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China's Economic Footprint: Blessing or Curse for Angola and Sudan?

Abstract

This article explores the complexities of China's relations with African countries, especially Angola and Sudan. It explores the large investments that China has made in infrastructure, energy, and natural resource extraction, both the promise of economic growth and the attendant issues of sustainability, debt dependence, and indigenous capacity development. In Sudan, China's economic and military presence showcases the country's strategic interests in stabilizing the area but poses vital questions about governance and human rights. Similarly, Angola's reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure development illustrates the merits of foreign investment, while the heavy debt burden threatens "debt-trap diplomacy." The research underlines the imperative for both countries to prioritize inclusive development, increase local labor employment, and ensure that investments underpin socio-economic resilience. Finally, the paper argues that mutual gains in Sino-African relations should manifest in tangible improvement of the local people, creating long-term development and economic self-reliance.

Keywords: China, Sudan, Angola, Sino-African Relations, Economic Growth, Investment, Infrastructure, Resource Extraction, Debt Dependency

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Abstract

This article explores the complexities of China's relations with African countries, especially Angola and Sudan. It explores the large investments that China has made in infrastructure, energy, and natural resource extraction, both the promise of economic growth and the attendant issues of sustainability, debt dependence, and indigenous capacity development. In Sudan, China's economic and military presence showcases the country's strategic interests in stabilizing the area but poses vital questions about governance and human rights. Similarly, Angola's reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure development illustrates the merits of foreign investment, while the heavy debt burden threatens "debt-trap diplomacy." The research underlines the imperative for both countries to prioritize inclusive development, increase local labor employment, and ensure that investments underpin socio-economic resilience. Finally, the paper argues that mutual gains in Sino-African relations should manifest in tangible improvement of the local people, creating long-term development and economic self-reliance.

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Keywords:

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Introduction

China, which was a major world power, went into decline in its "Century of Humiliation." This led to its leaders, such as Mao and Deng, concentrating on revival through economic development and global alliances, particularly with Africa. Although advocating for equality and mutual gain in its relations with Africa, China's strategy tends to

concentrate on access to resources and influence rather than changing society, posing questions about the impact on host economies and industries. China welcomed the ninth FOCAC summit in September 2024 with 53 African delegations, out of which 36 were heads of state. Xi Jinping pledged \$50.7 billion of financial commitment over the next three years, including



\$30 billion in credit, \$10 billion in development aid, and \$10 billion in investment. China also pledged 1,000 livelihood improvement projects covering vocational training, agriculture, and green energy. The summit promoted China's "all-weather" alliance with Africa, political relations, and calls for UN Security Council reforms, including projects such as the "Luban Workshop" and Juncao technology (Neema, 2024). During the FOCAC summit, China stressed its African modernization model and emphasized areas of cooperation with respect to anti-corruption, agriculture, technology transfer, and poverty alleviation. The Action Plan is to establish networks for party cooperation, media participation, and training programs to enhance knowledge transfer (Li & Hackenesh, 2024).

Since Africa is endowed with resources that are vital to China's manufacturing base. China's Global Development Strategy has added a new dimension to its infrastructure investments in the continent by promoting long-term stability. Beijing's activities in the continent are in pursuit of overriding goals, including accessing vital natural resources, deepening market outreach, and augmenting power inside international institutions. In addition, China has pledged to actively participate in international diplomatic and security fields, including United Nations peacekeeping missions, relief assistance, anti-piracy patrol operations, and joint exercise drills (Magdalena & Krukowsk, 2024).

China's strategic alliance is designed to ensure regional stability, important for China's economic and trade development. China's "Fuqiang Policy" reflects its pursuit of national rejuvenation and to regain its economic, political, and cultural superiority, vying to reclaim its position as a great world power. Beijing's policy has been guided by the principle of peaceful rise, an all-around diplomatic policy highlighting its role in conflict resolution in Africa. Far from seeking wholesale transformation of society—an achievement still unlikely—China has as its principal goals securing access to natural resources and establishing strategic partnerships. Instead of exerting direct military power to protect its interests, it employs indirect means like subcontracting and using economic leverage. This strategy is reinforced by frequent high-level diplomatic exchanges, used as a tool of public diplomacy and a means of building intergovernmental confidence. In line with the Five

Principles elaborated below, it is a political awakening that supports the country's economic expansion policy (Carmody & Taylor, 2010).

