, authoritarian and partly democratic transitional regimes. These developments suggest that as opposed to suggestions that Beijing has been "propping up" dictators (Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small 2008), China's overarching strategy is eminently pragmatic, aimed at forging positive working relations with any partner state that can help advance its economic interests – regardless of whether its political regime is authoritarian or democratic.

Situating Non-Interference

In spite of the debates and controversies surrounding non-interference, segments of African populations and African leaders have on balance shown strong support for Beijing's style of engagement on the continent. Advocated in Beijing's official foreign policy for nearly 60 years, non-interference has since emerged as an important tenet of Third World solidarity and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In 1954, during meetings aimed at addressing heated border disputes between their two countries, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru issued a joint statement emphasizing their adherence to the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence". These included non-interference, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equality and mutual benefit, mutual non-aggression, and peaceful coexistence (Hess and Aidoo 2010: 359). As expressed in subsequent international declarations advanced by Beijing and other developing nations, specific violations of non-interference might include: armed interventions, threats of force, support for domestic insurgencies and rebellions, hostile propaganda, and using one's economic and political power to destabilize a foreign country or limit its ability to determine its own development and internal affairs (Hess and Aidoo 2010: 359).

The Five Principles attained global significance a year later when they were affirmed by 29 countries from Asia and Africa participating in an international conference in Bandung, Indonesia. This set the stage for their eventual adoption by NAM and a for series of declarations advanced by large coalitions of developing countries in the United Nations General Assembly from the 1960s to the 1980s (United Nations General Assembly 1981; Hess and Aidoo 2010: 358–359). During the Cold War, the Five Principles parallelled efforts by Third World countries to assert their newly won national sovereignty and resist the domination and interference of Soviet and American superpowers. Since the end of the Cold War, Beijing has continued to espouse rhetorical support for the principle of non-interference, which has served to leverage China against Western condemnations of its own domestic practices – including human rights violations –

and to build solidarity with partners in the global South (Tull 2006: 460–461).

As reflected by the Five Principles and South–South allegiance, the Chinese policy of non-interference encapsulates some essential features and rhetoric of China's diplomatic efforts towards developing countries. These include respecting the sanctity of internal and external sovereignty; abstaining from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of a particular country, refraining from acts that may be perceived as threats (both aggressive and subtle) to the independence of a country, avoiding the use of economic or political measures to force a country or its government to acquiesce to particular demands, and eschewing any efforts to assist or tolerate the overthrow of a regime in power. These ideals have been touted in decades of Chinese diplomacy toward the developing world. From Beijing's consistent reference and adherence to its Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression with Burma during the political displacement of Aung San Suu Kyi in the 1990s to its current insistence on non-interference in Sudan and South Sudan, non-interference has served as a guidepost for China's actions or lack thereof in global affairs.

This has further prompted scholars and other stakeholders to investigate the motivations behind China's vacillations within the frame of this policy. The adherence to non-interference or non-intervention has been perceived as a pragmatic step towards securing and sustaining access to vital resources in most of the developing world. In Africa, China's seemingly non-engaging stance towards rogue and non-democratic regimes in Zimbabwe and Angola has been perceived as Beijing's way of gaining uninterrupted access to oil and non-oil resources. In addition, the policy of non-interference has been instrumental in furthering South–South solidarity in the developing world. This solidarity has been the bedrock of China's relations with countries in the developing world, especially in Asia and Africa. It offers countries on those two continents some assurance of mutual respect and prolonged friendship amidst changing global orders. Another motivation behind the policy of non-interference is to enable China to distinguish its political and economic agenda in Africa from the West's. Given Africa's haunting past with colonial rule and the role played by the West in this history, China has been continuously prodded to prove the difference between its contemporary relations with Africa and that of the West in the continent's past. With such a difficult task, Beijing has persistently alluded to the policy of non-interference as a complete detour from decades of Western interference that were wrapped in conditional giving and diverse interventions.

With such motivations, when forging relationships in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world, Beijing has emphasized its role as a fellow member of the South, its history free of imperialism or colonialism in foreign lands, and its willingness to provide aid, assistance and economic opportunities on the basis of equality – without the paternalistic prescriptions or conditions often demanded by Western donors and international financial institutions. After decades of Western countries applying the prescriptions laid out in the Washington Consensus, doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of Western conditional support as a remedy to Africa's development maladies. This is encapsulated in infamous and proverbial sound bites such as "We must turn toward the East, where the sun rises", as Zimbabwe's Mugabe welcomed China, and the admission by Ethiopia's Meles Zewani that "neoliberal reforms advocated by the World Bank and others had failed to generate the kind of growth they sought" (Halper 2010: 62). Expectedly, the West has also been very suspicious of China's activities in Africa. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently tapped into this suspicion as she retorted that

> it is easy – and we saw that during colonial times […] to come in, take out natural resources, pay off leaders, and leave […]. We don't want to see a new colonialism in Africa (*Reuters* 2011).

