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Chinese aid and the library development in Africa

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Abstract

The recent relations between China and Africa are much debated topic in international socio economic and geopolitics. There are many different opinions about the Chinese presence in the African continent. Some see it as a ray of hope for the African sustainable development and other contested it as a form of 'neo-colonism'. It is further argued that the along with other form of China-Africa relationship, countries in Africa can be benefitted from the 'Chinese Aid' beyond the trade or infrastructure development. In this context this study tries to investigate the Chinese contribution in library development in many countries of Africa. Taking various secondary sources, particularly the newspaper content analysis, this study has identified a few cases where China has invested for the library development in Africa. It is observed that, Chinese aid in African library development comes in three types. In the first type, Chinese government directly involved in the construction of library, in the second type Chinses multinational firms are donating books and other e-learning materials to the schools and libraries. In the third type, Chinese non-governmental organizations donating books and other materials to the local schools and communities. Along with other form of China Africa relations, Chinese aid in the library development in Africa will perhaps enhance learning, capacity building, mutual trust, and friendly relationship. In the long run, this will be a win-win situation for both the sides to further enhance the South-South cooperation and above all the development of the whole continent.

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Introduction

The China Africa relationship has a long history. The relationship between China and Africa dates to the 1950s. However,

the relationship was not that pronounced until 1978 when China opened its economy to the outside world^[1]. Further, the Sino-African relationship has grown substantially in the early 21st Century. Now China-Africa relations refer to the economic, political, and social interactions including the people-to-people interactions between China and the African nations. The relationship is further extended with the establishment of “Forum on China-Africa Cooperation” (FOCAC). The FOCAC was established by the Chinese government in the year 2000. It was established with the objectives of “*Equal consultation, enhancing understanding, expanding consensus, strengthening friendship and promoting cooperation.*” The FOCAC conferences are held every three years and is co-chaired by the President of China and respective head of the state of the host African country^[2].

With the increasing trade, now China is investing heavily in Africa, particularly in the areas of infrastructure development, and resource extraction. China is also a major buyer of African raw materials, particularly oil and minerals, which has helped to boost African economies. Chinese multinational firms are involved in the construction of transportation networks, railways, sea ports, and other large-scale infrastructure projects in Africa. According to an estimate, China has helped Africa to build more than 10,000 km of roads, over 6,000 km of railway lines. Besides this, China has also constructed many libraries, schools, hospitals, and other income generating facilities for the people throughout the continent^[3].

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed plans to build a “Silk Road Economic Belt” and a “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”. Later it was named as the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI)^[4]. The Belt & Road Initiative is China's greatest international economic ambition^[5]. The project was initiated with an aim to stimulate better connectivity and subsequent economic development. The project includes a vast region of the globe covering Asia, Africa, and Europe. According to an estimate, the BRI project might include about 64% of global population and cover 30% of world GDP. While infrastructure development is the major aim of BRI initiative, it also includes policy dialogue, trade, monetary support, and people-to-people contact^[6]. It is further argued that the BRI is highly compatible with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Agenda 2063 of African Union (AU). Further, BRI is aligned with the common development strategies of AU, forming a strong network and collaboration among the nations for achieving common goals and promoting sustainable development in the continent.

Scholarly research on the China Africa relationship is mainly centred around the business, trade, infrastructure development etc. Along with the other activities, China is also established several school libraries, giving aids in the development of university libraries and so on. There is not much studies on China Africa relationship in terms of library development. In this background, this study aims at finding the Chinese investment in library development in various countries in African countries.

Research Objective

The study is going to investigate the Chinese involvement in the African continent in terms of its investment in library development in Africa.

Sources of Data

Newspaper sources have been extensively used to find the Chinese contribution in library development in Africa. The news was extracted from the popular newspaper “China Daily”. It is an English-language daily newspaper published from the People's Republic of China. The newspaper was established in 1981. It is presently owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. China Daily publishes news, analysis, opinions, and commentary on various issues of China. The newspaper has global coverage of various issues. The newspaper is widely read by English-speaking Audiences in China and all over the world. China Daily has a website and mobile app that provide latest news and multimedia content. It is one of the important sources of information for the analysis of contemporary issues of China and its role around the globe.