China actively endorsed the process, sending troops for UN peacekeeping as well as investing significantly in South Sudan's oil sector. Notwithstanding its devotion to peacefulness, China's action is motivated by its extensive economic interests, as it is the biggest consumer of South Sudanese petroleum. The partnership has turned into one of strategic collaboration that is mainly aimed at mutual economic interests, even though there are still doubts regarding the balance of power in their partnership (Both, 2023).

The initiative is primarily focused on developing infrastructure to spur economic growth in the world's emerging nations and strengthening China's role in African development and regional stability. Its peacekeeping missions in South Sudan secure stability in areas where there is a high level of Chinese investment. In the same vein, China's naval presence in the Gulf of Aden is instrumental in combating piracy, protecting sea shipping routes, and securing its energy supplies (Sanders, 2023).

The Angola model is focused on mutual gains and foreign direct investment, including possible green energy endeavors. However, obstacles like Angola's political climate, economic dependence on oil, and external competition remain, which need to be handled carefully to continue succeeding in partnership. China and Angola are strategic allies in the shift towards clean energy, and Angola requires the technology and finance that China offers. Their partnership, boosted by Angola's inclusion in the Belt and Road Initiative, is challenged by political instability and Western competition. Despite this, they have vast opportunities for mutual gain in energy cooperation (Chen & Tao, 2024).

Literature Review

The *Handbook* "Colonial Intervention and Destabilization of African Identities" by Obed Mfum-Mensah examines historical and contemporary forces that destabilized African identities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. It traces these through Muslim Arab traders, European colonialists, Western agencies, and China's modern influence. The book aligns with this perspective, illustrating how Chinese

investments in Africa mirror historical colonial patterns of exploitation under the guise of development partnerships. It explores religious interventions, urban planning, and economic dependency as key areas of identity destabilization (Mfum-Mensah, 2025). The literature lacks a unified framework linking colonial exploitation to post-independence governance failures.

The article "China and India in the New Scramble for Africa: Neocolonial Charges Under Review" by Babić examines China's role in Africa's "New Scramble," assessing whether it fosters development or neo-colonialism. In contrast to the IMF and World Bank, China concentrates on infrastructure, finance, and industry. Although projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative boost connectivity, they also pose financial sustainability issues. The research concludes that, with developmental contributions, China's investment continues to display neocolonial trends in resource extraction, debt, and environmental effects (Babić, 2025). The literature lacks analysis of how China's infrastructure-driven approach in Africa balances development with neocolonial tendencies.

The literature, "Resource-for-Infrastructure Loans, Economic Transformation and Catch-up Growth in Angola" by Johanna Bolander highlights China's RFI model came as a rival to Western loans, providing infrastructure finance without strict policy conditions. She stresses the importance of infrastructure in economic development and contends that RFI loans speed up development by borrowing natural resources. She addresses the resource curse, illustrating how dependence on oil constrains economic diversification. She emphasizes governance failure within RFI projects to create economic inequality (Bolander, 2024). The study does not fully account for external shocks, such as global oil price fluctuations and the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly influence Angola's economy and its reliance on Chinese investments.

The book "China's Outward Infrastructure Investment in Africa", analyzed using Frischmann's framework, highlights economic gains generated via transport, energy, and construction projects. The research tests Chinese-African firm interactions' influence on stock market valuations, African countries' export growth, and government borrowing implications. Applying econometric

specifications, the results reveal increased exports and strategic resource-for-infrastructure financing against the debt-trap narrative. Although productivity spillovers are mixed, Chinese investment implies confidence in the economy and promotes industrial development (Yetunde, 2024). The study rebuts the debt-trap diplomacy narrative, further research would be needed to assess the medium- to long-term debt sustainability of African countries involved in China's resource-for-infrastructure (RFI) model.

The article "Opportunities and Challenges of China and Angola Energy Cooperation in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative" by Haojun Chen examines the strategic partnership between China and Angola in terms of opportunities and challenges. Angola, among the earliest African nations to be a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is now pivotal for Chinese investment in the oil and gas industry. China's major oil corporation Sinopec has made large investments in Angola, cooperating with global oil majors such as BP and Total. These deals have enabled China to access equity oil, crucial for its own energy security (Chen, Tao, & Lu, 2024). However, the paper does not touch on the implications of China's debt-trap diplomacy and short-term investments.

The article "China's Approach to Human Security Within and Outside UN Peacekeeping: Drawing Lessons from South Sudan" by Mateja Peter and Ruoxi Wang accounts for China's human security strategy, particularly in the South Sudanese civil war. It expounds on China's subtle position on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm, advocating for state sovereignty and the first two pillars of R2P: prevention and response. In spite of its qualms regarding the notion of human security, China is the biggest troop contributor to UN protection of civilians (POC) operations. The article offers a typology of activities—mediation, physical protection, and capacity building—to examine China's dual-track strategy (Wang & Peter, 2024). The academic literature is vast on China's military and economic functions in Africa, but there is a lacuna on how its human security dual-track impacts local governance and international norms.