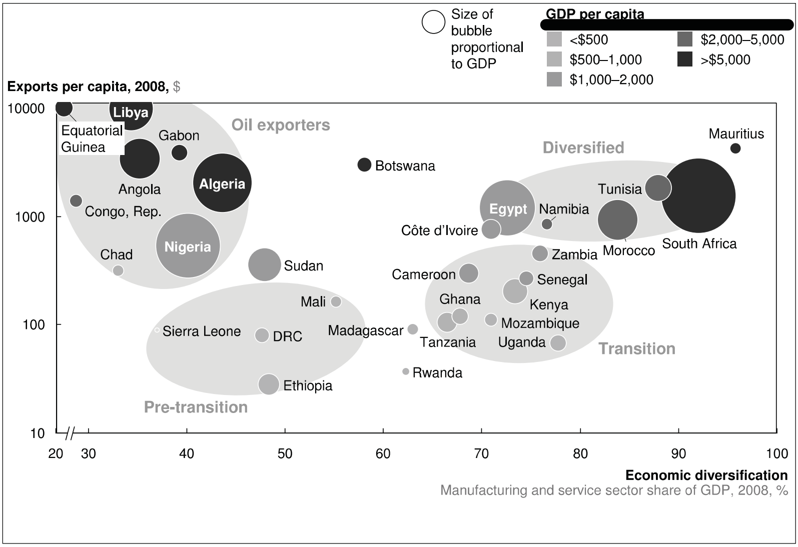
In the past decade, a body of scholarship has attributed China's access to untapped resources and potential markets in parts of the developing world to the deployment of its charm or soft power (Kurlantzick 2007). However, some contend that this strand of argument represents a simplistic way of explaining a rather complex relationship between China (an emerging global economy) and Africa (a continent in transition). Additionally, China's recent economic expansions are a result of its "flexigemony", which entails Chinese actors adapting their strategies to suit the particular histories and geographies of the African states with which they engage in economic partnerships (Carmody and Taylor 2011). This provides China the flexibility it needs to successfully work with diverse political regimes in different domestic contexts and, most important, to redefine the extent of its domestic involvement. Hence, in spite of the growing disaffection among some African populations, China and its non-interference policy generally receive strong approval in national public opinion surveys (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738; Pew Research Centre 2007). However, a closer look at these empirical studies also reveals a more nuanced African response with regards to the policy of non-interference and Sino-African partnership.

In most literature and the media, China's relations with Africa and its policy of non-interference have garnered a two-pronged response – harsh, critical censure from China sceptics and the West, assuaged by a rather accepting and optimistic response from African populations. Nevertheless, recent growing anti-Chinese sentiments, coupled with allegations that Beijing has attempted to meddle in the domestic affairs of nations like Zambia, Sudan and Libya, suggest that this growing relationship is rather nuanced. These alleged instances of interference have occurred even as Beijing persistently professes rhetorical support for the policy of non-interference on Africa's evolving political and economic landscape.

Complementary and Competing Economic Relations

The recent image of Africa, or at least of a large part of the continent, has been a departure from decades of economic stagnation. With a pro-growth economic agenda, stronger and more open political institutions, the continent has significantly improved its prospects for development (Mahajan 2009; Radelet 2010a, 2010b). In economic terms, Africa's growth has been diverse with present and future growth trajectories classifying countries as oil exporters, pre-transition, transition and diversified (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). As shown in Figure 1, this patchwork also highlights progress toward diverse sources of economic growth and the generation of export revenue to finance further growth.

Figure 1: Segments of Present and Projected Economic Growth among African States



Source: McKinsey Global Institute 2010.

These developments have significantly improved the continent's position in the global economy, attracting economic interests from Europe, the Americas and Asia. The most momentous among these have been China's expanding economic interests. Chinese economic engagements in African countries have largely been centred on resource extraction of both strategic and non-strategic resources and on securing a growing market (Zweig and Bi 2005; Taylor 2009). To sustain access to such critical economic interests, Beijing has rhetorically evoked non-interference as part of its foreign policy agenda to steer clear of domestic political entanglements that might soil its image as purely a "business partner".

Of course, growing Chinese engagement has produced both winners and losers among its major economic partners. The nature, whether complementary or competitive, of China's economic activities in a particular African state determines the respective support for or opposition to Beijing's engagement. Kaplinsky, McCormick, and Morris (2010) note that China's engagements with individual African countries are often complementary. China provides these countries with appropriate capital goods and cheap consumer goods in exchange for strategic and non-strategic resources. An influx of competitively priced Chinese manufactures, often sold for half the price of Western goods, improves the purchasing power of African consumers and reduces the overall cost of living (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

On the other hand, the importation of consumer goods has presented new competition for local producers. As Beijing becomes more vested in African economies, scholars and stakeholders continue to vacillate between the opportunities and challenges of its trade, investments and aid, all of which are meant to transform these economies. China provides a market for African primary commodities while simultaneously competing with these African economies for the global market for manufactured products. As demonstrated by the export similarity index, the competitive nature of Chinese imports has varied dramatically across the continent. The exports of countries with nascent manufacturing sectors – such as South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania – face the greatest competition from China's exports, whereas those countries with greater reliance on resource exports – such as Nigeria, Sudan and Angola – face the least (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). Of course, the competitive challenges posed by China's economic activities also vary depending on the specific economies with which it is doing business. Studies of countries like Ghana (Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010), Zimbabwe (Sachikonye 2008) and South Africa (Edwards and Jenkins 2013) have shown Beijing's economic overtures to be threatening to some specific domestic industries, particularly in the manufacturing sector, while complementary to others, such as mining. In other words, China's growing economic footprint has generally benefitted some specific economic sectors in Africa, while harming others.

As China's interests in African economies diversify to include investment in the African manufacturing sector, the economic stakes increase, giving Beijing a farther and more controlling reach into these economies. In fact, in recent years, 22 per cent of Chinese investment in Africa has been in manufacturing, rivalling its better-known involvement in mining (29 per cent) (*The Economist* 2011). While such ventures have contributed to job growth and the transfer of skills to local workers, they inevitably put pressure on the policy of non-interference as the Chinese government and its companies seek to be part of the decision-making apparatus aimed at safeguarding their investments. There has been an uproar over the adverse effect of Chinese trade and investments on African manufacturing industries, including the deterioration of local working conditions and the proliferation of questionable business practices in local economies (Taylor 2009). The widespread nature of this problem has drawn negative responses from many Africans, indicated by the growing anti-Chinese sentiments among sections of different populations (Donovan and McGovern 2007). A recent increase in Chinese manufacturing investments has elevated concerns over the shady nature of these business deals in certain places – especially ones that are joint ventures between Africans or African governments and Chinese partners.