Search Strategy

Data has been extensively searched from the Newspaper China Daily (website: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/index.html>). The news items were searched using the Keywords “China”, “Africa”, “Library”. The retrieved records are further analyzed. Some other renowned databases viz google scholar were searched to find the relevant literature in the field. The data collection and analysis for this study has been done during February- March 2023.

Newspaper content analysis is a research method that involves analyzing the content of newspaper articles to identify patterns, themes, and trends. It is often used in academic research, as well as by advocacy groups and media organizations to monitor media coverage and assess the impact. This paper uses the news reports from the China Daily to gain insights into the Chinese involvement in various library related activities in China.

Limitations

While newspaper content analysis can provide valuable insights into media coverage. However, it is important to note that it has its limitations. For example, it may not capture the full range of the story behind the reporting. Additionally, it may be the subject to biases in the selection of articles or the interpretation of the data. Also, this paper is based on the single newspaper content. The China daily is owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China. Hence there may be a possible bias towards more Chinese opinion or voice.

Data Analysis

The following section will discuss the Chinese contribution in the library development in several African countries. As previously discussed, the data has been collected from the popular English language ‘China Daily.’ The result is presented in Table 1, which shows the various examples of Chinese contribution in Library development in Africa

Djibouti

Djibouti is a small country in the African continent located in the 'Horn of Africa'. The country is an important gateway to Africa for the 'Belt and Road Initiative.' The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, built by Chinese multinational firms are first electric railway in Africa. A report said that China had given aid to the National Library and Archives of Djibouti for its reconstruction and development. It is further expected that the with the Chinese assistance, National Library and Archives of Djibouti will play an important role in future. For example, the national library will play a critical role in learning, reading and promoting national culture^[7].

Egypt

Egypt is a country located in North Africa and the Middle East. With a population of over 100 million, it is the third most populous country in Africa. The 'Bibliotheca Alexandrina' is a major library and cultural center located in Alexandria. The library was one of the largest and most important libraries of the ancient world. It was renovated and inaugurated in 2002. As a part of goodwill gesture, the China Cultural Center located in Cairo donated books and audio-visual materials to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina^[8].

Kenya

Kenya is an East Africa country has a long-standing relationship with China. These two countries have engaged in various forms of cooperation, including trade, investment, infrastructure development, and cultural exchange. China is a major investor in Kenya's infrastructure, particularly in the areas of transportation. One of the most notable projects 'Nairobi - Mombasa' Standard Gauge Railway is built with the Chinese help.

The National Museums of Kenya in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has launched an open digital library for indigenous games funded by the Chinese multinational company Tencent Holdings Ltd. It is assumed that these type of digitization projects will help to preserve the country's rich cultural heritage for future generations^[9]. Further, Chinese government proposed to build a China-themed library at the University of Nairobi. The university has already a centre for 'Confucius Institute' to promote Chinese language and culture in Kenya^[10].

Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zambia, and Ethiopia

The 'Project Hope for Africa' is an initiative by the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF). The project aimed to supplement governmental initiatives to provide reading materials, textbooks, and educational equipment to various schools across Africa. The project was started in 1989 by the All-China Youth Federation. In Africa, the project started functioning in the year 2011 in Tanzania. According to the estimate, the Project Hope has raised \$1.4 billion, and helped over 4.9 million economically weaker village students. With the monetary help, the project helped to build 18,335 'Hope primary schools' and about 20,604 small libraries in the rural areas.

Further, about 19 Chinese entrepreneurs each donated 10,000 yuan (equivalent \$1,570) to 23 school libraries^[11]. The project is supporting the educational needs of hundreds of children in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and Namibia^[12].