Research Questions

1. Analyze the relationship between China's

conflict management and its economic interest in Africa.

2. How do China's lending practices contribute to debt trap diplomacy in African countries?

Research Methodology

This research is based on secondary sources of data collection. Qualitative tools of research have been utilized, such as information from reliable sources like the United Nations, African government statistics, and media reports. The researcher has chosen this case study since it has permitted extensive scrutiny of the effects of Chinese investments in Angola, and the security programs in Sudan and has made it possible to scrutinize the reasons for the investments, commerce, and security policies. Document analysis has been conducted, entailing examination of pertinent policy reports, recent articles, books, newspapers, reports, and scholarly literature.

Research Limitation

A significant shortcoming of this research lies in its limited emphasis on the involvement of global powers such as the US and Russia in Angola and Sudan. The literature did not fully examine or compare the complex geopolitical dynamics and the multifaceted influences exerted on the respective African countries. It does not sufficiently elucidate how these external actors might either bolster or hinder China's ambitions.

Sudan: Rich in Resources, Burdened by Dependency

Sudan is blessed with a complicated and rich ethnic mix, one that has most frequently yielded strife and tension. It has been split between African South and North Arab for centuries, a split confirmed during Egyptian and British colonial dominance. These earlier divisions gave rise to the beginning of the First Sudanese Civil War (1955–1972) due to frustration at cultural exclusion, economic inequality, and political disenfranchisement of the South. While the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 temporarily halted the war by providing half self-governance, failure to implement it entirely meant that the Sudanese war of 1983 to 2005 had been one of Africa's longest and most devastating wars. This war was also intensified by wars over competition for resources, economic and political

marginalization, and the imposition of Islamic Sharia law over a multireligious and multi-identity base. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement officially ended the war, with the southern region being given a right to self-rule, which ultimately led to the secession of South Sudan in 2011. The North, dominated by Arabs, ruled over the others, and its dominance helped in the exclusion and marginalization of southern African ethnic groups. Following independence, Sudan faced recurring civil wars, coups by the military, and political unrest, which culminated in the 2023 RSF-SAF skirmish. Destructive effects of the Sudan conflict on regional stability and peace (Liyew, [2025](#)).

Resource Exploitation and Economic Domination

China is also accused of tapping into Africa's resources primarily oil, gold, and minerals without investing in African development. Unequal Trade Relationships: China is accused of pouring cheap Chinese products into African markets, destroying local industries, and creating economic dependence. China's investments and loans are not well regulated, often enriching political leaders at the expense of plunging African nations into massive financial obligations (Liyew, [2023](#)). Sudanese governments get minimal returns from their natural resources, as multinational companies arrange tax exemptions and profitable maximization deals, reducing national control over resource riches. The governments' dependency on Chinese and Gulf states' financial assistance has undermined Sudan's economic autonomy, exposing it to foreign political manipulation (Elmakki, [2025](#)). Chinese firms that run with minimal transparency have resulted in large-scale mismanagement of oil revenue far-reaching. Research shows that the oil revenue tends to be re-routed to political and military uses instead of reaching citizens (Kibe, [2024](#)).

China's economic involvement with Sudan has been remarkable, particularly in trade, lending, and assistance. In 2010, China imported more than \$6 billion of goods from Sudan, essentially raw oil. Regardless, this number drastically fell subsequent to South Sudan's independence in 2011, as imports reduced to \$1.5 billion in 2012 and advanced to over \$500 million by 2016. Despite reduced oil imports, Chinese commerce with Sudan continued to grow,

evidencing a diversification of economic relations that includes development and consumer goods. In terms of finances, the Chinese pledged loans to Sudan have been a standout deterioration since 2011, despite the fact that a considerable \$3 billion credit line was extended in 2008 for oil infrastructure projects. Levels of aid increased during the time of humanitarian suffering in Darfur, particularly in 2007 and 2008, and China forgave \$160 million in debt in 2017 and offered about \$70 million in financial assistance (Peter & Plicht, 2023).

China's economic concerns in South Sudan are motivated by oil resources and business presence. Major facts are: Sudan supplied 9.26% of China's oil imports by 2002; CNPC has a 40% stake in South Sudan's Greater Pioneer Operating Company; more than 100 Chinese companies have a presence in infrastructure, telecommunication, and construction; and South Sudan is an important energy partner, with the region contributing more than 5% of China's oil imports pre-2011 (Peter & Wang, 2024).