China's continually growing interest in African raw materials, particularly oil, puts Beijing at the core of a vital economic sector that is characterized by messy and corrupt politics, which further complicates Chinese efforts to increase economic engagement without interfering in the internal affairs of partner states. As noted by Duncan Clarke (2008), for China nothing rivals its drive to capture oil and gas potential in Africa, as loans, aid monies and debt write-offs grease the political wheels to help finance access to oil deals in some of Africa's known oil economies. This urge is exacerbated by China's exceptionally robust economic growth in the past two decades, which will continue to depend mainly on oil to fulfil its increasing transportation and industrial needs in the foreseeable future. Chinese firms have been involved in various deals with the majority of the 19 African countries that produce oil or have proven oil reserves (Taylor 2009).

In some cases, Beijing must compete against established and well-known Western companies for these oil and gas concessions. In such cases, differences between China's approach to African resources and that of the West become imperative to the securing of oil contracts. For China, oil and politics are one, in contrast to the Western model. Some small, Western-owned firms have wittingly or otherwise acted as Trojan horses for larger Chinese interests in oil deals (Clarke 2008: 401). For instance, in 2010, business in Ghana's new oil industry became confusingly messy for most of the industry's watchers as a 5 billion USD joint bid by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) was put forward to purchase the stake of the Texasbased company Kosmos Energy. This instance was perceived as arm-twisting by the Ghanaian government to transfer the assets and the stake of Kosmos in the Jubilee oil field – Ghana's largest – to the Chinese instead of to ExxonMobil (the choice of Kosmos Energy) (Dogbevi 2010). Also, in Nigeria, a Chinese oil investment deal – oil-for-infrastructure – reached under the Obasanjo administration was suspended by the Yar'Adua administration pending investigations into corruption. In both cases, Beijing is either tied to some iniquitous investment activity or perceived as a crony to a corrupt African government. Such instances provide proof for critics who label China's activities in Africa under the policy of non-interference as self-serving and opportunistic.

Moreover, as noted in a report by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (2005), African commodity exports to China, such as oil, metals, cotton and timber, do not typically have a net-positive impact on job creation. Moreover, the poorest and most marginalized populations of African partner states cannot easily access the revenue streams connected to these industries. These trends suggest that in China's African partner states – many of which were already plagued by substantial income inequality – this problem may persist or grow (Department for International Development 2005: 14–16). Thus, unskilled workers and other marginal groups may be dislodged from a sector of the economy harmed by Chinese engagement but may not be able to access the benefits gained in other (often extractive) sectors. These circumstances can readily contribute to pushback against Beijing's presence in African societies. Consequently, even in extractive industries, which have seen record growth from China's unquenched demand for commodities, particularly energy resources, Beijing has experienced complications to its "business-is-business" approach to economic relationships.

Beijing's Foreign Policy in Africa's Changing Political Landscape

Much has been written about the soft-power-oriented "charm offensive" China has used to pursue its foreign policy goals since the early 2000s. Seeking to win supportive allies, deflect criticisms of its internal policies, acquire needed raw materials and export markets and avoid direct confrontations with the United States, China has refrained from the overt use of its military and economic resources to influence its foreign partners. Instead, it has extended offers of aid, assistance and economic partnership to foreign states, insisting on upholding the principle of non-interference and forging "business-is-business" relationships with "no political strings" attached (Kurlantzick 2007: 37–56; Alden 2007: 8). Since the initiation of Jiang Zemin's "Going Out" policy in 1999, China's non-interference strategy has proved remarkably successful in winning allies and securing the market access and resources needed to sustain the country's dynamic economic growth.

Throughout Africa and elsewhere in the global South, Beijing has forged an expansive body of bilateral and multilateral agreements with its foreign counterparts as Chinese officials, firms and entrepreneurs rapidly expand into new markets, finding new opportunities to work, trade and invest. To the present, these deepening bonds have been facilitated primarily through direct government-to-government exchanges, with Beijing currying favour and linking up with national leaders and ruling parties in various African states. Since the mid-1990s, Beijing has frequently deployed national-level officials, including heads of state, to high-profile face-to-face meetings with their counterparts in various African capitals and at regional organizations, such as gatherings of the African Union. Moreover, Beijing has hosted African heads of state and delegations representing ruling governments and has even established a formal multilateral institution – the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) – as a base for launching regional initiatives, facilitating greater economic and political cooperation and extending offers of aid and assistance (Shambaugh 2013: 109–110).

By framing its diplomatic overtures in the rhetoric of non-interference, Beijing has attempted to focus on maintaining friendly relations with local ruling elites, who as sovereign rulers formally represent the entirety of their constituent territories and populations. Ruling parties such as the National Congress Party (NCP) of Sudan, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) have even participated in joint training and cooperative exchanges with the Chinese Communist Party, deploying delegations of cadres to China for such programmes. Once agreements for cooperation have been struck and relationships with ruling parties have been established, Beijing has utilized its friendships with local rulers to gain market access for its own firms, who seek avenues to needed resources, local consumer markets and opportunities for local investment. Beyond removing barriers to trade and investments, Chinese officials have also bundled offers of aid and assistance into high-level deals requiring the contracting of Chinese firms to complete projects or the purchasing of Chinese products (Geda and Meskel 2009: 20). Moreover, when operating in economies often troubled by official corruption, cronyism and a lack of transparency, Chinese firms have rightly or wrongly been accused of using their influence with ruling parties to win market share and contracts, displacing local businesses (Goldie-Scot 2012: 249–251).