Table 1. Examples of Chinese contribution in Library development in Various library development in Africa

SI No	Country	Region	Beneficiary	Funding agency	Types of library services provided
1. 1.	Djibouti	Eastern Africa	National Library and Archives of Djibouti	Chinese Government	The National Library and Archives is renovated with the financial help.
1. 2.	Egypt	Northern Africa	Alexandria library, Egypt	China cultural center	China cultural center donated books and audio-visual materials to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.
1. 3.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	National Museums of Kenya	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Tencent Holdings Ltd	UNESCO and Tencent Holdings Ltd helped National Museums of Kenya to develop open digital library for indigenous game.
1. 4.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	University of Nairobi	Chinese government	Chinese government has proposed to develop a China-themed library at the University of Nairobi.
1. 5.	Kenya	Eastern Africa	Various School libraries	Project Hope for Africa, the initiative by China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF) In 2010, the Chinese Business Association, the China Youth Development Foundation and the Tianjiu Happiness Holding Group initiated Project Hope into Africa, and jointly launched "China-Africa Project Hope".	Project Hope for Africa provides textbooks and other learning materials to various schools. Many Chinese entrepreneurs donated money to school libraries for various collection development in schools.
	Tanzania	Eastern Africa			
	Rwanda	Eastern Africa			
	Burundi	Central Africa			
	Namibia	Southern Africa			
	Zambia	Southern Africa			
	Ethiopia	Eastern Africa			

1. 6.	Lesotho	Southern Africa	National Library of Lesotho	Chinese government	China has helped to build Lesotho's National Conference Center, Paramount Hall, and National Library
1. 7.	Madagascar	Eastern Africa	National Library of Madagascar	Chinese government	Donated Chinese books to the National Library of Madagascar
1. 8.	Nigeria	Western Africa	National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure	Huawei Technologies	Huawei Technologies deployed e-libraries, e-classes, and smart campus networks
1. 9.	Republic of Congo	Central Africa	Ngouabi University	Chinese government	China has funded and constructed Ngouabi University library
1. 10.	Rwanda	Eastern Africa	Rwandan Community	The Chinese community in Rwanda	The Chinese community started a library to promote learning, academic and cultural exchange between Chinese and the Rwandan people
1. 11.	Republic of South Africa	Southern Africa	South African Community	Huawei Technologies	Huawei Technologies helped to build e-Libraries program to boost literacy in South Africa
1. 12.	Tanzania	Eastern Africa	University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania	Chinese government	China helped Tanzania build a university library

Source: Own compilation from various news sources published in the online version of China Daily

Lesotho

Lesotho is a small, landlocked country located in southern Africa. The country has a population of approximately 2.2 million. It is surrounded by South Africa on all sides. China has invested in Lesotho to establish a free trade zone. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, since 1983, China has helped to build Lesotho's National Conference Center, Paramount Hall and National Library, radio, television, and other broadcasting facilities^[13].

Madagascar

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world and the largest in Africa. Madagascar is an island country located at the south-eastern coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. It is the fourth largest island in the world and has a population of approximately 27 million people. China and Madagascar officially established diplomatic ties in 1972. China and Madagascar established a comprehensive partnership in 2017. China-Madagascar partnership is extended in health, education, culture, sports, and other areas. The association is further deepened with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the Belt and Road Initiative between these two nations. Cultural exchanges between these two nations are also increasing. The cultural linkage is further extended with the donation of Chinese books at the National Library of Madagascar^[14].

Nigeria

Nigeria is a country located in West Africa. With a population of over 200 million people, it is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world.

Huawei Technologies, China is helping Africa with the development of telecommunication infrastructure. China is involved in upgrading an undersea cable to Europe. This will increase faster connectivity and help to address urban-rural digital divide issue. The connectivity will further extend to libraries, schools, and remote areas. In Nigeria, the Chinese Multinational Huawei has installed the National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure. In addition, it has successfully deployed e-libraries, e-classes, and smart campus networks in various educational institutes^[15].

Republic of Congo

The Republic of Congo, also known as Congo-Brazzaville, is a country located in Central Africa. It shares its borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic.

China has funded the construction of Nguabi University library. The Nguabi University is the only public university in the Republic of Congo. The library has more than 10,000 books and CDs about China. These materials are helpful to learn more about China and Chinese culture^[16].

Rwanda

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country located in East Africa. It is bordered by Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, Burundi to the south, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west. Kigali is the largest city and the capital of Rwanda.