China Peacekeeping Missions

In 2023, China deployed 331 peacekeepers to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). This Unplanned deployment of both military and engineering troops, focuses on tasks like infrastructure development and medical aid (Panyue, 2023). Chinese peacekeepers have successfully evacuated UN personnel from disputed areas in Sudan. China is also working with the UN to deploy Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in Mali, enhancing situational awareness in peacekeeping missions (Emewu, 2023). China has deployed more than 1,000 peacekeepers in South Sudan, including engineering and medical staff, which is the largest Chinese peacekeeping mission. Moreover, China has provided essential assistance to the integrated forces of South Sudan and mediation efforts, while providing support for the lifting of global sanctions. These actions demonstrate China's devotion to respecting sovereignty and assisting nations in their development. The 10th Chinese Peacekeeping Infantry Brigade at Juba, undertook more than 150 commanded tasks, such as security duties, armed patrols, and crisis reaction operations (Wong, 2024).

Motivations Behind the Chinese Peacekeeping Missions

Sudan's political and economic unrest has profoundly affected China's development projects, building projects, and conflict control. China's participation in peacekeeping, diplomatic mediation, and security operations is not merely to safeguard its economic interests but also a means of allowing Beijing to acquire hands-on experience in international security issues. By sending police, troops, diplomats, and specialists to various war zones, China is making itself a fulcrum in international security affairs, while also guarding its increasing economic and geostrategic interests in Africa (Khan A. M., 2024).

China is more eager to collaborate with the international community at large on matters like peacekeeping and conflict mediation. China has come under sharp criticism for its complicity in perpetrating genocide in Sudan, especially in Darfur and oil-rich areas of South Sudan. Chinese weapons sales to the Sudanese government have caused conflicts that led to widespread civilian deaths and human rights violations. China provided military hardware, which included combat aircraft and guns, used in ethnic cleansing actions in Darfur, Amnesty International reports (Wise, 2021).

Angola: A Case of Debt and Oil Diplomacy

Angola is known to be a country that has been endowed with abundant natural resources, being the second largest producer of crude oil in Africa. It is also endowed with rich deposits of various minerals, including Iron, Manganese, Bauxite, Uranium, Gold, Diamonds, and Natural gas. Despite its wealth in natural resources, Angola does not provide a better living standard for its citizens. This situation exemplifies the "resource curse," where countries rich in resources often experience less economic growth and worse development outcomes compared to those with fewer natural resources. The exploitation of natural resources has not only led to environmental degradation but has also hindered efforts to achieve lasting peace in Angola (Bhattacharyya, 2023).

The "Angolan Model" was a resource-for-infrastructure arrangement in which China extended billions of oil-backed loans to Angola to

finance postwar reconstruction, to be repaid through oil exports. While it allowed for swift infrastructure construction and guaranteed China's energy interest, the model enriched a narrow elite around former President José Eduardo dos Santos, gave rise to exuberant corruption, and left the broader Angolan population impoverished. When oil prices plummeted after 2014 and production peaked, the model collapsed, sending Angola into an economic crisis (Yoshikawa, [2024](#)).

China is leveraging debt to acquire strategic ports and privileged access to African oil in nations such as Angola, Kenya, and Djibouti, sometimes doling out attractive infrastructure deals followed by increasing demands for influence within the Belt and Road Initiative. Although such transactions assisted Angola in overcoming civil war, they further entrenched its dependency on oil and subjected it to price shocks, weakening its capacity to repay loans and resorting to increasing reliance on Chinese refinancing. Critics view this as "debt trap" diplomacy—where China obtains long-term control over strategic assets (Hamdun, [2022](#)).

Although the infrastructure projects were meant to drive economic development, they also led to high debt for Angola. According to the paper, servicing the debt to pay for the projects could amount to up to 10 percent of Angola's GDP. This high financial cost is a cause for concern regarding the viability of Angola's economy as well as its capacity to invest in other vital sectors, including healthcare and education (Jura, Kosiński, Polus, & Tycholiz, [2024](#)).

Angola has to pay \$3.1 billion in Chinese Development Bank loans in 2024, while total foreign creditor payments are projected at \$10.1 billion. Angola had postponed debt repayment during the pandemic for three years but resumed it in 2023, triggering economic issues such as a weak currency. The resumption of debt servicing boosted debt repayment, fueling inflation and currency depreciation. Chinese loan reliance over the long term is a cause for concern, particularly if Angola is unable to bring in sufficient revenue to cover its debt. Diversification of Angola's economy from crude oil continues, which is necessary in order to diversify away from oil and dampen the effect of oil price shocks (Sousa, [2024](#)).