Perceived collusion between ruling parties and Beijing has resulted in varying degrees of local backlash in African states negatively affected by China's engagement. To cite some notable examples, such actions have included the kidnapping of 29 Chinese workers by Sudanese rebels in January 2012; the adoption of anti-Beijing rhetoric by Zambian opposition candidate Michael Sata during the 2006, 2008 and 2011 presidential elections; the killing of four Chinese workers in South Africa in November 2011; violent labour strikes at Chinese-owned coal mines in Zambia in 2012; the arrest and deportation of Chinese miners in Ghana in June 2013; and demonstrations by workers and traders against Chinese goods in Ghana, Senegal, Kenya and Malawi over the last several years (Cropley and Martina 2012).

These manifestations of anti-Chinese sentiment have been extraordinarily diverse. Some have taken place within the domain of conventional, institutionalized politics, while others have taken non-institutionalized forms outside the legal limits of political actions. Some have been violent in nature, others non-violent. They have also adopted a diverse collection of targets, with some actors taking aim at local ruling governments and their officials, and others acting directly against Chinese multinational companies and their property or Chinese nationals, whether workers or independent entrepreneurs. The single common thread has been that these groups and individuals have attributed negative social and economic changes in their communities to China and carried out collective action framed around China's influence in their respective countries.

As noted by scholars of contentious politics, the repertoires of contention adopted by social actors are shaped by the structure of opportunities and threats in a given political environment (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 48–49). These structures vary substantially across countries and regime types and have a powerful impact on determining the prevailing repertoire of contention adopted by actors making claims directly or indirectly on a government. Tilly and Tarrow (2007) categorize regimes by their degree of capacity, a government's ability to take actions that affect the "character and distribution of population, activity, and resources within [its] territory", and by their degree of democracy,

> the extent to which people subject to a given government's authority have broad, equal political rights, exert significant direct influence over government personnel and policy, and receive protection from arbitrary [government] action (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 55).

As reflected in much literature on contentious politics, particular types of regimes tend to experience specific repertoires of political contention. High-capacity democracies are more likely to see social movements, low-capacity democracies often experience military coups and ethnic or religious struggles, high-capacity non-democracies yield many insurgencies and bouts of violent state repression, and low-capacity non-democracies often see protracted, high-intensity civil wars (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 56–57). The emergence of more democratic forms of government amidst Africa's political transformation, which is of particular interest to this study, has in recent decades created a continent with highly varied structures of political opportunities and threats as well as highly varied forms of popular contention. This transformation has required that Beijing and other outside players adapt their foreign policy strategies to an increasingly varied political terrain.

As indicated in Table 1, China's closest African partners have varied significantly in terms of their degree of political freedom and capacity. Despite allegations that China has an interest in propping up dictatorships in sub-Saharan Africa, Beijing has developed close relations with democracies and non-democracies alike. Moreover, China's closest relationships have included more stable regimes, such as Ghana and South Africa, as well as weak and less stable regimes, such as Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan, where political risk and human rights concerns have deterred Western actors, creating opportunities for Chinese firms. In this study, we have identified twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa noted for their high levels of Chinese foreign direct investment, trade and assistance. These cases are classified as high or low democracy based on Freedom House's (2013) *Freedom in the World* report, which combines ratings for political rights and civil liberties. They are classified as high- or low-capacity based on combined measures for the strength of the security apparatus and ability to provide basic public services included in the Fund for Peace's (2013) *Failed States Index* report. Hereafter, the combined score of these two measures is referred to as "political capacity". Both measures are dichotomous; the six countries with the lowest scores ("most free") according to Freedom House are labelled as high democracy: Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Nigeria. Those with the six highest scores ("least free") are listed as low democracy: Sudan, Ethiopia, Angola, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Uganda. Similarly, the six cases with the highest ratings for political capacity are Ghana, South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Angola and Kenya. The six with the lowest ratings are Uganda, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Nigeria and South Sudan. This study focuses on four cases, each representing one of the four categories of the categorization scheme: Ghana as a high-capacity, high-democracy case; Angola as a high-capacity, low-democracy case; Nigeria as a low-capacity, high-democracy case; and Ethiopia as a low-capacity, low-democracy case.

Table 1: Categorizing China's African Partners

	High Democracy	Low Democracy
High Capacity	Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia	Angola
Low Capacity	Nigeria	Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe

Source: Fund for Peace 2013; Freedom House 2013.

In each of these four cases, China has adapted its foreign policy strategies to address new and varied forms of popular backlash that emerge from the real and perceived losers of deepened engagement. It is in this context that Beijing has increasingly realized the diversity of anti-China pushback across the region – in both manner and degree – and modified its non-interference policies to ensure lasting positive relations with ruling governments, access to desired resources and markets, and the safety of its citizens, firms and their respective assets in the region.