The Chinese community in Rwanda launched a library in the capital Kigali. The library is equipped with more than 5,000 books in Chinese, Korean and English languages. The library is established to encourage reading culture among the Rwandan people^[17].

South Africa

The Chinese Multinational, Huawei Technologies has several corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in Africa. Among the many CSR Programs, one of the programs was launched in 2015 related to the e-Libraries program to boost literacy in South Africa^[18].

Tanzania

Tanzania is a country located in East Africa. It is bordered by Kenya and Uganda to the north, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the west, and Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to the south. One of the significant activities in the library development by China happens in Tanzania and perhaps in the whole continent. China has helped

the University of Dar es Salaam to build a university library at a cost of \$41.28 million. Now, this library is the largest university library in Africa^[19].

Discussion

With the increasing Chinese involvement in the African continent, China is also investing in the education and library development in several countries in Africa. The Chinese involvement in the development can be categorised in three types. In the first types, the Chinese government is the direct funder and involved in construction of libraries. The second type is the multinational firm's involvement through corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. The third type is the active involvement of non-Governmental agencies.

Among the direct involvement of Chinese government, the funding for the construction of the university library of the *University of Dar es Salaam* in Tanzania, National Library and Archives of Djibouti, China-themed library at the University of Nairobi is noteworthy.

The Chinese firm Huawei Technologies is investing in developing telecommunication infrastructure in many African countries including Nigeria. The e-Libraries program is implemented by Huawei to increase e-literacy among the masses in South Africa

The Project Hope for Africa is donating books to the school libraries and helping under privileged students in schools across Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia, Zambia, and Ethiopia.

The Chinese aid is coming in various forms, it includes the library infrastructure development, construction of university library, book donation and community awareness of reading habits and so on. These are some of the activities of Chinese side in the African continent. However, in many cases the books are donated through the Chinese aid are the books on China, Chinese language and its culture. It is also questionable how much benefit is incurred into the local community if the books are written in Chinese language. However, it requires further investigation in the ground and to be supplemented by the interview with the various stakeholders.

As the countries in the continent is diverse, the benefit from the Chinese aid may vary. However, the countries with comparatively well-developed library structure (for example South Africa) might be benefitted from the Chinese assistance.

Conclusion

The relationship between China and Africa has not been without controversy. There are mainly two streams of discourse in China-Africa relationship. In one side, critics have accused China of engaging in 'neo-colonialism'. This stream of scholarly discourse accused China for the exploitation of African resources without incurring much benefits to the local communities. Along with this, there are also concerns about the environmental impact of recent China's activities in the

continent. On the other side, it is argued that Chinese investment in Africa is supporting the development of African economies. China being the superior in terms of technological capability will help Africa to upgrade in various stage of global value chain through technological learning. African countries, in turn, are looking to China for more inward investment and trade opportunities to boost their economic growth. Perhaps Chinese experience will be helpful for Africa for technological learning and upgradation. However, keeping all these challenges, it is predicted that the relationship between China and Africa is expected to grow in future.

This is beyond doubt that the Chinese presence, along with their technological superiority will benefit the continent and the global south as a whole. However, to extract the benefit from the Chinese technological learning Africa must develop its 'absorptive capacity'^[20] through the technological learning. Here, a well-developed library system has a definite role to play. In this context an in-depth analysis of Chinese aid and the subsequent benefit in the education particularly the library development is to be investigated in a different perspective beyond the popular discourse. This paper is an attempt to study the Chinese activity in the library development in the continent. It is observed that China is investing the development of various libraries and donating books to increase the reading habits among the local people. However, many of such activities are attached with Confucius Institute. The institute is mainly propagating the Chinese language and culture. The actual benefit incurred by the local community beyond the teaching of Confucius Institute is need to be investigated further.

This study is mainly based on the newspaper report published on the online platform of the popular outlet China Daily. The further holistic picture of the Chinese influence on the library development in the continent need to be investigated through a field study by interviewing the various stakeholders in the ground. This will supplement the findings further with the actual nature and breath of benefit incurred to the local community.

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