Discussion: Blessing or Curse

In 2023, China gave Africa its largest loans in five years, with Angola receiving the lion's share. President Xi Jinping pledged \$50 billion to Africa and promised a Chinese naval base in Angola to enhance military might. In early 2024, China was purchasing 572,000 barrels of oil daily from Angola a 7.5% increase making Angola its 8th-largest source, essential for energy diversification. Chinese state oil companies CNPC, Sinopec, and CNOOC created an alliance with Angola's Sonangol, in which CNOOC began exploration of Block 24. In June 2024, Huawei entered into a deal with Angola Telecom to improve telecommunication services. Chinese firms also made an effort to push energy deals at the Angola Oil & Gas 2024 event. With sub-Saharan mineral imports of \$10 billion in 2019, China is making its foray into Angola's lithium and copper sectors (Hollands, [2024](#)).

Chinese state-owned oil firms such as CNPC, Sinopec, and CNOOC dominated Angola's oil industry behind closed doors in exclusive deals with Sonangol, the state oil company of Angola. The alliances primarily served a small group of President dos Santos' followers, facilitating massive corruption. Few Angolans benefited from it. The 2015 arrest of CIF's Sam Pa exposed illegal transactions and focused attention on China's support for one of Africa's most corrupt governments (Yoshikawa, [2024](#)).

Coordination between Chinese SOEs and Angola's military regime government tends not to be properly monitored, and this results in poor compliance with labor rights and environmental regulations. Less than 30% of local employees limit skill transfer, hindering local growth. Mistrust among Chinese and Angolan partners ensues from excessive state control, hindering cooperation and knowledge sharing. Chinese companies tend to operate independently, and cultural or technical differences further erode partnerships. The emphasis placed on big projects also neglects small, local projects crucial for long-term development inevitably (Jura & Carvalho, [2023](#)).

Conclusion

The Sudan and Angola case studies present useful perspectives on the multifaceted character of China's increasing involvement in Africa. In Sudan and Angola, China emerged as a significant

development partner, investing billions of dollars in roads, railways, oil fields, power plants, and telecommunication systems. Such investment introduced much-needed capital and technical capacity, fostering post-conflict reconstruction and economic modernization. In exchange, China has gained access to critical energy reserves and markets for its firms. China's military relations with Sudan—as well as its attempts to promote internal stability, mirror Beijing's two objectives of protecting its business interests and enhancing its geopolitical position in the region. But the cooperation with Sudan also has profound issues.

However, Angola's increasing reliance on Chinese financing has created increasing concerns about debt sustainability. Most of the borrowing is opaque, contracted at the elite level with no public oversight, and linked to Chinese enterprises and workers—suppressing economic spillovers from the local economy. There is a high risk of "debt-trap diplomacy" in which nations become indebted to their creditors and lose strategic independence, which is an urgent concern in the context of Angola.

In spite of huge Chinese investment, Sudan and Angola have witnessed limited local growth, as the majority of projects benefit from foreign labor, technology, and resources, generating little local employment or technology transfer. This has generated local resentment and revealed the shortcomings of a model of growth emphasizing explosive building at the expense of inclusive development. In order to create more balanced partnerships, African countries need to advocate for increased institutional transparency, economic diversification, and ownership over terms of cooperation by way of unambiguous loan agreements, robust local content legislation, and autonomous debt audits. China would be better advised to take a more discriminatory, long-term

stance favoring local capacity-building and mutual prosperity.

Recommendations

- Angola needs to diversify its economy beyond crude oil alone. This is vital in order to minimize reliance on oil and prevent the effects of oil price volatility.
- Angola must seek alternative sources of funding to contain its debt and finance economic expansion. This may involve foreign loans but at perhaps higher interest rates.
- For such agreements to also serve Sudan, there has to be a promise of local capacity building, sustainable development, and development that is inclusive and puts the interests of the people of Sudan first.
- Increase transparency regarding the motivations and operations of Chinese peacekeepers to address concerns about political motivations. This could include regular reporting on activities and outcomes.
- Work together with other countries and international groups to share resources, knowledge, and successful methods. This will make peacekeeping operations more efficient and effective.
- Develop strategies that focus on sustainable development and long-term stability in the region. This could involve supporting local governance structures, economic development, and infrastructure projects.
- Angola should actively engage in international debt relief initiatives, such as the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), to alleviate the burden of debt repayments.

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