Ghana

Ghana's current political system is considered as one of the most stable democracies in Africa. Since its return to constitutional rule in 1992, the country has maintained free and competitive political contests among its varied political parties, led by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC). This more recently emerged political image of the country stands in contrast with the decades of political instability and economic stagnation that have characterized most of the post-independence era. With sturdy and collective pressures stemming from both external and domestic interests, Ghana stepped into a democratic era in the early 1990s, turning away from the years of military dictatorship that had dominated its postcolonial political discourse. Over the past two decades, competitive elections with a series of electoral turnovers have pushed Ghana over Huntington's crucial threshold of democratic consolidation (Huntington 1993). Besides the political transformation, economic liberalization and reforms coupled with the discovery of oil have renewed external interests in the Ghanaian economy. China and its economic entrepreneurs have shown significant interest in Ghana's economy as investments in different sectors have increased over the years – Chinese exports to Ghana increased from 93 million USD in 2000 to more than 1.5 billion USD in 2008, and significant infrastructure projects such as the 622 million USD Bui hydroelectric dam have been undertaken (Power, Mohan, and Tan-Mullins 2012).

In a democratically free Ghana with a transitional economy (see Figure 1), its relationship with China is both complementary and competitive (see Baah and Jauch 2009). Ghanaians generally see China's influence as a positive one but are somewhat circumspect with regards to non-interference, as they support the policy but with some reservations (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738). So, in spite of the complementary provision of infrastructure such as road networks, railway systems, football stadiums and the Bui hydroelectric plant, there have been serious negative consequences of working with China. Such instances include the weakening of the clothing and textiles sector from an influx of cheap textiles from China. These developments negatively affect the perceptions of the popular Chinese economic efforts in Ghana. In recent years, Ghanaian textile companies and their workers have largely been depicted as hardworking and law-abiding, competing against large-scale Chinese manufacturers engaged in illegal modes and networks of production such as counterfeiting, smuggling, tax evasion and the use of child labour. The business strategies of the Chinese are often referred to as unethical (Axelsson and Sylvanus 2010). In recent years, the main source of Ghanaian frustration toward the Chinese has come from the latter's involvement in illegal mining (galamsey) activities in different parts of the country. As Chinese nationals enter this unregulated economic activity, they get into intense and sometimes life-threatening competition with the locals who continue to see this as their mainstay. "These Chinese people do not respect our laws and local traditions. When they see opportunity, they move in at the cost of all else", said an angry and frustrated hotel operator in Awaso in Ghana's Western Region (Interview 1 2013). Though public outcry has led to the deportation of large batches of Chinese nationals, this has yet to be converted into a political agenda by a particular political party.

As a result of the mass deportation of Chinese nationals, there seems to be some official retribution from Beijing in the form of tightening visa requirements for Ghanaians travelling to China as well as delaying the payment of a 3 billion USD China Development Bank (CDB) loan to Ghana. Tsikata, Fenny, and Aryeetey (2009) also cite the case of CALF Cocoa Processing in Ghana, a joint venture between the government of Ghana and China International Cooperation Company for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries (CALF), which later degenerated into domestic political propaganda. This case began with a line of credit totalling more than 18 million USD from the Chinese Exim Bank to the Rawlings administration to invest in a cocoa-processing project alongside a gold mine and a fishing net and rope factory. This investment became entangled in domestic politics when it was reported that the Ghanaian government's share was managed by a company with ties to the 31st December Women's Movement, an outfit of the wife of (then) President Rawlings. This project was fraught with internal political wrangling, leading to the halting of this investment plan by the succeeding government (Tsikata, Fenny, and Aryeetey 2009). The attempt by Beijing to establish its economic prowess in Africa faces the difficulty of upholding promises both to keep things "strictly business" and to avoid domestic interference, real challenges for Beijing's economic expansion in Africa.

But in contrast to the neoliberal reforms under the Washington Consensus, the policy of non-interference has appealed to some Ghanaians and elites, who perceive this policy as less bureaucratic and paternalistic than the approach embraced by Western actors. Conversely, the shades of unpopularity and indifference registered with China's economic engagements may be attributable to the competition between its economic actors and domestic economic interests – the textile industry and galamsey. Perhaps most important, Ghana has seen regular and peaceful rotations in power between its two leading political parties in recent years. Neither has tapped into anti-Chinese sentiments, since securing Chinese investment and trade has become critical for governments once in office. Thus, in Ghana's competitive democratic environment, opposition challengers have a strong expectation of victory in approaching electoral contests, dissuading them from publicly criticizing China to win political points, even when it has to do with Chinese interference into local matters. As put by a local in Awaso in the Western Region of Ghana – one of the areas that has seen an increase in galamsey,

> We know they [the Chinese] are bribing the politicians and leaders, but we will not say anything. All we can do is vote them out of office (Interview 2 2013).

Angola

Following a peace accord in 2002, Angola ended 25 years of civil war and began the long process of rebuilding the country's economy and putting it on a path of development. In the immediate aftermath of the civil war, Angola's government, led by the victorious Movimento Popular para a Libertação de Angola (MPLA), courted a range of international donors to help finance the country's post-conflict recovery. The Angolan government struggled to secure funding from the IMF and World Bank, failing to develop an approved poverty reduction programme and meet other conditions (Burke, Corkin, and Tay 2007: 17). Meanwhile, Angola accepted a 2 billion USD financing package from China in early 2004, followed by a 2 billion USD loan in 2007 (Campos and Vines 2008: 6–8). Both loans had very low interest rates, were used to fund infrastructure projects, were required to be repaid through oil sales over a period of 12 to 15 years, and also had almost no associated conditions – other than the requirement that at least 70 per cent of all construction work and equipment be purchased from Chinese firms (Alves 2013: 107–108). These funds were used for a range of infrastructure projects throughout the country, including the rehabilitation and construction of roads, hospitals, schools, irrigation systems, the country's telecommunications network and water treatment facilities (Campos and Vines 2008: 7–8). Bilateral trade between Angola and China exploded from 1.8 billion USD in 2000 to 36 billion USD in 2013, with crude oil making up over 95 per cent of Angola's exports to China (Ren 2014). Chinese investment in the country rapidly expanded, particularly in construction and oil and diamond extraction (Campos and Vines 2008: 15–18).

In general, Angola and China have had highly complementary economic relations. As its consumption continues to soar, China's demand for Angola's oil resources has grown. At the same time, post-conflict Angola has struggled with the conditions posed by international financial institutions, creating a need for China's outside financing as well as its affordable technical assistance and construction projects. Nevertheless, some sectors of Angolan society have expressed frustration with China's growing involvement in their country. First, Chinese firms have tended to import Chinese nationals to work in both high- and low-skill positions rather than to hire local labourers. Second, Chinese companies have often secured contracts through high-level closed-door discussions with Angolan officials, leading to suspicions of corrupt deal-making and collusion between Chinese firms and the ruling party. Third, Chinese construction projects and consumer products have gained the reputation of being of low quality, such as roads that quickly develop potholes or even wash away during seasonal rains. Finally, Chinese investment has mostly flowed into extractive industries, such as oil and diamonds, which produce high profits – most often captured by well-connected individuals – but relatively few jobs for average Angolans. These frustrations have played a role in criticism of China by Angolan civil society actors and even violence against Chinese nationals, including robberies and physical attacks, by both criminal gangs and anti-government rebels (particularly in Cabinda). In those cases, Chinese nationals are identified as supporters of the Angolan government and thus serve as proxy targets for anti-regime violence (Faucon and Su 2010).

In Angola, President dos Santos and the MPLA have established effective and unchecked power over the political system. The influx of oil revenues and China's emergence as a source of foreign support and financing, which places no pressure on dos Santos to make good governance reforms, have strengthened the grip of the ruling party and enabled it to dominate all potential sources of countervailing political power. In 2008 elections, the MPLA won 82 per cent of the vote, compared to 10 per cent for the leading opposition party (Amundsen 2013: 2). As a consequence of the party's political dominance over Angolan society, Beijing's foreign relations have centred on currying favour with the MPLA, particularly President dos Santos' inner circle, where political power is heavily concentrated, and providing direct support to the ruling elite. Since opposition actors are fragmented and weak, Beijing focuses on the MPLA and President dos Santos, making little effort to hedge its bets by reaching out to opposition or civil society actors.

Nigeria

Nigeria represents a political paradox in sub-Saharan Africa. It has immense political and economic potential yet is plagued by a multitude of challenges that have hobbled this oil exporter. Though Nigeria has seen a sustained period of civilian rule since independence from the British, democratic governance is in a transitional phase with embers of past military rule and ethnic rivalry still glowing underneath the incipient democratic culture. After navigating some turbulent times through the military dictatorships of the Babangida and Abacha administrations, Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999 under Olusegun Obasanjo, a period which also saw the start of the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in contemporary Nigerian politics. The subsequent Yar'Adua administration gave way to Goodluck Jonathan's government after the former's sudden demise. These series of governments under the Fourth Republican dispensation have been continuously dogged by ethnic and religious violence, endemic corruption and elite competition (Campbell 2013) as exhibited by low-capacity democracies. However, as a leading member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting

Countries (OPEC), Nigeria's oil economy has attracted investments from different parts of the world, including China.

China's investments in Nigeria's oil and gas industry have increased along with Sino-Nigerian trade relations, which grew from 384 million USD in 1998 to 10 billion USD in 2011 (Crusoe 2011). China's growing presence is evidenced by deals like the Petro-China contract with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in 2004, valued at 800 million USD, and Sinopec's contract with the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company and the Italian company Eni to develop the Okono and Okpoho fields, which have combined reserves of 500 million barrels (Taylor 2009: 47). In addition to these, China's "oil-for-infrastructure" bid with the Obasanjo administration (1999–2007) included contracts to accomplish tasks such as the modernization of Nigeria's railways at the cost 8.3 billion USD by the China Civil Engineering and Construction Corporation (Obi 2010: 181). The Jonathan administration was also able to secure an oil-for-infrastructure deal for 1.1 billion USD in low-interest loans (as part of a 3 billion USD loan) to develop airports, roads and a hydroelectric plant (*Associated Press* 2013). Nevertheless, China's interests in the Nigerian oil economy have developed amidst the corruption and the risk of insurgencies in Nigeria's oil-rich regions and the notoriety of Boko Haram – the militant Islamic group. For instance, it was reported that the CNOOC offered a 2.7 billion USD development-spending commitment on top of the more than 2 billion USD purchase of a 45 per cent stake in a Niger Delta oil block during a period when the insurgency in the Niger Delta was expected to discourage new investors (Mahtani 2006).

Despite these influences, Nigeria's population is yet to be widely convinced of Beijing's cornerstone principle of non-interference (Sautman and Yan 2009: 738). Even though there is a somewhat healthy support for China's influence, some remain sceptical of Beijing's growing presence, as signalled by the widely publicized investigation by the Yar'Adua administration of contracts awarded to Chinese firms under the Obasanjo administration (Obi 2010). One of the major contentions that may easily stir dissatisfaction for China's policy of non-interference is the problem of de-industrialization, as Nigerian infant industries claim they are outcompeted by all the cheap Chinese products dumped on the Nigerian market. This is further exacerbated by the participation of the Chinese in petty trading, a phenomenon known as the "illegal Chinatowns" (see Ogunsanwo 2008). In March 2013, the governor of Nigeria's Central Bank, Lamido Sanusi, authored an editorial in the *Financial Times* that warned that China is engaging in "predatory" trade practices, such as manipulating its currency and using subsidies to promote its own exports. As the world's second-largest economy, it has now emerged as an

> economic giant capable of the same forms of exploitation as the West [… and] is a major contributor to the de-industrialization of Africa and thus African underdevelopment (Wallis 2013).

In a bid to deal with a very strategic but hard-headed partner on the continent of Africa, China has continuously extended good relations and development packages even in the face of challenging periods of Sino-Nigerian relations. To maintain and build on this relationship, China has largely adhered to its non-interference maxim of "business is business" as it works with the different administrations – irrespective of any domestic political mess resulting from the democratic process. As one Chinese businessman expressed in an exchange in Nigeria, because in a democracy everyone decides, nothing works. Neither China nor Africa needs democracy (Michel and Beuret 2009: 29). This attitude represents Beijing's delicate approach to dealing with a very important partner in its engagement in Africa – it ignores Nigeria's democratic stumbles and tows the line of the government in power and the influential elites. This is the function of non-interference in an oil economy with limited capacity and an open, if imperfect, democratic system.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia can be defined as a low-capacity non-democracy with its chequered political history largely featuring different autocratic regimes characterized by centralized political authority and personalized rule. In 1991 Meles Zenawi and Tigray Popular Liberation Front (TPLF) insurgents displaced the previous Derg administration and assumed control of the state. As an insurrection group, the TPLF had ideological ties to the PRC through its embrace of Maoism and the related strategy of a people's war. However, upon taking power, the new leadership (rebranding itself the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) abandoned references to Marxism, instead adopting the rhetoric of democracy and market economics as it successfully courted support for trade and development assistance from Western powers and international financial institutions, namely the IMF and World Bank (Library of Congress – Federal Research Division 2005).

By the mid-1990s, the Zenawi administration had begun to eschew Washington-based development programmes, turning instead to the East for economic inspiration and practical support. The regime reached out to non-Western powers, China in particular, to balance against Western influence and reduce its leverage over Ethiopia's internal affairs. China reciprocated these overtures, capped with Meles' visit to Beijing in 1995 and Prime Minister Jiang Zemin's visit to Ethiopia in 1996 (Adem 2012: 145). Thereafter, relations between China and Ethiopia expanded and deepened as the two countries forged a growing number of bilateral and multilateral linkages. In 1998, the China–Ethiopia Joint Commission was created as a permanent body entrusted with reviewing and making recommendations for improving the two countries' bilateral relations. Thereafter, Ethiopia became an active participant within the Beijing-initiated FOCAC, established in 2000, and hosted the organization's second ministerial conference – the first held in Africa – in 2003 (Adem 2012: 145). In 2008, the governments of Ethiopia and China agreed to establish a "special economic zone" outside of Addis Ababa aimed at attracting foreign investment and enterprises – one of six on the continent (Giannecchini 2011; for more in-depth analysis of China's special economic zones in Africa, see Brautigam and Tang 2011). These efforts contributed to a rapid expansion of Sino-Ethiopian economic relations. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose from 100 million USD to over 1 billion USD in 2010 (*Afribiz* 2011), making China Ethiopia's leading import and export trading partner as of 2011 (Geiger and Goh 2012). Chinese foreign direct investment, largely non-existent in 2004, rapidly increased to 58.5 million USD in 2010 (Geiger and Goh 2012: v).

As its economic and political linkages with Ethiopia expanded, Beijing forged extensive bonds directly with the ruling EPRDF, making no visible effort to play it safe by reaching out to the opposition. These connections were manifested in cross-party exchanges between officials from the EPRDF and CCP (Getachew 2014); the observing and emulation by the EPRDF of CCP tactics for quelling social unrest and political dissent (*Ezega News* 2010); and Beijing's installation and support of a system for monitoring and filtering Internet traffic and jamming unwanted radio and TV signals. The system, run by Ethiopia's Information Network Security Agency (INSA), was highly publicized at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, when it effectively shut down transmissions from the independent Ethiopian Satellite Station (ESAT), as well as Voice of America and Deutsche Welle (*Addis Neger* 2010; ESAT 2011). Moreover, when providing aid, assistance and investment in Ethiopia, Chinese firms and government officials typically arranged contracts with EPRDF officials behind closed doors, leaving out Ethiopians without strong personal connections to the party and leading to accusations of unfair collusion between Beijing and the EPRDF (Goldie-Scot 2012: 249).

The downsides of Chinese engagement, as well as Beijing's perceived one-sided support for the EPRDF, have generated sporadic resistance from various sectors of the public. These include local workers who complain of poor treatment and low wages at Chinese firms (Geda 2008), local manufacturing and construction firms harmed by Chinese competition (Gebre-Egziabher 2006; Geda and Meskel 2009), opposition activists who allege that Beijing has strengthened the EPRDF's autocratic hold on political power, along with ethno-regional insurgents who consider Chinese firms and employees as proxies or allies of the ruling party – even targeting the Chinese company, Sinopec, in a deadly 2007 attack at an Abole oil field. In general, such anti-Chinese resentment was relatively muted and Ethiopian public opinion was generally supportive of Beijing (Pew Research Centre 2007). These trends reflect the general success of Beijing's policy of direct engagement with the EPRDF. In a tightly controlled political system dominated by a hegemonic single party that claims over four million members, and which won 99.9 per cent of local *kebelle* elections in 2008 and secured 544 of the 547 seats in national legislative elections 2010 (Human Rights Watch 2010; Tronvoll 2011), little space has existed for opposition politicians to mobilize public support against Chinese engagement. The primary risk to Chinese interests has come from non-institutionalized actors, particularly ethno-regional secessionist movements that have taken to using Chinese firms and individuals as proxy targets for the government in Addis Ababa. As a consequence, Beijing raised concerns about political instability in general but made little effort to hedge its bets by reaching out to opposition parties as it has in competitive multiparty systems such as Ghana. Instead, China has thrown its full-fledged support behind the EPRDF, which has consistently won big in elections, expanded its reach across Ethiopian society via its large party cadre and denied the opposition the resources or opportunities to achieve relevance or influence government policies. As a consequence, China's non-interference has consisted of unreserved support for the incumbent party, driven by the expectation that – even after the recent passing of Meles Zenawi – the EPRDF has and will continue to maintain hegemonic control over Ethiopia's political landscape for the foreseeable future.

Concluding Remarks

In the past decade, the two tales that have defined post-independent Africa are the continent's ongoing political and economic transformation and China's momentous return to the continent. Though these two big stories have received attention in academic circles, very little research has been done on the connection between the two trends. The changes in Africa's politics and economics have had varying impacts on the China–Africa discourse. These impacts have led to some nuances in African responses to China and its policy of non-interference. China has been consistent in its rhetorical insistence on non-interference in the domestic affairs of African states. Like most international norms, non-interference is characterized by an identity challenge that lends itself to adapting conceptual and contextual usages of the term. As China shifts from its largely ideological role of the 1950s to the current pragmatic economic engagement in Africa, its cornerstone policy of non-interference has been increasingly challenged with the growing need to protect its now-established economic interests across the continent. Also, along these lines, China has drawn some appeal in most African countries with its principle of non-interference. This policy provides an edge over other competitors for African natural resources and markets, especially in regards to its Western rivals.

However, a careful look at recent trends in Sino-African relations reveals that the seemingly broad appeal of China's economic strides and practical implementation of non-interference is much more nuanced than is often reported. Non-interference appeals to both the African elites and the masses. Statements by African elites imply an overwhelmingly positive reception on the continent, but many sectors of African society have revealed growing displeasure with Beijing's unwanted competition in domestic markets. Hence, Beijing's gain in elite support for its non-interference policy must adapt to accommodate instances of popular dissatisfaction with China. These are often based in the country's competitive edge over African labour as well as some of the reported underhanded deals with some African governments over strategic resources like oil. Emerging anti-Chinese protests around Africa reflect this sentiment and have dictated that Beijing adjust its application of non-interference to perform well in its operations within a variety of political and economic environments.

In different African political and economic situations it has become clear that China's non-interference policy can be perceived or re-examined based on the following: First, China continues to display the ability to engage in diplomatic twists and turns in reaction to public support or lack thereof regarding its activities in Africa. In democratically stable countries like Ghana where public opinion can pressure a government or even threaten its existence, China carries out society-wide charm offensives and manoeuvres to avoid being perceived as directly interfering in the domestic affairs of the country. Recent changes in visa regulations and the brouhaha over Beijing's 3 billion USD loan to Ghana represent sudden shifts in China's engagement with Ghana. These shifts were perceived as reactions to Ghana's handling and subsequent deportation of illegal Chinese miners. This stands in contrast with Chinese dealings with autocracies such as Ethiopia or Angola, where Beijing gives overt support to ruling parties, even carrying out cadre exchanges and political training sessions. Second, despite Africa's political and economic diverse landscape, the approach to economic and resource relations has proven less complex for China, as it has continuously stuck to its plan to improve infrastructure and also give out loans. This approach may not seem different from what the West has done for decades in Africa; however, China continues to insist on an approach that improves African countries with little to no interference in their political economic setup. For instance, the major oil economies like Nigeria and Angola may be complex political and economic terrains to traverse, as corruption and social expectations might prove a challenging mix for an external actor. However, China's contributions through infrastructure and loans as it reiterates its "business is business" maxim has kept it in business with the Nigerians as well as other complex, resource-based political economies. Third, as African political regimes continue to change, reaching out to the elites is central to the sustenance of Beijing's economic and diplomatic agenda in Africa. In most African polities, especially in countries lacking some level of democratic openness, such as Ethiopia and Angola, China's relationship with the elites provides a good basis for a long-lasting relationship, with the benefits of resources and markets. Whether political power can change hands or not, China has skilfully managed to either transition from the incumbent to an incoming opposition party or stay connected to the powerful elites. This has largely been accomplished while asserting its non-interference in the domestic affairs of the country. The case of President Sata in Zambia, who was anti-China in opposition and crossed over to pro-China as the winning candidate and current president of the copper-rich southern African state, is a known instance among many across the continent.

China has advocated a principle whose core tenets were aligned with the initial struggles for African political independence as depicted by the Bandung Conference in 1955 (*Review of International Affairs* 1955). Since then, post-independence Africa has been characterized by immense and unsettling changes in the political and economic landscape. These have introduced and re-introduced structures and institutions that influence relations with external actors on the continent. For these reasons, it has become evident that as the interests and situations change for the main players in this relationship – China and African states – so have the relevance and applicability of non-interference. Scholars and policy crafters should recognize these changes and perceive them as emblematic not only of structural changes in the continent's politics and economics but also of Beijing's intentions to adjust to these changes in order to secure its expanding economic interests. China will insist upon and uphold the policy of non-interference in its partnerships with African states since this sets it apart from past external actors on the continent. However, current research should recognize and address the emerging challenges and potential pitfalls to this policy, especially as Africa's politics and economics continue to evolve.

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